

Letter sent by email on December 12, 2016.

Dear Simon Brault,

I have long been an admirer of the enlightened and sophisticated ways that Canada has supported community engaged arts activities. I am the leading spokesperson for "teaching artists" in the U.S., and I speak highly of this in my keynote speeches in the U.S., Canada and abroad.

However, I have become alarmed in noticing that the Canada Council's new funding model eliminates the explicit funding pathway for community engaged work. While I am sure that you might argue that the reorganization just adjusts what was already in place without making a real change, I see real risk for this work to be diminished--the very work that has distinguished Canada in the eyes of many. Again and again, in country after country, I have seen community engagement work suffer when its visible identity was diminished. This work is easily marginalized, as are the people it serves, and unless a proud and prominent banner reminds everyone about it, the louder and more glamorous kinds of projects take the focus and money.

I urge you to include community-engaged arts as its own field, distinguished as a proud and particular field of practice, a colleague to other arts practices and not assumed or subsumed in other fields.

I recommend that you inaugurate consultation with this sector to define criteria for consistent assessment of grant proposals, and that you empower peer-respected artists experienced in community based practice as the project and application assessors.

Please give community-engaged arts prominence on the Canada Council's website, both in video and text. Don't let these programs be "underserved" by the Council, as so many communities are underserved in the arts.

Thank you for taking this concern seriously--it IS serious to me, to many in the U.S. and Canada, and especially to the hundreds of thousands whose lives are enriched by these programs.

Sincerely,
Eric Booth

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