

ARTS2U Diversity and Inclusion Discussion: Becoming and Staying Visible in the Digital Universe

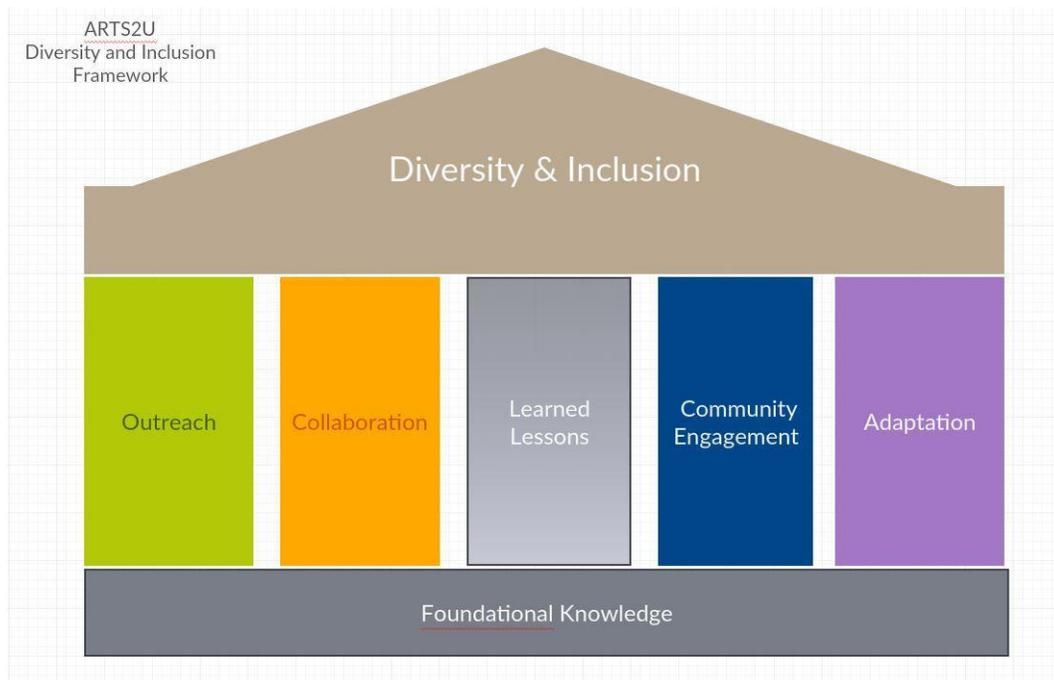
ARTS2U spoke to a range of arts representatives from organizations who work with diversity and inclusion issues on a daily basis. We were looking to discover what are the best practices to ensure that marginalised communities are included in event listings, for now and for the future. We can do this by sharing this discussion with Canadian arts producers and technology developers working with the arts.

ARTS2U produced a discussion questionnaire in consultation with ELAN's Inclusion Committee. Discussions were held with groups that represent women, LGBTQ communities, persons of colour, Indigenous communities, and linguistic minorities. ARTS2U has created a summary based on the responses to this questionnaire.

Inclusion Begins at the Source: Recognizing Precedents

As the umbrella organization serving the English-speaking artistic community, ELAN strives to ensure all artists can establish thriving careers in this province. ELAN's [Inclusion Plan](#) considers how identities and lived experiences are frequently marginalized based on factors that include language, dis/ability, race, gender, religion, sexuality, ethno-culture, age, socioeconomic status, and geography (urban/rural). As an arts organization, ELAN recognizes that artistic factors—such as an art form, artistic discipline, genre, career stage, or professional stature—intersect with identity and experience in ways that produce and contribute to marginalization.

ELAN's Inclusion Plan outlines actions taken to date, and introduces other actions that will be taken before the end of the five-year period from 2017-2022. Conversations about inclusion, diversity and equity have made clear that many of Quebec's English-speaking artists face specific barriers due to discrimination based on race. The work done by ELAN is the starting point for ARTS2U to ensure that a national listings platform would be open and available to a diversity of event listings, and inclusive of all arts communities.



Concerns of Marginalized Communities

In a world dominated by multinational companies, there is growing concern about the loss of print media space, loss of journalist positions, and decreasing capacity for reviews.

ELAN's conversations about inclusion, diversity and equity have also made clear that many of Quebec's English-speaking artists face specific barriers due to discrimination based on race, gender, disability, Indigeneity, language, and a number of other factors.

Indigenous Communities and First Nations

According to the [2016 Census](#), "More than 1.67 million people in Canada identify themselves as an Aboriginal person". Aboriginal peoples include both the fastest growing populations in Canada (between 2006 and 2016) and the youngest populations in Canada (about 44% were under the age of 25 in 2016). According to [Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada](#) (CIRNAC), "There are more than 630 First Nation communities in Canada, which represent more than 50 Nations and 50 Indigenous languages."

Describing the process of posting event listings online across Indigenous media outlets, Indigenous artist Mack Mackenzie states: “Each individual band has its own website, and getting information from those websites would be a challenge given that they're all independent and there is no standardization. There are also many languages and many approaches to the way event promotions are structured. There are often three groups within a band who all contribute to the band's identity and events.”

Other digital initiatives across Canada indicate that a deeper review is needed on the organization of information for Indigenous events. In their research paper “A Linked Digital Future for the Performing Arts”, Estermann B. and Julien F. write, “There are a number Indigenous concepts and relations that would deserve to be adequately represented (or, at the very least, not excluded) in the linked open data ecosystem for the performing arts.”¹

Directions to Encourage Inclusion

ARTS2U has been developed across disciplines and in partnership with producers who have engagement and interaction with their communities. When difficult and potentially insufficient labels (such as LGBTQ2) need to be understood, we defer to the guidance of our collaborators. There are challenges to achieving inclusion when instances of exclusion are not reported.

Outreach and collaboration with other arts promoters is critical to increasing the visibility of marginalized arts events across Canada. There are situations when misrepresentation or cultural appropriation may arise, and an arts producer may not understand that a mistake has been made. General common sense, adaptability, and consistent monitoring of the ARTS2U system must therefore be in place. Contingency plans to react to divisive or contentious posts, and incorrect or incomplete information, are essential for ARTS2U.

As a public broadcaster, CBC has developed an extensive plan to address inclusion in the workplace, which they believe will encourage inclusive representation in the broader media

¹ Estermann B. and Julien F. (2019) A Linked Digital Future for the Performing Arts: Leveraging Synergies along the Value Chain. Canadian Arts Presenting Association (CAPACOA) in cooperation with the Bern University of Applied Sciences. Sect. 3.5 Addressing Diversity.

landscape. The CBC's [Diversity and Inclusion Plan](#) (2018-2021) states: "Our workplace culture must be truly inclusive, where everyone feels that his/her voice, views and ideas are valued. It's these different perspectives that are integral to our broadened understanding of one another and the rich fabric that makes up our country."

Strong and comprehensive, well-funded strategies demonstrated by public corporations like the CBC are important references to craft inclusion guidelines for the ARTS2U listings platform.

[ArtsCan Circle](#) now sends teams of Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists to engage children and youth in northern Indigenous communities in art workshops. With a mission to teach new skills, promote self-esteem and creative self-expression, ArtsCan Circle gives marginalized youth a voice. Amanda Hurst, Operations Manager of ArtsCan Circle, reports in the ARTS2U discussion questionnaire: "The impact of inclusion is that students see broad gender representation and culture in our teams, which has a high relatability factor. By including an Indigenous team member, it provides a deep cultural connection and motivation for our youth that a non-indefensible person could not achieve in the same way."

Amy Blackmore, Executive and Artistic Director of [Fringe Montreal](#), states in the discussion questionnaire: "Working with other projects and being inclusive will increase our understanding of current digital transformations, point towards promising collaborations, and ultimately produce more effective tools built with the needs of the community in mind."

It is clear that Fringe Festivals across Canada have built their audiences based on their accommodation of diversity in Fringe productions: there is no formal curation or jury selection, and every production accepted is done by a lottery. Fringe values diversity, and does so by conducting four separate lotteries with the following quotas for theatre productions: 35% Québec Anglophone; 35% Québec Francophone; 15% Canadian (outside Québec); 15% international companies.

As Jessa Agilo, founder and CEO of [Artspond](#), states in the discussion questionnaire: "Digital has the power to include a more dynamic accessible platform. The opportunity is to empower marginalized [communities] with their own data. Data has more value than gold or oil. If we don't have ownership, small communities will be exploited. The best future is happening around cooperative solutions. "

Event Type	
Name	
Comedy	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conference & Professional	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dance	<input type="checkbox"/>
Festival	<input type="checkbox"/>
Film	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interdisciplinary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Literary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Music	<input type="checkbox"/>
Theatre	<input type="checkbox"/>
Visual Arts	<input type="checkbox"/>
Workshop	<input type="checkbox"/>

ARTS2U "Events Types" Table.

Event Types: Revisions in ARTS2U

Where **Event Types** are concerned, ARTS2U received input on art event types that should be added to the above list. In practice, we anticipate that new event types will arise. Some suggested additions were **Accessible - AODA (Ontario)**, and **Disability Arts** (which is its own event type).

Genres and descriptors in the ARTS2U system are expandable. Basic Event Types, and twenty-six parent-level **Genres** are currently active in the system, but additional parent and unlimited sub-genres, even hundreds of thousands can be added. *The Dance Current*, a Toronto-based dance publication, uses four hundred and fifty tags to describe the dance discipline alone. Descriptive layers that are currently being tested for the ARTS2U system include 'sentiments' or emotions such as *raucous, relaxed, chill, or intense*.

A keyword descriptive layer is being added that could offer more description around the cultural community of events (such as *Mohawk Pow Wow*), in addition to the tags of *dance*, *music*, and *festival*.

Respondents to the questionnaire were concerned with the capacity of the ARTS2U system to describe what was and was not present in the system to describe Indigenous or First Nations' cultural events, such throat singing or a pow wow. ARTS2U advocates for a full understanding of the context of such events, and has a content review protocol in effect to monitor misuses of such terms.

Suggestions for additional genres or descriptors were taken as part of the discussion, including adding tags or icons to denote events that might be described as **Youth-centered, Community Engaged, Accessibility** (related to mobility), **Audio-** and **Visually-assisted**.