

## ***A NEW MODEL FOR A NEW MOMENT***

### ***Bridging the Divide: Reclaiming Arts Funding for Community and Cultural Sovereignty***



*By ArtBridgeCanada*

**Historically, the synergy between art, science, and governance has propelled societies toward enlightenment and progress.** In Canada, this was exemplified by the creation of the Canada Council for the Arts in 1957, following the Massey Commission's declaration that the arts were essential to national identity. That vision helped build a thriving, nationally recognized cultural sector.

But today, the foundations of that vision are faltering. Despite the arts contributing nearly **\$60 billion** annually to Canada's GDP and employing approximately **850,000 people**, public support remains uneven, precarious, and overly centralized. While recent federal budgets have made investments - such as **\$31 million** for the Canada Arts Presentation Fund and **\$45 million** for the National Arts Centre - many underserved communities are left out.

#### ***The Problem:***

##### **Disinformation, Populism, and Misplaced Priorities**

Canada's arts ecosystem isn't just challenged by limited funding - it's undercut by deeper societal trends. **Disinformation, media fragmentation, and political populism** have eroded public trust in culture, education, and the arts.

The **Dunning-Kruger Effect** - where individuals with limited knowledge overestimate their understanding - fuels resistance to expert opinion, artistic complexity, and creative inquiry. Social media platforms magnify this trend, giving voice to sensationalism while silencing or sidelining meaningful cultural dialogue.

At the same time, **arts funding mechanisms can unintentionally reinforce the problem** by rewarding institutional prestige over local relevance, visibility over inclusion, and competition over collaboration.

#### ***ArtBridgeCanada:***

##### **A New Model for a New Moment**

**ArtBridgeCanada** emerged in response to this dual crisis of perception and distribution. As a national, artist-led nonprofit, it is reimagining the role of arts in Canada through a **"Community First – Commerce Second"** approach.

Rather than prioritizing gallery openings in major cities or the metrics of ticket sales, ArtBridgeCanada asks:

- *How are we building cultural capacity in rural and remote communities?*
- *Are Indigenous and equity-seeking artists shaping the conversation and sharing power?*
- *How can we restore trust in the arts by reconnecting them to people's lives, stories, and challenges?*

### ***What Needs to Change:***

#### **A Community Development Approach to Arts Funding**

To meet the moment, we must reframe arts support as **essential to social cohesion, civic health, and local economic renewal**. This means:

##### **1. Invest in Local Arts Infrastructure**

Prioritize funding for artist-run centres, Indigenous-led initiatives, and community organizations in underserved areas.

##### **2. Empower Artist-Led Projects**

Offer direct microgrants, mentorship programs, and co-created giving models that shift decision-making to artists and community partners.

##### **3. Place-Based Funding Models**

Adapt funding programs to local contexts - urban, rural, northern, Indigenous, immigrant - and let place define the priorities.

##### **4. Counter Disinformation with Creative Expression**

Support storytelling, public art, and educational initiatives that foster critical thinking, inclusivity, and truth-telling.

### **The Opportunity Ahead**

We believe art is not a luxury - it is the **engine of connection, resilience, and cultural sovereignty**. ArtBridgeCanada is building a national network to amplify those values, not through hierarchy, but through **collaboration, mentorship, and equity**.

Let's invest not just in *what art is*, but in **what art does** - for our communities, for our democracy, and for the generations to come.

**Learn more:** <https://artbridgecanada.ca>

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