

Overlooked Human Factors: Explaining the Gap ArtBridgeCanada Aims to Fill

I was recently asked: “Why haven’t other organizations in Canada adopted ArtBridgeCanada’s mission and vision - one that focuses on forging deep, collegial networks for artists and addresses the ‘human factors’ needed for true career development?” In brief, I would suggest that traditional for-profit and non-profit models often miss the psychological and collaborative elements crucial to artists’ growth. ArtBridgeCanada was formed from this very different perspective.



1. The Economic Realities of Existing Models

a. For-Profit Constraints

- **Revenue First:** Traditional for-profit platforms (directories, galleries, magazines) need to prioritize revenue - through ads, commissions, subscriptions - to sustain operations.
- **Transaction Over Community:** The focus naturally leans toward transactions (selling art, ad space) rather than long-term artist development or peer-based support.
- **Misalignment with Artists’ Core Needs:** Genuine collaboration and “community-building” rarely become the main drivers when the business model depends on quick returns.

b. Not-for-Profit Challenges

- **Grant & Donation Cycles:** Many non-profits must shape programs around time-limited grant cycles. This can limit flexibility and long-term planning.
- **Advocacy vs. Facilitation:** Existing arts non-profits often advocate for fair pay, equitable policies, or specific causes; they rarely provide holistic, ongoing professional development and deep peer-to-peer networks.
- **Resource Silos:** Individual artist-run centres or local councils have localized mandates, making it difficult to scale a nationwide collaboration-and-career-growth initiative.

Most existing organizations slip into these two frameworks. Neither is intrinsically designed to spotlight *relationship-building, peer mentorship, and deep personal/professional development* for artists over the long run.

2. Overlooking the “Human Factors” in the Arts

a. Psychological Lens Missing

- Traditional arts organizations and publishers often come from backgrounds in fine arts, business, or policy. They’re not necessarily trained to identify

psychosocial needs, such as the importance of peer mentoring, identity-building, or emotional support in creative careers.

- Viewing the art ecosystem through a *client-with-a-problem* lens - essentially, from a psychological and human-centered vantage - reveals gaps that might be invisible to those used to traditional industry structures.

b. Reliance on Collegial Networks

- The insight that artists frequently turn to their peers for guidance, feedback, and emotional support indicates a strong *community-driven* dynamic.
- Historically, “schools” of art (Impressionists, Surrealists, Group of Seven, etc.) formed around collective exploration and mutual reinforcement - yet many modern organizations treat artists in isolation, providing only single-issue support (e.g., grant money, exhibition space, or ad listings).
- *No single platform* has stepped up to systematically foster these peer connections on a national scale.

c. Focus on Tangible Outputs Over Intangible Inputs

- It’s far easier to measure sales, exhibit attendance, or website traffic than to measure the impact of collaborative learning, mentorship, and professional growth.
- Organizations often shy away from intangible, long-term endeavors (like fostering community or mentorship) because they don’t translate as neatly into success metrics - making them harder to pitch to funders or investors.

3. The “Aha!” Moment: Connecting the Dots

a. A Psychological Perspective

- Coming from a publishing background (ARABELLA) certainly revealed market realities, but it was my psychology background - focusing on human relationships, motivations, and support systems - that provided a fresh lens.
- Recognizing that artists learn and grow most effectively through *collegial networks* - rather than purely top-down instruction - laid the groundwork for ArtBridgeCanada’s mission.

b. Why Others Haven’t Followed Suit

- **Institutional Inertia:** Legacy organizations are deeply entrenched in their operating models (advertising-driven or grant-driven). Shifting to a *relationship-centric* model requires rethinking core metrics and funding priorities.
- **Resource Constraints:** True mentorship and collaboration demand hands-on facilitation (e.g., program coordinators, matching mentors with mentees, hosting interactive platforms), which can be expensive and resource intensive.
- **Risk Aversion:** Many boards and leadership teams prefer proven revenue streams or established funding calls, making them cautious about launching new, untested frameworks that emphasize intangible outcomes.

4. Conclusion: Why No One Else?

Essentially, *no one else is pursuing ArtBridgeCanada's exact mission* because it sits in a space that neither a purely for-profit nor a standard non-profit model has adequately served. Addressing artists' *human factors* - their need for collegial support, shared knowledge, and collective growth - requires a hybrid approach that isn't easily shoehorned into traditional funding or operational structures. Our team's awareness of these deeper psychological dimensions - and the historical precedent of "schools" of art forming through peer collaboration - gave rise to a vision that most industry stakeholders never even considered.

That's the crux: **ArtBridgeCanada was born out of a recognition that existing frameworks, shaped by market and institutional forces, often overlook the crucial, collegial, and developmental aspects of artistic growth.** As a result, no single organization had both the insight and the impetus to do what we're proposing - until now.