

RE-ENVISIONING OPERATING ASSISTANCE

Summary and Share Back



The 2023-2024 provincial budget included a \$1.4 million increase to Arts Nova Scotia's budget for operating grants. With this increase, Arts Nova Scotia committed to reviewing the Operating Assistance to Arts Organizations fund to ensure it remains responsive to community needs and supports the long-term sustainability of the sector. Previously, the structure of the operating assistance program did not allow for meaningful changes in funding levels for established organizations or the welcoming of new and emerging organizations.

The review of this program considers the learnings from the [Building Back Better Report](#) as well as the Arts Nova Scotia's [2023-2025 Strategic Priorities](#) established by the Arts Nova Scotia board that were outlined in the 2022-23 annual report.

In addition, a public feedback survey was circulated throughout October 2023 and three targeted facilitated group discussions took place in November 2023:

- Eltuek Arts Centre, Sydney, Cape Breton, Friday, November 10
- Halifax Central Library, Halifax, Friday, November 17
- Online session on Zoom, Friday, November 24

This document outlines six key themes that came out of those engagements, highlighting areas of community consensus and potential for change.

Access and Equity

- There has not been access to the operating program for new organizations.
- There needs to be pathways to multi-year operational funding for new organizations.
- A new operating program needs to remain open to new organizations.
- Project funding is too limited for current recipients of operating assistance. Access to project funding needs to be increased with no limits or less restrictions.
- Equity-seeking community members should be included in peer assessment committees.
- A regional lens needs to be applied to ensure that rural organizations and organizations outside of the Halifax Regional Municipality have access to operating assistance.
- An equity-lens can be used in tie-breaking situations.

Community and Collaboration

- The role of mentorship in the arts community is something that needs to be supported and upheld.
- Youth should be encouraged to pursue careers in the arts/cultural/creative sector.
- Operating funds need to remain flexible to the needs of the community.
- There are opportunities to explore shared service models (e.g. one or more organizations sharing Human Resources, IT, communications, financial expertise, etc.).
- There are opportunities to explore shared health care and other benefits (including mental health care).
- Arts Nova Scotia could support/encourage/incentivize collaborations between organizations.
- Arts Nova Scotia could facilitate professional development and mentorships between organizations.

Funding and Distribution

- There should be a designated program or funds for emerging and or equity-deserving groups.
- All organizations should have access to multiyear funding (previously some operating assistance was annual).
- The minimum annual grant needs to be increased.
- The current tiered system (three tiers divided by revenues and annual/multiyear cycle) should not be continued.
- The current program does not support growth for organizations receiving operating assistance.
- Artistic discipline should be a consideration in distribution of funds.
- Operating funding from Arts Nova Scotia does not currently cover all operating expenses and costs continue to rise with inflation.
- There should be built-in growth and increases to funding.

Optimizing Processes

- The base level accountability needs to be adjusted to the size and scope of an organization.
- Applications and reporting should be streamlined to reduce administration burden on organizations.
- There needs to be better process alignment with other funders such as Canada Council.
- A digital portal for applications would be helpful (no need to resubmit static information each deadline).
- Currently, applications feel futile as there have been no opportunities for increases.
- Currently, annual applications are not equal to admin labour it takes to complete them.
- Staff are not adequately compensated for grant writing and reporting.
- BC Arts Council could be looked at as a model.

Values and Evaluation

- Track how organizations are impacted and are responding to climate change (could use green reporting tools like [Julie's Bicycle](#)). Do not tie this information to decision-making and funding.
- Evaluation should consider the organizations mandate rather than a general assessment rubric.
- An organization's impact needs to be considered within its own individual context.
- Regional context should be considered in evaluation. For example, rural organizations have less access to goods/services in urban centres.
- Areas for assessment identified included:
 - Artist excellence/merit in programming
 - Equity/ Inclusivity
 - Engagement with equity-deserving groups
 - Community Impact/Engagement
 - Professional wages
 - Support for Artists
 - Wage standards/living wages
 - Engagement of emerging, established and senior artists
 - NS-based artists
 - What percentage of the budget is artist fees?

Opportunities and Other Considerations

- Emergency support should be built-in to future program in the event of pandemics, climate disasters, etc.
- There should be targeted infrastructure support (e.g. solar energy panels).
- Arts Nova Scotia could provide workshops and training around climate change and the arts.
- There needs to be consideration for inflation and rising cost of living in the context of operating.
- Having regular communication, such as open forum Zoom calls is helpful.
- Arts Nova Scotia should support capacity-building for emerging organizations so they can access operating funding.
- To support onboarding more equity-deserving groups, Arts Nova Scotia should have direct and frequent outreach/workshops with priority groups.