

The Canadian Network for Arts & Learning

Online Mapping Project



**Research Report
May 2017**

Prepared by

Tiina Kukkonen
CNAL Research Assistant

This research was made possible through funding provided by the
Ontario Trillium Foundation



Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Overview of Hubs	2
Purpose and Description	2
Additional Hubs	3
Participants	3
Discussion Questions	4
Observations & Suggestions for Improvement	5
Summary of Discussion Findings	6
Positive Outlooks & Directions for the Arts	7
Perceived Issues & Barriers	8
Brainstorming The Map	13
Additional Strategies for Success	20
Conclusion	22
Acknowledgements	23

Introduction



Despite being a vital component of human culture and development, learning in, through, and about the arts is consistently being impeded by a variety of barriers, ranging from a lack of funding to public perceptions and mindsets.

The Canadian Network for Arts and Learning (CNAL) is working to unite local, regional, and national arts and learning communities with the aim of transforming the arts education landscape and cultivating a more creative, innovative, and prosperous Canada.¹ Part of their networking task involves the development of an online map that will showcase and connect the diverse arts and learning entities across the country. A three-year initiative funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation is currently underway to start the mapping process in Ontario.

To gather feedback pertaining to the usefulness and functionality of the map, CNAL is conducting a series of Eduarts hubs across Ontario that bring together various stakeholders within arts and learning. Each hub involves arts workshops and/or presentations, followed by an audio-recorded focus group discussion.

Findings from the five focus group discussions from Year 1 of the project are summarized in this report. Participants provided insight into the status of arts and learning in their communities and discussed how the map might benefit their particular contexts. Practical suggestions and strategies to improve the map and promote the growth of the arts sector were also discussed at length. The information gained through the hubs is continuously being used to inform and develop the map.

¹ see CNAL vision, mission, and values at <http://www.eduarts.ca/vision-mission-values>

Overview of Hubs

Purpose and Description

The Year 1 hubs aimed to gather insight from various stakeholders in the arts regarding the status of arts and learning in their communities, the issues and barriers they face, and how the proposed online map might help them achieve their goals.

The hubs started with 2-3 arts workshops and/or presentations, followed by a brief overview of the online map, and then roundtable focus group discussions. A summary of locations, discussion participants, and workshop offerings are detailed in the table below.

Date	Location	Non-CNAL Participants*	Workshops/Presentations
November 14, 2016	Toronto – Young People’s Theatre	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Brazilian music• Collective theatre creation
November 16, 2016	Kingston – Tett Centre	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Presentations (Kickstart Arts, Creative Expressions, H’Art Centre)
March 28, 2017	London – Innovation Works	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bollywood dance• Cree drumming/dance
March 29, 2017	Windsor – Arts Council Windsor & Region	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Metis artist talk• First Nations beading workshop
May 25, 2017	North Bay – Days Inn Conference Centre	31	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Indigenous art workshop & artist presentation• Wampum beading demonstration

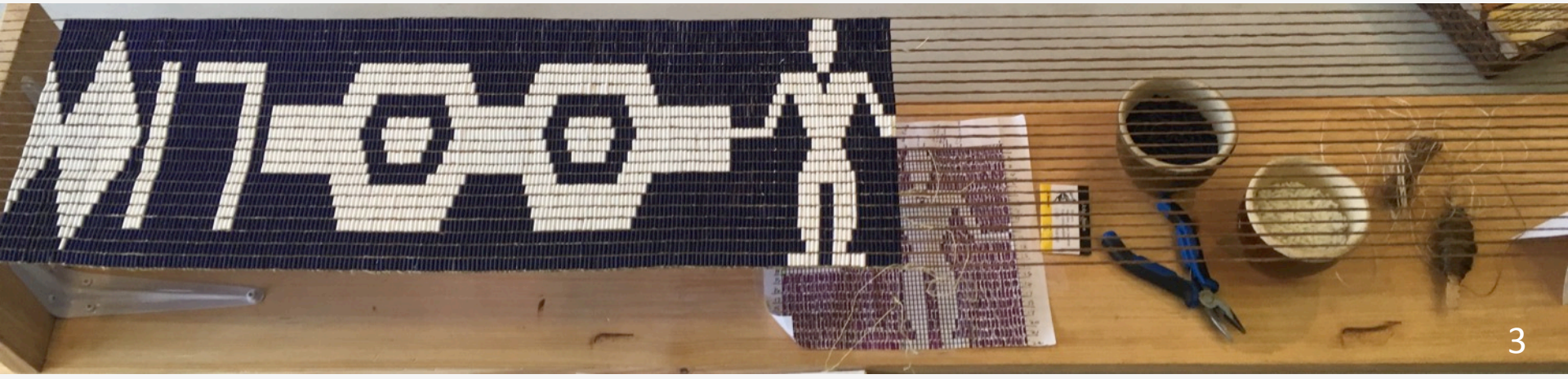
*These numbers represent focus group participants only. Some hubs had more people participating for the workshops who did not stay for the discussion portion.

Additional Hubs

In March 2017, CNAL conducted two additional Eduarts hubs in Edmonton and Regina. Although the hubs were not focused in Ontario nor funded by the Trillium Foundation grant, they provided further insight into the arts and learning situation across Canada and promoted the use of the map outside of Ontario. Hence, pertinent data gained from these hubs was also used to inform this report.

Participants

Of the non-CNAL participants attending each hub, a variety of backgrounds (e.g., digital media, performing arts, visual arts, education) and positions (e.g., education coordinators, independent artists, students, executive directors, program managers, teachers, arts council representatives, and business owners) were represented in the discussions.



Discussion Questions

The following questions were provided to participants and were used to guide the focus group discussions at each hub:

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?*

Observations & Suggestions for Improvement

Based on feedback and observations, participants really seemed to enjoy and appreciate the hands-on arts workshops provided at the hubs. The variety of artists and learning opportunities not only reflected the diverse range of creative offerings in each community, but also helped maintain a creative and energized atmosphere. However, timing was often an issue as there was usually only 30 minutes allotted for each activity (not enough time to really engage with an art form). Scheduling could be improved by:

- (a) including only one extended arts workshop/presentation, or;
- (b) having one workshop at the beginning, followed by the focus group discussion, and ending with a second workshop.

Starting the hubs with two workshops made the activities seem rushed and also seemed to detract somewhat from the discussion as people started to get tired and perhaps overwhelmed with information/stimulation.



“The fact that I learned Bollywood this morning and did a smudging ceremony, that’s the most incredible thing...it’s okay to step out of your comfort zone.” –London participant

Summary of Discussion Findings

Several common themes emerged from the hub discussions. In general, participants felt that there are a lot of positive things happening within arts and learning across the provinces, much of which is unknown to the public. Across the communities we visited, many common barriers and issues were voiced in relation to perceptions of the arts and artists; accessibility and equality; lack of training and experience in the arts; funding, infrastructure, and governance; and outreach. The map was seen as a potential tool to work through some of these issues, and participants offered suggestions to help improve the content, look, and function of the map to better meet the needs of their contexts.

“Yes, there are many new programs but we must ask ourselves – who has access? I feel we require a greater degree of emphasis on the adult population, on the aging population, on minorities, and on the differently-abled population.” -Edmonton participant



Positive Outlooks and Directions for the Arts

The conversations buzzed with energy and excitement as participants eagerly shared the positive happenings and future directions for the arts in their communities. Overall, there appears to be a lot happening under the radar in each community that can be amplified through the mapping project, particularly in terms of encouraging and supporting interdisciplinary partnerships and communication. The following points summarize the current direction of arts and learning in Ontario, as observed by the participants:

- ◆ The different arts disciplines are breaking out of their silos and becoming more collaborative and supportive of each other. Arts organizations generally want to see each other succeed, despite being in competition for much of the existing funding.
- ◆ Non-arts organizations are more motivated and willing to work with artists, but require more support in their approaches.
- ◆ There is now more of an interdisciplinary focus in arts and learning, leading to more collaborations between domains (e.g., the corporate sector is increasingly looking to the creative sector for solutions). This trajectory is viewed as important not only for the sustainability of the arts, but also communities as a whole.
- ◆ The public wants more entry points into the arts, as evidenced by the growing popularity of activities such as knitting and colouring.
- ◆ We are moving away from the notion of the arts as a simple consumable. People are starting to realize the value of active participation in the arts (i.e., making a painting vs. buying one).
- ◆ There are a lot of new arts initiatives and festivals on the rise (e.g., the *Open Streets Festival* in Windsor; the *1000 Seats* initiative at the Grand Theatre in London; the interdisciplinary conference *Rural Talks to Rural* in Blyth; *Gallery Hops* in North Bay) which break barriers and encourage a sense of community.
- ◆ In certain areas, Indigenous ways of knowing and art are making their way into the curriculum and everyday happenings in schools and communities (albeit in small steps).

“I think those conversations between various sectors of our social network are important for the survival and thriving of, not only the arts, but the community.” –Kingston participant

Perceived Issues & Barriers

The path toward a vibrant future for arts and learning in Ontario is riddled with barriers and issues that are experienced by those on the front lines of formal education, community arts organizations, creative industries, and independent arts practice. To better understand how the map can serve the various communities across Ontario, these barriers need to be acknowledged and considered. The following sections outline the different challenges faced by arts and learning stakeholders in Ontario, as put forth by the focus group participants.

Perceptions of the arts & artists

- ◆ The arts are devalued within the education system and public sphere as a whole. The people funding and making decisions in education do not see the arts as being a fundamental part of human development.
- ◆ There needs to be a shift in education from what kids can learn to *do*, to how they can learn to *be* in the world; the arts play a vital role in this kind of education, and thus deserve more recognition in the education system.
- ◆ The arts are viewed as an elite and professional realm.
- ◆ Conservative and traditional mindsets about art are still prevalent (e.g., understanding the arts as only visual arts, demanding only traditional forms of public art such as murals, limiting Western perceptions of visual art and music, and omitting Indigenous arts).
- ◆ There exists an understanding of the arts as being decorative and only for commercial use.
- ◆ Artists are looked at as entertainers rather than entrepreneurs. There is also an expectation that artists should provide services for free.
- ◆ Certain art forms are prioritized over others in the school system (e.g., visual art and music over dance and drama).

Accessibility and equality:

- ◆ Certain neighborhoods, schools, and organizations have more resources to offer, creating inequity in terms of access to the arts (e.g., rural vs. urban areas).
- ◆ Adult learners are often overlooked in arts programming and advocacy, even though they are the demographic that is most likely to have the money and decision-making capability for learning in the arts. They need to know where and how to access arts programming that is catered to their specific needs.
- ◆ Cost and transportation to and from arts opportunities are major issues for many different populations (e.g., the elderly, individuals with special needs, school groups with limited field trip funds, low-income families, people living in rural communities).
- ◆ Not everyone is “digitally connected” or has access to technology to find out about opportunities.
- ◆ Many people have limited entertainment and leisure budgets and have to make conscious spending choices.
- ◆ Certain arts organizations/artists get left out if they don’t have an online presence.

A photograph of an empty theater with red seats and a stage. The theater is dimly lit, with warm lights on the stage and balconies. The seats are arranged in a semi-circle, and the stage is at the far end. The overall atmosphere is quiet and somewhat somber.

“A lot of people who may be interested aren’t on social media, they’re not on Twitter, they won’t find out about something like this because they’re not digitally connected.”

–London participant

Lack of training and experience in the arts:

- ◆ Pre-service teachers and teachers in schools lack training in the arts, limiting their ability to provide quality art education to their students. Furthermore, professional development art workshops are typically a one-time deal and teachers lack the knowledge to build on the skills they develop in the workshops.
- ◆ Artists lack pedagogical training, limiting their ability to facilitate groups of students and deliver developmentally- and age-appropriate programming.
- ◆ There is a lack of time, funding, and resources to provide teachers and artists with the training they require, or provide opportunities for partnerships between teachers and artists.
- ◆ There seems to be a decline in arts education opportunities in schools as compared with previous generations.
- ◆ Teachers lack knowledge and resources on how to integrate Indigenous arts, and there is a clear underrepresentation of Indigenous artists and educators in the schools.



According to participants, children need more opportunities to partake in quality arts education in order to:

- Ensure the sustainability of the arts (i.e., students who have positive experiences will continue to seek out arts opportunities across their lifespans)
- Build self-confidence, pride, practical skills, and creativity
- Enrich their lives with something that is personally fulfilling!

“Kids are getting arts experiences from their teacher that doesn’t have the tools to do that, so I think it leads to a devaluing of the arts.”

–Toronto participant

Funding, infrastructure, and governance

- ◆ Problems with city planning and government (e.g., financing infrastructure but not programs; appointing unqualified chairs for arts committees; disconnect between city planners and the arts; dysfunctional public forums; and biased systems for artist commissions).
- ◆ Lack of investment and private funding in the arts (e.g., citizens with money are not interested in donating to the arts; businesses and corporations not investing in the arts).
- ◆ Everyone in the arts is competing for the same funding.
- ◆ Lack of reasonably priced spaces for artists to congregate and collaborate.
- ◆ There is a need for long-term funding and support to allow for extended arts learning opportunities. The current model of short-term or one-off arts programming is problematic for all learning populations, offering little more than a time filler activity.
- ◆ School mandates limit the focus and selection of learning activities outside of school. Thus, teachers have to justify and make choices for field trips and workshops based on curriculum needs and limited funding.

“Money is always an issue, and that gets really tiring, always chasing after the dollar.” -Windsor participant

Outreach and partnerships

- ◆ There is a disconnect between the arts community, education community, and general public. We need to create better partnerships, connections, and shared understandings/goals to ensure the sustainability of the arts.
- ◆ The arts community is very insular in that the same people and ‘bubble’ groups support each other without branching out to other areas or populations (e.g., “20-year-olds working with 20-year-olds for 20-year-olds”) .
- ◆ Personnel and resources are limited for community outreach and advertising.
- ◆ Artists/arts organizations fear being rejected or undervalued within certain areas and neighborhoods, or do not have access to certain schools/communities.

“It seems like there’s a lot of things going on... but nobody really knows about them. That’s not to do with the people, it seems it’s just a lack of word of mouth, or lack of advertising. Advertising typically requires a budget, and there’s not typically a lot of disposable income up here to support advertising, so we rely on social media, we rely on word of mouth, but do we truly exchange anything?”

-North Bay participant

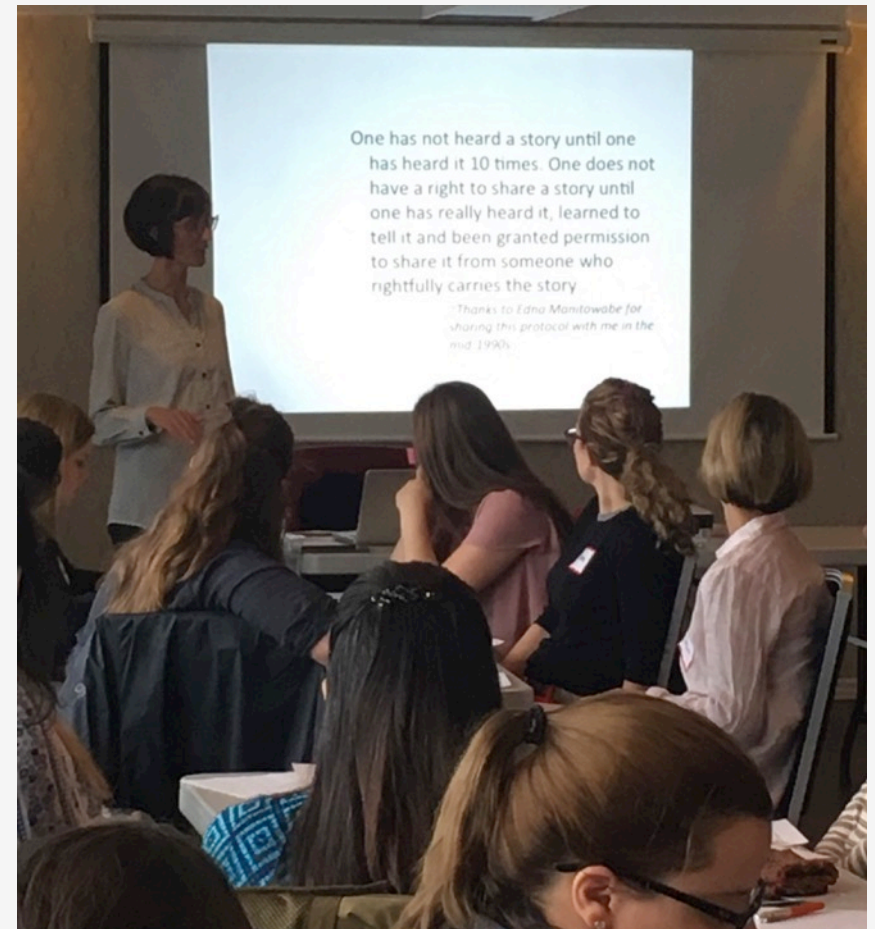


Brainstorming the Map

After talking extensively about the positive and challenging aspects of arts and learning in their communities, participants were given the opportunity to discuss how the map might be useful and how it might be enhanced to fit their needs. This section recaps participants' views on the potential benefits of the map, as well as their concerns and suggestions for improvement.

Potential Benefits & Uses

Focus group participants envisioned many ways in which the map could benefit their communities and practices. Specifically, they saw the map as a tool for: developing communication and partnerships; advocating for the arts and changing perspectives; improving inclusion and accessibility; and showcasing potential within and beyond the arts and learning sector.



Communication & Partnerships

- Building communication between the public and the arts sector.
- Creating a two-way flow of information between local community resources and the map.
- Promoting dialogue between cities and communities.
- Creating partnerships and cohesion between arts organizations and groups to combine funding.
- Bridging the gap between different sectors (e.g., arts and health).
- Helping to strengthen artist-to-artist collaborations that are just starting out.
- Acting as a central resource for outside organizations to find artists to work with and to learn *how* to work with artists (e.g., how much to pay them).
- Connecting newcomer artists with arts venues and organizations.
- Serving as a tool to bring diverse people and domains together and creating connections within a single community.

Advocacy & Changing Perspectives

- Showing change in programs and offerings over time (today vs. ten years from now), to be used for research and advocacy.
- Normalizing the arts in our society so that the artist is equally represented within the community and serves an equally important role as other professions.
- Advocating to funders, city councilors, provincial/federal governments, etc., by providing a visual of where there are inequities in accessibility (i.e., marginalized vs. over-served communities).
- Helping to “elevate” the status of the arts in the public eye, and in turn the map itself, by expanding outreach.
- Changing negative or outdated perceptions of certain areas and communities.

Inclusion & Accessibility

- Keeping organizations up-to-date with the happenings and programs in the community, so they may then refer clientele to specific programs that meet their needs.
- Providing much needed “entry points” into creative endeavors for people who are less affluent or educated in the arts, or who are seeking affordable and accessible programs, or who have just moved to the community.
- Allowing Aboriginal artists to be represented and integrated into the fabric of a community.
- Serving as a place for adult learners to find programs that suit their needs.
- Encouraging and supporting self-taught and self-directed artists to become recognized and included within the arts community.
- Making rural communities and individuals feel less isolated if they see how many opportunities are in their own towns and surrounding communities.

Showcasing Potential

- Boosting tourism and building reputation for communities.
- Showcasing the uniqueness of individual communities as part of the larger “tapestry” of Canada.
- Presenting different investment opportunities to individuals and companies interested in investing in the arts.
- Showing how the arts are thriving in larger communities, as well as the rich opportunities that might be available in smaller towns.
- Showcasing community leaders in the arts who might potentially serve as role models for other organizations and surrounding communities.
- Raising awareness of arts opportunities to new populations, and also suggesting a variety of new opportunities to people already involved in the arts.
- Demonstrating examples of successful partnerships among the arts and other sectors (e.g., how the London Arts Council has managed to branch out to various community partners) to inspire others to do the same.
- Highlighting potential areas where an artist’s/organization’s services could be useful.
- Advertising opportunities for professional development to enhance the practice of teachers and artists alike.

Concerns & Suggestions

The general idea behind the map was well-received by participants, but not without some recommendations for improvement. The following pages summarize participants' concerns and suggestions for the focus and technical features of the map, as well as criteria for users and organizations looking to be represented on the map, and strategies for outreach and advertising.

Focus & Scope

Identifying a clear focus and scope for the map was voiced as an important starting point. Other similar maps may already exist at the local level, prompting the need to consider who this map is intended for and why. It may very well be that the map will not be for everyone. Connecting with open data sources and local resources that are already doing mapping work would help avoid duplication and confusion.

The map should act primarily as a registry/identifier for arts and learning opportunities rather than as an endorser of organizations; this way, CNAL will not be held accountable for the quality of services offered by the map's users.

"I think the map makes more sense in bigger cities...here it's kind of hard to grasp 'cause it's so small. The arts things are usually around downtown, so it's not going to be as helpful here."

—North Bay participant

Technical Considerations

Accessibility & Aesthetics

Given that this map is meant to represent the arts, the visual appeal of the map is an important consideration. However, even more critical is the map's ability to cater to diverse audiences and needs. The following suggestions were given to improve the look and accessibility of the map:

- Visual images and icons to make it more accessible to people with impairments or language barriers
- Key accessibility features: colour contrast, click radius, proper tagging, overall site structure
- Make it mobile friendly (beneficial for people traveling)
- Make it "artful", approachable, and aesthetically pleasing
- Do not oversaturate the map with information; rather, have links to different sources of information (e.g., tourism sites, arts councils, etc.)
- Needs to be FAST and very user friendly

Keeping information up-to-date & interactive

Keeping the information up-to-date is vital to maintaining public interest and engagement. The map might also be made to be more interactive to encourage people to keep coming back on a regular basis. The following strategies were offered by participants:

- A sidebar for special arts events and regular updates/newsfeeds
- E-mail updates or push notifications that people can filter to their liking
- Offer suggestions based on their previous interactions with the map (e.g., if you liked this arts venue, here are some other options you might explore)
- Crowd-sourcing the map and making it interactive so that people can flag key elements to receive push notifications of changes, or so that they can notify others of changes (e.g., an art gallery has moved or closed)

Filters for Searching & Viewing

Several filtering options have already been applied to the map to make searching and viewing easier for different audiences. The following suggestions were of key importance to the discussion participants (some of which have already been implemented):

- Filters for cost and distance (important for areas with no public transit)
- Filter for adult learning
- Different "lenses" or layers through which to view the map (e.g., lens that showcases Indigenous arts and traditional territories, or per capita dollars spent on the arts within different municipalities)
- Highlight different sections/neighborhoods within one city, instead of just the city as a whole

Criteria for users and organizations looking to get on the map...

Quality Control

Formal and informal learning opportunities should be present on the map so that it honours the “small opportunities” and makes it easier for people to participate. That said, quality control of the represented arts organizations is a concern, as some people may do more harm than good. Participants offered some strategies that might help mitigate this issue:

- Links in member profiles to websites with testimonials; recommendations to join from other members (may however perpetuate inequity).
- Have a jury to curate the map (e.g., Ph.D. students). It was mentioned that this could be part of the next level of funding for the project.
- Some sort of learning component should be part of the user/organization’s offerings.

Profile Information

User profiles will provide audiences with pertinent information regarding the services, venues, and missions of arts organizations and artists. The following suggestions could improve the content of the profiles to attract potential clients, partners, and employees:

- Mention whether an organization is run year-round, established, funded by any arts funding body, etc.
- Offer different ways for organizations to self-identify (many are multi-disciplinary).
- Differentiate between artist-run centres, national galleries, public/private galleries.
- Provide access to testimonials, personal stories, images, and videos.
- Include calls for arts submissions.
- Note the physical accessibility of arts and learning venues (e.g., ramps, elevators, etc.).
- Indicate the level of difficulty/participation required in the program or activity.
- Include phone numbers at the very least.
- Mention whether or not the artist/organization is willing to partake in an online video chat exchange (e.g., to give an art lesson or artist talk to a class over video) and how to contact them for that.

Promote the map at the community level by sending the link to key knowledge brokers, such as realtors, libraries, social service centres, seniors centres, tourist centres, TV/radio stations, newspapers, professors, etc.

Create an actual physical version of the map to distribute to the public, similar to a road map or bike trail map, that is attractive in design and size.

Outreach & Advertising

Attracting a greater audience outside of the arts and learning sector was seen as a key approach to ensuring the success of the map and the arts in general. Here are some strategies that CNAL might use to achieve public outreach for the map.

Create connections with organizations who can help their clientele navigate the map and provide information to CNAL as well. For instance, community centres and First Nations band offices.

Promote the map in US cities that border and are linked to Canada such as Detroit, which in many ways functions as a community with Windsor.

Reach out to real estate developers, landlords, or others to advertise space they might be willing to rent out to artists/groups, and have them be on the map.

Additional Strategies for Success

Participants felt that CNAL should take on a strong role in sharing people’s experiences and stories, as well as promoting and advertising the different ways in which the arts can enhance professional development and everyday living. Several strategies were shared throughout the focus groups that are currently used by arts organizations to support arts and learning within different contexts, or that are seen as being conducive to the future growth of the arts and learning sector. These strategies may further inform the potential features and uses of the map, or could perhaps otherwise be included on the CNAL website so that organizations and communities can learn from the successes of others.

- Encourage direct experiences with arts venues through enriched arts programming.
- Expose children to the arts from a young age to get them “hooked”.
- Offer accessible price points and ticket packages so that diverse populations can experience the arts.
- Adopt an open-door policy to encourage the public to interact with arts venues.
- Embrace the understanding that learning “within, through, and about the arts” are all equally valuable approaches with unique benefits.
- Offer arts workshops for professionals in diverse disciplines to encourage new ways of thinking and communicating.
- Arts and culture representatives should “get out there” to talk about what’s going on and finding out what happening in the neighborhoods, and act as “walking ambassadors” for their organizations.
- Use visual and digital media (e.g., videos) to showcase the arts in action and social media to get the word out there. However, be wary of negative comments and how those feed negative perceptions of the arts.

- Work with professional networks rather than individual organizations to spread the word about projects and opportunities to more people.
- Offer support rather than duplicating or competing with other programming in the community (e.g., create an overall program that can be delivered within and by different arts venues).
- Offer programs that link post-secondary students to the arts community in meaningful ways (e.g., internships, apprenticeships, volunteering).
- The general public has to *want* to be aware of the arts. Surround them with arts experiences and offer “first points of contact” to act as bridges into the arts (e.g., public art that catches them on their way to work and makes them want to know more).
- Arts festivals are needed where the public can interact with the arts firsthand, and where artists/organizations can showcase their work.
- Artists and organizations could share spaces to create a “hub”, which in turn may increase diversity and funding.

“That’s the great thing about the arts, it helps us celebrate what it really means to be alive.” –Regina participant

Conclusion

The hub activities and discussions thus far have illustrated a positive and dynamic picture of arts and learning across Ontario. Stakeholders in the arts face many challenges and concerns, but nevertheless remain tireless and passionate in their work. A map of arts and learning has the potential to assist those working towards a sustainable future for the arts by showcasing the many offerings across the province, which in turn can promote accessibility, advocacy, and inclusion, as well as the development of different partnerships and funding opportunities. The information gained from these hubs will help create an initial platform on which to build content and experiences that will attract a diverse audience.



A big thanks to all our hub partners!

