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**To:** ["Direct to Mayor and Council - DL"](#)  
**Date:** 1/13/2023 6:00:57 PM  
**Subject:** RTS 15452 2023 Cultural Grants Report - additional background  
**Attachments:** Dragon Boat Festival 2023 Cultural Grant.msg

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Mayor and Council,

In advance of the upcoming RTS 15452 2023 Cultural Grants (CASC, Advance Grants, Capacity Report Back), we have received questions regarding about a number of the recommendations, specifically: (a) VANDU Art Table, (b) Canadian International Dragonboat Festival Society, and (c) Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival Society.

Below, staff have provided some specific information regarding these three grant recommendations, as well as general commentary about granting that provides some context to the reasons for recommendations of such grants, the community-driven grant recommendations process, and considerations for Council as part of the report review. Also attached is Managing Director of Cultural Services Branislav Henselmann's response to recent email from the Dragonboat Festival Society re: the grant recommendation.

#### Recommended Grant to VANDU for an Art Table project

There was a question received related to the recommendation to grant VANDU \$7,500 in support of an art program (Art Table). Specifically, the query relates to the City stance on any recommended grant funding for VANDU-related programs given their history of public critique of the City, as well as some of their protest activity during the recent encampment.

ACCS grants fund programs, projects, services, and spaces. City grants generally – unless directed by Council – do not fund advocacy activities. The VANDU Art Table cultural grant recommendation is seeking to support a very specific project of the organization, that focuses on providing a low barrier creative program for people to express themselves, connect with other people, and access other resource that Vandu offers. This grant funding is not for general operating support of VANDU's advocacy initiatives or ongoing programs and services. The project, as per the grant application, is as follows:

The VANDU art table "is a consistent art table for the DTES community twice a week that hosts local, cultural artists' workshops and collaborates other DTES organizations for larger projects. Hosting local cultural artists not just once but multiple times so a deeper relationship and trust is formed and specific artistic skills can be developed. We've been building these relationships with Musqueam elder, Rita Kompst, who instructs on cedar weaving and cultural artist, CJ Santana, for Dia de los Muertos and other Indigenous Turtle Island celebrations. We are looking to continue the Art Table in this manner, twice a week, with stipends spots for members, specialized workshops by visiting artists, and collaborations with DTES organizations and artists that have a focus on healing and grieving."

To support accountability for how grants are spend, staff receive final reports from grant recipients that outline how the funding was spent and, in rare cases when the funding was not spent as outlined in the grant agreement based on the grant application, appropriate action is taken: e.g., misspent funding is recalled, second installment not issued, agreement is cancelled, etc.

Generally, to avoid perceived constraints on freedom of expression, peer juries, staff at the City, as well as other funding organizations, do not consider applicants' critique of government as a factor in assessing eligibility for a grant.

#### CASC (Communities and Artists Shifting Culture) Program Context/Background

For this report, out of 84 applicants, 59 organizations that reflect the diversity of Vancouver and align with CASC program and *Culture/Shift* priorities have been recommended for funding. However, of the 25 applications that were declined funding, two organizations - as outlined below – have regularly applied for project funding for their annually recurring festivals and have previously received funding: Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival Society and Canadian International



## Dragonboat Festival Society.

As per usual practice, CASC grant recommendations, as most Cultural Services grant programs, are informed by community peer juries, made up of expert community members, guiding and augmenting staff's specific experience and expertise in the arts and cultural sector. This practice is the cornerstone of arts funding locally (i.e.. Vancouver Foundation), provincially (i.e.. BC Arts Council), as well as federally (i.e.. Canada Council for the Arts). Within the context of limited resources and continuously increasing number of new and expanding events, the peer jury members endeavour to guide staff recommendations by ensuring that limited resources are shared in ways that respond to current and growing needs in the cultural community. These are not easy recommendations to make and each year the committees must make very difficult recommendations to discontinue, pause, or deny funding to approximately 30% of the applicants. However, there are other City supports to augment these resources, including Sport Hosting Vancouver grants, Transit Shelter and Video Screen Advertising and various off-sets or discounts through Park Board which these groups benefit from. This ongoing support is a testament to the City's commitment to important events even when cash grants cannot be recommended.

Please note that, generally:

- CASC is a project-based funding program. While many CASC applicants apply regularly for annual recurring events, funding in previous years does not guarantee subsequent funding.
- As with any competitive grant program, grant recommendations vary based on how well the project aligns with the program objectives and criteria.
- CASC grant program is consistently oversubscribed with total grant requests exceeding available funds; staff have received a total request amount of \$1,160,033 and were working with an available budget of \$470,000 for this first intake for CASC project grants.
- Overall, there has been an increase in demand for this grant program with little to no increase in available funds.

Below are some specific peer jury assessment committee comments related to the two unsuccessful applicants mentioned above:

### ***Canadian International Dragonboat Festival Society***

While the organization met general eligibility criteria, it was not recommended for funding by the community peer jury as, during the assessment process, other applications rated higher in addressing this program's priorities. Specifically, peer jury noted that other applicants demonstrated greater financial need, and crucially, artistic programming is decided on by a committee of the board rather than artistic leadership. Leadership also confirmed that there is little to no input from artists that are active in the community, although the organization provides important opportunities for local artists to showcase their work. The CASC grant program supports the artistic celebration of the event (not the entire event itself), however, no artists were identified in the application making it difficult to assess this component

Peer jury also noted that activity is taking place on a waterway, and questions with respect to permissions and working with local Nations were not adequately addressed. Since other applications for projects with host Nations leadership and participation secured their involvement, those projects ranked higher.

The organization has been supported for several years in amounts ranging from \$6,000 - \$9,000; this is the first year in the last seven years that they have been declined funding.

Staff have held consistent conversations with the festival organizers over the years, and leading to the application deadline, as well as after the grant results have been announced. Most recently staff met with Dominic Liu on Sept. 13<sup>th</sup> in 2022 for an hour to discuss questions and concerns that Dominic had raised, including decreasing levels of support and concern that lack of City funds would impact federal support. Staff have offered consistent feedback of community member peer juries as follows:

- Questions around artistic leadership and who is making the artistic programming choices. Currently there is no artistic personnel, and the decisions are being made by those without expertise. Often applications are made without artists being identified which makes it challenging for this central component of the grant program to be assessed.
- Decreasing levels of support impacting other levels of funding. City staff, by requirement of the Department of Heritage, complete forms to indicate support (in-kind and cash) to ensure eligibility for federal funding under the community celebrations program. Even if funding is not yet approved, staff will indicate other types of support (in-kind promotion, space, permits, etc.) which enable access to federal funds.
- Staff have invited the society to make applications to the two deadlines each year to increase their chances for



- funding, but they have not chosen to take that opportunity.
- Staff have also introduced them to our cultural spaces colleagues to access information and funding for facility upgrades.

It is also important to note that in recent years other canoe projects and festivals have come into being – the Canoe Cultures Society and Western Canada Community Projects Society. These organizations have been well received by the community given their strong alignment with local First Nations leaders, artists, and communities. Current leadership of the Dragon Boat festival in recent correspondence to the City and in other conversations with staff, has not spoken well of the Dragon Boat’s previous leadership and who is currently leading and co-leading these two societies.

Staff will be in touch with organization again in the coming weeks.

### **Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival Society**

While the organization met general eligibility criteria, peer jury committee members did not recommend funding as, during the assessment process, other applications rated higher in addressing CASC program’s priorities. Specifically, peer jury noted that proposed activity does not prioritize artist-led programming or incorporate high level of engagement with the artistic community.

Please note that the organization has been supported for several years in amounts ranging from \$6,000 - \$8,000; this is the first year in the last seven years that they have been declined funding.

Staff are always able to provide information during report deliberation and in advance of consideration. Should Council require further information, please feel free to contact Sandra Singh directly at [sandra.singh@vancouver.ca](mailto:sandra.singh@vancouver.ca) and she will make all efforts to provide a response in advance of the Council meeting. Staff will also be at Council to respond to any questions in person.

Best,  
Paul

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Additional notes for reference:

### **Meetings Held with Dragon Boat Festival Society**

1. July 2020: correspondence around Community Arts grant, delayed award due to covid. First touchpoint with the organization after staff transition
2. Sept 2020: correspondence connecting DB with Peter around VCT spaces, as DB was planning an exhibition on the history of dragon boat
3. Feb 22, 2021: mtg in advance of CASC 2021 intake
4. Feb 26, 2021: I attended their exhibition at the BC Sports Hall of Fame
5. Feb 23, 2021: introduction made to Public Art team as DB was contemplating a public art piece at the festival site
6. Oct 14, 2021: Webex meeting in advance of CASC 2022-1 intake
7. Tues, Sept 13, 2022: Teams mtg in anticipation of the CASC 2023-1 intake deadline of Oct 26, 2022

### **High Level Summary of Discussions (2021, 2022)**

- **Artistic vision:** With the growth of the festival and increased focus on artistic programming, the org has been encouraged to create a structure for community/artist input going forward. Currently, artistic programming is decided on by a committee of the board. Leadership confirmed that there is little to no input from artists that are active in the community; though the org provides opportunities for local artists to showcase their work
- **New facility in Chinatown:** DB has recently moved into a multi-floor building in Chinatown. In addition to office space, they intend to build a gymnasium/fitness centre, and a performing arts space with a gallery. Connection made with Spaces around the Cultural Infrastructure grant, which leadership was dismissive of at first because they assumed it would not provide them with enough funds. When notified of the \$250k potential, they were amenable to an introduction. (Conversation on Sept 13, 2022 and follow-up email).

- **Demonstration of financial need:** committees have expressed that financial need is not demonstrated, as the festival has access to and receives a substantial amount of corporate and private donor support, in addition to funding/supports from all levels of government. Financial statements indicate healthy financial position and well-compensated staff (compared to many arts orgs).
- **Applying to multiple intakes:** CASC was launched in 2021 with one intake in March, and a key feature to increase access to funding is that organizations can apply to both intakes with different projects. 2022 was the first year in which CASC had two intakes. In response to the organization's concern with the decreased award (email of Jan 19, 2022), the organization was encouraged to consider applying for both intakes and avail themselves of this opportunity to apply for more funds, particularly because of the increased focus on artistic activity and programming outside of the festival time in partnership with Chinatown organizations. The next opportunity would have been the March intake of CASC (2022-2), pretty quickly after the conversation was held. However, leadership stated that this doesn't work in their timelines and did not apply.

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The City of Vancouver acknowledges that it is situated on the unceded traditional territories of the x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əyəm (Musqueam), Sḵwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.



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**Subject:** Dragon Boat Festival 2023 Cultural Grant

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Dear Ms. Gall, dear Mr. Lai,

Many thanks for your comments in response to the grant recommendation - they are very much appreciated.

By the way of context, I wanted to highlight that, similar to most of Cultural Services' funding programs, the CASC grants program is adjudicated by, and the recommendations are made in collaboration with the community peer juries. This practice is the corner stone of arts funding locally (ie. Vancouver Foundation), provincially (ie. BC Arts Council), as well as federally (ie. Canada Council for the Arts). As you mention in your email, within the context of limited resources and continuously increasing number of new and expanding events, the peer jury members endeavour to guide staff recommendations by ensuring that limited resources are shared in ways that respond to current and growing needs in the cultural community. Please know that these are not easy recommendations to make; the peer juries and the staff care deeply about the arts and cultural sector, yet, each year, the committees have to make very difficult recommendations to discontinue, pause, or deny funding to approximately 30% of the applicants.

There are several larger scale events in the city, now including the Dragon Boat Festival which has grown significantly with the initial support of Cultural Services, that, due to their scope and scale, do not always align with the arts and culture grant programs in their entirety. However, there are other City supports, including Sport Hosting Vancouver grants, Transit Shelter Advertising, and various off-sets or discounts through Park Board, which provide important supports to such larger-scale events. This ongoing, steadfast support is a testament to City's commitment to important events such as the Dragon Boat Festival, and the impact it has in the community.

I understand that my colleague Aliyah Amarashi, who manages the CASC program, has been in touch to provide some specific feedback about jury's decisions and the general context about this round of recommendations. I would ask you to please consider continuing that conversation with Aliyah and our team at Cultural Services.

We, and our colleagues in Sport Hosting and Park Board, would also be interested to hear more about your thoughts regarding the intersection of sports and culture, as well as the intersection of public and private sector funding mechanisms to support large-scale events that engage both artistic and active participants and general public. This is an important discussion as part of our ongoing efforts to put structures in place that will better serve the communities by addressing the multiplicities of their needs.

Our goal is to continue to support Vancouver's many vibrant communities in meaningful ways and in ways that align with their capacity and need - this can only be done by ensuring ongoing permeability of information flow among everyone involved, be it artists, producing organizations, supporters and funders, and impacted communities. This approach is at the very core of community-based work that led the creation, adoption, and now, implementation of *Culture|Shift*.

While we understand that the decision in this round of granting may be disappointing, we will make sure to schedule a meeting and discuss future options with you in the coming weeks. Please also note that we will make sure to share this email with the Mayor and Council, so they are aware of this information we have provided you.

Many thanks again for your email, and we look forward to continuing the conversation about the holistic support of the Festival in the future.

Best wishes,

Branislav Henselmann  
Managing Director, Cultural Services