FIRST YEAR REPORT

ARTISTS IN COMMUNITIES

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INTRODUCTION

Artists in Communities, a new program recognizing community-engaged arts as a vital contributor to the arts landscape and community, was introduced in fall 2022. In consultation with community-engaged art practitioners and organizations who engage in community arts from across the province, the program was developed to be responsive to the current context and practice.

The intention of the program was to:

- Support community-based and socially engaged arts practices.
- Approach community arts through an artist-driven lens.
- Foster partnerships/collaborations between artists and non-arts organizations.
- Strengthen relationships between artists and community.
- Support emerging ideas and ground-breaking initiatives in this area of practice.

In the program's inaugural year, Arts Nova Scotia committed to host a gathering to exchange learnings and discuss how the program can respond to new challenges and community needs. This feedback is meant to inform how the program can further evolve to serve the artists and community.

This report provides an overview of the first application intake (November 1, 2022) and the discussions held between grant recipients and Arts Nova Scotia staff at a gathering at Wonder'neath Arts Society in Halifax on July 19, 2023.

Flags hand painted by children in the Prospect community fly on the Bluenose. Photo courtesy of Melinda Spooner.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Arts Nova Scotia has existing programs designed support professional artists and arts organizations. Broadly, funding has been available in three categories: creation, presentation, and professional development. Funding decisions are made by peer assessors – professional artists and arts workers – and take into consideration artistic merit, impact, and feasibility. Successful applicants are required to submit a written report at the conclusion of their activity.

Artists in Communities uses these same basic principles but also marked something new for Arts Nova Scotia programs including:

NEW CATEGORIES OF FUNDING

- o Development grants ($5K max) to allow applicants time to research and explore ideas for community-engaged projects. This was created with the understanding that building solid reciprocal relationships with communities takes time.
- o Engagement grants ($20K max) to allow applicants to carry out a community-engaged project that already has confirmed partnerships and collaborators. This is the most funding available for project streams at Arts Nova Scotia. The $20K maximum was established to allow for projects that have longer-term programming and multiple collaborators.

PRIORITIZING EQUITY-SEEKING GROUPS

- o In the past, Arts Nova Scotia has supported equity-seeking groups through targeted programs. Artists in Communities was open to all applicants but was designed to prioritize projects that benefitted or were led-by equity-seeking communities. This was accomplished by:
  - Developing a new voluntary Self-ID form for individuals and organizations to fill out at the time of application. (See Appendix 1)
  - Incorporating a question in the assessment tool that asked assessors to consider how applications were considering IDEA (inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility).

EVALUATING COMMUNITY IMPACT

- o In addition to artistic merit, impact, and feasibility, assessors were given a list of questions to consider that specified what community impact means to Arts NS. For example, how does the proposed project develop meaningful connections with the community to generate future artistic opportunities.

ROUNDTABLE REPORTING

- o We facilitated a roundtable oral final report as an alternative to a written one. Community-engaged art places value on process and not necessarily project. A roundtable final report allowed for sharing between community members rather than a traditional transaction between funder and grantee.

APPLICATION BREAKDOWN

- 27 Applications
- 15 successful
- 3 Insufficient funds (recommended for funding)
- 3 applications used Access Support
- 80% of funded applications received the maximum amount allowable for the category
- $331K total in requested funds
- $190K total funding awarded
- Applications from Halifax Regional Municipality, Kings County, Annapolis County, Antigonish County, Victoria County, Inverness County, Digby County, Lunenburg County
- Funded projects in Halifax Regional Municipality, Kings County, Antigonish County, Victoria County

Cast of Mischief/Colonial Park. Photo provided by Neptune Theatre.

PROJECT SYNOPSES

SEAWATER CIRCLES

ENGAGEMENT, $10,000
WONDER'NEATH ART SOCIETY

Seawater Circles was a six-week artistic collaboration exploring stories, togetherness, and care through the eyes of community elders and newcomers led by artist Jenny Yujia Shi, with support from Wonder'neath. The result was a collaborative artwork of wet-felted circles around the theme of water and climate change. Partners included Ecology Action Centre, ISANS, Climate Emergency Unit and Mulgrave Park Caring & Learning Centre.

MAKING SPACE

ENGAGEMENT, $20,000
RAINBOW REFUGEE ASSOCIATION

Making Space was a ten-week pottery program offered for free to people who identify as LGBTQI+ newcomer, prioritizing people who have arrived to Canada as refugees or who are refugee claimants. Participants were invited to build skills and communities through a pottery-focused art group at artist Andrea Puszkar's studio. Translation, bus tickets and snacks were provided.

NAVIGATING FUTURES: DEEP MAPPING THE LOCAL

ENGAGEMENT, $20,000
ARIELLA PAHLKE AND MELINDA SPOONER

Navigating Futures: Deep Mapping the Local was a reflection on the 150th anniversary of the wreck and rescue of the SS Atlantic in Prospect. Artists worked with local children to imagine what life would have been like for the survivors and community members, recording their stories with a professional documentary filmmaker and painting their interpretations on flags that would eventually be flown on the Bluenose as it sailed to Prospect to mark the anniversary.

MISCHIEF/COLONIAL PARK

DEVELOPMENT, $5,000
NEPTUNE THEATRE

During the pandemic lockdowns two artists independently of one another, wrote short 15-minute plays about the removal of the Cornwallis statue in downtown Halifax. While Neptune Touring Company typically presents only in schools, they used a Development grant to explore presenting within community centres in Halifax, staging *Colonial Park* by Shauntay Grant and *Mischief* by Lisa Nasson at the Black Culture Centre and the Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre. Presented in partnership with Roots of Creation and Shared Strength, the plays were presented in tandem with drama workshops focused on social justice and marginalized voices.

HAND PAPERMAKING IN COMMUNITY

DEVELOPMENT, $5,000
KRISTI FERRIER

Kristi Ferrier explored how foraged fibre could be repurposed and made into paper working with community members in the Middle River valley in Cape Breton. Participants were invited to learn about the process of papermaking and how found and foraged objects could be used to make paper that is infused with both memory

and meaning making. The project allowed Kristi to establish new relationships and partnerships in the community in anticipation of a larger future project.

SEEKING SANCTUARY

DEVELOPMENT, $5,000
MO GLITCH AND MO PHÙNG

Seeking Sanctuary was a collaborative photography and drawing project that aimed to provide sanctuary for trans individuals and communities. Development funding was used to expand the collaborative process between two lead artists and trans folks with different lived experiences and shared identities. Trans participants were given the rare opportunity to actively collaborate in their portrait and make choices about how they were portrayed and wanted to express themselves.

NOISEMAKERS

ENGAGEMENT, $20,000
NOCTURNE

NOISEmakers: in the field is a free 14-week professional development program in partnership with ISANS and Wonder'neath where Newcomer artists have been participating in professional development workshops, field trips and artists talks. Finally, they are working together towards a group exhibition that is scheduled to be presented at the 2023 Nocturne festival. The program gives an opportunity for immigrants to build connections and have an opportunity to discuss challenges.

AT THIS HOUR

DEVELOPMENT, $5,000
ZUPPA THEATRE

At This Hour is a documentary theatre lecture about the causes of the Halifax explosion developed in partnership with the blind community, initially conceived as site-specific to the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic. Two casts perform the show simultaneously - a hearing cast and a Deaf cast and the set/projection design is animated surtitles of the show's script projected above the actors' heads. A Development grant allowed Zuppa to adapt the show for touring to SOUND OFF, Canada's national festival dedicated to the Deaf performing arts.

FUTURES OF WETLANDS

DEVELOPMENT, $5,000
CARRIE ALLISON

Carrie Allison was awarded a Development grant for research and partnership building to create a future community collaborative project titled *Futures of Wetlands*, that creates space to discuss the importance of wetlands and their future on this planet and more specifically in our local environment here in Mi'kma'ki. Development consisted of research, community meetings and artistic exploration.

SHARING NLAKA'PAMUX BLACKWORK WITH COMMUNITY AND BEYOND

ENGAGEMENT, $20,000
DION KASZAS

Dion Kaszas is a Nova Scotia-based tattoo artist who as created a "Nlaka'pamux Visual Dictionary" through extensive research into the visual and material culture of his Nlaka'pamux artistic tradition. Dion used Artists in Communities funding to share a small run of the project with his community and host a gathering of community members and tattoo practitioners with the aim of these gatherings will fostering reciprocal and generative

relationships within an international community of tattoo collaborators, Nlaka'pamux elders, knowledge keepers, artists, creators, and youth.

EXPLORING COMMUNITY-BASED THEATRE WITH LOCAL SYRIAN COMMUNITY

DEVELOPMENT, $5,000
FESTIVAL ANTIGONISH SUMMER THEATRE

Antigonish is home to over 100 Syrian families, including the Hadhad family who own Peace By Chocolate. Over the past several years, FAST has welcomed people from this community into the theatre as volunteer actors, sewers, ushers and spectators. A Development grant was used to hire local artists to engage the community to deepen these relationships in the hopes of eventually providing a meaningful theatre project tailored to the needs and wishes of the community the following hear.

OUTDOOR THEATRE PROGRAM FOR YOUTH

ENGAGEMENT, $14,800
GALE FORCE THEATRE CO-OPERATIVE LTD.

Gale Force Theatre collaborated with the Adventure Earth Centre (AEC) to create a free outdoor theatre creation program for youth ages 13-18. This project aims to build community and expression around connection to environment and climate change in an urban setting.

## LUCID: QUEER YOUTH MENTORSHIP PROJECT

ENGAGEMENT, $20,000
HEIST

LUCID was a hybrid digital and in-person program aimed at developing, supporting, mentoring and producing work by Queer emerging artists within the Nova Scotia community, specially prioritizing the QTBIPOC population. In this case, emerging is defined as 18 - 30 years of age. The program is aimed to fit a maximum of 13 youth participants who were paid for their time, talent, and creations. Participants can come from all over the province and can choose to explore a variety of artistic disciplines within this process.

COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

ENGAGEMENT, $20,000
THE BUS STOP THEATRE

Supporting three artist development programs: StART, a mentorship program for emerging artists looking to start a professional career with priority given to BIPOC and Disabled artists; Art Arena, a showcase opportunity to help build the professional portfolios of StART participants and additional emerging artists; and, the Bus Stop Writers' Circle, free, monthly drop-in sessions that provide feedback for emerging writers of all disciplines including playwrights, screenwriters, poets, novelists, rappers, songwriters and non-fiction writers.
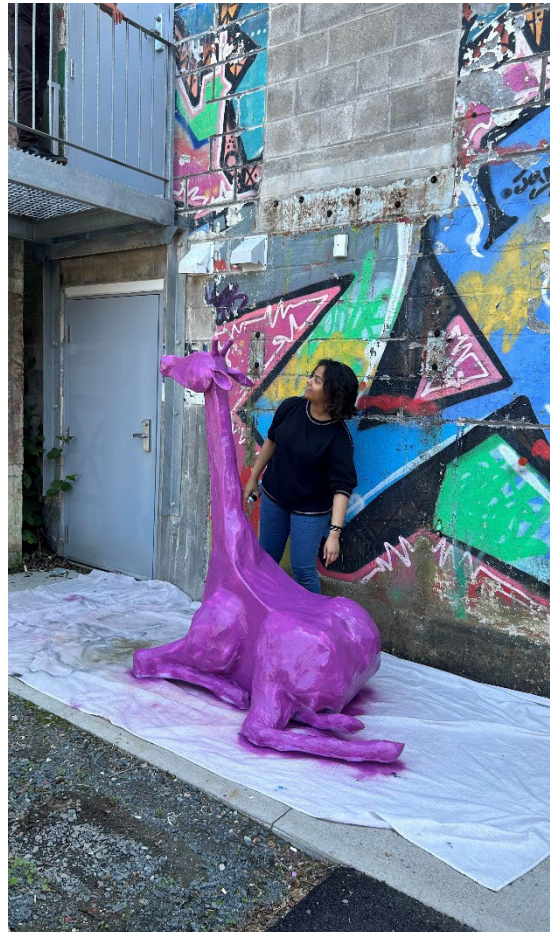
Participant in HEIST's LUCID program. Photo courtesy of HEIST.

A FERRY TALE

ENGAGEMENT PROJECT
THE CLUB INCLUSION

A Ferry Tale was an inclusive piece of theatre for actors with intellectual and/or physical disabilities, mental health challenges, and/or individuals who have trouble with communication. Twenty-four participants worked alongside professional theatre artists Karen Basset, Justin McGarragh, and David Simmonds, to write and develop the original play, which was part of the STAGES Theatre Festival with Eastern Front Theatre.

Photos from The Club Inclusion's "A Ferry Tale." Photos courtesy of The Club Inclusion.

ROUNDTABLE REPORTING

Successful applicants were invited to share their experiences during a two-hour in-person roundtable discussion at Wonder'neath Art Society on July 19, 2023, facilitated by Arts Nova Scotia staff Briony Carros and Lauren Williams with Naomi Vogt as notetaker. Representatives from eight of the 15 successful projects were in attendance: Andrea Puszkar (Rainbow Refugee Association); Ariella Pahlke (independent artist); Ben Stone, Richard Taylor, and Xavier Taylor (Zuppa Theatre); Kristi Farrier (independent artist); Laura Caswell (Neptune Theatre); Melany Nugent-Noble (Nocturne); Mo Glitch and Mo Phùng (independent artists); and, Danielle Friesen, Heather Wilkinson, Kawama Kasutu, and Melissa Marr (Wonder'neath).

After sharing a brief overview of their project, attendees were asked to participate in a "rose, bud and thorn" sharing exercise. The rose, bud and thorn served as a metaphor for strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities. A rose is a highlight, success, or positive impact; a bud is a new idea, potential outcome, or something to look forward to; and a thorn is a negative experience, a challenge, or something you wish you had done differently.
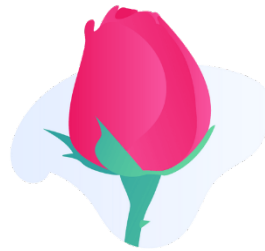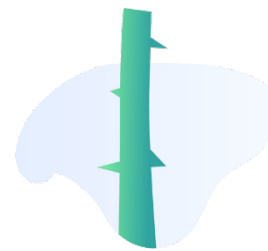

ROSE   BUD   THORN

Illustration from https://easyretro.io/templates/rose-bud-thorn/

ROSES

- Providing connection for elders who face social isolation
- Seeing participants branching out and trying new things and taking pride in work
- Receiving support from Mikmaw Native Friendship Centre community
- Seeing new faces in the community that don't come to the usual events
- Discovering new ways to work with children and community members
- Having community-engaged art recognized by Arts NS
- Extra development time led to new technical innovations which saved time and money
- Audience feedback that helped improve accessibility supports
- Connecting with participants in a place that was comfortable, inclusive and accessible
- Folks saying they felt seen and captured in a way that felt good
- Deepening relationship with existing contacts
- Seeing participants flourish after the fact
- Partnering with different organizations
- Making new connections and booking new engagements

BUDS

- Increased number of submissions program in later iterations
- New relationships with other organizations and artists
- Anticipation from community of the next iteration of the project
- Potential to simplify the process moving forward
- Participants generating their own idea for future programing
- How can we start to involve more mentorship so more people are available and organizations have more experts to tap for doing this work?
- Older artist participants feeling newly confident to fill facilitation roles in future programming
- Hopeful that new folks will be inspired by work in community which better represents marginalised folks
- Taking time and space to create work creates healing

THORNS

- Strained workforce with high rates of turnover and low pay
- Balancing the large amount of administrative work with the art-making
- Accessing art supplies in rural Nova Scotia can be difficult
- Capacity to support the "invisible weight" on participants due to external factors (e.g. discrimination, trauma, precarity)
- Building trust takes time and there is difficultly maintaining a connection once the program and funding concludes

Participants of "Seawater Circles" at Wonder'neath. Photo courtesy of Wonder'neath.

Participants in HEIST's LUCID program. Photo courtesy of HEIST.

QUESTIONS AND CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Can we build connections among artists and grant recipients so that money goes farther?

Could Arts NS facilitate partnerships to enable projects to go farther?

Is there a role the organizations could play after the project has finished?

Is there a public list of all funded projects?

How can we stay in touch with other artists? Can Arts NS could play a role?

Can there be new models/pathways for applying for funding to be more accessible? Could mentorship be built into this?

Is there a way to get bigger organization to partner with community projects to host at their sites?

CONCLUSION

The Artists in Communities program is well on its way to achieving all the stated goals of the program, with room for growth. The successful projects represent community-based and social arts practices from a variety of disciplines across the province. There were many new partnerships and collaborations between artists and arts organizations and participants. Finally, participants widely reported positive experiences and intentional and innovative community building.

While all projects are artist-driven there was a question of the administrative burden of these programs and how to balance this with the art-making process.

Grantees were also interested in how and if Arts Nova Scotia could help facilitate these connections between artists and non-arts organizations, especially with consideration for organization size and capacity.

NEW CATEGORIES

In particular, the Development category was well-received by artists and organizations. Grantees reported that development grants afforded them the time to build strong relationships prior to projects, build in better accessibility, and to explore in a way that made their projects more efficient and affordable.

One of the most common remarks during the roundtable discussion was that this work takes more time and funding than is available and that it was difficult to continue relationships once programs concluded. There was also a realization that the time to build relationships is the same regardless of program length/size.

PRIORITIZING EQUITY-SEEKING GROUPS

Funded projects intentionally built relationships and programming for participants in the following equity-seeking communities: Black/African Nova Scotian, Mi'kmaq/Indigenous, 2SLGBTQ+, Newcomers/immigrants, Deaf, people with disabilities, and people with mental illness.

Both individual and organizational grantees reported representation from many of these communities in their self-IDS, though there is a recognition that there appears to be the lowest representation from equity-seeking groups at the leadership level in organizations who have applied.
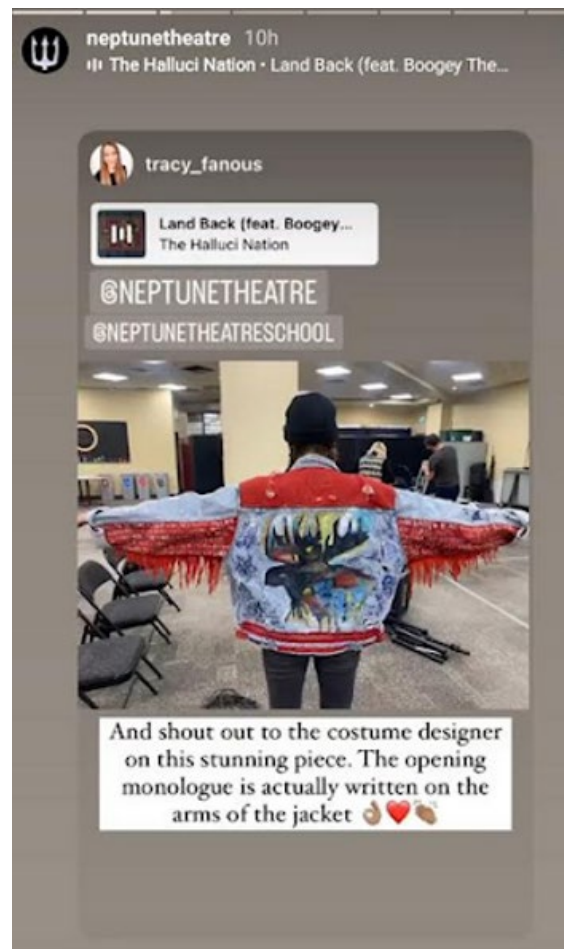
Screenshot of social media post about "Mischief/Colonial Park." Photo courtesy of Neptune Theatre.

EVALUATING COMMUNITY IMPACT

Grantees widely reported positive community impact as was intentionally built into the peer evaluation of this program. Projects contributed to the artistic development and benefit of communities, addressed relevant themes and issues, developed meaningful connections, and created future opportunities.

ROUNDTABLE REPORTING

The in-person, communal approach to reporting was well-received by those who participated. Many said that they would be willing to do it again. They also felt that they would prefer to do it in-person as opposed to online if it was done again. One artist mentioned it felt more reciprocal than writing a traditional report. Others mentioned they were happy to be able to be in the same room and speak openly to their funders about their challenges and frustrations.

NEXT STEPS

- Consider a higher maximum for this category would allow for multi-year programming that is more sustainable.
- Continue option for in-person, roundtable reporting
- Explore ways to create connections between grantees prior to the reporting process (especially with projects that are working within the same community or themes)

Detail of flags hand painted by children in the Prospect community fly on the Bluenose. Photo courtesy of Melinda Spooner.