

# BUILDING A CREATIVE COMMUNITY

KINGSTON ARTS COUNCIL  
STRATEGIC PLAN 2016-2018



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## BACKGROUND

In February 2015, the Kingston Arts Council (KAC) began work on developing an integrated three-year strategic plan that would respond to emerging needs in the Kingston arts community. The scope of the project also included determining organizational priorities — as a focus for action and best use of KAC resources, and for alignment of board and staff roles in a high-performance structure to accomplish those goals.

Actual strategy development activities began following some governance work undertaken by the Board in March–June 2015 (when it drafted a working mission and ends statement) and some staffing changes made during the summer. In August, following the hiring of a new Executive Director, the KAC’s strategic planning process was launched and a small team began meeting regularly to develop the recommended priorities and strategies outlined in this plan.

# CONTEXT FOR THE PLAN



As the oldest regional arts council in Ontario, the Kingston Arts Council has acted as an advocate, promoter, and supporter of the arts. For more than 50 years, the KAC has taken on a leadership role throughout the Kingston community, striving to meet the needs of artists and arts organizations alike, focusing on professional artists and arts programs.

Like all who work within this sector, we have experienced our fair share of change, where direction, vision and mission must be reflected upon and defined. In 2015, we found ourselves at a pivotal moment where we needed to pause and reflect on the changes in the sector, in our city and within our organization, in order to better serve the arts community.

The City of Kingston places priority on the arts and cultural landscape and recognizes the social and economic impact of the arts. Kingston has an active Cultural Services Department, a community rich in academic and cultural institutions, and a new arts hub, The Tett Centre for Creativity and Learning — our new home. In 2007, the City of Kingston established the City of Kingston Arts Fund (CKAF) to support operating and project based funding.

Since its inception, the KAC has administered the fund, awarding more than \$4 million to established and emerging arts organizations and collectives. The City of Kingston Culture Plan, established in 2010, continued to lay the groundwork and set cultural goals; establishing a prominent place for the arts in our community. In 2015, the emphasis on the arts was reaffirmed by the release of the City of Kingston's Strategic Priorities for 2015-2018, that places arts and culture as a key point of identity for the city.

In 2016, CKAF will enter a period of review, where the structure, impact and outcomes of the funding program will be examined and evaluated. As administrator of this program, we see this as an opportunity to take action to ensure that we are best serving and supporting the current artistic landscape of Kingston, and to advocate for points of change. 2016 also marks a time of strategic prioritizing by the Arts Advisory Committee, a committee composed of members of the arts community and municipal government that has the ability to consult and put forth recommendations to Council.

Acting as an arms-length, arts service organization, we recognize the priorities of the City as well as the needs of the community. As part of our strategic planning process, key themes that emerged from community consultations spoke to a broader social scope; access to space, programming, funding, and inclusivity, and building a stronger local arts community through information sharing, networking, and professional development.

**The creative landscape of Kingston has evolved, as has the role of the arts council. Arts education, community arts and business in the arts are now familiar terms. They are practices and modes of investigation that play a leading role in the sector today. An arts council's role has expanded from that of a resource and supporter of the studio artist to an active voice, able to use the arts as a tool for community development — creating opportunity, sharing information, bridging economic and generational divides, imparting new skills and igniting dialogues.**

# HIGHLIGHTS & FINDINGS FROM COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS



In November 2015, the Kingston Arts Council conducted consultations with more than 100 individuals to discern pivotal issues and used different types of forums — online feedback, interviews with the City, discussions with the Multicultural Roundtable, and five stakeholder focus groups with artists, arts organizations and community partners.

Extensive notes were taken by KAC staff to document these sessions. A few of the highlights and recurring themes are noted below:

- There *didn't seem to be a clear sense of what role, focus, direction or purpose guides KAC*. The KAC of the future was envisioned more as an organization that provides strategic leadership for the arts, as a champion/advocate and expert on the local arts community. Many saw the current mission statement as vague or confusing; some felt it ignores broader community and arts interests (beyond those of artists).
- There was *no apparent expectation for a member-based organizational model*, and some participants (artists) mentioned it as a barrier to engaging with the KAC.
- Feedback reflected an expansive, inclusive, multi-level / multi-disciplinary approach to the arts, culture and creativity — suggesting the *KAC should have a broad focus*, beyond just “professional” artists or the visual disciplines. Examples clearly showed that individual artists and organizations work in quite varied contexts. And some advocated for a new mindset about the arts as a network, not a hierarchy.
- Questions that explored the types of value desired of the KAC, its programs and services led to *feedback on needs* for an arts communications hub and resource, varied opportunities for networking and collaboration, system-level leadership in roles as catalyst and facilitator, funder, provider of professional development opportunities, and promoter/marketer in support of audience development.
- “*Nobody knows what everyone is doing / what’s going on*” was a common refrain. Scores of suggestions for action were received on various types of outreach, special events, mixers, networking opportunities, bridging diverse communities, facilitating collaborations, and connecting with youth, with business (WAMB) & with community partners. Some described being a “conduit” as an important future role for the KAC.
- A clear message came back to *break down “the silos”*. Feedback focused on website redesign and newsletter improvements, cultural mapping, databases and directories to help the arts community find resources (including talent, volunteers, board members and spaces); as well as use of social media and other methods (e.g. event calendars) to help ensure awareness of the arts, promote arts opportunities and coordinate activities.

- Some participants raised issues challenging the KAC to clarify *governance and potential conflict-of-interest* concerns, such as the KAC's relationship with the City of Kingston. In one session, some participants raised concerns about the membership and composition of the City's Arts Advisory Committee.
- In different ways, feedback touched on the need to *celebrate the value and impact of the arts*, the importance of artists, public education / understanding and awareness of the arts, celebrate achievements and showcase success stories.
- Participants saw that it was important for the arts to *have a voice at "the big tables"* where community policies and cross-sector decisions are made (cultural tourism strategy was one example).
- *Funding* was a key issue for artists, and some organizations. Feedback suggested a need to develop new revenue streams and funding opportunities for them; lobby for increases in CKAF funding; respond to demands for individual artist funding; and provide expertise and support for writing grant applications and connecting with sponsors.
- Feedback clearly indicated that artists and arts organizations face challenges in *marketing and promotion*, finding sales opportunities, and audience development.
- Interest in professional development programming modes ranged from traditional workshops to mentoring, skills sharing, making peer and cross-sector connections, online resources, and helping those interested in learning the "business of the arts".
- There was little to no explicit discussion about KAC's past or future role in *presentation programming*. Events for those in the arts community, such as the Building Community Through Arts & Heritage series, were commended.
- Participants raised examples of *issues that affect many individuals and organizations and need resolution at the system level* (challenges with insurance being one).
- There was support for *reaching out to different neighbourhoods / parts of the city*, but the Tett location did not seem to be viewed as a particular barrier for KAC.
- It seems many *community partners* with an interest or connection to the arts are prepared to work with KAC as it stabilizes as an organization, although many have not had much of a past working relationship beyond CKAF funding.

# KINGSTON ARTS COUNCIL

## MISSION, VISION, AND ROLE



Feedback from the consultation process indicated that the KAC's purpose (and mission as currently described) is not clear to stakeholders and not focused enough on the broader arts community (vs. a strict focus on just artists / cultural content creators).

- It is recommended that the KAC take as its purpose the **MISSION of providing strategic leadership and services for the arts — as funder, champion, advocate, and expert on the arts community in Kingston and the surrounding area.**
- It is recommended that the KAC be guided by a **VISION that it should be an organization of supporters, rather than members — a network connecting diverse communities, arts organizations and artists from all disciplines.**
- This vision should also embrace **various resource and facilitation roles for the KAC as a local arts service organization** — a communications hub and resource for the arts community, a catalyst and facilitator for networking and collaboration, a funder (including but not only the City of Kingston Arts Fund –CKAF– funded by the municipality), and provider of professional, artistic and skills development programs.



# MISSION

The Kingston Arts Council provides strategic leadership and services for the arts — as funder, champion, advocate, expert, and resource — in Kingston and the surrounding area.

# VISION

The Kingston Arts Council aims to strengthen arts and culture in the community by acting as a network for diverse groups, arts organizations, and artists across all disciplines and as a catalyst and facilitator of opportunities to experience the arts as creator, viewer, participant, and/or supporter.

# WHAT WE DO

The Kingston Arts Council (KAC) is the region's primary resource for the arts information and support. The KAC administers key funding programs, the City of Kingston Arts Fund (CKAF) and the Nan Yeomans Grant for Artistic Development. The KAC promotes the creation, development, and appreciation of the arts in Kingston and the surrounding region. We support artistic growth and engagement for artists and arts organizations through arts activism, professional development opportunities, accessible arts activities and initiatives, and communications.

# 2016-2018 STRATEGIC THEMES AND PRIORITIES

## 1

REBRAND AND REPOSITION THE KAC IN ITS ROLE AS CHAMPION, ADVOCATE AND EXPERT ON THE ARTS COMMUNITY IN KINGSTON AND SURROUNDING AREA.

### Objectives:

#### **Improve access to KAC for the broader arts community.**

- Reach out to diverse communities and to communities outside of downtown.
- Replace KAC's "membership" model with a broader, accessible "supporter" model.
- Share and promote opportunities of benefit to the arts community.
- Design programming in ways that offer access to all audiences, regardless of means or ability.
- Act on directions from the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA) with respect to working technique, accessible spaces and readable documents.

#### **Recognize, serve and engage a broad spectrum of artists, arts organizations and supporters of the arts community.**

This inclusive view of the arts would include artists in a range of arts disciplines and at various levels of practice (enthusiast, amateur, emerging, professional) as well as organizations (recreational, educational, professional) in an effort to foster arts and cultural vitality. Roles include:

- Communications (including website, social media, consultation & facilitation).
- Advancing public appreciation, recognition and celebration.
- Promoting/supporting arts education (especially with children and youth, and diverse, intergenerational and marginalized communities).

#### **Become a "thought leader" that challenges traditional norms.**

With enhancements to the KAC's level of knowledge and expertise, this role is to:

- Act as a facilitator and catalyst to spark new initiatives and strategic investments in arts development.
- Represent the arts community when a strong arts voice should be involved in planning and decision-making in the community.
- Advocate strategically on behalf of the interests of a broad arts community.

#### **Play a leadership role as a resource in evaluation / outcome measurement.**

These outcomes might relate to standards and processes within the arts sector, policy development, best and next practices, and evaluation.

# 2

STRENGTHEN AND SUPPORT THE LOCAL ARTS COMMUNITY THROUGH COMMUNICATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUNDING, NETWORKING AND COLLABORATION.

## Objectives:

### **Play an active role as a *communications* hub for the arts community.**

- Help the arts community break down “the silos” and work together, coordinating activities through engagement in person and through digital communications and an event calendar.
- Promote awareness of the arts in Kingston, featuring arts organizations, events & activities, “what’s happening” in the arts locally, as well as opportunities, media coverage & success stories.

### **Enhance *funding* opportunities, sponsorships and other forms of revenue and financial support to meet evolving needs in the arts community.**

- Continue KAC’s role as administrator of the City of Kingston Arts Fund program (on behalf of the City of Kingston) as well as the Nan Yeomans Grant for Artistic Development (in partnership with the Community Foundation for Kingston and Area).
- Serve as a resource for those seeking to apply for funding opportunities.
- Investigate new potential streams of arts funding, sponsorships or revenue.
- Build relationships with the business sector to activate more financial support.

### **Build trust, understanding and strong strategic *partnerships* with a diverse range of community partners.**

Particular focus would be placed on:

- Local businesses, KEDCO, Chamber, Downtown Kingston BIA, and other groups, as well as school boards, libraries and various community centres.
- Opportunities for children and youth.
- Arts education and engagement activities for marginalized communities.

### **Act as a catalyst for *networking* within and outside of the arts.**

This might include various special events, mixers and networking opportunities (e.g. for artists, sectors, organizations, businesses and/or other community partners), informal gatherings, recognition events, or focused programming for skills-sharing.

# 3

BE A LEADING LOCAL ARTS RESOURCE,  
RESPONDING TO KEY ARTS AND COMMUNITY ISSUES.

## Objectives:

### **Enhance KAC's role in *professional development* for artists, cultural content creators and arts organizations.**

- Develop KAC's knowledge of the community to identify specific professional development (PD) needs.
- Support PD and opportunities for skills-sharing across disciplines, sectors (e.g. arts and business) and generations.
- Develop a resource library featuring current materials (writing, data, images, etc) on professional development, financial management, grant writing and a variety of multi-disciplinary publications.

### **Offer a strong *understanding of new trends, models and developments* within the sector — locally and in other communities.**

- Develop connections with other arts service organizations and local arts councils in other communities to maintain best practices and keep up to date with our peers in the sector.
- Establish strong evaluative resources to measure and review the KAC's programming impact on an ongoing basis.

### **Facilitate dialogue, concept development, advocacy, and mentorship.**

- Utilize social media as a tool for discourse on topics, issues and points of interest relevant to our Kingston arts community.
- Bridge communication between artists, arts supporters, businesses, and community stakeholders, and act as a conduit for information.
- Establish relationships outside of the arts sector to develop innovative partnership and mentorship opportunities.
- Create a network and build consensus among arts supporters, activists and stakeholders to tackle advocacy issues within the local arts sector.

# 4

## BUILD KINGSTON ARTS COUNCIL'S ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

### Objective:

#### **Ensure ongoing success of the Kingston Arts Council through increased staffing, stronger partnerships, and expanded/more diversified revenue streams.**

- Pursue full-time *staffing* along with competitive salary and benefits.
- Explore opportunities to engage project-based *contract and/or seasonal staff* (e.g. through Canada Works, co-operative student programs, internships etc).
- Enhance *professional development* opportunities for staff, including training on a variety of databases and software.
- *Build upon the KAC's current funding base* through project funding, matching financial contributions from project partners, and/or other, more diversified sources of revenue.

Kingston Arts Council  
370 King Street West, Unit 115  
at the Tett Centre for Creativity and Learning

Kingston, ON, K7L 2X4  
[www.artskingston.ca](http://www.artskingston.ca)  
[info@artskingston.ca](mailto:info@artskingston.ca)  
613-546-2787