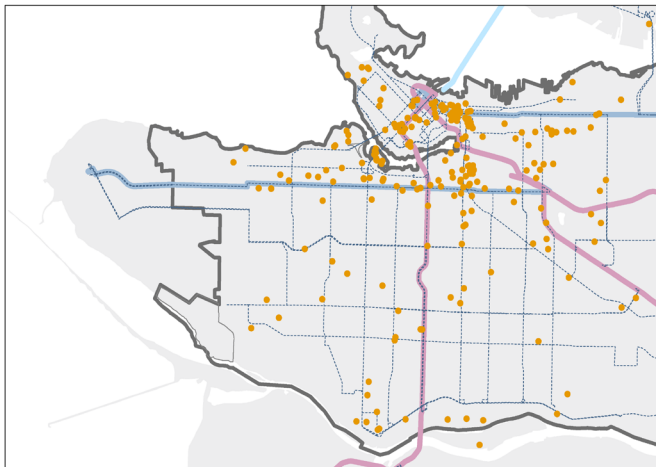


This brief summarizes the impact of COVID-19 on Vancouver’s Arts and Culture non-profit sector. It is a compilation of key excerpts from several surveys, reports and key informant interviews. Highlights have been thematically arranged to provide: an overview of the sector across Vancouver; a brief description of the role and contribution of sports and recreation non-profits; an outline of key issues, needs and barriers; and innovative and resilient responses adopted by the sector that show promise moving forward.

## The Arts and Culture Non-Profit Sector in Vancouver: Overview

Arts and Culture Non-Profit Organizations  
Unceded territories of the x̱m̱əkw̱əy̱əm (Musqueam), Sḵw̱əw̱7mesh (Squamish), and səllw̱ətəl (Tsleil-Waututh) nations



Locations of 394 Arts and Culture organizations in Vancouver  
Data Source: BC211 service directory list accessed April 2020 and ACCS community non-profit partners inventory. Note that locations may reflect an organization’s office location rather than where programs and services occur.

- The characteristics of the arts and culture sector vary but can be broadly categorized by discipline: performing arts (e.g., theatre, music, dance) or studio-arts (e.g. visual and media arts, literary). Groups often form as producers (developing their own material), or presenters (showing work that is developed by others, such as a festival or a series of performances), or service organizations (supporting artists and groups with information, professional development, advocacy efforts, promotion, shared access to equipment or space), or facility operators or cultural facilities (providing artists and groups with access to space such as studio, rehearsal, gallery, theatre, storage, office, multi-purpose etc.).
- Vancouver is home to world-renowned artists and a thriving artist-run centre scene, an epicenter of Indigenous cultural resurgence, as well as Black, Chinese, and South Asian cultural redress. It is known for a distinct community-engaged arts practice, a booming independent music

scene, home to hundreds of annual cultural celebrations and major festivals, well-loved theatres, and well established dance, heritage, and music institutions.

- The city has a dynamic cultural ecosystem including creators, artists, and cultural practitioners who move between disciplines (visual arts, media, theatre, dance, music, writing, storytelling, community arts, Indigenous arts and more) working with commercial and non-commercial organizations of varying mandates and scales.
- A strong cultural infrastructure consists of artist live/work studios, artist run centres, galleries, studios and theatres, multi-purpose space in community centres, shared production and administrative hubs, non-profit video and film spaces, outdoor space, large scale shared studio spaces, informal and DIY music and performance spaces, small and large theatres (including four city-owned and operated Civic Theatres), small and large museums, and major art galleries.
- British Columbia has the highest proportion of artists in Canada, and Vancouver specifically has the highest concentration of artists per-capita among major cities in Canada. An estimated 8,800 professional artists live in the city.

## Contribution of Arts and Culture Non-Profit organizations in Vancouver

- This cultural vitality is critical to the City’s identity, liveability, economic prosperity, social cohesion, and sense of environmental responsibility.
- Vancouver’s cultural diversity and cultural equity are correlated with higher rates of the kinds of openness, risk-taking, and unconventional thinking that drive innovation and respect rich cultural traditional knowledge.
- Culture is the force that cultivates Vancouver’s rich and distinctive sense of place, creating a sense of belonging and acting as an antidote to the homogenizing and polarizing effects of globalization.

- Cultural non-profit organizations promote cultural traditions through music, dance, theatre, painting, sculpture, literature, and media. These are creative expressions that not only enrich people's lives but also shape the cultural identity and spirit of a place generating communal meaning.
- Between 2010 and 2019, the City's Cultural Infrastructure Grants have contributed over \$11 million in capital grants to 135 local arts and culture non-profit groups. This funding has supported over 279 projects, allowing them to plan, buy, build, or renovate both City-owned and community spaces. At the same time, City funding has allowed these organizations to leverage over \$66M in additional investment through co-developments, fundraising, Federal grants, and owner-financed or conventional loans. Approximately 30 projects are supported each year up to a maximum grant of \$250K per organization.
- In 2019, for every \$1 the City invested in core funding to arts and cultural groups another \$14.17 was raised through other revenue sources.
- This investment includes operating support, theatre rental and cultural infrastructure which amounts to \$9.9M which levers \$76.5M in earned revenue, \$34.9M in private sector revenue, \$17.6M in federal funding, \$14.6M in provincial funding, \$1.4M in net investment income, and \$358K in other grants and in-kind support.
- In 2018, the City's investment in core cultural activity generated over 31,000 public performances and activities attracting over 7.8 million attendees and offering approximately 20,000 artist opportunities and 22,000 volunteer opportunities.
- Research conducted by Hill Strategies on culture's economic impact in Canada and BC reveals that cultural economic production outperforms many traditional industries. They contribute 2.7% to the GDP (\$7.9B), outperforming agriculture, fishing and forestry (\$5.8B) and utilities (\$6.3B), and create 4% employment.
- The direct economic impact of the music industry alone is \$690M, creating 7,945 music jobs and 6,595 indirect jobs. Commercial and non-commercial arts and culture organizations both contribute to direct economic impact, and generate substantial jobs. The health of the commercial sector is inextricably linked with the strength and vitality of the broader cultural ecosystem of arts and culture non-profit organizations, DIY collectives, non-professional community arts groups, and individual practitioners.

### **Impacts of Covid-19 on Arts and Culture Non-Profit Organizations in Vancouver**

Unfortunately, COVID-19 has had a profound effect on Vancouver's cultural organizations and individuals working in the arts and culture sector. The pandemic has further

amplified existing challenges faced by the sector, many of which are linked to scarcity of funding and inequitable funding levels, precarious affordable and secure space, lack of secure employment and low income levels, and artists and cultural workers, who through systemic marginalization, are more vulnerable due to the pandemic. The City has recognized that its operations and legislation has excluded or ignored groups and communities who are historically underrepresented. It is increasingly acknowledged locally and globally that systemic racism and its contributing factors have compounding effects and during emergencies, these groups are disproportionately impacted.

- The occurrence of the pandemic disrupted the implementation of Culture|Shift priorities, namely the redistribution of grant funds to achieve more equity in grants investments. In order to avoid further negative impact to a sector already in crisis, recommended community-informed 2020 grant decreases were deferred which resulted in less of an increase in investment in equity-seeking cultural groups in 2020.
- Despite more equity-seeking organizations being supported through core funding in 2019 and 2020, and an increase in investment in equity-seeking groups in those same years, the number of groups is disproportionate to the level of investment: Equity-seeking organizations make up 44% of the number of core groups funded and receive 32% of the funding. Mainstream organizations make up 56% of the number of groups and receive 68% of the funding (with the majority of funding being invested in 5 large institutions).
- Further delays occurred when grants to support hundreds of diverse community-based celebrations and projects (including events such as National Indigenous People's day that moved to an online format for June 21st) were delayed while the City was reviewing the significant impacts on its own budget. Some of the city's most diverse artists and community groups that this program provides ongoing funding to welcomed the approval of these grants on July 21st.
- There is already a lack of affordable space for Vancouver's artists and cultural non-profits, which in some cases can lead to the displacement of cultural workers outside the City. With the closures of facilities and limited numbers of gatherings, facility-based organizations are disproportionately impacted by the loss of income from ticket sales and rentals (45%), compared to organizations without a facility (24%). They report more than twice the average loss in total (\$232K/org), compared to organizations without a facility (\$113K/org) and extended closures and capacity restrictions will disproportionately affect arts and culture facilities in Vancouver and across BC.
- The median income of an artist in Vancouver is \$22,116, below the national poverty line and 44% lower than all Vancouver workers at \$41,900. Local COVID impact data

reports that 43% of artists are concerned they will lose more than 75% of their projected income in 2020.

- Theatre, Music, and Festival groups report higher percentage of losses from ticket sales and reopening delays or restrictions on sales capacities and will disproportionately impact the sustainability of these organizations.

### ***Operational Challenges: Shifts in the sector and the effects on impacted communities***

- Despite the closures, many groups remained active and moved programs online. Earlier in the pandemic, 109 Vancouver-based arts and cultural nonprofits reported that 70% planned to remain open but with modified operations and 22% reported being closed. 1 in 5 (20%) groups reported changing in-person events to virtual events using video conferencing software (Vantage Point Survey conducted April 8 - 21, 2020).
- Most organizations and artists have since moved programming and services online but have reported increased competition for audiences with the vast increase in digital offerings coupled with online access to global content. They have also noted diminishing quality of the work as it was not developed with such a format in mind and they cannot generate as much revenue online compared to a live performance presented in a professional venue.
- Despite rehearsal venues being closed, artists have continued to train in order to maintain their practice (dancers in particular) through access to online workshops and programs from home. While not ideal, this has enabled them to train with people they might not have had access to in person locally.
- Some artists who rely on contract work, have timed the work they take on carefully allowing for two weeks in between to ensure they are not manifesting symptoms and are healthy before they enter into a new environment.
- Organizations operating facilities are disproportionately impacted by the extended closures and capacity restrictions put in place due to public health measures. Restricted revenue opportunities will continue to impact these organizations' ability to stay open as cultural organizations face extended facility closures or limited capacity due to physical distancing. Only 13% of organizations that operate a facility expect to be able to sustain a maintenance level of operation for more than 9 months, compared to 38% of organizations without a facility (GVPTA).
- Notably, the sustainability of Live Performing Arts organizations (which include theatre, music, dance and festival groups) is particularly threatened due to reopening delays, losses from ticket sales, increased expenses and the impact of physical distancing measures. The uncertainty

around the willingness of audiences to return to theatres and venues to experience live performing arts is also key factor in the sustainability of the sector.

- Individual artists primarily working in Live Performing Arts report that the precarity of contract work and lack of sick leave or health benefits has left them vulnerable, with some seeking training in fields outside of the arts and culture sector to ensure permanent, secure employment. There is concern that earning a livelihood as an artist is not feasible anymore for the long term. Adopting their craft to a digital format is counter to their identity as a live performance artist, and/or the quality of accessible digital platforms is not adequate to effectively share their work with an audience, resulting in diminished quality of the audience experience.
- Arts and Recreation based charities are more likely than other sub-sectors to report decreased demand, organizational capacity and revenues, leading to greater layoffs and work reductions. One study also argues that these charities are specifically having difficulty transitioning their programs online and developing new programs in the wake of the pandemic. In response many charitable organizations are choosing to cease or suspend operations, (Imagine Canada study on the impacts of COVID-19 on charities, Survey conducted between April 15-28, 2020).

### ***Financial Pressures***

- Vancouver's Arts and Cultural organizations are more likely than other types of organizations to depend on earned revenue. They are also experiencing greater financial vulnerability, with 86% of Arts and Cultural nonprofits reporting reduced revenue since the start of the pandemic (Vantage Point).
- BC Arts and Cultural non-profits anticipate financial losses over \$90M. The biggest impacts overall are lost revenue from ticket sales (\$26.5M); and pre-paid, committed expenses and COVID-19 costs (\$21.7M). Theatre, music and festival groups report a higher percentage of losses from ticket sales and closures (GVPTA).
- The Vancouver Economic Commission (VEC) COVID-19 Economic Update indicates the extent of the revenue impact in the first quarter due to widespread closures and product cessation:

#### **Creative Sector**

- o Information and Cultural Industries revenues -22%
- o Performing Arts and Spectator Sports revenues - 42%

#### **Tourism and Retail sector**

- o Arts and Entertainment and Recreation revenues - 42%, greater than the retail sector (-33%) and comparable to Accommodation and Food services (-46%)

- Individual artists report more than \$7M in confirmed or

projected lost income - 69% of which was from artistic work (GVPTA).

- Less than half of Vancouver artists and arts organizations had applied or intended to apply for Federal emergency aid measures. 40% of respondents reported applying to the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) which may cover up to 75% of employee wages, and only 12% planned to access Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA) interest free loans of up to \$40K. Of those organizations who did not apply to CEWS, 41% responded their organization is ineligible because it will not have a decrease in revenues that meets the requirements. Of those who did not apply for CEBA, 24% responded their organization is not eligible because, for example, their total payroll was less than \$50,000 in 2019 (Canada Council for the Arts).
- Individual artists report ineligibility for CERB due to just exceeding the \$1,000 monthly income threshold, but due to drastic cuts in performance and teaching contracts, they are facing difficulty in closing the gap to earn a livable monthly income.

### **Workforce and Human Resources**

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the mental health of BC artists and arts workers. 96% of respondents reported higher stress and anxiety in their organization, with 86% saying it was having a negative impact on their wellbeing. Only 64% of respondents reported they were somewhat or very positive they had the tools to support their team or their own mental wellbeing (GVPTA).

- And as reported before, artists lost a significant amount of work: \$7M in confirmed or projected losses.
- Vancouver's arts and culture sector expects to be most heavily impacted by lay-offs. Respondents estimated a 27% reduction in full time staff employed between March 1 and June 1, 2020 (Vantage Point survey conducted prior to the implementation of CEWS). In early conversations with organizations that had to quickly lay off their staff to sustain operations, some fear they will lose these employees permanently due to the necessity to find other employment.
- The arts and culture sector, like many nonprofits, relies heavily on volunteers who may not feel safe to return to their positions and where many are retired and in an age bracket that many leave them more vulnerable.
- Many groups cannot afford full-time staff so hire contract workers which made them ineligible to collect the CEWS.
- Arts and Culture, Environmental and Religious and faith-based organizations were the least optimistic when asked about their organization's ability to recover from COVID-19 (Vantage Point).
- High poverty rates among most visible minority groups

prior the COVID-19 pandemic make them vulnerable to the financial impact of work disruptions. Among the crowdsourcing participants who were employed prior to work stoppages, Whites and most visible minority groups reported similar rates of job loss or reduced work hours, although the rate was higher among Filipinos and West Asians. However, the COVID-19 pandemic generally had a stronger impact on visible minority participants' ability to meet financial obligations or essential needs than for White participants, even after taking into account group differences in job loss, immigration status, pre-COVID employment status, education, and other demographic characteristics

### **High Level Supports Needed**

Cultural non-profits identified the following areas of support for recovery:

Financial Support:

- Sector specific assistance tailored to address the challenges faced by the arts sector over the long-term.
- Expanding the eligibility of the current emergency aid measures to include artists and cultural workers.
- Flexibility in funding including relaxing deadlines for grants and supporting a shift towards digital engagement.
- Directed funding to equity-seeking organizations to address pre-existing gaps that have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

Information:

- Access to mental health and wellbeing resources for artists and cultural workers.

Expertise:

- Expert advice on applying for government and other emergency programs, support fundraising and grant writing, as well as professional development and guidance oriented to post-pandemic recovery.
- Supporting conversations about re-envisioning what's possible at the organization and sector level, creating opportunities for creative discussion and collaboration about how to serve an organization's mission differently as physical distancing requirements change.
- Supporting conversations that address anti-oppression and decolonization at an organizational level to inform both recovery and rebuilding.

Other areas of support identified through key sectoral interviews:

- Extended public hours so they can allow for more attendees over long periods of time and conditions for safe physical distancing.

- Access to safe space for rehearsal and practice and presentation.
- Continuation of subsidies such as CERB.
- Build audience confidence to experience live performance again.
- Assistance with technology for higher production values.
- Momentum and hope for artists.
- Maintaining presence in community and ongoing promotion outside of the events they are no longer able to have.
- Timed and ticketing software.

### ***The City's role and requested support for the sector***

The following areas of support were identified through key informant interviews and other analysis:

- Highlighting how integral artists are to the economy and prioritize the need for guaranteed income and living wages.
- Increase financial resources to the sector to double the impact.
- Provide tools, resources, training for mainstream organizations to become more inclusive.
- Modernize funding policies to allow funding for artists to subsist (rather than only for creating new work) similar to funding that enables organizations to subsist (core funding).
- Stronger civic advocacy for the sector as a whole and awareness of the critical role arts and cultural groups play in the health and well-being of a city.
- Relaxation in sign bylaws to allow for groups to have digital advertising to generate additional revenue.

In addition to what we heard in the sector, there are key areas where the City can play a stronger role.

- Recognize that it was slow to respond to the arts and culture sector and focus on making structural changes internally for better response on an ongoing basis such as creating efficiencies in the concurrence and authority structure of routine grant approval and disbursement processes.
- Advance goals of Culture|Shift through the NPO and SE Recovery Program framework (Cultural Equity and Accessibility, Reconciliation and Decolonization, Artists at the Centre of City Building) to expedite the delays

in increasing investment in equity-seeking artists and groups.

- Build on and invest in sectoral systems change and initiatives for a more resilient sector (networks, information exchange, funds for BIPOC artists).
- Address pre-existing systemic issues including under-employment of people of colour, low income and lack of secure employment, toxic and unhealthy workplace environments.

### ***Resiliency in the Arts and Cultural Sector: Innovative responses to the crisis and positive outcomes***

- Despite these significant challenges the sector has shown the ability to adapt and meet the needs of community members.
- Performing arts groups were quick to continue to share content with the public through live streaming or pre-recorded concerts and productions.
- Some groups who were closed took the time to address inherent organizational development fractures through dedicated planning.
- More established artists and arts organizations shared their technology platforms (websites, equipment, production support), and reputation and marketing reach to promote the work of other artists.
- The GVPTA developed the BC Patron Insights Program which is a data strategy to better understand arts and culture patron sentiment in order to assist recovery efforts. Using an individualized survey and a series of core questions this tool provides survey management resources to non-profits and charities in BC with an arts culture or heritage mandate. For more information: [https://www.gvpta.ca/patron\\_insights](https://www.gvpta.ca/patron_insights)
- The Artist-run centre sector is leading a crowd-fundraising initiative (with a goal of \$500K) and structure to create a fund for BIPOC artists with support from nonprofit organizations, public sector funders, and corporate partners. (current goals is \$500K).
- Networks have strengthened and new ones have formed to support each other with discussion groups, information sharing, leveraging critical relationships to access key information, and other critical resources. Groups who normally operate in a climate of scarcity have been generous to share their resources
- The Vancouver Opera turned their costume shop into a mask-making endeavour early on when supplies were not as available.

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