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Ontario Budget 2025 Submission

We write to you as the Alliance of Arts Councils of Ontario (AACO), a provincially registered not-for-profit organization representing more than 30 municipal and regional arts councils, community arts councils, and artists' networks across Ontario. Our pre-budget recommendations focus on addressing both immediate needs and enhancing the economic and social contributions to Ontario derived from a strong, sustainable arts sector.

Ontarians Value the Arts, and the Arts are Valuable for Ontario

The arts drive tourism, enhance mental well-being, and create the conditions necessary for vibrant, thriving communities. Ontarians recognize the essential role of the arts in their communities. Time and again, surveys demonstrate that Ontarians support provincial funding for the arts, value the arts as critical to their quality of life, and understand that arts and cultural activities contribute significantly to economic prosperity.

Ontario's arts and culture sector contributes **\$27 billion to the provincial GDP, and provides almost 300,000 jobs**—more jobs than in real estate, auto-manufacturing, forestry and mining combined.[1] Our province is home to 81,000 professional artists, 40% of the artists in Canada. Arts and culture tourism itself contributes \$10 billion in provincial GDP, and over \$4 billion in tax revenue.[2] The average arts and culture trip has nearly tripled the economic impact of non-arts and culture trips. Attending performances and visiting galleries are key cultural tourism activities.[3]

We appreciate the ongoing support from the Province of Ontario, which has enabled the arts sector to continue creating meaningful, paid work for local artists while ensuring that communities benefit from arts programming. However, despite our sector's resilience, rising inflation and the increasing costs of goods and services have placed significant financial strain on artists and arts organizations. Immediate and sustained government investment is crucial for the sector's survival and long-term growth.

Recommendations

To ensure the arts sector continues to contribute to Ontario's economy and well-being, we recommend:

- 1. Increase Core Operating Funding for Arts Organizations by \$40 million**

- Provide stable, accessible, multi-year increases in operating funding through the Ontario Arts Council (OAC) and other provincial arts funding programs to offset inflation and rising costs.
- 2. Expand Access to Arts Funding for Small and Mid-Sized Organizations**
 - Ensure that community arts organizations, smaller arts councils, and emerging artists have equitable access to provincial funding, particularly in rural and underserved regions.
- 3. Invest in Arts Education and Youth Engagement**
 - Support arts education programs in schools and communities to foster better mental health amongst vulnerable groups providing real engagement for future generations of artists and cultural workers.
- 4. Enhance Support for Arts and Mental Health Initiatives**
 - Fund arts care programs and arts-based wellness initiatives that have proven successful for addressing mental health challenges particularly for youth, seniors, and marginalized communities.

The arts are a popular necessity for a thriving, dynamic Ontario. Continued and enhanced investment in the arts will yield significant economic, social, and cultural benefits for all Ontarians. We urge the Province of Ontario to take bold steps to realize the potential of our arts sector and strengthen its role in supporting a healthy and strong Ontario.

We welcome the opportunity to collaborate on solutions that will amplify the impact of the arts on life for Ontarians.

Warm regards,

Janet Jarrell and Shruti Ganapathy
Co-Chairs, Alliance of Arts Councils of Ontario
<https://aacontario.ca/>

[1]<https://www.arts.on.ca/news-resources/news/2024/arts-across-ontario-study-reveals-billion-dollar-impact-on-ontario-gdp-by-oac-funded-organizations>

[2]<https://www.arts.on.ca/oac/media/oac/Publications/Research%20Reports%20EN-FR/Arts%20Participationand%20Audiences/O>

[3]<https://www.arts.on.ca/oac/media/oac/Publications/Research%20Reports%20EN-FR/Arts%20Participationand%20Audiences/Ontario-Arts-and-Culture-Tourism-Profile-2023-Final-EN-DesignVer-FINAL-s.pdf>