

# Canadian Network for Arts & Learning Online Mapping Project

## Summary of Findings

London Hub – Innovation Works

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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, the issues and barriers they face, and how the proposed online map might help them achieve their goals.

The hub started with two arts and culture workshops (Indigenous- and Bollywood dance-themed), followed by a brief presentation of the online map, and then one roundtable focus group discussion.

### Participants

A total of 12 people participated in the focus group discussions (9 participants, 3 CNAL representatives). Of the non-CNAL participants, six were female and three were male. They represented a variety of backgrounds (e.g., tech, theatre, music) and positions (e.g., education coordinator, digital content specialist, executive director, program manager, artist-educator) based in the London area.

### 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

The discussion participants were eager to share their experiences, successes, and concerns within arts and learning. They outlined several issues and barriers in relation to schools, the community arts sector, and the general public. However, their responses overall painted a vibrant and hopeful picture of the arts scene in London, with much of the discussion focusing on how the London Arts Council and various arts organizations have strategically promoted the growth and accessibility of arts opportunities in the city. Participants viewed the map as a way to spread awareness of the arts and showcase successful cross-disciplinary partnerships. Their practical suggestions for improvement focused on outreach strategies and the layout of the map, as well as general suggestions for CNAL as an organization.

### Positive Outlooks and Directions

- School boards are starting to understand that education does not only occur within schools; learning needs to happen in the community as well.
- School board consultants now see “the value of the arts for the arts themselves” rather than solely in service of other academic subject areas.
- Arts organizations are generally very supportive of each other and want to see each other succeed.
- More and more people in different sectors are seeking out the support and expertise of arts organizations.
- Post-secondary institutions and students are motivated to work within the community.

### Perceived Issues

#### In relation to schools

- There is some competition among arts organizations to appeal to school populations.
- Funding is limited for school arts programs and field trips, and also budget cuts for post-secondary community-oriented programs.
- School mandates limit the focus and selection of learning activities outside of school.
- The high cost of bussing for school groups.
- There seems to be a decline in arts education opportunities in schools as compared with previous generations.
- The arts are devalued within the school system as a whole.

#### In relation to the community arts sector

- 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.

- Certain groups and/or organizations “hoard” information and keep it within their specific realm.
- Personnel and resources are limited for community outreach.

### **In relation to the general public**

- Not everyone is “digitally connected” or has access to technology.
- People have limited entertainment budgets and have to make spending choices (i.e., why see a play once a month for \$10 when you can get a Netflix account for the same price?)
- People are afraid to step out of their comfort zones.

### **Strategies for Success**

- 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.
- Understand 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.
- Those involved in the arts need to act as “walking ambassadors” for their organizations.
- Use visual and digital media (e.g., videos) to showcase the arts in action.
- Work across sectors and build interdisciplinary partnerships (e.g., among the arts sector and the economic or health sectors).
- 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 Map**

#### **Potential Benefits**

- 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.

## Concerns and Suggestions

### *Key questions raised*

- There may be several maps out there in existence, so how will people know to go to this one? How do we avoid duplication?
- How do we get more people involved and attract a greater audience for the map?
- How do we get the message out to the masses as opposed to the masses trying to get to our message?

### *Outreach suggestions*

- Sending the map link to key knowledge brokers, such as realtors, libraries, social service centres, seniors centres, tourist centres, etc.
- Creating 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.

### *Considerations for the map*

- Offering suggestions to people based on their previous interactions with the map (e.g., if you liked this arts venue, here are some other options you might explore).
- Providing access to testimonials, personal stories, images, and videos.
- Making the map mobile friendly as many people primarily use their phones for internet browsing.
- Considering key accessibility features: colour contrast, click radius, proper tagging, overall site structure.
- Addressing the physical accessibility of arts and learning venues (e.g., are there ramps? Elevators?).
- 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).
- Creating different “lenses” through which to view the map (e.g., an Indigenous lens that showcases how Indigenous communities engage with the arts).

## General suggestions for CNAL

- Promote and advertise the different ways in which the arts can benefit professional development, future job prospects, and every day living.
- Understand that different people have different preferences and needs and that's okay; those who have use for the map will use it, those who don't won't.
- Post articles and stories about people's experiences with the arts.
- Be as open and invitational as possible to attract different types of people.

## Suggestions for Future Hubs

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

- Having two energizing activities before the roundtable was perhaps a bit much and seemed to take away from the discussion. In future, we might consider a different structure (e.g., one workshop and discussion, followed by another workshop at the end).
- There was not enough time to really engage in the workshops, and either one could have lasted a full hour. One workshop of that nature would be optimal.
- We should continue to seek out a diverse range of activities that encourage people to try something new, as illustrated by the participant quote below:

*“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.”*