



ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF ART GALLERIES

401 Richmond Street West, Suite 395, Toronto, ON M5V 3A8

Phone: (416) 598-0714 Fax: (416) 598-4128

Website: www.aaag.org

Charitable Business Number 10779 6690 RR0001

March 26, 2020

The Honourable Lisa MacLeod
Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries
The Honourable Rod Phillips Minister of Finance
The Honourable Monte McNaughton Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development
Legislative Assembly of Ontario 111 Wellesley Street West Queen's Park

Dear Ministers MacLeod, Phillips, and McNaughton

On behalf of the Ontario Association of Art Galleries (OAAG), I would like to express our sincere appreciation for the work and leadership provided by the Ontario government during this unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic.

OAAG is a unique and leading organization in the Visual Arts Sector, representing Public Art Galleries, giving voice and supporting more than 270 members across 63 communities in Ontario.

The Visual Arts sector is a complex ecosystem consisting of visual artists, art professionals, art businesses such as art transportation, art publishers and other allied professions. The contribution of this sector on the economy is substantial and the sustainability of the sector is critical to hundreds of art professionals, businesses, associations, and artists.

Apart from being an employment provider, Public Art Galleries are vital to the tourism sector, community assets and social infrastructure across all the communities in Ontario.

In its 50th year, OAAG stands ready to bring data from the frontlines of the sector and provide advice on the development of strategies for **mitigation, continuity and recovery** from the consequences of the pandemic. The current crisis and the imperatives of Public Health measures are having an adverse impact and straining on severely limited budgets and depleting resources of our membership.

OAAG is concerned in response to the mitigation of the crisis. We are hearing a **focus on recovery, but our grave concern is that without business continuity, given the fragility of the underfunded Visual Arts sector, there will be nothing left to recover from.**

I am writing to request serious consideration and support to Public Art Galleries during this critical time in response to COVID-19.



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We ask the Government of Ontario to consider the following recommendations.

Recommendations:

1. **Public Art Galleries Fund--** In our first impact study with **input from 30% of our stakeholders on the Covid-19 Impact Survey**, grave concerns regarding the business continuity of these organizations have been raised. Over the **next six months**, across Ontario, the Public Art Galleries will have a conservative **total loss of \$10.5 million**. At stake are the **small and mid-scale** institutions across the 63 communities in Ontario.

In addition to this, significant employment loss has and will occur, and the avenue for training and internship through programs such as Young Canada Works and Graduate Internships will not be affordable and discontinued.

2. **Presence and Voice at the Table:** Expressly include **Public Art Galleries voices** at leadership table established to ensure that the needs of Public Art Galleries are explicitly addressed in **crisis mitigation, business continuity and recovery planning** and that funds are allocated to the **Visual Arts sector** within the current and prospect relief measures for COVID-19.
3. **Digital Engagement Strategy and Fund:** Going digital and virtual has been the clarion call in this crisis. We have to differentiate between social media ready and going digital.

The capacity to engage audiences online is not developed in the sector nor do galleries have their collections digitized to be brought online. Further, our membership informs us through our impact survey that there is limited inhouse expertise and it can take from **2 weeks to 24 weeks** of time to create digital resources.

OAAG has been spearheading the movement of the Public Art Galleries sector towards a Digital ecosystem and it has recently been granted specific funding towards creating the sector ready for data-based decision making. Given its expertise, OAAG can appropriately advise the government on moving forward with the Digital Engagement Strategy and Fund for Public Art Galleries and Museums.

4. **Business Continuity Fund for Art Service Organizations (ASOs):** Establish a fund to provide financial support to substitute for loss of membership revenue which is a large percentage of earned revenue and overall operation budget. This can address the cash flow issues as well as offer the members indirect relief while sustaining the sector. Given the crisis, non-renewal of the membership is going to have a cascading impact on the ASOs— ASOs are projecting sustainability for the next 3 months only.



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ASOs provide **critical services**--advocacy, professional development and networking –towards creating sectoral identity. In the current situation of the crisis, ASOs are on the frontlines, taking the voice of the membership to funders and government. ASOs convene their membership and offer a slate of programs and it is feared a considerable number of jobs may be lost due to the cancellation of these programs, in addition to lost revenues. Other revenue sources ASOs count on, like sponsorships and donations may be at risk if programs or fundraising events are cancelled or postponed.

We look forward to meeting with you and your representatives at the earliest opportunity to discuss these recommendations and how Ontario's Visual Arts sector can be a part of the government's contingency fund, relief and recovery plans to address COVID-19 impact.

As a partner in solutions, OAAG can offer the government the benefits of direct and effective communications channels to an extensive network of Public Art Galleries across the province.

We all recognize the burdens presented during these challenging times and appreciate all of the government's efforts to support the culture sector.

The OAAG looks forward to continuing discussions with the Government of Ontario to help with the relief and recovery plans for Ontario's Public Art Galleries.

Sincerely,

Zainub Verjee
Executive Director