

ELAN Board Meeting with Canada Council

Discussion Summary

March 24, 2017 – 5:30-7:30 PM

ELAN – 610-460 Sainte-Catherine West, Montreal

This summary has been edited and paraphrased.

For answers to the questions submitted by ELAN members in advance: See answers [here](#)

In attendance

Canada Council: Simon Brault (Director & CEO), Sarah Dingle (Manager, Policy and Planning), Claude Schryer (Senior Strategic Advisor, Arts Granting)

ELAN Board of Directors: Bettina Forget (President), Valerie Buddle (Vice President), Kristelle Holliday (Treasurer), Fortner Anderson, Khosro Berahmandi (Festival Accès Asie), Deborah Forde (QDF), Lori Schubert (on behalf of Quebec Writers' Federation), Helen Simard and Chuck Childs.

ELAN Staff: Guy Rodgers (Executive Director), Amy Macdonald (Program Coordinator)

Introduction: Simon Brault

This week marks one year since announcement that the Canada Council's budget would be doubled over the following five years.

This year, the first of five, \$40 million out of the \$550 million total increase was available. The Canada Council created the New Chapter program (a one-year initiative marking Canada's 150th) in order to demonstrate its capacity to invest these new funds in innovative ways. This program received an extraordinary response from the arts community.

Many of the projects submitted are already reflecting some of the areas of emphasis in the New Funding Model: multidisciplinary creation, expanded networks, youth, Indigenous arts, diversity, etc.

The Canada Council is implementing the New Funding Model with more capacity in general. The design is completed, and the design of its new Digital Fund is almost done – which was validated at the Digital Summit.

The New Funding Model application portal opens later this spring. Assessment of core applications will give direction for many years. Internally, they have reorganized teams, and revisited how they measure success. As of April 1, the real change begins. It will be a constant learning experience.

On the world stage, the Canada Council is in the rare position of receiving a large injection of new funds, giving it the capacity to provide better support to the arts. Next week, Canadian Heritage Minister Mélanie Joly and Simon Brault will attend the G7 of culture in Italy, which will be an interesting experience.

The Canada Council has additional resources, but it needs to do something with those resources that goes beyond more of the same. It is time for the community to take advantage of a unique moment in Canadian history.

The New Funding Model represents a rebuilt set of programs outside of disciplinary logic, with which Council will try to achieve outcomes related to creation, communities, and international outreach. There is no change in terms of the intention of supporting artists. Rather than upholding the orthodoxy of specific practices, Council's role is to ensure support for the artistic community.

Q&A with ELAN Board

Q: Regarding the Equity Office: under the New Funding Model, will there be something in place to track equity-related goals?

A: Simon Brault explains that although the Equity Office will no longer issue grants directly, its role is now to ensure that equity is a priority everywhere in the Canada Council. Council has integrated equity into criteria for evaluation under the new programs. Everything will be tracked, and Council wants to demonstrate results. Those commitments are very strong.

Q: On the topic of socially engaged art: people feel there's an opportunity to push the conversation to the next level in Canada, but now that the Council's terminology has changed it is important to ensure a way for that conversation to continue.

A: Simon Brault agrees. The Canada Council's fundamental goal is not to tell the arts community how to practice, but to ensure that it is supported to thrive. Movements in the community, including social engagement, may move to the mainstream in order to reach maturity and find broader support.

Q: There are strong themes of innovation and interdisciplinarity within the New Funding Model. Wondering about transdisciplinary practice, e.g. merging art and science. Is there a way to connect outside of the arts?

A: Simon Brault responds: yes. Certainly this is possible, for example, with the Arts in a Digital World fund. Council wants the internal capacities of the arts sector to grow, and this can happen through partnership with the academic and private sectors. Artistic disciplines belong to their practitioners. Artistic disciplines are a reality, but they are changing; the Council must recognize this without prescribing what that change should look like.

Q: The Digital Fund is an extraordinary investment. What other areas does the Canada Council foresee investing in strategically in arts communities?

A: Simon Brault responds that on the longer term the Council will help the arts sector to transit through any social shifts that arise. Under the New Funding Model, the first five years will focus on the digital as that social shift. Three years from now, it could change. Council's role is to help the sector to adapt, to test and try.

Q: How does the Canada Council see the role of cultural workers? In dance, for example, there is a great need for administrators, managers, agents, etc. Will there be shifts based on the needs of the community?

A: Simon Brault explains that right now, roughly 64% of all Canada Council grants are going to core funding. By 2021, it will be 50% to core and 50% to projects. The Supporting Artistic Practice program, as well as the Digital Fund, contain components related to innovation, hubs, merging companies, etc. Council wants to make sure consolidation and change can happen. Scale is a big question for the future. The quest for better models has been a topic of discussions with NASOs as well. Canada Council recognizes there are issues in arts administration and is exploring solutions.

Q: Request for clarification on how the jury process will work under the New Funding Model.

A: Simon Brault clarifies that not much will change. Disciplinary juries will still be in place when necessary. The main difference is that Council is trying to debunk a legend that juries were decisional in awarding funds. In fact, peer assessors rank applications on the basis of merit, in terms of program criteria. Under the New Funding Model, Canada Council staff will take the jury's recommendations and apply them to the budget for the program, gauging decisions for organizations at the same scale.

Q: Can organizations recommend jurors?

A: Simon Brault explains that there is a permanent public appeal for jurors on the new portal through a peer registry. The Council may seek out good potential jurors and ask them to register, but those individuals must take the initiative to register. The jury recruiting process will be public and transparent.

Q: Will the Canada Council be looking outside the Western cultural framework, for example to recognize the credentials and experience of immigrants and refugees?

A: Simon Brault explains that this has started with Indigenous arts. The focus is on self-governance of artistic practice to redress historic inequities such as cultural genocide. The Canada Council recognizes the need to look at new forms and communities.

Q: Request for further clarification of jury process/ranking.

A: Simon Brault elaborates: a jury normally ranks projects by merit. Council staff doesn't change that ranking; they allocate the money accordingly. The sole exception is equity seeking groups, for whom there is specific funding to correct systemic issues.

Q: Is there a place for community arts – i.e. art not made by professional artists but community members?

A: Simon Brault explains that the Canada Council remains committed to its mandate of supporting professional arts. They don't intend to open the territory of community arts. Note: the Council remains committed however to the support of professional led 'artist and community collaboration (community-engaged arts) activities'.

Q: Professionalism is defined differently in different artistic practices. Will this be taken into account?

A: Simon Brault explains that when Council staff created the program design and eligibility criteria, they recognized the range of practices that exist within that artistic community, to their knowledge, and started there. Difficulties can arise when they lack information about applicants they don't usually support. With the new portal, Council will have a way to track that information and investigate patterns or trends, including of applicants they do not yet fund.

Simon Brault leaves the meeting.

Presentation on Official Languages

Sarah Dingle explains that in addition to her role as Manager of Policy and Planning, she is the Canada Council Section 41 Coordinator. This is a Section of the Official Languages Act setting out obligations of the Canada Council and other federal institutions for vitality of Official Language Minorities (OLM) and linguistic duality. She is both a point of contact for these communities and internally responsible for reporting back to the federal government.

The New Funding Model presents a new opportunity to simplify and standardize approaches to OLM. The Council's Official Languages Policy is a public document (available [here](#)). It lays out obligations under Section 41 and explains existing mechanisms for implementation, such as representation on peer assessment juries and context briefs.

Council is also getting ready to release a new Official Languages Action Plan. The focus is to build on the existing measures in the OL Policy and to make sure OLM groups have access to funding.

Council will be tracking the impact of the new money available. Application success rates, funding levels, etc. will be tracked and shared. Self-identification is a key piece: when you self-identify as an OLM artist, you gain access to funding streams that wouldn't otherwise be open to you.

Council will be evaluating its Official Languages Fund and Market Access Strategy, which will give the community an opportunity to provide feedback. Council will also build staff awareness about OLM issues.

Q: It seems that Council's Official Languages strategy focuses on access as opposed to supporting the disenfranchised. Council has targeted support for artists because of the language they speak within a certain physical location. It would be nice to see that included in the Official Languages portion.

A: The Official Languages Action Plan is in addition to two targeted pockets of funding that will be maintained (Market Access Strategy and Official Languages Fund).

Q: In the context of Council's budget doubling, simply maintaining OLM funding over five years is not really enhancing OLM community vitality. Why is Council not increasing the OLM fund proportionally?

A: Council wants to focus on building coherent, responsive programs. They want to make sure communities can access the money that is available in the system, through the regular programs. Eighty-eight (88) % of the doubled budget is going directly to the arts community.

The Official Languages Fund has been used for highly-recommended applications and top-up of grants. With more money in the system in general, Council anticipates needing to provide special assistance to fewer OLM highly-recommended applications (because more will be funded). Artists will have a better chance at a grant, but OLM funds will be there to catch some of those who don't. Decisions will still be based on merit. The Official Languages Fund and Market Access Strategy are there to help strategically.

Under the New Funding Model, Council plans to increase project funds by 224% over 5 years. Some organizations don't have the capacity to sustain core grants, and can instead apply for up to three-year project or composite grants to meet community needs. The New Funding Model also includes a multidisciplinary activities profile, which can include any 2 or more disciplines including inter-arts.

Q: There are a lot of red-hot conversations about diversity, inclusion, and representation. Is this the type of theme or program which could be funded by the Canada Council? For instance, ELAN has noted that OLM artists in Quebec face specific barriers when taking into account marginalization based on race, ability, gender, and other axes of lived experience, partly because these topics are discussed differently in English-speaking circles than within the French-speaking majority. Organizations often lack resources to access training and implement best practices. Many marginalized artists want to move from talk to action. To develop models for our community, we will need resources.

A: Council recommends reaching out to a Supporting Artistic Practice program officer. Council is considering how artists self-identify, and how that information is used or retained by organizations. Under the New Funding Model, equity criteria are built into programs. Supporting Artistic Practice is meant to help artists with change and development. The new system is meant to recognize new ways of working and thinking as well as new relationships that must be built.

Q: There seems to be a problem in deciding what is excellent and what is not: the idea of "artistic excellence" can be deeply discriminatory. How can we move those conversations forward without putting a burden on marginalized artists to educate others?

A: The Canada Council wants to design programs that make funding accessible, with strategies to mitigate barriers faced by disadvantaged groups. Council invites the arts community to sit on peer assessment committees. Having more voices in these conversations will strengthen the results.

Q (comment): There are examples of people who are not accepted to opportunities they apply for because their background doesn't conform to the idea of what art is here. For jury processes and otherwise, it's important that those issues be put into action.

Q: In relation to this: it was hard for community engaged artists to be recognized as professionals. That category was a way for their work to be validated. For the OLM community in Quebec, it is difficult to get statistics to support our applications – many stats represent a majority anglo group rather than a minority. Will there be a mechanism to isolate statistics on the Quebec OLM from those pertaining to the ROC?

A: Council encourages all OLM artists to fill out the voluntary self-identification form in our applications to assist in getting more accurate statistics.

Q: Regarding this first round of changes to core funding, what is the capacity for new organizations to receive core funding?

A: It depends on how many applications are received, etc., but there will be room for growth and also a rigorous assessment. Some organizations' core funding might go down, some might stay the same, and great applicants could see increases.

Q: Will core funding increase in line with cost of living increases to take into account periods when it was frozen?

A: Applicants will need to make the case that they respond to program criteria. What will matter is how the application is evaluated now. Canada Council is aware of patterns of underfunding in equity seeking communities. Council must strike a balance between core funding and making room for new applicants. Multi-year project funding will allow new organizations to access funds.

Q: In the dance community, succession planning for companies that receive core funding is a major question. If established companies close or transition, is their core funding reassigned to new companies?

A: If a company no longer operates, its money can be distributed to applicants in the same pool at the discretion of the Program Director. Generally the idea is for reassigned core funding to stay in core funding. They will prioritize equity-seeking groups, and leave room to change the ecology without unduly destabilizing the community.

Q: Can you apply for core funding if you have never done so?

A: Once you have two project grants (under specific programs), you may be eligible to apply for core funding. The chance of getting a project grant may be higher, due to the higher percentage of project funds. They want to maintain a balance but allow for new ways of working.

Q: Under the New Funding Model, artists and companies are limited to one research and creation grant per year. This doesn't reflect the reality of doing multiple projects at the same time. You can do a composite

grant if you have a public presentation involved, but what about an artist doing three research projects without a presentation plan yet?

A: Artists can apply three times a year but that there are some restrictions by component. The Canada Council has tried to give artists flexibility to apply for different supports at the same time (see <http://canadacouncil.ca/funding/grants/guide/apply-to-programs/annual-application-limits>). The intention is to accommodate having multiple projects at the same time within the application limits. They will bring that feedback back to Council.

Q: Is it possible that Council staff could refuse to sign off on a grant and if so, in which cases?

A: Council's responsibility is to follow the ranking established by peer assessment committees. Staff, as outlined the Council's granting policy, take final decisions on amounts. The criteria used to make those decisions are the publicly announced program criteria as well as strategic priorities. Council maintains an overall analysis of patterns of how committees ranked applicants, and tries to ensure fair distributions across multiple committees. However, final decisions are generally based on program criteria and strategic priorities, all publicly available information.

Q: Will it be possible to see how juries assessed applications and how final decisions were made?

A: Competition results will be available on the Council's web site. The other process is internal. There will always be questions and Council will try to be as transparent as possible.

Q: Does Council try to give the full requested amount to top-ranked applicants?

A: This has depended on the program in the past. It has been inconsistent across disciplines. It depends on the application pool. They do try to give the full amount wherever they can, but they also take into account the merit of other applications. The full amount is given wherever possible.