

Canadian Network for Arts & Learning Online Mapping Project

Summary of Findings

North Bay Hub

May 25, 2017

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Hub Overview

Purpose and Description

The aim of this hub was to gather further insight from various stakeholders in the arts regarding the status of arts and learning in their community (North Bay), the issues and barriers they face, and how the proposed online map might help them achieve their goals.

The hub included an Indigenous arts workshop, an Indigenous artist talk, and a wampum beading demonstration, followed by a brief presentation of the online map and roundtable focus group discussions.

Participants

A total of 34 people participated in the focus group discussions (31 participants, 3 CNAL representatives), making it our best attended hub yet! Of the non-CNAL participants, a variety of backgrounds (e.g., tech, visual art, social work, education) and positions (e.g., university students, artists, school teachers, program managers, etc.) were represented.

Focus Group Discussion

The following questions were provided to participants and were used to guide the discussion:

1. What is the status of arts and learning in your community?
Prompts: *What are your hopes and dreams for the arts in your community? What challenges/barriers do you face in implementing and supporting these aspirations?*
2. How could the map help/serve your arts and learning community and achieve your goals?
Prompts: *For example, would it help promote awareness of different arts programs within the community?*
3. What elements/features might be modified or added to further enhance the effectiveness and relevance of the map?
Prompts: *Would it be useful to include networking or professional development opportunities? Is there anything you would change in terms of layout to make it more user friendly?*
4. Are there additional questions you feel we should be asking with regards to the Mapping Process?
Prompts: *Is there something unique to your community or your circumstances that you would like to draw our attention to?*

Summary of Discussion Findings

Despite being a smaller and less populated community than the others we have visited over the last year, North Bay offers a lot of arts and learning opportunities through a tight-knit collective of arts organizations. A major concern raised across all focus group discussions was the inclusion (or lack thereof) of Indigenous educators, art, and artists within the community and school system, but many felt that the situation is improving slowly through ongoing initiatives and education. Other issues were brought up in relation to arts and learning in schools (e.g., funding) and the community (e.g., communication between different areas and individuals). Many saw the potential of the map for creating connections, but there was an equal number of participants who were critical of the format. Suggestions were given with regard to building an audience for the map, and for map users and profiles.

Positive Outlooks and Directions

- There are a lot of diverse community arts opportunities for all ages in North Bay.
- The community supports and promotes the success of artists.
- Curriculum is slowly but surely being revised to include more Indigenous perspectives, and Indigenous art is becoming more known in the community.
- The *Gallery Hop* initiative is bringing organizations together and engaging the public in the arts; *Music Makes Us North Bay* is bringing music into schools.
- Word-of-mouth is strong in North Bay for communicating events.

Perceived Issues

In schools

- Lack of Indigenous artists and educators in schools.
- Indigenous education is not a core component of the curriculum.
- Arts funding varies across schools and school boards.
- Teachers feel pressured by high expectations to make everything work, but they can only do so much with the resources they have.
- Lack of professional development funding for teachers.
- Arts teachers feel disjointed from the rest of the teaching/school community, with little help and few resources.
- Fewer students seem interested in participating in musicals and concerts.
- There is a hierarchy of subjects in schools (e.g., visual arts prioritized over dance).
- Money is allocated to bringing artists into schools rather than taking students out into the community to the art/artists, which is not the same experience.
- Teachers feel uncomfortable approaching certain Indigenous topics in the classroom.

In the community

- Lack of communication and public understanding about arts activities, such as the Gallery Hop, and activities in general. Word-of-mouth is the primary method of communication, but does not always reach everyone.
- Arts activities happen during work/school hours when many people cannot attend.
- There is a disconnect between the Nipissing University community and the broader community (e.g., community activities are not always advertised at the university and vice versa).

The Map

Potential Benefits

- Providing one central location or “starting place” to find out about arts happenings.
- Creating connections between the arts and the general public.
- Sharing the work of artists in remote communities.
- Creating a digital presence for artists and organizations that may not have one.
- Good from a research standpoint to visualize disparities between communities.

Concerns and Suggestions

Formatting and Navigating

- Several people noted that the map may not be as useful for a small community like North Bay, and that perhaps the map is not the best format. Some participants said they would rather use Google or another type of “bulletin board” platform.
- An app would be essential for many people who use their phones for this kind of search platform.
- Limit the scope of the map in some way to be able to provide a specific service; an infinite scope does not seem useful. Do not overwhelm the map with information.
- Connect to existing sites instead of creating something entirely new (e.g., artist websites, community networks, etc.).
- Make sure the map is ultra-fast, efficient, and user-friendly (as many maps are not).

Building an Audience

- Have radio stations use the map for announcing events (e.g., “Check out the CNAL map for more information on [blank event]”).

- Offer incentives for people to use the map (e.g., a prize or contest of some kind).
- Make it interactive so that users can potentially post and ask for specific services (e.g., I'm looking for [blank] service).

Users & Profiles

- Ensure that profiles include phone numbers and basic information to prevent users from having to click on several different links.
- Encourage photos and short bios within profiles.
- Reach out to Elders who may be willing to share knowledge with teachers, schools, and community groups and see if they might want to join.
- Consider older populations who may not use the internet. How do you get the map to them?
- Contact band offices to get information about artists who may want to join the map.

Suggestions for Future Hubs

Based on observations and feedback from this hub, here are some recommendations for future hubs:

- Many people come and go throughout the hubs, so we need to keep better track of the full number of participants vs. those who participate in the focus group discussions to get a better understanding of how many people we are reaching.
- Again the schedule seemed too busy, but it was necessary to satisfy all the partners and to provide the kind of professional development the participants were looking for.