

Alek Phan
tphan107@my.centennialcollege.ca

The Ontario Culture Strategy

[Telling our stories, growing our economy](#)

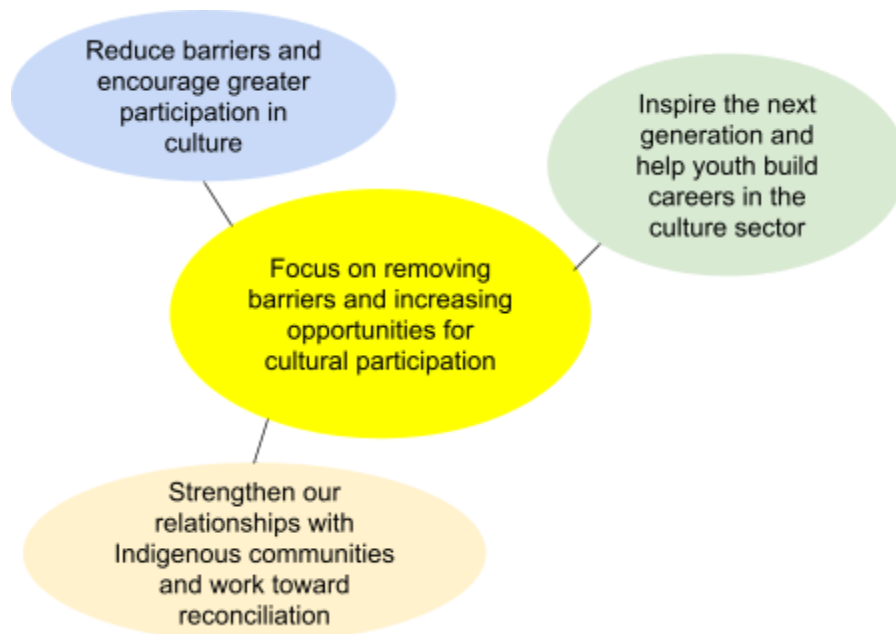


In contemporary society, the impact of arts and culture transcends mere aesthetic worth. Beyond contributing to economic growth, fostering social equity, and promoting environmental responsibility, cultural vibrancy plays an important role in ensuring the sustainability of communities. This is particularly crucial in a society that values inclusivity, allowing individuals from diverse backgrounds to partake in and access cultural opportunities that resonate with their unique interests and aptitudes.

This paper endeavor is dedicated to conducting a comprehensive examination of “The Ontario Culture Strategy.” This strategy serves as a guiding framework that provides essential guidance to decision-makers and partners in the province. It seeks to elucidate the mechanisms for effectively assigning roles, allocating responsibilities, and determining priorities. The primary

objective of this study is to enhance our comprehension of how Ontario actively promotes and sustains artistic and cultural initiatives by integrating them into various aspects of local government planning.

Goal 1: Promoting cultural engagement and inclusion



In pursuit of the goal to eliminate barriers for cultural participation, the first strategy concentrates on the following key aspects: **Bringing together government granting partners to share best practices in the application and assessment process ensures that a fair and equitable distribution of culture funding is achieved.** *The Ontario Heritage Trust* has launched an online gallery and educational resources with the objective of fostering a deeper appreciation of Franco-Ontarian heritage. Additionally, *the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Royal Ontario Museum* have recently joined forces with *the Institute for Canadian Citizenship* to initiate their innovative Ahlan welcome program. This initiative strives to connect newcomers with cultural attractions, enriching experiences, and individuals within their local communities. Furthermore, *Science North* is actively engaged in delivering science programs to Northern and Indigenous communities, a commitment that extends to providing services to five remote communities through a collaborative partnership with *the Northern Nishnawbe Education Council*. The *Ontario Arts Council* introduced its inaugural Deaf and Disability Arts Projects program (2015-2016), designed to offer support for artistic endeavors led by individuals who are Deaf or

have disabilities. Additionally, the *McMichael Canadian Art Collection* has developed and disseminated its guide, titled "The Art of Inclusion," outlining a comprehensive seven-step process for the design and implementation of accessible programs within arts and cultural organizations.

This concerted effort has resulted in improved access, enhanced inclusion, and increased support for various communities within Ontario. These encompass Indigenous, Francophone, ethnocultural communities, people with disabilities, individuals who are Deaf, and those residing in rural and remote areas. Programs such as the Deaf Artists Residency Program at *Tangled Art + Disability in Toronto* provide opportunities for Deaf artists to actively engage with the arts and collaborate with their fellow artists. Notably, organizations like the *ReelAbilities Film Festival*, the largest film festival in North America dedicated to narrative and documentary films that explore Deaf and disability cultures, serves as a platform for the work of Deaf and/or disabled filmmakers and performers. Furthermore, it equips educators responsible for Grades K-12 with free, year-round resources that facilitate students in learning about disability, inclusion, empathy, mental health, and the deconstruction of barriers, biases, and stereotypes. Initiatives such as aHa! and Ask Anything are dedicated to equipping emerging artists, producers, and managers with the essential skills and tools necessary for establishing successful and enduring careers in the arts. aHa! offers online webinars on best practices in arts administration and producing, catering to emerging creators and producers across various disciplines within the arts and culture sector. These webinars cover a range of topics, including the essentials of grant writing, financial management, and more. Ask Anything, as an annual internship program, provides guided mentorship and training in arts management and social innovation to 3 to 8 emerging arts and culture managers and producers. To date, participants have hailed from Humber's Post-Graduate Arts Administration and Cultural Management Program, Ryerson University's Undergraduate Creative Industries Program, and the University of Toronto's Undergraduate Urban Planning and Development Program. Supported by Canada Council for the Arts' Digital Strategy Fund, from 2020 to 2022, the *Digital Arts Service Alliance* convened arts and technology leaders from across Canada to define a digital strategy that addresses the needs of underserved, equity-seeking groups. This initiative focuses on connecting national champions, strengthening digital literacy and regional advantages, promoting cross-disciplinary collaborations, and fostering shared human/digital infrastructure and resources. **Collectively, these strategies have resulted in a notable enhancement of access, inclusion, and support for various communities in Ontario, marking a significant stride forward in expanding opportunities for involvement in the arts and culture.**

Goal 2: Strengthen culture in communities



For a city that celebrates diversity and inclusion through the arts, culture and heritage, it is important to develop protocols, tools and guidance that are responsive to communities' knowledge and practice, from which communities continue to protect their identity and cultural heritage, at the same time, incorporates broadly held cultural and ethical values in respect. **Collaboration with Indigenous partners, archaeologists, museums, and other stakeholders is a strength of the first strategy. It reflects a commitment to preserving and celebrating Indigenous interests in heritage conservation, assessing merit based on their traditional values and cultural expressions.** As the result of The Ontario Culture Strategy, 15 percent of both the Creative Engagement and Innovation Funds are allocated to support Indigenous projects. Mainstream audiences are increasingly appreciating the creative contributions of Indigenous artists, from Norval Morrisseau (1931–2007), who is considered by many to be the Mishomis, or grandfather, of contemporary Indigenous art in Canada, to The Halluci Nation, formerly known as A Tribe Called Red, a group whose music has been labelled as "powwow-step", a style of contemporary powwow music. **By recognizing the importance of engaging a diverse range of experts and communities to improve conservation practices and ensure the transmission of historical knowledge to future generations, this leads to a strengthened sense of identity in the vibrancy of today's First Nations, Métis, and Inuit arts and culture sector, in both traditional and contemporary**

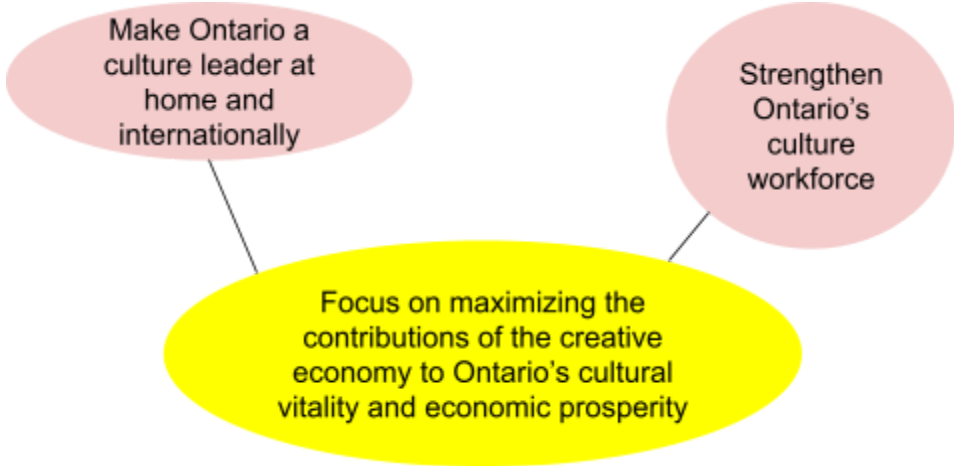
art forms in all genres. In order to be more inclusive of Indigenous communities and perspectives in cultural heritage conservation, the Ontario Heritage Trust and the University of Toronto partnered with the Huron-Wendat Nation to create the Thonnakona Ossuary in 2013, and rebury the remains of 1,760 Huron-Wendat Ancestors—the largest reburial of Indigenous ancestral remains ever undertaken in North America. **This strategy, however, could lead to cultural insensitivity issues if the effort fails to ensure that Indigenous histories and cultures are accurately and sensitively represented,** hence, having the communities’ meaningful involvement and consultation is crucial for success. In 2017, a Toronto gallery was compelled to cancel an exhibition featuring paintings by a white artist due to concerns of cultural appropriation. Many individuals acquainted with the Woodland School of Art, an art genre also referred to as such, viewed this incident as an instance of cultural appropriation involving a young artist who had no inherent connection to the tradition. The controversy surrounding the artist's work has reignited discussions about the entitlement to utilize and benefit from particular cultural practices.

The third strategy of building strong community-based culture organizations encompasses several key elements aimed at optimizing the utilization of public libraries, museums, art galleries, and other cultural venues as central points for the community, as well as incorporating artistic and cultural events and environments into educational institutions, cultural celebrations and other communal establishments. Public libraries are continuously evolving to provide access to new technologies and digital resources such as “makerspaces” for creating and showcasing art, school projects, or products for small businesses to utilize technology like 3D printers and audio/video recording equipment. To realize the desired outcome of increasing recognition and utilization of public libraries and other cultural facilities as community hubs, Ontario public libraries have been successful in reducing entry barriers into the workforce, including professional and educational qualifications. The skill set of library workers shifts to place less emphasis on traditional library skills and more on community development skills such as empathy, active listening, and conflict management. **As a result, the public library workforce represents the community it serves as community hubs, offering easy registration, no identity document requirements, and free community workshops.** On a related, yet distinct, special programming of arts and culture in the province for the celebration of Canada's 150th anniversary since Confederation in 2017 inspired visitors to experience a variety of outdoor sports and healthy lifestyle activities, and offered families ways to get outside and explore what Ontario had to offer. **Collaborating with sport and recreation partners provided further opportunities to integrate cultural engagement into community activities, making culture a more integral part of people's lives.** Ottawa's ByWard Market transformed into Inspiration Village featuring street performers, musical acts, educational exhibits and a sea of sea containers. The Culinary Ontario Festival highlighted the best of food and drink from across the province. The Heritage Ontario festival celebrated the heritage

and traditions of Ontario through music, interactive exhibits and food. Doors Open Ontario was offering expanded programming in cities and towns across the province to showcase Ontario's architecture and history in honour of the sesquicentennial. Wild Ontario continued at the Butterfly Conservatory at the Niagara Parks Commission, highlighting the province's incredible biodiversity -- featuring everything from a barn owl to an American kestrel and a black widow spider. This underscored the significance of arts and culture in the province and the country's history, **supports tens of thousands of jobs and generates millions of dollars in revenue¹. By emphasizing the importance of collaboration and partnerships between the different sectors, this approach can lead to the development of synergistic programs that enhance arts and culture initiatives, making it more accessible to current and future generations.**



Goal 3: Fuel the creative economy



¹ News Ontario. "Celebrating Ontario's 150th Anniversary at Ontario Place." *Ontario Newsroom*, 19 May 2017, <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/44849/celebrating-ontarios-150th-anniversary-at-ontario-place>. Accessed 6 November 2023.

The music community in Ontario is considered one of the province's three key competitive strengths, as recognized by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce alongside mining and manufacturing. This policy aims to leverage the Ontario Music Fund to establish Ontario as a prominent hub for music production and performance in North America. It achieves this by investing in individuals' talents and skills while fostering a dynamic and innovative environment, all geared toward driving economic growth in the music industry. Established in 2013 as a three-year initiative, the Ontario Music Fund allocates \$15 million annually. According to Ontario Newsroom, the fund's support in its first year has already contributed to the retention of 2,000 jobs and the generation of an additional \$24 million in revenue for music-related businesses. **However, there have been challenges in maintaining transparency regarding how the funding is utilized, as well as in verifying claims related to job creation and the benefits received by domestic record companies.** Notably, primary members of Music Canada, including Sony Music Entertainment Canada, Universal Music Canada, and Warner Music Canada, received an average of over \$830,000 per award during the fund's in the first year of the fund, and shared \$1.75 million in 2017-2018.²

In 2019, \$15M budget for Ontario Music Fund was reduced to \$7M as the province looks to modernize it “to focus on activities that bring the biggest return to the province, and refocus its investments into emerging talent to create opportunities to achieve success,” a spokesman for Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport, Michael Tibollo, said in a statement. Given that Ontario houses the country's most significant music production sector, responsible for over 80 percent of Canada's total music industry revenue, it's rather perplexing to consider funding cuts as the solution for "modernizing" the music industry. Supercrawl, for instance, has demonstrated a substantial economic impact of \$14 million, and its audience has grown significantly from 3,000 attendees in 2009 to over 160,000 in 2014. Not to mention, artists like Drake in Toronto and Arcade Fire in Montreal have exemplified the ability of music to simultaneously foster hometown pride and gain global recognition. **Such cuts seem counterproductive in terms of attracting and nurturing talent, as well as in providing opportunities for a wide spectrum of individuals, from artists to recording labels and domestic music companies.**

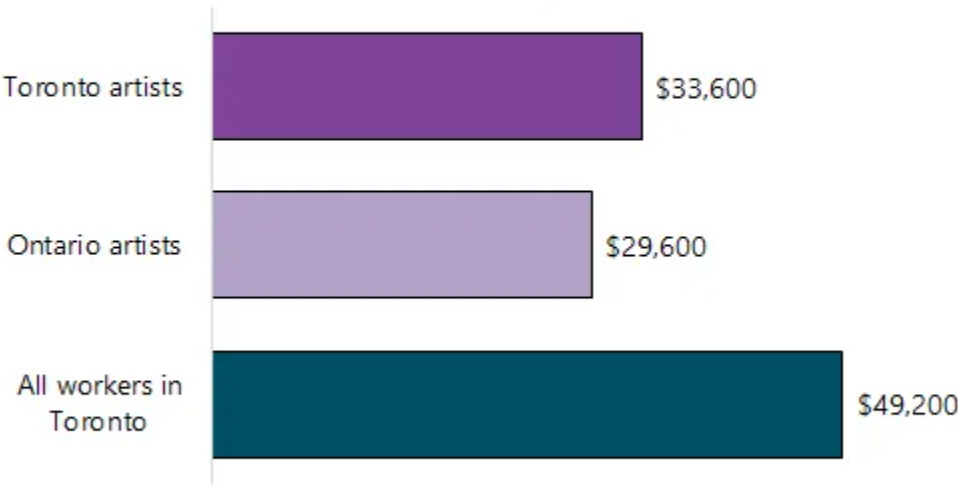
On another note, the policy emphasizes support for arts and cultural industries by collaborating with the Ministry of Infrastructure to develop a long-term infrastructure plan for the culture sector acknowledges the importance of addressing its unique needs. According to the announcement for joint funding for 12 community and recreation infrastructure projects across Ontario in 2022, Ontario is investing over \$10.2 billion to improve public transit; community, culture and recreation; green infrastructure as well as other priority infrastructure, including across rural and northern communities. Among the projects announced is the construction of the Barrhaven Town Centre in Nepean. This new cultural hub will include the

² Bliss Karen. “Ontario Music Fund Gives Major Labels \$1.75 Million in Latest Round of Grants.” *Billboard*, 1 May 2018, <https://www.billboard.com/pro/ontario-music-fund-gives-major-labels-175-million/>. Accessed 6 November 2023.

construction of a 15,000 square foot cultural centre, a 3,000 square foot seniors' space, and an over 25,000 square foot library. Once complete, this project will provide residents in Ottawa with a cultural hub that will foster social interactions and community engagement for years to come.

Stated in strategy two, **Ontario’s culture workforce is positioned to succeed by engaging federal, provincial and territorial culture partners on strategies to improve the socioeconomic status of artists. However, this still requires a lot of effort to gain progress.** Originally passed in 2007, the Status of Ontario’s Artists Act recognizes the importance of the province’s artists—but, artists have to continue pursuing labour rights and benefits. While culture contributes more than \$25 billion to Ontario’s economy, 80% of Ontarians agree that an active local arts scene helps communities attract business³, artists in Toronto have had a very low employment income of \$15,700 in 2020, which is just over one-third of the median employment income of all Toronto workers in the same year (\$42,800). It is notable that the median employment income of artists in Toronto in 2020 was higher than the median in the province as a whole (\$11,200). The graph below shows the median personal incomes of artists and all workers in Toronto and Ontario. The difference in median personal income between artists and other workers in Toronto (-32%) is significant, but it is lower than the difference in all of Ontario (-41%).

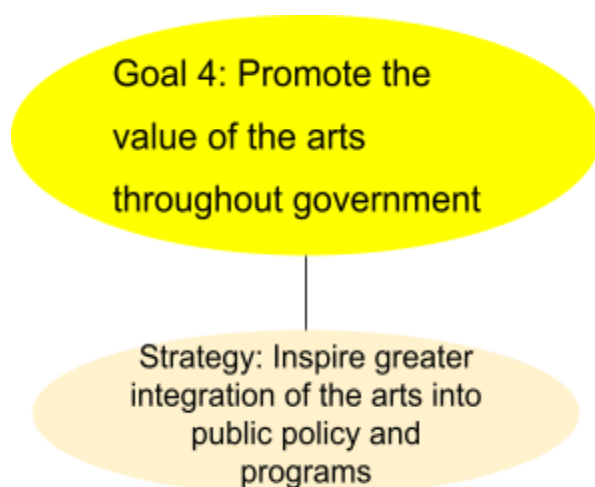
Median personal incomes of professional artists in Toronto and Ontario, with a comparison to all Toronto workers, 2020



Note: Personal incomes include all sources for an individual during the 2020 calendar year. Source: 2021 census, custom data request by Hill Strategies.

³ *Impressions of the Impact of the Arts on Quality of Life and Well-Being in Ontario: Ontario Arts Council Survey Findings, by Nanos Research for the Ontario Arts Council, March 2017.*

Goal 4: Promote the value of the arts throughout government



This strategy of promoting the arts can lead to **increased support and investment in arts when other sectors such as urban planning, healthcare, and so on recognize and acknowledge the contributions of artists and the arts' impact when the government encourages further integration of the arts into public programs.** And the values of diversity and inclusion are kept as priorities in both nonprofit and commercial arts organizations to build a skilled workforce and support the entire arts ecosystem.

The Creative Engagement Fund to Stop Sexual Violence and Harassment, which has emerged as a result of the Ontario Culture Policy is supporting eleven partnerships between arts and not-for-profit community organizations, professional artists and sexual violence experts to develop projects that stimulate conversation, shape people's perspectives and opinions, and give them new tools to name and take action on sexual violence and harassment in their communities. Aanmitaagzi's three-year touring project "Material Witness" includes both community engagement workshops and a dance theatre production that explores themes of sexual violence, harassment and violence against Indigenous women. The "Resilient Hearts" offers multi-disciplinary arts education including spoken word, poetry, visual arts that celebrates strength and survival. "It's Never Okay for Franco-Ontarian Youth" engages Franco-Ontarian youth in dialogue and action on sexual violence and harassment. "Get Consent" project explores consent and offers youth practical skills to ensure they have positive healthy relationships. "Just Believe Us" uses storytelling and digital art to increase understanding of sexual violence survivors' experiences and improve relationships between women, police and the community.

"Path of Wabano" works with Elders to develop "Story Baskets" with Métis youth and youth in six First Nations communities, while exploring language related to sexuality, sexual violence and harassment, and roles for two-spirited people."Far from the Heart/Loin du Coeur" is a theatre performance designed to affect attitudes and promote healthy relationships amongst youth. "Project ArmHer" provides a forum for sex trade workers to tell their stories of sexual violence through performance, exhibits and audience workshops. By offering new tools to name and take action on sexual violence and harassment, people can imagine a better and healthier future.

By promoting the contributions of the arts sector, there is an opportunity to increase recognition of the arts' importance in enriching the quality of life, fostering a sense of identity, and contributing to the economy. In the 49th report by the Statistical Insights on the Arts (SIA) series from Hill Strategies Research in 2016, there are 158,100 artists, representing 0.87% of the overall Canadian labour force. In other words, 1 in every 116 Canadian workers is an artist. In 2021, there are 202,900 artists in Canada who spent more time at their art than at any other occupation, plus people who were not in the labour force in May of 2021 but had worked more as an artist than any other occupation since the start of 2020⁴. Artists represent 0.98% of the Canadian labour force, which consists of 20.6 million people. Examined differently, this means that 1 in every 102 Canadian workers is an artist. The size of Canada's labour force increases 20% from 2016 - 2021, while employment in the art sector remains at 1%. The 81,800 professional artists who reside in Ontario account for 40% of the artists in Canada in 2021. Artists who reside in Toronto account for 39% of all artists in Ontario and 16% of all artists in Canada. One of the key highlights from the [Provincial and Territorial Culture Indicators](#), 2021, Canada's culture GDP rose 8.3% to \$54.8 billion in 2021, with increases in all domains⁵. This increase was observed across all domains, with the most significant contributions coming from the audio-visual and interactive media domain, which saw a growth of \$1.6 billion or 9.8%, and the visual and applied arts domain, which experienced a growth of \$1.1 billion or 11.0%. **In general, it is true that this strategy leads to the increase of awareness of Ontario's diverse arts community.**

⁴ Hill, Kelly. "Over 200,000 artists in Canada." *Statistical insights on the arts*, 10 January 2023, <https://statsinsights.hillstrategies.com/p/over-200000-artists-in-canada>. Accessed 6 November 2023.

⁵ *Provincial and Territorial Cultural Indicators, 2021.* Canada Council for the Arts, 26 June 2023, <https://canadacouncil.ca/research/research-library/2023/06/provincial-and-territorial-indicators-2021>. Accessed 6 November 2023.

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