

A Dialogue With Alberta's Arts Sector



Alberta

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“The arts are not just recreational, but part of self care and quality of life.”

Edmonton Regional Dialogue participant

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Executive Summary

March 2011

Culture connects us to our communities, our province, and to the world. It reflects who we are: what we value and consider beautiful, how we spend our leisure time, how we think about and treat each other, where we come from, and where we are going. Culture is increasingly acknowledged as a necessary element of a healthy and balanced society. In fact, there is a high level of recognition among Albertans that quality of life is important, and culture is a key contributor. Alberta's cultural industries and the arts also help to give our province an important advantage as we compete to attract and retain skilled workers and their families.

The Spirit of Alberta, the province's cultural policy, provides a framework to create a better quality of life through increased **access** to cultural activities; greater community **capacity** to support culture; emphasis on **excellence** for cultural professionals; and sustainability and growth of **cultural industries**. The Government of Alberta is working to achieve the goals of *The Spirit of Alberta* through a number of agencies and programs including the Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA), the Alberta Multimedia Development Fund (AMDF); the Premier's Council on the Arts and Culture (PCAC); and the Alberta Film Commission.

The Government of Alberta is proud of our province's unique and vibrant culture, proud of the fact that Alberta is the only province in Canada that provides grants to amateur artists, and proud that Alberta is third in per capita arts funding in the country. The Government of Alberta wants to see the arts continue to grow and flourish. Starting in December 2009, the Honourable Lindsay Blackett, Minister of Alberta Culture and Community Spirit hosted a series of meetings in six communities across the province with the arts sector.

The purpose was to identify challenges and opportunities where the government and the arts sector could work together to support healthy and vibrant communities. Conversations focused on commonly shared issues and participants consistently commented on how they appreciated the chance to actually have a dialogue. At this time the Minister committed to making this an annual activity.

Between October 7 and December 8, 2010, the Minister returned to each of the six communities he visited previously, as well as two new communities. The Minister met with arts sector representatives in Grande Prairie, Calgary, Red Deer, Fort McMurray, Edmonton, Lethbridge, Cold Lake and Medicine Hat. Those who were unable to attend the meetings were able to provide feedback through the Culture and Community Spirit website.

The size of the arts sector in Alberta, along with diverse local needs and interests, resulted in unique conversations within each community. There were, however, a number of themes that were repeated in several of the conversations that are important to note:

- Promoting the Arts
- Funding Challenges
- Communication and Collaboration
- Facility Needs
- Engaging the Private Sector
- Engaging Young Albertans
- Regional Challenges – Northern Communities

Approximately 175 people from the arts sector participated in the second round of dialogues. The following is a summary of what was heard and the solutions both Alberta Culture and Community Spirit and the sector are currently engaged in¹. Also included are new actions Alberta Culture and Community Spirit is undertaking as a result of the dialogues. This report is arranged based upon the key themes that emerged.

¹ 'Sector Solutions' are examples of sector led activities that Alberta Culture and Community Spirit is aware of. These activities may only provide a small snapshot of the best practices and collaborative work being led by the sector. Additionally, this report does not include the work being done by other Government of Alberta ministries in support of the sector.

Promoting the Arts

The breadth of work undertaken by the sector and the positive impacts on the Alberta economy and quality of life is not well-understood by Albertans. The value of the arts sector in Alberta needs to be better communicated².

What we heard...

"There are benefits to be achieved from partnering with other marketing organizations, such as Travel Alberta."
(Multiple locations)

"Given the interest in technology, 'creative industries' is a positive way to market arts to youth."
(Multiple locations)

"The value of the arts to the economy and people's quality of life needs to be better promoted to our citizens."
(Multiple locations)



The Government of Alberta, through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts is helping to unleash the potential of Alberta's artists and arts organizations through funding, promotion and capacity-building.

Donna Durand and Jonathan Werkema perform during Alberta arts Days 2010 at the Red Deer Museum and Art Gallery.

² This theme was mentioned in the winter 2009-10 Regional Dialogues, and continues to be of interest to many within the arts sector.

What has happened...

- **Sector/Government Solution:** [Alberta Arts Days 2010](#) was held September 17 to 19 and encouraged Albertans to discover, experience and celebrate our unique and talented artists, and the importance of arts and culture to healthy and vibrant communities. The Government of Alberta has taken a leadership role in this province-wide celebration; yet it is through the support and participation of Alberta's artists and arts organizations that this initiative has grown as quickly as it has and become a staple event for Albertans. Thousands celebrated and explored an array of artistic disciplines through 681 events in 91 communities in 2010. Alberta played a key role in launching the first year of National Culture Days.

Each year, in an effort to stimulate community involvement, Alberta Culture and Community Spirit forms partnerships with organizations, facilities or event planners where Alberta Arts Days events are spotlighted. These Feature Celebration Sites incorporate community-level partnerships between local groups, artists and arts organizations.

Family-friendly activities and performances featuring local artists are presented at these sites throughout the Alberta Arts Days weekend. Partnerships between the ministry and five Feature Celebration Sites were established for 2010:

- Lethbridge - Southern Alberta Art Gallery and community partners;
- Grande Prairie - Centre for the Creative Arts and community partners;
- Red Deer - Red Deer College, Red Deer Museum, Art Gallery and other community partners;
- St. Albert - Arden Theatre and other community partners; and
- Banff - Banff Centre for the Arts and other community partners.

- **Sector/Government Solution:** Alberta artists and arts organizations were given a national stage during Grey Cup 2010 in Edmonton on November 28. Alberta Culture and Community Spirit working with the 2010 Grey Cup Committee staged a variety of fun and engaging events that included a downtown Family Festival and Street Party, parade, concert and other related activities. Approximately 4,500 people attended Alberta House during the festivities with 32 Alberta artists offering performances.

- **Government Solution:** The [Alberta Culture Calendar](#), part of Alberta Culture and Community Spirit's [Culture in High Gear](#) website, was created for the cultural community to promote their events to the Alberta public as a 'one stop' source of information. Communication is taking place with the arts and heritage communities to encourage better usage of the calendar.

- **Government Solution:** Alberta had a significant presence at the Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games and the Cultural Olympiad, where over 80 Alberta artists and groups were given the opportunity to showcase their work to international audiences. This provided the artists with new opportunities for developing new contacts in other locations, including 40 Alberta artists who participated in free concerts at Alberta Plaza.



Maria Dunn performs at Alberta House during the 2010 Vancouver Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games.

What we're going to do...

- Alberta Culture and Community Spirit and the AFA will continue to circulate information on government and sector-led programs and initiatives through its various social media networks (E.g., AFA Newswire, [AFA Facebook](#) page, [AFA Twitter](#), [Alberta Arts Days Facebook](#) page, [Alberta Film Classification Twitter](#)).
- Alberta Culture and Community Spirit will explore new ways to promote the arts through the use of technology.
- Alberta Culture and Community Spirit will explore opportunities with Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation and Travel Alberta and other jurisdictions to feature culture in marketing efforts to generate travel to and within the province.
- The AFA will assist the arts community in assessing their externally targeted communication needs by developing programs that the community can utilize in developing their plans.
- The AFA will explore potential marketing relationships with municipal, provincial and federal funding programs as well as the private sector to assist in generating awareness about the value of the arts.
- Alberta Culture and Community Spirit will work with other jurisdictions and stakeholders to conduct research to measure the economic and quality-of-life benefits of the arts.
- Alberta Culture and Community Spirit will work with partners to promote greater participation in Alberta Arts Days 2011 (September 30 – October 2) and boost the impact and reach of community efforts to promote the value and availability of cultural programming in our province. From five celebration sites in 2010, the same amount of money will be used to support 55 – 60 celebration sites in 2011.

Funding Challenges

Access to ongoing, sustainable funding from public and private sources remains a critical and pressing challenge.

What we heard...

"Ongoing funding stability and predictability are the greatest challenges."

(Multiple locations)

"AFA funding cuts in 2010 had a huge impact..."

(Multiple locations)

As a result of funding cuts, organizations have had to develop more creative operating methods. These include: 1) seeking partnerships with and receiving additional funding from the private sector; 2) reducing business costs; 3) reducing programming; and 4) re-focusing on what needed to be done in order to survive and to ensure sustainability without relying on government funding.

Organizations are frustrated by the administrative burdens of completing huge, complex applications. For example, applicants may need to coordinate grant requirements from municipal, provincial and federal governments.

What has happened...

- **Government Solution:** Financial support to artists and arts organizations from the province has seen a 55 per cent increase in the past five years. There are no reductions to the 2011-12 AFA budget; which is roughly \$28 million and reflects the transfer of Cultural Industries programming and funding to the Alberta Multimedia Development Fund.
- **Government Solution:** The AFA has achieved operational and administrative efficiencies by moving from 36 grant streams through four programs in 2009 to 18 streams through three programs in 2011. This has benefited artists and arts organizations in easing the administration associated with identifying and applying for grant funding.

What we're going to do...

- Continue to further refine the AFA's grant streams, in dialogue with the sector.
- Examine funding policies to ensure that no unintentional barriers are created that may inhibit partnership development within the sector.
- Examine the opportunity for an arts sector conference for artists and arts organizations from across the province. Topics related to funding could include promising business practices in the arts sector, development of strategic partnerships and marketing alliances to promote cultural tourism.
- Examine further administrative efficiencies, including online applications, in applying for AFA grant streams.

Communication and Collaboration

Collaboration between artists, arts organizations and government is a positive practice to achieve shared outcomes. Some participants commented on how the sector would benefit from the development of an arts advocacy group and a sector conference.

What we heard...

"The sector needs a singular, province-wide body that can speak with a collective voice when approaching government."

(Multiple locations)

"Collaboration, not competition, is the key to building sustainability within the sector."

(Multiple locations)

There is strong sector support for a Government of Alberta-facilitated arts conference to allow organizations and artists to share best practices.

There is a continued need for arts groups to communicate and collaborate on:

- Best practices including operational and sustainable funding;
- Marketing strategies;
- Facility sharing opportunities;
- Information sharing opportunities; and
- Networking and partnerships.

What has happened...

- **Government Solution:** The AFA has developed a Facebook page that encourages the sharing of arts and culture news and opportunities by members of the arts sector.
- **Government Solution:** The [Culture in High Gear](#) website was developed as a mechanism for the cultural community to promote their events to the Alberta public through The Alberta Culture Calendar.
- **Government Solution:** All social media and online tools are featured prominently in the AFA Newswire, an electronic newsletter that reaches approximately 5,000 subscribers.
- **Government Solution:** Alberta Culture and Community Spirit is currently examining the opportunity for an arts sector conference for artists and arts organizations from across the province.

What we're going to do...

- Conduct discussions with cultural industry stakeholders to receive input on approaches to grant guideline development that will support the sound recording and book and magazine publishing industries.
- Alberta Culture and Community Spirit is currently examining the opportunity for an arts sector conference for artists and arts organizations from across the province.
- Develop Terms of Reference for a Cultural Industries Advisory Committee to provide advice to the Minister on a comprehensive sector strategy related to film, television, digital media, sound, and book and magazine publishing.

- Encourage the use of technology to build better business models, develop new products and services as well as improve the sharing of information.
- Ensure the arts sector is aware of the available [Government of Alberta programs](#) that assist in capacity building, strategic planning and board development/leadership.
- Promote existing Alberta Culture and Community Spirit professional development programs that are available online for leadership, succession planning, etc.
- Explore the development of online grant application assistance tools such as form wizards and online grant tutorials.
- Explore the development of a non-Government of Alberta hosted central hub to facilitate information sharing for sector organizations.
- Work with arts sector leadership to develop organizational capacity through partnerships within the community and the sector to strengthen arts organizations.
- Work with partners to provide assistance to the sector in the areas of audits, training, and procurement.

Facility Needs

Affordable and appropriate facilities and space is crucial for artists and arts organizations. Affordability includes facility development or retrofitting, technical features and specialized equipment. A number of attendees commented on the lack of affordable space for arts production and administration and how the sector would benefit if this was in place.

What we heard...

“There is a great deal of available space, but it is not affordable.”

(Multiple locations)

“Arts venues can’t afford to provide reasonably priced space to other arts organizations.”

(Multiple locations)

“Funding has been provided to build the spaces; sustainably operating these spaces is the challenge.”

(Multiple locations)

“There is a lack of usable space for organizations with specific performance/technical needs.”

(Multiple locations)

“The development of a facilities listing (focusing on available space) would be beneficial to the sector.”

(Multiple locations)

“Affordable rental space is needed for individual artists.”

(Multiple locations)

What has happened...

- **Government Solution:** Alberta Culture and Community Spirit has prepared a [Regional Cultural Facilities Dialogue Report](#) following six community consultations in 2009.
- **Government Solution:** Alberta Culture and Community Spirit staff have encouraged clients to explore funding opportunities through the [Community Facility Enhancement Program \(CFEP\)](#) – a granting program that provides assistance with the construction, renovation or redevelopment of community public-use facilities including facilities that support arts and culture.
- **Sector/Government Solution:** Over the past three years Alberta Culture and Community Spirit has invested in provincial arts facilities:
 - Montrose Cultural Centre in Grande Prairie - \$1.5 million
 - Olds College Fine Arts and Multimedia Centre in Olds - \$85,000
 - Southern Alberta Art Gallery in Lethbridge - \$250,000
 - Nina Haggerty Centre for the Arts in Edmonton - \$750,000
 - Art Gallery of Alberta in Edmonton, approximately - \$30 million
 - Rosebud Theatre in Rosebud - \$450,000
 - Medalta Potteries in Medicine Hat - \$2.3 million
 - Citadel Theatre in Edmonton - \$2.3 million
 - EPCOR Centre for the Performing Arts in Calgary - \$500,000



The Government of Alberta recognizes that the successful production of cultural goods and events depends on the availability of adequate and specialized facilities. Community enhancement programs are assisting communities and organizations in maintaining and developing the facilities they need for culture to flourish.

Lethbridge's Southern Alberta Art Gallery

What we're going to do...

- Examine ways to improve the use of and access to existing funding programs to better meet the needs of the arts sector.
- Develop a Cultural Facilities Capital Planning Framework that addresses medium and long-term needs throughout the province. This framework will enable the Government of Alberta to identify and prioritize the cultural facility needs of communities across the province.



Medalta Potteries National Historic Site, Medicine Hat

Engaging the Private Sector

Arts organizations are reaching out to the private sector for support with increasing frequency in light of funding pressures but also to assist in strengthening the arts community by building partnerships.

What we heard...

"Encouraging business to work with the arts sector is essential."

(Multiple locations)

"Tax incentives are a great opportunity to increase engagement with the private sector."

(Multiple locations)

What has happened...

- **Sector/Government Solution:** Working with industry partners, Alberta Culture and Community Spirit is supporting the development of a new film studio in Calgary that will enhance support, retention and attraction of film, television and digital media production investment and related job creation in Alberta.
- **Sector/Government Solution:** Working with community arts organizations, provided information to assist in developing partnerships with the private sector in support of Arts Days.
- **Sector Solution:** Since the regional dialogues one organization, The Community Learning Network (www.communitylearning.info) has negotiated a special rate for the nonprofit/voluntary sector with *Alberta Charities and Non-Profit Organizations/Staples Advantage Office Supply Program!* Information on the savings has been shared through various nonprofit/voluntary sector networks throughout the province so that others can take advantage of the specially negotiated rate.

What we're going to do...

- Develop an inventory of potential private sector organizations that may be interested in partnering with or investing in the arts and culture sectors locally, regionally, provincially, and nationally.
- Review the possibility of making the inventory available through the [AFA website](#).
- Work with Alberta Finance and Enterprise to explore innovative approaches to encouraging private sector investment in the culture sector.
- Alberta Culture and Community Spirit is committed to continuing discussions with sector organizations and accounting institutions on the cost of audits for nonprofit/voluntary sector organizations.

Engaging Young Albertans

The desire to more effectively tap into youth audiences and artists is an ongoing priority for the sector and is essential to the sustainability of the sector.

What we heard...

"The arts sector needs new strategies, including communication, to increase youth engagement."
(Multiple locations)

"Organizations may consider using digital technologies and social networking tools to reach younger generations who have a different approach to accessing information and culture."
(Multiple locations)

"There should be an emphasis on providing arts opportunities to youth through varied programming."
(Multiple locations)

"The arts curriculum needs to be more effectively utilized in Alberta schools."
(Multiple locations)

What has happened...

- **Government Solution:** Alberta Culture and Community Spirit has undertaken various initiatives to engage young Albertans as cultural ambassadors for Alberta.
 - Alberta House at World Skills 2009³ highlighted the performances of a dozen musicians under the age of 22.
 - Alberta's cultural program at the 2010 Winter Olympics featured numerous young performers as part of the Cultural Olympiad and programming at Alberta Plaza.
- **Government Solution:** Alberta Arts Days programming for 2009 and 2010 featured U22 performers⁴ at Alberta Culture and Community Spirit's cultural facilities (i.e. Royal Alberta Museum); as well as other public buildings in downtown Edmonton.
- **Government/Sector Solution:** Other programming supported by Alberta Culture and Community Spirit including, the Games Cultural Component (Canada, Arctic and Alberta), Alberta Future Leaders and special projects such as Alberta Untapped, highlight and promote the talents of young Alberta artists by offering them development and performance opportunities.
- **Government/Sector Solution:** The dates for Alberta Arts Days 2011 were referenced in the 2011 Speech from the Throne as a way to continue to celebrate the rich diversity of arts, culture and heritage throughout our province.

What we're going to do...

- Develop relationships with existing youth organizations to build future leaders for the arts sector.
- Create an action plan to develop youth arts leaders.

³ World Skills is an international biennial skills, trades, and technologies competition promoting excellence and global industry standards. Competitions range from robotics to web design, welding to cooking, and auto-body repair to landscape gardening. 848 competitors and thousands of delegates from around the world attended [World Skills 2009](#) in Calgary.

⁴ [U22 Productions](#) is a collection of talented and promising young musicians aged 22 and under.

Regional Challenges – Northern Communities

Participants in northern communities identified issues unique to their location.

What we heard...

“There is a lack of available professional talent without having to pay huge travel costs.”
(Multiple locations)

“Challenges experienced by local educators results in performers moving to larger urban centres to satisfy their training needs.”
(Multiple locations)

“There is a lack of basic art supplies through local suppliers.”
(Multiple locations)

“The lack of a distinct arts/cultural centre has created ‘strangers’ amongst Wood Buffalo arts community.”
(Multiple locations)

“There is an increasing demand amongst the local population for art facilities, particularly a large cultural centre for multicultural and arts groups. Potential solutions include the construction of a new structure, or retrofitting of existing buildings.”
(Multiple locations)

What has happened...

- **Sector/Government Solution:** Fort McMurray and Grande Prairie served as Feature Celebration Sites and partners for Alberta Arts Days in 2009 and 2010 respectively.
- The City of Grande Prairie recently committed \$5,000 to Arts Days 2011.
- **Government Solution:** The AFA ensures that the Travelling Exhibition (TRES) Program – a program that brings visual art works to local communities – continues to tour art exhibitions to Northern communities as well as across the province.



Wearable Arts Show, Alberta Arts Days 2010
Centre for Creative Arts, Grande Prairie

What we're going to do...

- Establish smaller working groups to discuss specific regional issues facing the sector in addition to the Minister's regional dialogue sessions.
- Bring together both nonprofit and arts organizations into a common discussion to address regional needs.



This report was compiled in March 2011. For information on the Alberta Culture and Community Spirit programs and initiatives highlighted in this report, call 780-427-9968*.

**Dial 310-0000 for toll-free access in Alberta*

Additional information on government programs and initiatives that support community development and cultural vibrancy in Alberta can be found at www.culture.alberta.ca