In Service of Our Stories

Co-Designing a Community-Engaged Arts Service Organization

PHASE ONE: IDENTIFYING THE MODEL

Northern Ontario Research, Development, Ideas and Knowledge
NORDIK INSTITUTE

THINKING ROCK COMMUNITY ARTS

ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
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an Ontario government agency
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Dr. Jude Ortiz, Miranda Bouchard and Elizabeth MacMillan

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PHASE ONE: IDENTIFYING THE MODEL

Executive Summary

This report reflects the search for an organizational model intended to meet the provincial development needs of cultural workers and organizations within the field of Community-Engaged Arts (CEA), with a focus on the needs of Northern Ontario practitioners. CEA is defined as "a multi-faceted approach to making art, whose main defining factor is that it involves professional artists working alongside populations who do not self-identify as artists to co-create professional art products, making it a uniquely relational form of art making." (Meschino, Sutherland & Bouchard, 2020, pp. 10-11).

The research stems from work that began in 2018 when Thinking Rock Community Arts (TRCA), with support from the Ontario Arts Council (OAC) and Mass Culture, convened a group of 15 community-engaged Indigenous and settler artists and arts organizations from across Northern Ontario to dialogue about their shared work. The participants focused on two questions: i) What are the challenges and opportunities facing community-engaged artists and organizations based in the rural and First Nation contexts of Northern Ontario, and; ii) What support, research and policy might help make this work easier and more sustainable? The work generated further investigation that came to be known as ***The Story of Our Stories: A Regional Community-Engaged Research Project*** (Meschino et al., 2020).

The document highlights two key opportunities to address the identified challenges and enable community-engaged artists and organizations to continue working towards and contributing to the development and healing of their communities.

1. **OPPORTUNITY ONE:** Implementing measures to support the attraction and retention of community-engaged artists in the region by further developing cultural infrastructure and promoting arts and culture.

2. **OPPORTUNITY TWO:** The establishment of a central organizing body (OB) or arts service organization (ASO) with the specific mandate to support and connect community-engaged artists and organizations across Northern Ontario.

The support this entity could provide would be multi-pronged and organized around:

- Advocacy and public education support;
- Networking and mentorship support;
- Business and communications support;
- Human resources support;
- Supporting cross-sector connections, and,
- Promotional support (pp. 36-38).

In 2021 the Ontario Arts Council hosted a two-part virtual gathering, *Raising Our Collective Voice*.[1] It convened 50 community-engaged artists and organizational representatives from across Ontario, broadening the discussion regarding CEA practitioner needs for representation, support and advocacy to a provincial scope. Comments harvested at the gathering aligned with the previous research. It was clear from the excitement, passion and urgency conveyed that many who attended the gatherings are eager to move forward the idea of establishing a dedicated central organizing body (OB) (or "un-body"), ASO or network, while keeping the needs of Northern practitioners in the forefront.

This research is very timely. Jackson, Jarvis & Fernandez (2024) note the absence and importance of establishing a dedicated CEA ASO/OB. While certain needs of CEA practitioners and organizations may be met by existing ASOs operating nationally and provincially (ie., CARFAC, CultureWorks Canada, etc.), the urgency for a CEA-specific ASO/OB is underscored by the recent pausing and hibernation of two key CEA organizations, ***ArtBridges*** and the ***International Centre of Art for Social Change***, and the oversubscription of available OAC grants for community-engaged artists.

Building on past research that clearly states the WHY and the WHAT, this report surfaces the HOW—how the organization or body will be structured, administered, and engage with artists and communities, with the goal of creating a mapped-out plan that can be actioned and realized in a subsequent multi-year funding proposal. Recognizing the collaboration, consultation and strategic development work critical in establishing such the initiative is divided into three phases:

- Phase One: Identifying the Model (this report)
- Phase Two: Investing in the Model: Implementing the next steps stemming from Phase One including identifying funding and investment opportunities; and, developing an operational plan
- Phase Three: Operationalizing the Model: Implementing the operational plan outlined in Phase Two

Phase One research goals are twofold: i) Identify the Model: How the ASO/OB will be structured, administered, and engage with artists and communities; and, ii) Next Steps: Outline the next steps that can be actioned and realized in a subsequent multi-year funding and investment proposal.

In launching the research, an advisory committee was established and ethics approval from Algoma University was received. A literature review traversed the nonprofit and the community-engaged arts sectors from which the key informant questions were derived. (See ***Appendix II: Key Informant Questions***). A diverse range of ten key informants participated in semi-structured interviews conducted by video call or phone. The matrix included professional artists, cultural workers and administrators working within the sector, along with community developers, working independently and/or with organizations (in the CEA sector, the nonprofit arts and culture and community/

[1] The first OAC *Raising Our Collective Voice* gathering in 2021 was called *Our Common Threads* (November) and the second was called *Weaving it All Together* (December).

economic development fields) in Northern Ontario, provincially and/or nationally. They provided experiential knowledge, deepened insights into their communities, and offered a wide variety of best practices and perspectives to consider.

Data was compiled and analyzed within a framework of nonprofit governance and organizational structures. Governance involves setting the overall organizational direction and culture, shared values, and processes for decision-making and accountability, while the organizational structure identifies how the work is organized to effectively meet its mandate.

The Nonprofit Environment

The role and relationship between the government and community nonprofit organizations has changed significantly over time with the advent of neoliberalism in the 1970s. Key aspects of neoliberalism in relation to the nonprofit sector include:

- The state no longer considers itself to be the steward of social wellbeing;
- Downloading responsibilities for social welfare onto nonprofits, communities and for-profit organizations;
- Resulting in manufactured vulnerability and precarity; and,
- Expected to do more with less and resiliently endure (Shields, Joy & Cheng, 2024).

Trends and forces impacting nonprofit governance design include: systemic oppression; financial instability; human resources; meaningful engagement; partnerships and collaborations; changing demographics; and, data and digitization. **Six promising practices are:** purpose-driven and principle-focused organizations; meaningful engagement for effective interventions; data-informed decision making; partnerships, collaboration and cogeneration; shared governance; and, attraction and retention strategies. Refer to ***Appendix III, The Nonprofit Environment*** for more information.

There are eight critical **governance functions** that must be fulfilled. They are deeply interconnected and range from those that are highly strategic and generative to those that are more routine. They are: i) Organizational purpose; ii) Strategy; iii) Organizational culture; iv) Resources; v) Governance design; vi) Engagement; vii) Assets; viii) Compliance (ONN, 2021a, p. 5). Refer to ***Appendix IV: Nonprofit Governance As A Framework*** for more information.

Phase One includes all aspects except for strategy, assets and compliance. Strategic direction, safeguarding assets and compliance with regulations, relevant laws, and accountability including evaluation and assessment frameworks, are part of Phase Two that involves identifying funding and investment opportunities, and developing an operational plan. Within the eight functions, governance design includes four elements: i) Governance Culture; ii) Organizational Structures; iii) People; and iv) Policies and Procedures. The data emerging from this report is organized around these four categories.

There are a number of **governance and organizational models** in the nonprofit sector. While certainly not comprehensive, this report does offer some choices to consider when launching a new venture. Differences between incorporated and unincorporated nonprofit organizations, registered charities (those that are able to offer tax receipts) and worker ownership models are followed by three traditional ways the work could be organized: The Simple Structure; The Bureaucracy; and The Matrix Structure. Four newer organizational designs are: The Team Structure; The Modular Organization; The Virtual Organization; and, Boundaryless Organization (Robbins & Langton, 2003, pp. 467-475). Also included are a few examples focusing on operationalizing governance, or organizational structures, or a combination of both, such as: membership benefit; social enterprises; worker self-directed; sociocratic structures; an organizational development model; and, shared governance within and across organizations. Refer to ***Appendix V: Models of Governance and Organizational Structures*** for more information.

Identifying the ASO/OB Model

Establishing a province-wide ASO/OB involves, among other considerations, determining the governance and organizational structure of the organization. Governance defines the framework for decision-making and accountability. Its goal is to ensure the organization operates effectively and ethically in achieving meaningful impacts and outcomes for the benefit of its stakeholders. Governance focuses on the "what" and "why" an organization does something. The organizational structure identifies the "how" and "who"–how the work is organized and the workflow. Its goal is to enable the effective execution of the organization's activities. It focuses on setting up the organization to achieve its goals, including the division of labour, the relationships between people and their roles and responsibilities, reporting lines, and communication channels.

Governance and organizational structure are intertwined. Governance decisions influence the type of structure needed to fulfill its purpose, and the organizational structure provides the framework for implementing governance policies and processes. An effective organization has a well-defined organizational structure and cohesive approach to governance. Collectively they ensure the organization achieves its objectives effectively and responsibly.

Establishing an ASO or an organizing body (OB) is a multi-step process with many interconnected and interdependent components. It is important to continually revisit the process of weaving together governance and structural elements in a manner that meets the group's identified needs and accountability while fostering, supporting and encouraging an ecosystem of broader social change and sustainability.

GOVERNANCE CULTURE

The following quote speaks to the culture of CEA as a practice and, as such, should be reflected in the

ASO/OB's governance and organizational structure. "The stewardship piece of it is a central theme to me. Not only environmental stewardship, but stewardship of care, of community, of people, all around. I made a commitment to try to be a good ancestor. So that's what I'm trying to do. And so this [CEA practice] ties in to doing that. And we should all go for that because the work we're doing today lives on, right?" (KI-07).

Another important aspect of governance culture revolves around bureaucracy, language and structure. A key informant notes organizations are so steeped in bureaucracy and suggests finding a balance between "the work of organizing, the work of creating structural systems, and then a commitment to working creatively with people in the community… You could develop an organization that values creative learning, accountability, and effective structures that do all the things that need doing in an organization… we're starved for realness… and pooling resources – What are your resources in your community? What are your resources as an individual? How can we pull them out? What are the mutual benefits? Those are all ways of working creatively, I think. Less top down." (KI-07).

IDENTIFY THE ORGANIZATION'S PURPOSE

Its purpose, as identified through past research, is to support community-engaged cultural workers across the province, with a focus on Northern Ontario actors. KIs following four key purposes provide a clear focus, yet remain sufficiently broad, capturing many of the discussion points regarding practitioner needs that surfaced during past research.

1. **Define** the practice and uphold the language around CEA, the vocabulary and terms of reference, as part of cultivating, elevating and breathing life into the practice.
2. **Convene** opportunities for congenial and community exchanges, knowledge generation and sharing.
3. **Facilitate** opportunities to liaise or partner with other types of organizations, exploring common ground and generating synergy in addressing key demographics within their communities.
4. **Advocate** for support in ways that sector workers and organizations cannot to champion the importance of the work, and be upfront about the challenges the sector is facing.

DETERMINE THE SCOPE OF THE ORGANIZATION

Factors impacting decisions regarding the scope of the organization, i.e., the boundaries to whom support extends, may include funding, available expertise, cultural and/or geographic disparities and priority of needs. There is concern about whom it serves given that CEA, and its definition may be seen as ambiguous, confusing and amorphous (Meschino et al., 2020, pp. 10-11) with its constellation of terms, practices and interdisciplinary approaches. Attention to cultural diversity is also an important consideration, but it is complicated. One key informant explains "Francophones are still very, very conscious about assimilation… a branch or department of the organization, that's something to avoid at all costs… (KI-05).

ESTABLISH A CLEAR AND DEFINED MISSION STATEMENT

KIs underscore that an arts service organization could serve many purposes. "Hav[e] a clear vision and mandate and mak[e] sure it is achievable… [Define] what the point is and what you're trying to do… It's hard to engage people when you don't really know what the benefit is" (KI-09). "[K]now what your values are, these things should be embedded… [into the mission statement]. And then operationalized by the team" (KI-01). Once crafted, stay true to the mission throughout the organization (KI-10).

DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

Regardless of what you wish to build, the organization should **demonstrate equity, inclusivity, creativity and be collaborative** in all ways (KI-07). **Within this framework** KIs offer differing perspectives on how the decision-making processes should be structured. Some advocate for **hierarchical** leadership, referring to one or more people making decisions, while others suggest a **consensus approach** involving many people.

Leadership is responsible for being **transparent in its actions and decision-making process**, generating a shared understanding of the organization's goals, how it plans to meet its mandate and convey what each person's role is within the collective action and implementation. Support for leadership (administratively and financially) in planning, decision making and implementation is important. **It takes time to develop collaborative practices**. **Ongoing consultation** and opportunities to contribute to the direction and life of the organization assist in alleviating such concerns (KI-02). These are crucial aspects of an effective organization (KI-06).

Organizational Structure

Given the organization's purpose, mission, current context, and desired operational culture, attention turns to what organizational structure works best at this time. Ontario is a culturally rich and ecologically diverse, vast geographical landmass with limited organizational, transportation and technological infrastructure posing challenges around connecting people and delivering programs within areas and between regions. Questions arise around how best to balance the diverse contexts including urban and rural, cultural disparity and geographic distances.

SELECTING THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Seek flexible, new models. A recurring theme throughout the research is the desire for the organization to instill a culture of flexibility and creativity, reflecting the values underpinning CEA practices, and supporting community-engaged cultural workers enabling them, in turn, to foster

social care, justice, health and wellbeing within various communities. This aligns with promising practices that embrace organizational fluidity, rather than more traditional hierarchical structures, allowing for more broadly shared decision-making processes (ONN, 2021b).

Discussion regarding what organizational structure might best meet CEAs needs, and of what worked well within these models as well as their pitfalls, surfaced different perspectives, largely grouped into two camps. Some KIs assume the organization would be a registered nonprofit organization, while others raise concerns about the process of formalizing the model and potential negative impact. Those in favour of a registered nonprofit organization suggest it lends significant legitimacy to the venture, particularly in the early stages. Communities are familiar with the model and appear to be more trusting of registered businesses, confident that they will adhere to their mandated goals, and be committed to care and service over a longer term.

There is openness to exploring organizational models leaning toward trying new and different partnership structures, multi-stakeholder relationships/coalitions, networks or ventures that may change at particular points in time to fulfil its mandate (KI-09). One research participant suggests the most effective ones have been multi-disciplinary arts groups conceptualized as "creating circles that are varied and diverse" (KI-04). They are "porous and more supple and able to change with the changing economies. Models that do not solely depend on a board will be the future" (KI-04). An alternative form of governance is linking to a 'mother' organization that would provide administrative services and guide its operational decisions. A possible working relationship would entail the 'mother' to be a stable organization with secure operating funds. While they would provide some administrative services (e.g., bookkeeping, payroll) and guide the operation as needed (e.g., legal, human resources, operational strategies), the ASO/OB staff would serve as their own governance structure responsible to its stated purpose, mission and principles (KI-04). This option aligns with the Fiscal Sponsorship model described in the ***Appendix V: Models of Governance and Organizational Structures***.

It is very important for board members to **know their role within the organizational structure**. Since there is no one definition for CEA, terminology can be quite fuzzy. Members may have experience in the field but a different understanding, focus or scope of practice than the organization's mission (KI-02). Dedicate time to ensure there is common understanding of the terminology, and of what the organization intends it to mean, i.e., the context, premises and assumptions (KI-02). An **organizational chart** that is easy to read and readily accessible is definitely needed in order to understand how the operation functions. People want to know the processes and procedures, the working relationships, who is accountable to whom, and who would mediate issues that may arise, as well as how to resolve them (KI-08). There needs to be transparency—"[w]here the leadership is coming from and why the leadership is who they are. How people can participate" (KI-06).

WORKPLACE STRUCTURES

Decisions around workplace structures are deeply intertwined with people and place. e.g., who they are, their capacity, and relationships within the organization and communities where they may be situated. As an arts organization starting out, "You can establish an arts organization nearly anywhere you want, but establishing those relationships with community partners and community members themselves, that's where the real work really begins, before you even start thinking about projects. There's very little you can do as an arts organization if you don't establish yourself in those communities." (KI-08).

Physical offices, in contrast to virtual or home offices, allow for people to drop by and ask questions (KI-05; 08). It could also facilitate the creation and maintenance of a resource library, archival material, and a dedicated space for delivering workshops should they be offered on a frequent basis (KI-02). There is a lack of archive space in Canada, physical or otherwise. Archival space is seen as contributing to capacity building, knowledge sharing and succession planning. There is concern that a number of artists have taken up community arts "in a 'wobbly way' that would greatly benefit from the knowledge, experience and wisdom that has been brewing within community-engaged arts organizations" for more than 15 or 20 years (KI-07).

The location of physical work spaces brought forth some wariness of the organization's headquarters being rooted in the metropolis of Toronto or the surrounding area. It "**just exacerbates all the things that we already have**." A more pragmatic approach grounded in available financial resources is offered. "I want to be mindful of where the hub would be in relation to the geographic outreach that we want to facilitate." (KI-10). "You need that **administrative stronghold** in order to ground the work itself. You need to have a place where **people know that they can come and see you**. You just need to have a **space to organize**" (KI-10).

Decentralized facilities is another option. "Ontario is so huge and the experiences are vastly different from down south to Northern Ontario. It's almost like you would need branches, because the needs are different, the audience is different, and opportunities are different. There would have to be that focus, because you can't serve everyone—the needs are so vast. You need to understand that they're not the same" (KI-09).

Any organization that is looking at a **provincial mandate must understand how to scale resources over time**. Start small, and develop community contacts as representatives or advocates or champions for the work. Regional reps can work from home, but would be required to travel through their area extensively, meeting with other organizations, attending events, and delivering programing and professional development workshops in different communities within their regions. Decentralized offices allow for **wider board and staff representation** (KI-03).

A **hybrid model**, with offices in the region, would be worth considering if technology (i.e., high speed internet) and a budget to cover remote overhead costs and travel are available (KI-01). Staff

could work regionally, connecting virtually with other staff. Hybrid is about meetings, but gathering underpins the work of CEA. "The one-off projects don't build relationships. You're just there as a novelty" (KI-07). This speaks to the importance of having a longer-term presence in various communities to foster respect and connection. **Mobile units** traveling to specific areas would assist in providing provincial coverage, particularly in the north where they do not have the same access to resources that urban centers have.

PEOPLE

Key informants identify that valuing and supporting people through attraction, retention and succession planning strategies are important aspects of a healthy organizational culture that respects interrelationships. Centring relationships is key to success. KI-10 advocates for a "**diverse set of voices that are helping you facilitate the work on a day to day basis**" with an eye to the type and purpose of relationships that are being developed within and beyond the organization. There are a myriad of **capabilities the organization collectively needs to possess**, including subject specific people that know either the community, the stakeholder group or the tasks that the organization is undertaking or plans to execute. The compositional mix should consider equity, diversity and inclusion, and be representative of the community it is serving (KI-01).

How an organization demonstrates that it **values its staff** may vary considerably from one nonprofit to the next. It is important that there is dialogue and discussion around how staff feel regarding the workplace, their aspirations and opportunities. As a means of valuing people, the KIs suggest flexible work and staffing models, decent pay, addressing compensation inequities, benefits packages and mental health supports. Mental health support has emerged as an endemic need in organized workplaces and self-employment situations alike and applicable to all members, board and staff, across the organization. Refer to ***Appendix VI: Mental Health Supports*** for a more detailed overview.

Rather than have a core team of primarily in-person full-time staff, **a more effective mix is a few full-time employees with a majority being part-time or contracted**. It enables the organization to pay better wages and reduces burnout by having a job description that has a discrete focus. "Where we used to layer responsibilities into full-time jobs, we now have discrete focuses and that gives people the ability to go deep, and to feel like they're succeeding in the area that they're responsible for. That structure brings a lot of resilience to the organization and extends the depth and meaning of our organizational relationships. Staff are happier. Staff are staying longer" (KI-03). Staffing priorities that intentionally focus on hiring artists who are working on their existing careers and who, therefore, have the ability to understand the sector and really support their peers is a much better staffing model.

RECRUITMENT OF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Executive Director is the linchpin in the success of the ASO/OB, responsible for operationalizing the mandate and strategic objectives, and reporting to the board of directors/the governing members. Key informants offer three varying points of view regarding the timing of hiring the founding Executive Director, i.e., when it is best to bring them onboard. They are: i) hire an inspired and capable person to shape the organization, engaging them in the visioning and development of the organization (KI-07); ii) first have a clear vision for the ASO/OB, what is possible and what it wants to do (KI-06) then find person; or, iii) define the organization to a certain point and then seek a leader (KI-02). The Executive Director needs to be knowledgeable in all aspects of CEA and human resource management because everyone will be relying on their expertise to guide them (KI-01).

Recruitment challenges revolve around the **value proposition** that a nonprofit can offer, given that wages are considerably lower than similar positions in for-profit enterprises. Non-monetary items such as flexibility to work from home, professional development opportunities, and an opportunity to work to achieve the mission can be incentives (KI-01). There is concern that a number of leadership candidates with the desirable depth of experience in the field would be practitioners currently engaged in community arts work and leading companies, and would not necessarily want to be siphoned off to run an arts organization. The geographic scope of the organization poses an additional challenge when attracting staff and leadership. It is not a Toronto-based organization where there is a concentration of experienced people, but provincial in nature, encompassing rural, remote and culturally diverse populations (KI-02).

ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Engagement and communications strategies are intertwined, both requiring investment and intentional planning. “There has to be a really good staffing structure of communication as well, to ensure that what is being communicated is on an organizational level, everybody understands and everybody is able to speak to it and able to connect the person who is asking questions with the right resources and more help.” (KI-03). Utilize a variety of storytelling strategies, virtual, digital and in-person to connect with people in a meaningful way. Be transparent in conveying the ASO’s purpose, mandate and operations, ensuring people understand the work and its impact on a project/program basis. Each storytelling platform has its nuances but ideally it should include ways for audiences to see the important underlying ‘connective tissue’, i.e., how the organization is meeting CEA needs, and why it may be pivoting in response to changing circumstances. Discussions focusing on engagement often include issues related to access to, and people’s capacity for, utilizing the internet. Not everyone has broadband access, are familiar with the multitude of platforms or have the means to upgrade their skills. This issue is certainly not unique to the cultural sector. It is also important to remember that needs and challenges regarding engagement and communication faced in one part of the province—for example, Northern Ontario—could differ from those in another and, as such, may also require different strategies and solutions.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

A Policy and Procedure Manual is a foundational operational component outlining the organization's rules, guidelines and processes, ensuring consistency across all aspects of operations. It reflects its culture, values and operational practices. A really good policy structure that's embedded and transparent for the board and staff supports and nurtures cohesiveness within and between these groups, and helps them understand how they work together in service of the organization (KI-03).

FEASIBILITY AND FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

When speaking to the feasibility of launching an ASO/OB at this time, a number of KIs reiterate the need for such an organization, particularly given the changing contexts, underscoring the urgent need, and the benefits it would provide to practitioners, and thus, participants and communities. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated revenue generation problems that nonprofits were already facing. Nonprofits are being advised to "[e]xpect more disruption–and prepare accordingly" (CanadaHelps, 2025, p. 5). "We're heading into hard funding times, as you know, and then on the other hand we will come out of them on the other side one day." (KI-02). The federal government's objectives for the artistic and cultural communities have vastly changed over the last five years. Securing funding is significantly more competitive now due to the high number of organizations asking for funding that's just not there (KI-05).

"**Planning and designing the organization around scalability is really critical**. What does it take to start out small? What would the initial quantitative and qualitative measurements be for the impact that it's bringing to that initial work? And then how can those be scaled? Not necessarily up, but wider over time. The organization will have the trust and reliability then of government funders and individual donors and also community and supporters: seeing the care and then also being able to be part of the journey of growth. Instead of coming out with a huge bang, we're starting here, but this is where we see ourselves going" (KI-03). Reviewing similar past initiatives for guidance, and **conducting a feasibility study** is how KI-10 suggests determining pathways forward. "Feasibility studies are definitely something that should be pursued" (KI-10). "I think it's probably feasible, but I think it's a monumental task." (KI-01). It becomes more feasible if there is a lead person who can drive the work, and energetic people with the heart, mindset and willingness to implement plans (KI-08). Research into the scope and feasibility of the work that this and past research projects provides will determine its feasibility (KI-06).

Research participants suggest a range of potential initial funding and longer-term sources ranging from government grants, foundations, donations and sponsorships, to earned revenue such as memberships and fundraising. Many nonprofit organizations are very reliant upon **government funding**, and due to its prevalence in the arts and culture sector, some KIs do not see any other way to fund the ASO/OB (KI-05; 09). Cautionary notes include "Do not overly rely on government funding.

Use project grants towards a scalable model. Develop your own self-earned revenue streams" (KI-03). KIs urge Phase Two participants to seek funds to start the organization that includes the development of a revenue generating plan.

It is important to create relationships and links with decision-makers to explain its importance (KI-05) and move lobbying efforts forward (KI-10). Making a compelling case for CEA, or an ASO/OB dedicated to serving its practitioners is challenging. Assessment metrics defining economic development and tourism initiatives do not necessarily align with CEA values, objectives or evaluation frameworks. While there is significant impact, funders often require proof of contribution to the economy. KI-02 succinctly expresses the hurdle. "I don't know if it's possible to make a really compelling case for a community arts service organization. It's not like it's inventing. It's something that's coming out of a history that is a… different thing. There's a gap" (KI-02).

Many nonprofits receive **donations** of cash and in-kind goods and services from individuals, businesses and foundations to support their work. Nonprofits can consider forming a **charity/non-charity partnership** enabling non-charities to benefit from their partner's status as a registered charity to aid in attracting both charitable donations and funding from granting foundations. Charity/nonprofit partnerships are relatively common. Historically, culture sector charities attract a very small portion of donations through ***CanadaHelps***, with the 2023 ***The Giving Report*** indicating sector donations represented only 1.5% of all Canadian donations (Business/Arts, 2024). To diversify revenue streams, alongside public funders (e.g. government grants), organizations may make appeals to public and **private foundations**. In the past, many grantmaking foundations were restricted to granting and gifting to other charities. Recent changes to the Income Tax Act in 2022 have eased limitations on charity/non-charity partnerships somewhat.

Earned revenue including contracted services, membership, and fundraising are mentioned as possible sources of revenue (KI-02; 04; 08). Depending upon the organization's capacity and expertise, services could be contracted by a variety of organizations and businesses. Government service contracts are one example. "**Use the government contracting system as revenue**. So there could be areas of special focus where your organization is actually able to deliver the objectives for a government program. And that can be a pretty stable source of income" (KI-03). **Membership fees can be quite controversial** in terms of equity, access and CEA practices regarding charging people money (KI-02). **Fundraising is possible**, but the KIs note that hosting gatherings is not really a viable revenue stream as they do not really generate money. Other organizations can make financial contributions, but the sector is not strong enough right now, and attempting to sustain an organization through fundraising is very challenging (KI-06).

Supporting CEA Practitioners

If the development of an ASO/OB is deemed not feasible at this time, the key informants recommend the following support for individual cultural workers and organizations. Many requests align with the purpose of an ASO/OB and its various roles as discussed throughout this research report. Some echo supports identified in previous research.[2] The following points are identified as *(New)* and do not appear in earlier reports, or they refer to different aspects of previously mentioned items. Refer to ***Supporting CEA Practitioners*** to see the full list of supports that KIs mentioned.

ADVOCACY AND PUBLIC EDUCATION SUPPORT

- Shifting bureaucratic systems and measurement standards to be more supportive of building meaningful relationships within the work (relationship-centred) and impact-focussed, and therefore, appropriate for CEA *(New)*;
- Relaxing funder expectations/repercussions about organizational advocacy around matters of importance to the community (i.e., circulating petitions) *(New)*; and,
- Access to high speed internet.

NETWORKING AND MENTORSHIP SUPPORT

- A network is needed to facilitate referrals, consultancy and mentorship opportunities and job postings. While job boards exist, there is not one for community arts *(New)*.

BUSINESS AND COMMUNICATIONS SUPPORT

- Organizational structuring, strategic planning, and developing clear objectives to be better able to prioritize actions, attract the right partners to advance your mandate and assess progress in meeting objectives *(New)*;
- Developing policies that are well suited and customized *(New)*;
- Sample grant proposals, contracts, collaborative agreements that others could access, centrally held and updated *(New)*;
- Communications support including the development of infographics and targeted fact sheets conveying what is happening, the impact and the reach, serving to attract people to participate as well as advocating for their activities *(New)*; and,
- Grant writing clinics to access funding from all levels of government for a range of activities including printing, and workshops offered through ***Canadian Artists' Representation/Le Front des artistes canadiens (CARFAC)*** *(New)*.

[2] Previous research: ***The Story of Our Stories*** (Meschino, Sutherland & Bouchard, 2020), and *Weaving It All Together Gathering* (Forslund, 2025).

HUMAN RESOURCES SUPPORT

Within individual practices and/or when working collectively there is a need for:

- Legal advice and conflict management *(New)*.

SUPPORTING CROSS-SECTOR CONNECTIONS

To build ecosystem resilience:

- Options for sharing resources and creative strategy *(New)*; and,
- Cross-sector partnerships to facilitate learning opportunities through the arts where everyone benefits through generating and sharing of practical knowledge *(New)*.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Supporting CEA practitioners' professional development would increase their capacity in a number of crucial areas, and thus, their impact. Foremost is understanding the practice, what it entails, its relationship to individuals and communities, and its potential for social change and justice. KIs call for programming providing sound practice fundamentals, approaches, further resources and the creation of a learning network of artists. Establishing an archive is seen as another way to build sector capacity through sharing knowledge, wisdom and experience of others working in the field. It would provide a sound foundation and guide practitioners in their various practices, potentially avoiding the adoption of 'wobbly ways' when launching new initiatives or expanding areas of practice. Furthermore, an archive would contribute to succession planning, retaining successes and advancing individual, collective, and community engagement across sectors and the country. It may also serve as a repository or foundation for advocacy efforts.

Next Steps

The ten key informants participating in this research (Phase One) provide a wealth of insights that significantly advance the dream of establishing an ASO/OB dedicated to supporting cultural workers and organizations in the field of community-engaged arts, with a focus on the needs of Northern Ontario. Their input contributes to the process of selecting a governance and organizational model, informing its underlying culture, approach and shape, as well as identifying a number of important considerations regarding attracting and retaining people, policy and procedures, and feasibility and financial sustainability to keep at the forefront when establishing an ASO/OB.

Phase Two entails an iterative, multi-step process of weaving together the various elements of governance and structure within the context of purpose, priorities, capacities, existing relationships and networks, and financial opportunities, nested within the larger picture of uncertainty and

precarity in which nonprofit groups are enmeshed. Continual attention and decision-making is required to ensure the many interconnected and interdependent aspects support each other in a manner that enables the governance culture to facilitate the organizational structure in serving the ASO/OB's purpose. The governance style and organizational structure that best suits the ASO/OB's initial needs in launching the initiative may be different than what is needed in the longer-term. Sustainability issues driven, for example, by growth in demand in services, or community and/or political changes may encourage scaling operations or spark a change in model over time.

The KIs note specific tasks stemming from this research that would support Phase Two, the identification of funding and investment opportunities and the development of an operational plan. They are:

1. **Define** the ASO/OB's purpose and priority areas by conducting an environmental scan of existing supports within/outside the CEA sector;
2. **Identify** its scope by determining what constitutes cultural workers and organizations working in the field of CEA;
3. **Prepare** a clearly stated mission statement;
4. **Select** a governance and organizational structure that facilitates meeting the mission;
5. **Develop** an operational plan for meeting the ASO/OB's provincial mandate including the type and location of workplace structures;
6. **Conduct** a feasibility study to assess the practicality, potential viability, and the issues that may arise in evaluating what is feasible and manageable at this time; and,
7. **Seek** partners and investors.

Three recommendations for moving forward are:

1. Have a firm development plan, co-created with key stakeholders;
2. Host a summit meeting to align strategies; and,
3. Conduct a feasibility study.

The pausing and hibernation of two CEA pillar organizations, ***ArtBridges*** and the ***International Centre of Art for Social Change***, both citing tight funding or severe funding challenges, is a cause for concern on two fronts. First, the feasibility and sustainability of a new ASO/OB, and second, the unmet needs and loss of potential avenues for local community development and healing opportunities that CEA practitioners facilitate. ***ArtBridges*** was serving over 395 community partnerships with 2024 marking 15 years of service, and the ***International Centre of Art for Social Change***, following 40 years operations serving more than 500 Arts for Social Change organizations. As Jackson, Jarvis & Fernadez (2024) note, the absence of and importance of establishing a dedicated ASO/OB is timely: "Without a dedicated arts service organization for community-engaged work, practitioners have few formal supports for networking, critical dialogue, co-learning and the sharing of their stories."

In sum, the key informants express the importance of the work, the processes and ethics underpinning CEA, and the increasing demand and need for engagement of this nature for individual and collective health, wellbeing, and resilience. Much more can be achieved when working as an organization, networking and collaborating, than as individual practitioners. Collectively the key informants provide clear 'next steps' in advancing this work. The establishment of an ASO/OB "is not impossible"… It may be "a monumental task" (KI-01), but the impossible can become possible with the right energetic people who have the heart, mindset and willingness to drive it and implement the plans (KI-02; 08).

Time allotment for Phase Two is dependent on a number of factors. It would include the time required to: form an advisory group to lead the process; formulate and conduct consultative and advice-gathering summits, events and individual meetings to identify funding and investment opportunities and partnerships; analyze the data; and, compile it into an operational plan within the context of a feasibility study. Phase Three, operationalizing the model, would be dependent upon the outcome of the feasibility study, whether the project is deemed feasible in its entirety or a scaled version is proposed, and if the leadership group remains the same or a new team is gathered to oversee the implementation process.

In moving forward, ***The Story of Our Stories: A Regional Community-Engaged Research Project*** (Meschino et al., 2020) serves as a resource for retaining an emphasis on Northern practitioners. It captures the impacts of CEA practice, the motivation for engagement, and the challenges as identified by those living and working in the region.

PHASE ONE: IDENTIFYING THE MODEL

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PHASE ONE: IDENTIFYING THE MODEL

1.0 Introduction to the Research

This report reflects the search for an organizational model intended to meet the provincial development needs of cultural workers and organizations within the field of Community-Engaged Arts (CEA), with a focus on the needs of Northern Ontario practitioners. CEA is defined as "a multi-faceted approach to making art, whose main defining factor is that it involves professional artists working alongside populations who do not self-identify as artists to co-create professional art products, making it a uniquely relational form of art making." (Meschino, Sutherland & Bouchard, 2020, pp. 10-11).

The research stems from work that began in 2018 when Thinking Rock Community Arts (TRCA), with support from the Ontario Arts Council (OAC) and Mass Culture, convened a group of 15 community-engaged Indigenous and settler artists and arts organizations from across Northern Ontario to dialogue about their shared work. The participants focused on two questions: i) What are the challenges and opportunities facing community-engaged artists and organizations based in the rural and First Nation contexts of Northern Ontario, and; ii) What support, research and policy might help make this work easier and more sustainable? The work generated further investigation that came to be known as ***The Story of Our Stories: A Regional Community-Engaged Research Project*** (Meschino et al., 2020).

The document highlights two key opportunities to address the identified challenges and enable community-engaged artists and organizations to continue working towards and contributing to the development and healing of their communities.

1. Opportunity One: Implementing measures to support the attraction and retention of community-engaged artists in the region by further developing cultural infrastructure and promoting arts and culture.

2. Opportunity Two: The establishment of a central organizing body (OB) or arts service organization (ASO) with the specific mandate to support and connect community-engaged artists and organizations across Northern Ontario.

The support this entity could provide would be multi-pronged and organized around:

- Advocacy and public education support;
- Networking and mentorship support;

- Business and communications support;
- Human resources support;
- Supporting cross-sector connections, and,
- Promotional support (pp. 36-38).

In 2021 the Ontario Arts Council hosted a two-part virtual gathering, *Raising Our Collective Voice*.[3] It convened 50 community-engaged artists and organizational representatives from across Ontario, broadening the discussion regarding CEA practitioner needs for representation, support and advocacy to a provincial scope. Comments harvested at the gathering aligned with the previous research. It was clear from the excitement, passion and urgency conveyed that many who attended the gatherings are eager to move the idea of establishing a dedicated central organizing body (OB) (or "un-body"), ASO or network, while keeping the needs of Northern practitioners in the forefront.

This research is very timely. Jackson, Jarvis & Fernandez (2024) note the absence and importance of establishing a dedicated CEA ASO/OB. While certain needs of CEA practitioners and organizations may be met by existing ASOs operating nationally and provincially (ie., CARFAC, CultureWorks Canada, etc.), the urgency for a CEA-specific ASO/OB is underscored by the recent pausing and hibernation of two key CEA organizations, ***ArtBridges*** and the ***International Centre of Art for Social Change***, and the oversubscription of available OAC grants for community-engaged artists.

Building on past research that clearly states the WHY and the WHAT, this report surfaces the HOW–how the organization or body will be structured, administered, and engage with artists and communities, with the goal of creating a mapped-out plan that can be actioned and realized in a subsequent multi-year funding proposal. Recognizing the collaboration, consultation and strategic development work critical in establishing such the initiative is divided into three phases:

- Phase One: Identifying the Model (this report)
- Phase Two: Investing in the Model: Implementing the next steps stemming from Phase One including identifying funding and investment opportunities; and, developing an operational plan
- Phase Three: Operationalizing the Model: Implementing the operational plan outlined in Phase Two

Phase One research goals are twofold: i) Identify the Model: How the ASO/OB will be structured, administered, and engage with artists and communities; and, ii) Next Steps: Outline the next steps that can be actioned and realized in a subsequent multi-year funding and investment proposal.

In launching the research, an advisory committee was established and ethics approval from Algoma University was received. A literature review traversed the nonprofit and the community-engaged arts sectors from which the key informant questions were derived. (See ***Appendix II: Key Informant***

[3] The first OAC *Raising Our Collective Voice* gathering in 2021 was called *Our Common Threads* (November) and the second was called *Weaving it All Together* (December).

Questions). A diverse range of ten key informants participated in semi-structured interviews conducted by video call or phone. The matrix included professional artists, cultural workers and administrators working within the sector, along with community developers, working independently and/or with organizations (in the CEA sector, the nonprofit arts and culture and community/ economic development fields) in Northern Ontario, provincially and/or nationally. They provided experiential knowledge, deepened insights into their communities, and offered a wide variety of best practices and perspectives to consider.

Data was compiled and analyzed within a framework of nonprofit governance and organizational structures. Governance involves setting the overall organizational direction and culture, shared values, and processes for decision-making and accountability, while the organizational structure identifies how the work is organized to effectively meet its mandate.

Phase One Research Goals

The following two research goals were identified:

1. Identify the model: How the ASO/OB will be structured, administered, and engage with artists and communities.
2. Next Steps: Outline the next steps that can be actioned and realized in a subsequent multi-year funding and investment proposal.

Thinking Rock Community Arts (TRCA) partnered with ***NORDIK Institute*** (NORDIK) to conduct this research. TRCA is the project administrator and advisor and NORDIK the project coordinator responsible for co-designing and leading the key informant interviews across Ontario, analyzing the data and publishing the final report. The report will be disseminated to funders, the ***Ontario Arts Council*** (OAC) and the ***City of Sault Ste. Marie***, key informants who requested a copy, and made publicly available via ***Thinking Rock Community Arts***' and ***NORDIK Institute's*** websites.

In launching the research, an advisory committee was established and ethics approval from Algoma University was received. A literature review traversed the nonprofit and the community-engaged arts sectors. It surfaced a number of trends and forces currently shaping nonprofit governance and operations, promising practices in navigating increasingly uncertain environments, and emerging organizational structures. Literature pertaining to community-engaged arts included an overview of the CEA sector, including definitions, purpose and publics served; the development and study of the field of practice worldwide, historically and in contemporary times; CEA sector governance; and shifts within the field and sector over time, most recently through the COVID-19 pandemic. Also reviewed were intersections of CEA and mental health, decent work, and organizational development and behaviour.

Input was sought from key informants (KI). Interview questions developed from the literature review aimed to elicit: how a provincial ASO or organizing body (OB) serving community engaged artists and communities might be structured and operationalized; how it will engage with artists and communities; potential human resources and financial sustainability challenges; and the feasibility of launching a CEA-dedicated ASO/OB at this time. See ***Appendix II: Key Informant Questions***.

A diverse range of ten key informants participated in semi-structured interviews conducted by video call or phone. The matrix included professional artists, cultural workers and administrators working within the sector, along with community developers, working independently and/or with organizations (in the CEA sector, the nonprofit arts and culture and community/economic development fields) in Northern Ontario, provincially and/or nationally. They provided experiential knowledge, deepened insights into their communities, and offered a wide variety of best practices and perspectives to consider.

Data was compiled and analyzed within a framework of nonprofit governance and organizational structures. Governance involves setting the overall organizational direction and culture, shared values, and processes for decision-making and accountability, while the organizational structure identifies how the work is organized to effectively meet its mandate.

Report Sections

The report is organized into the following sections to support the process of developing an ASO/OB model. The Nonprofit Environment (Section 2.0) provides an overview of the context of operating within a neoliberal framework, the trends and focus impacting governance design, and a number of promising practices. It is followed by Nonprofit Governance as a Framework (Section 3.0) outlining the foundations of governance and a variety of organizational structures ranging from traditional to emerging models. Section 4.0, Identifying the ASO/OB Model, is organized around the four elements of governance design: Governance Culture, Organizational Structures, People, and Policies and Procedures. It presents key informants' opinions and perspectives regarding the group's purpose, scope, and mission, as well as its decision-making processes; considerations for selecting the organizational and workplace location(s) in meeting its provincial mandate; the importance of valuing people; engagement and communication strategies; and, meaningful and embedded policy and procedures. Feasibility and Financial Sustainability is the focus for Section 5.0, highlighting potential funding sources and cautionary notes regarding such. Section 6.0, Supporting CEA Practitioners identifies supports for the cultural workers in the field should an ASO/OB not move forward. The final section, Next Steps (7.0) identifies actions stemming from this research that informs Phase Two, in pathways forward to seeking funding and investment opportunities and developing an operational plan to realize the dream of a dedicated ASO/OB.

PHASE ONE: IDENTIFYING THE MODEL

2.0 The Nonprofit Environment

Community nonprofit organizations encompass nonprofit organizations that provide goods and services to individuals, households, and communities, such as those related to food security, social services, housing, employment, health, newcomer settlement, recreation, sport, and religion (Shields, Joy & Cheng, 2024, p. 11). An ASO/OB serving community-engaged cultural workers would fall into the category of community nonprofit organizations.

This section provides an overview of the neoliberal context in which nonprofits operate, and outlines the key concepts and components of governance and organizational structures, the trends and forces shaping governance, as well as promising practices.

2.1 Community Context

The role and relationship between the government and community nonprofit organizations has changed significantly over time with the advent of neoliberalism in the 1970s. Key aspects of neoliberalism in relation to the nonprofit sector include:

- The state no longer considers itself to be the steward of social wellbeing;
- Downloading responsibilities for social welfare onto nonprofits, communities and for-profit organizations;
- Resulting in manufactured vulnerability and precarity; and,
- Expected to do more with less and resiliently endure (Shields, Joy & Cheng, 2024).

Decades of neoliberal restructuring and chronic under-resourcing significantly reduced nonprofits' resilience to respond, adjust and adapt with the onset of COVID-19. "For the community nonprofit sector, progressive social resilience must be constructed upon a stable and fair funding base, true partnerships with the state that respects sector autonomy, and a recognition and respect for the social justice missions of nonprofit organizations that informs public policy in myriad domains to address the roots of oppression." (Shields, Joy, & Cheng, 2024, p. 14).

Trends and forces impacting nonprofit governance design include: systemic oppression; financial instability; human resources; meaningful engagement; partnerships and collaborations; changing demographics; and, data and digitization.

Six promising practices are: purpose-driven and principle-focused organizations; meaningful engagement for effective interventions; data-informed decision making; partnerships, collaboration and cogeneration; shared governance; and, attraction and retention strategies. Refer to ***Appendix III: The Nonprofit Environment*** for more information.

PHASE ONE: IDENTIFYING THE MODEL

3.0 Nonprofit Governance as a Framework

Governance can be described as a "framework of responsibilities, requirements and accountabilities within which organizations operate, including regulatory, audit and reporting requirements, and relationships with key stakeholders (Lalande, 2018, p. 3). It is a foundational aspect of meeting operational functionality, accountability and transparency. Governance identifies who has a voice in making decisions, how decisions are made and who is ultimately accountable. It involves setting organizational direction and policies, overseeing performance and ensuring compliance and accountability. The ultimate **goal for governance** of an organization is to enable the achievement of meaningful impacts and outcomes for the benefit of its communities. The **role of governance** in a nonprofit organization is to provide stewardship, sensemaking and foresight that advances its purpose. Governance leadership takes responsibility for building and sustaining stakeholders' confidence in the organization's integrity, legitimacy and viability (Lalande, 2018, pp. 4-6).

3.1 Governance Functions

There are critical functions that must be fulfilled to achieve the role of governance for an organization. They are important design drivers and can be fulfilled by a wide range of governance leaders including board members, CEO/ED, senior management team, members, collaborators and partners. They are also deeply interconnected. For example, the organization's strategic choices are impacted by the availability of resources. Stakeholder engagement strategies are influenced by the organization's values. The way an organization chooses to carry out these functions, (e.g. tasks, activities, structures and processes) varies widely depending upon their unique circumstances and styles (ONN, 2021a, p. 4).

The eight critical governance functions that must be fulfilled are deeply interconnected, and range from those that are highly strategic and generative to those that are more routine. They are: i) Organizational purpose; ii) Strategy; iii) Organizational culture; iv) Resources; v) Governance design; vi) Engagement; vii) Assets; viii) Compliance (ONN, 2021a, p. 5).

For more information refer to ***Appendix IV: Nonprofit Governance as a Framework***.

3.2 Governance Design

There are four enabling factors that are the foundations of governance design. They are: Governance Culture, Organizational Structure, People, and Policies and Procedures. They can make good governance possible or create barriers to success. They also create a space that can be used as a playground for innovation (ONN, 2021a, p. 6).

3.2.1 GOVERNANCE CULTURE

The culture that drives governance is made visible in the organization's formal documents, such as the written vision and value statements and ethical standards, and in the stated views and behaviors of governance leaders. Culture is also expressed in less open ways, such as the unconscious mindsets, beliefs and assumptions of the governance leaders. All of these expressions of culture enable governance because they drive actions, decisions, rules and power dynamics. This includes who is consulted in governance decision-making; what types of knowledge and opinions are valued; the degree of risk tolerance; and how leadership is expressed and conferred (ONN, 2021a, p. 7).

Vision and Mission Statements

Vision statements describe the future path of the organization's success. It is a broader and more aspirational statement looking toward what the organization aims to achieve compared to the mission statement outlining the organization's guiding principles, values and purpose, its activities and how it intends to fulfill its goals. The mission statement should be action-orientated, and provide a sense of direction to all engaged in the organization.

To create an effective and efficient mission statement there needs to be an understanding of who is being served, why they need this service, and how this service is unique or different from other similar services. Establish a mission statement applicable for the current context. It can be updated as priorities shift.[4]

3.2.2 ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Organizational structure identifies how the work is organized–the hierarchy, workflow, relationships between people, and their roles and responsibilities within the nonprofit. Structures are the entities (e.g. formal and informal bodies created to do governance work, like the board or committees). This includes their roles, tasks, and the assignment of governance authority and accountability. The collection of governance structures forms a system which defines how tasks are allocated, coordinated and overseen (ONN, 2021a, p. 7). For more information and examples see ***Appendix V: Models of Governance and Organizational Structures***.

[4] More information can be found at: ***Canadian Business Development Centre***; ***Community Toolbox***; and ***Funding For Good***.

3.2.3 PEOPLE

Many people play a part in the governance of the organization, such as the Board, CEO/ED, management team, other staff, members, those served, collaborative partners and major funders. All these players create a web of interrelationships, and expectations, which enhance or impede governance. An organization's ability to fulfill governance well depends on the array of skills, experience and knowledge of governance leaders, particularly board directors and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or Executive Director (ED) (ONN, 2021a, p. 7).

3.2.4 POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Governance policies and processes guide how the work is done and typically include descriptions of mandates, reporting requirements, risk management protocols and decision-making procedures. They are often described in a governance policy manual. Policies and processes also include information processes which are essential to making informed decisions, e.g. tracking the external and internal environment; financial reporting (ONN, 2021a, p. 7).

3.3 Models of Governance and Organizational Structures

There are a number of **governance and organizational models** in the nonprofit sector. While certainly not comprehensive, this report does offer some choices to consider when launching a new venture. Differences between incorporated and unincorporated nonprofit organizations, registered charities (those that are able to offer tax receipts) and worker ownership models are included in this section.

Appendix V: Models of Governance and Organizational Structures provides information regarding three traditional ways the work could be organized: The Simple Structure; The Bureaucracy; and The Matrix Structure, and four newer organizational designs are: The Team Structure; The Modular Organization; The Virtual Organization; and The Boundaryless Organization (Robbins & Langton, 2003, pp. 467-475). It also highlights a few examples focusing on operationalizing governance, or organizational structures, or a combination of both, such as: membership benefit; social enterprises; worker self-directed; Sociocratic structures; an organizational development model; and, shared governance within and across organizations.

Given the dynamism and unpredictability of the current Canadian nonprofit environment, the disruption caused to philanthropy by many forces and values (Sharp Eizinger and Martin, 2023), and the impacts of public policy and "highly charged and politicized environments" on nonprofits, they must "align themselves with the demands of their environment" to be most successful (Vakil,

2014, p. 326). Among nonprofits, "a push to reject organizational structures that are seen as overly burdensome, regressive, and even harmful" is growing; this is attributable to experimentation necessitated and encouraged by the pandemic, a prioritization of power sharing and succession planning to navigate workforce stress and change, and desires to disrupt burnout, advance diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) goals, and support gradual leadership transitions (Sharp Eizinger and Martin, 2023).

Adopting new organizational models necessitates and encourages ongoing learning and change management (Sharp Eizinger and Martin, 2023). Organically-structured organizations that engage flexibility, decentralized authority, cross-organizational communication, and employee-based/democratic decision making are suited to these present-day conditions; where vertical structures within organizations rely upon hierarchy and formalization as means of control, horizontal structures engage information systems and cross-functional teams as coordinative devices (Vakil, 2014, pp. 325-332). Increasingly, non-traditional structures such as co-leadership, co- or multi-executive directorship, worker self-direction, and fiscal sponsorship are being adopted by nonprofits to support sustainability and delivery on mission (Sharp Eizinger and Martin, 2023). Information regarding business structures may be found on the ***Government of Canada website***.

Incorporated and unincorporated organizations

In Ontario, a group can be structured (governance regulatory structure) in a number of ways, largely divided into incorporated and unincorporated organizations.

An incorporated nonprofit organization is **an independent legal body** that can do anything as long as it helps to achieve the goals in its articles of incorporation and is allowed under its articles, bylaws and all laws. It can be incorporated as a nonprofit or a for-profit corporation.

An unincorporated association is not a legal entity. It is a group of people who have decided to do things together for a purpose or goal other than profit. They do not have legal protection from certain personal liabilities that incorporated organizations provide. Groups with unlimited funding may not see incorporation as priority, and other associations may wish to be as independent as possible from government oversight. There are no federal or provincial laws that govern unincorporated associations. Once you begin operating you become an unincorporated organization. A constitution (somewhat similar to a corporation's bylaws) is not required, however, it is a good practice to agree upon operating rules in case a dispute arises requiring court settlement. If not explicitly stated the court will assume decision-making is based on consensus, and not by majority votes (***Nonprofit Law Ontario***).

Incorporated nonprofit organizations: Legal and regulatory requirements

Lalande (2018) provides a thorough outline of the legal and regulatory requirements of nonprofits. Statutory requirements for incorporated nonprofit organizations include having a board of directors to provide organizational oversight to ensure resources are used effectively and appropriately in

meeting its mission and acting in the best interests of the organization, its fiduciary duty. Additional statutory requirements may apply depending upon the types of programs and services an organization delivers. Organizations can maintain significant discretion in the structure and focus of their governance body. Because the legislative requirements are limited and vary from province to province, a wide variety of governance options for the sector are possible. Beyond indicating the number of directors on a board (Ontario requires a minimum of three directors) and their responsibilities in incorporating the organization, there is limited provincial and federal legislation regarding the board's purpose and structure. While boards can delegate responsibilities and activities to management or any other person(s), they have ultimate accountability and liability. With regard to board size and composition, there is no standard size for boards and legal requirements vary between jurisdictions. Ontario requires a minimum of three directors for incorporation, and there are no rules on terms limits for memberships. Beyond these rules, a nonprofit organization's approach to governance (specific structures, processes and practices, including their bylaws) can largely be self-determined (Lalande, 2018, pp. 4-5).

Registered charitable organizations

A "charitable organization" is a general term that refers to the purpose of a nonprofit organization, e.g., reducing poverty or homelessness. A registered charitable organization, however, has successfully received recognition from the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) to issue tax receipts. It is an association or corporation that must use its resources for charitable activities and have exclusively charitable purposes. An incorporated or unincorporated nonprofit organization may apply to Canada Revenue Agency to become a registered charity under one of three designations: charitable organization, public foundation, or private foundation (Ayer, 2020). While some nonprofit corporations are charities, the Income Tax Act defines nonprofit organizations and registered charities as two completely different things that can never overlap (***Nonprofit Law Ontario***). More information regarding differences between a registered charity and nonprofit can be found on the ***Government of Canada website***.

Worker-ownership models

Worker-ownership models, including co-ops, are legally incorporated business structures that can be operated as nonprofits or for-profits. They are owned, controlled and operated by the people who work there. Their members contribute to the cooperative's capital and have a say in its democratic operation. Cooperatives are "autonomous association[s] of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise." (***Ontario Cooperative Association website***). Their alignment with mutual care supports "the solidarity economy" through democratic decision-making and accountability processes. This type of model encourages leadership at all levels of the organization, and nourishes a sense of collective responsibility (Sharp Eizinger and Martin, 2023). Two examples of worker-ownerships are ***Planet Bean Coffee*** (Guelph) and ***Epicerie Coop Grocery*** (Moonbeam). More information about cooperatives may be found on the ***Ontario Cooperative Association website***.

PHASE ONE: IDENTIFYING THE MODEL

4.0 Identifying the ASO/OB Model

Establishing a province-wide ASO/OB involves, among other considerations, determining the governance and organizational structure of the organization. Governance defines the framework for decision-making and accountability. Its goal is to ensure the organization operates effectively and ethically in achieving meaningful impacts and outcomes for the benefit of its stakeholders. Governance focuses on the "what" and "why" an organization does something within eight critical functions: purpose, strategy, organizational culture, resources, governance design, engagement, assets, and compliance. It entails developing the purpose and setting the overall organizational direction and culture (shared values), ensuring resources are available to develop and implement the mandate, establishing policies and procedures, overseeing performance, engaging stakeholders, safeguarding the assets and adhering to compliance and accountability requirements.

The organizational structure identifies the "how" and "who"—how the work is organized and the workflow. Its goal is to enable the effective execution of the organization's activities. It focuses on setting up the organization to achieve its goals, including the division of labour, the relationships between people and their roles and responsibilities, reporting lines, and communication channels.

Governance and organizational structure are intertwined. Governance decisions influence the type of structure needed to fulfill its purpose, and the organizational structure provides the framework for implementing governance policies and processes. An effective organization has a well-defined organizational structure and cohesive approach to governance. Collectively they ensure the organization achieves its objectives effectively and responsibly.

Establishing an ASO or an organizing body (OB) is a multi-step process with many interconnected and interdependent components. It is important to continually revisit the process of weaving together governance and structural elements in a manner that meets the group's identified needs and accountability while fostering, supporting and encouraging an ecosystem of broader social change and sustainability.

This section presents key informant responses in relation to governance and organizational structure, providing a high-level overview, the look and feel, defining principles, values and important considerations. Input is organized around the four enabling factors that are the foundation of governance design: 1) Governance Culture; 2) Organizational Structure; 3) People; and 4) Policies and Procedures. Individually and collectively they enable good governance, and create space for innovation and adaptation.

Of the eight critical functions of governance (Purpose, Strategy, Organizational Culture, Resources, Governance Design, Engagement, Assets, Compliance), purpose is covered within ***Governance Culture***; engagement and human resources is captured under ***People***; and financial resources are discussed in a separate section, ***Feasibility and Financial Sustainability***. Strategy, assets and compliance functions are to be addressed in future project phases as they focus on operational plans.

Organizational Structure, the second subsection, highlights considerations in selecting an organizational structure and workplace locations in meeting the provincial mandate. It includes dialogue around fixed headquarters, regional offices and hybrid options. The third subsection, ***People***, contains perspectives on human relations, specifically, attraction and retention and engagement and communication strategies. ***Policies and Procedures***, the final subsection, proposes key aspects regarding the organization's guidelines and processes.

4.1 Governance Culture

Research participants' opinions regarding governance culture first focus on the overall orientation and values of a potential ASO/OB. It is followed by three subsections, the organizational purpose (identifying the fundamental reason why it exists), scope (whom it should serve) and the mission statement (how it might achieve its goals). It concludes with discussions around oversight and decision-making processes, including hierarchical, consensus and collaborative leadership.

The following quote speaks to the culture of CEA as a practice and, as such, should be reflected in the ASO/OB's governance and organizational structure. "The stewardship piece of it is a central theme to me. Not only environmental stewardship, but stewardship of care, of community, of people, all around. I made a commitment to try to be a good ancestor. So that's what I'm trying to do. And so this [CEA practice] ties in to doing that. And we should all go for that because the work we're doing today lives on, right?" (KI-07).

Another important aspect of governance culture revolves around bureaucracy, language and structure. A key informant notes organizations are so steeped in bureaucracy and suggests finding a balance between "the work of organizing, the work of creating structural systems, and then a commitment to working creatively with people in the community… You could develop an organization that values creative learning, accountability, and effective structures that do all the things that need doing in an organization… we're starved for realness… and pooling resources — What are your resources in your community? What are your resources as an individual? How can we pull them out? What are the mutual benefits? Those are all ways of working creatively, I think. Less top down." (KI-07).

4.1.1 IDENTIFY THE ORGANIZATION'S PURPOSE

Its purpose, as identified through past research, is to support community-engaged cultural workers across the province, with a focus on Northern Ontario actors. As such, the CEA cultural workers are at the centre of its mandate, governance decisions and operations. In turn, the role of the cultural workers is to engage various communities, build the social fabric and meet particular goals relevant to each locale. A primary concern is determining whom, within the broad spectrum of community-engaged arts practices the organization is to serve, and identifying which specific supports should be prioritized.

Launching a new organization enables you to start with "a fresh page, rather than attempting to correct a lot of years from the past," referencing the challenges and initiatives an organization may have experienced (KI-01). This is not to suggest one ignores previous organizational challenges, or advancement of work within the sector, but refers to the opportunity to shed past success and constraints and start anew within the current climate.

KIs urge those developing the ASO/OB model to have a frank conversation about the intent of the organization–what it is trying to do and why; what niches is it trying to fill; what other organizations currently exist in the ecosystem, what needs are they meeting; and, what needs are not being met (KI-10). The organization must be more than a database of organizations and artists, i.e., not simply making work for people (KI-09), but supporting cultural workers in advancing their work.

"[A]s far as what it's going to be, you have a list of supports based on the earlier research, and you can look through those [and identify] which of these are our priorities, which of these are we going to address and serve. And then that'll give you your [direction]. Just need to define it flexibly." (KI-02).

KIs identify the following four key purposes:

1. **Define** the practice and uphold the language around CEA, the vocabulary and terms of reference, as part of cultivating, elevating and breathing life into the practice.
2. **Convene** opportunities for congenial and community exchanges, knowledge generation and sharing.
3. **Facilitate** opportunities to liaise or partner with other types of organizations, exploring common ground and generating synergy in addressing key demographics within their communities.
4. **Advocate** for support in ways that sector workers and organizations cannot to champion the importance of the work, and be upfront about the challenges the sector is facing.

These four purposes provide a clear focus, yet remain sufficiently broad, capturing many of the discussion points regarding practitioner needs that surfaced during past research.[5]

[5] Past research includes ***The Story of Our Stories*** (Meschino, Sutherland & Bouchard, 2020), and *Weaving It All Together Gathering* (Forslund, 2025).

4.1.2 DETERMINE THE SCOPE OF THE ORGANIZATION

Factors impacting decisions regarding the scope of the organization, the boundaries to whom support extends, may include funding, available expertise, cultural and/or geographic disparities and priority of needs. There is concern about whom it serves given that CEA, and its definition may be seen as ambiguous, confusing and amorphous (Meschino et al., 2020, pp. 10-11) both to people outside of the practice, working to understand it, as well as to those working within this field, as a constellation of terms, practices and interdisciplinary approaches are utilized. Many terms have been used to describe CEA over time, "each with its own nuanced goals and practices" (ICASC, 2016, p. 1; Pacific, 2001, p. 172): community- or socially-engaged art, "art for social change… community arts, animation culturelle, community cultural development, cultural mediation, social arts, and participatory arts" (ICASC, 2016, p. 1), and others. CEA is further distinguished by basic principles including the creation of value rooted as much in the co-creative process as in the final outcome; place-based focus, reflective of community stories, inclusive of community participants, and informed by community needs or concerns; and the generation of social impacts and benefits to communities served. "Defining what community arts means is a big challenge… Over the years some organizing efforts have died [when asked] what we would like to include… Where's the limit to what community arts is?... There are so many new disciplines and new approaches to art that it is difficult to find a definition and agreement amongst people on what type of services would be given to whom." (KI-05). For more information, see ***Appendix I: Overview of Community-Engaged Arts***.

Indeed, it has been noted that the field is changing quickly as it is "integrated with areas of public life that have not previously been identified with the arts: community economic development, activism, planning, community health promotion, trade unions, and so on." (Pacific, 2001, p. 171). Participants in past research identified their work, in addition to, or in place of the term 'community-engaged artist', as: social worker; facilitator; administrator; coordinator; artist (in various disciplines); art therapist; activist; entrepreneur; educator or teacher; community builder; artistic producer; curator and more (Meschino et al., 2020, p. 11). These myriad identifiers "[s]peak to the overlapping cultural, community, artistic and career-related identities that [CE] artists tend to hold; the diverse range of drivers and entry points that can bring people to [CEA] practice; the complexity and nuance of the practice itself; and the relatively peripheral and precarious nature of [CEA] as a source of employment, which leads practitioners to build a range of additional employable skills and parallel careers in order to sustain themselves and their practices" (Meschino et al., 2020, p. 11). While the field of CEA is rapidly expanding, so is the breadth of practitioner needs in undertaking the work.

Attention to cultural diversity is an important consideration in determining the scope of the organization, but it is complicated. One key informant explains "Francophones are still very, very conscious about assimilation… a branch or department of the organization, that's something to avoid at all costs… I would really like to see the sectors on both sides of the language work together, share information, share projects… Lost time and work and knowledge just because we work completely separately… We have earmarked funds to be Francophone and to do stuff in French only and to serve the minority language in Ontario and Canada. But that doesn't mean we

can't work together… We try to serve the Anglophones as much as possible. You cannot put on a bilingual show because your funding is for Francophone only. And I find it so shortsighted in the sense of the inclusion argument, we're sort of forgetting everybody else. There's still the First Nations populations here that I find are neglected. The Francophones are underserved as well. Some loss of good practices and collaborations when we have to operate in French and collaborate with only Francophone organizations." (KI-05).

4.1.3 ESTABLISH A CLEAR AND DEFINED MISSION STATEMENT

The mission statement is a concise, present-focused and purpose-driven declaration. It defines what the organization does, whom it serves, and how it achieves its vision. To create an effective and efficient mission statement there needs to be an understanding of who is being served, why they need this service, and how this service is unique or different from other similar services. A purpose-driven organization melds its mission and values in pursuit of its vision. It centres the people it serves at the core of all governance decisions (ONN, 2021b).

KIs underscore that an arts service organization could serve many purposes. "Hav[e] a clear vision and mandate and mak[e] sure it is achievable… [Define] what the point is and what you're trying to do… It's hard to engage people when you don't really know what the benefit is" (KI-09). "[K]now what your values are, these things should be embedded… [into the mission statement]. And then operationalized by the team" (KI-01). Once crafted, stay true to the mission throughout the organization (KI-10).

An environmental scan of other organizations' services, and a scoping process may be useful in determining the organization's purpose and mandate, i.e., what should be included and what should be excluded, with considerable thought given to what is achievable, desirable and needed within the breadth of the provincial context and the sector's existing organizational offerings. Identifying priorities, available resources and infrastructure gaps between cultures, communities and regions would contribute to developing a relevant, meaningful organization with a potentially significant impact.

4.1.4 DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

Best practice governance and decision-making processes are leaning toward shared leadership to support equity and inclusion and build leadership capacity (Fenech et al., 2022). Research participants speak about the realm of leadership in relation to the board of directors/governing members and between employees, offering perspectives on hierarchical, consensus and collaborative processes.

Regardless of what you wish to build, the organization should **demonstrate equity, inclusivity, creativity and be collaborative** in all ways (KI-07). **Within this framework** KIs offer differing

perspectives on how the decision-making processes should be structured. Some advocate for **hierarchical** leadership, referring to one or more people making decisions, while others suggest a **consensus approach** involving many people.

Leadership is responsible for being **transparent in its actions and decision-making process**, generating a shared understanding of the organization's goals, how it plans to meet its mandate and convey what each person's role is within the collective action and implementation. These are crucial aspects of an effective organization (KI-06).

The Chief Executive Officer is often the only point of contact between the board of directors and employees. This governance structure can strengthen an organization, "but it can also lead to a lot of stress and also a lot of dysfunction on the operational level where there isn't enough input and ownership by the larger team." (KI-03).

KI-06 recommends a consensus decision-making process be the basis for Board governance. "**Consensus as much as possible is the right way to go. However, I do also believe that hierarchies, as long as they're transparent and they can be accountable**. Mindfulness of how **power plays** out in groups is a very real thing. **No big strong hierarchy**. **But I do think that roles and responsibilities should be clear and who's taking what responsibility should be clear**. Consensus should be how people make decisions in groups so that **everybody feels included in how those decisions are being made**… [otherwise we risk] burning each other out because we had to agree on every little thing" (KI-06).

With regards to decision-makers utilizing a consensus approach, the **composition of members should be very representative of cultures and class** to ensure it has the capacity to address the organization's core mandate. It is also suggested that board members need not necessarily be professionals, but rather very 'grassroots,' ensuring people with lived experience are a key aspect of the decision-making process. This may, however, present its own concerns, particularly around the need to support board members' professional development in governance roles, responsibilities and accountability (KI-06).

One research participant raises concern around organizations largely run by committees as they may be less effective, compared to hierarchical leadership. Hierarchical leadership, KI-02 explains, does not necessarily mean it is limited to one person. It could be a singular or a shared leadership model led by people with the skills, passion, vision and time to drive the organization, who can make things happen, accomplish goals and meet the mandate. This key informant also recognizes that **collaborative leadership can assist the organization to thrive or it can hinder it**. A caution regarding formal hierarchical structures is offered, suggesting they should be eliminated because "it creates conflicts, it encourages people to be silent. It encourages people to suck up" (KI-07).

One key informant noted a Cree phrase, "we are learning together" (Kikiskinow Âpahcikân) which points to an erasure of hierarchy in recognition of the benefits of co-learning (KI-07) and the valuation

of leadership emerging across a team or community of practice. Such perspective, and the goal of being a "good ancestor" (KI-07), upholds humility and lifelong learning as we undertake challenging CEA work, individually and collectively, and as we take care of ourselves and each other.

Of great importance is defining and clarifying the roles and responsibilities of leadership positions, and supporting them (administratively and financially) in planning, decision making and implementation. Policies, guidelines, and good communication between organizational members is essential to avoid creating a culture of exclusion or a sense (perceived or otherwise) of abuse of power. **It takes time to develop collaborative practices. Ongoing consultation** and opportunities to contribute to the direction and life of the organization assist in alleviating such concerns (KI-02). This speaks, once again, to nonprofit governance promising practices that create and support equitable and inclusive organizations.

CEA prioritizes participatory processes, radical inclusion, collaboration and power sharing, so it is unsurprising that some key informant candidates voiced concerns about hierarchical organizational tendencies, particularly regarding the creation of space for participation and consensual decision-making, clear definition of roles/responsibility, transparency and conflict.

4.2 Organizational Structure

Data pertaining to the organizational structure is presented first, followed by workplace structure. Recurring themes revolve around the desire to be flexible and representative in meeting the ASO/OB's provincial mandate. Ontario is a culturally rich and ecologically diverse, vast geographical landmass with limited organizational, transportation and technological infrastructure posing challenges around connecting people and delivering programs within areas and between regions. Questions arise around how best to balance the diverse contexts including urban and rural, cultural disparity and geographic distances.

Key informants provide insights into three key interconnected strategies to operationalize the ASO/OB in meeting its provincial mandate. Workplace structures are presented in this section while attracting and retaining people (board and staff), and engagement and communications strategies appear in the following section titled ***People***.

4.2.1 SELECTING THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Given the organization's purpose, mission, current context, and desired operational culture, attention turns to what organizational structure works best at this time.

Seek flexible, new models

A recurring theme throughout the research is the desire for the organization to instill a culture of flexibility, creativity and innovation, reflecting the values underpinning CEA practices, and supporting community-engaged cultural workers enabling them, in turn, to foster social care, justice, health and wellbeing within various communities. This aligns with promising practices that embrace organizational fluidity, rather than more traditional hierarchical structures, allowing for more broadly shared decision-making processes (ONN, 2021b).

Discussion regarding what organizational structure might best meet CEA needs, and of what worked well within these models as well as their pitfalls, surfaced different perspectives, largely grouped into two camps. Some KIs assume the organization would be a registered nonprofit organization, while others raise concerns about the process of formalizing the model and potential negative impact. Those in favour of a registered nonprofit organization suggest it lends significant legitimacy to the venture, particularly in the early stages. Communities are familiar with the model and appear to be more trusting of registered businesses, confident that they will adhere to their mandated goals, and be committed to care and service over a longer term.

Those in favour of a less formalized organization caution against "unnecessary bureaucracy" for the sake of it (KI-02). In a similar vein, another KI stated, "I get frustrated when I've been part of an organization that I love, it's doing great grassroots stuff, it's interesting, it's joyful, it's meaningful. And then they're like, "Let's incorporate." And then it gets just sluggish and boring, and then the same old structures form again" (KI-07). It limits flexibility and loses sight of the activities and the many great people engaged in the work, including the volunteers (KI-07). Bureaucratic weight may hinder the organization's ability to serve a wide and diverse provincial population and to remain relevant over time. Should the organization not be registered, however, questions arise regarding potential individual and collective legal responsibilities, internally (organizational employees and/or members), and externally, within the broader public community.

There is openness to exploring organizational models leaning toward trying new different partnership structures, multi-stakeholder relationships/coalitions, networks or ventures at particular times to fulfill its mandate (KI-09). One research participant suggests the most effective structures have been multi-disciplinary arts groups conceptualized as "creating circles that are varied and diverse" (KI-04). They are "porous and more supple and able to change with the changing economies. Models that do not solely depend on a board will be the future" (KI-04). These comments align with data captured in Forslund's (2025) report of the OAC's 2021 *Raising Our Collective Voice* gatherings where participants suggested that the model could be refined, changed and fixed by others as it moved, expressing that the ASO/OB could take the form of a "network" or an "un-body", and that it needn't be a bureaucracy, but that its governance needed to be well-considered, and embrace the spirit of reciprocity felt in community while not contributing further to sector burnout.

An alternative form of governance suggested by KI-04 is linking to a 'mother' organization that would provide administrative services and guide its operational decisions. A possible working relationship would entail the 'mother' to be a stable organization with secure operating funds. While they would provide some administrative services (e.g., bookkeeping, payroll) and guide the operation as needed, (e.g., legal, human resources, operational strategies), the ASO/OB staff would serve as their own governance responsible to its stated purpose, mission and principles. The ASO/OB staff would also be responsible for generating the operational funds that would flow to the 'mother' organization for disbursement. The ASO/OB staff could be regionally-based professionals, with ten years' experience or more in the industry, and would meet regularly in person, online or in a hybrid format. The staff, operating across the province, would provide both the ASO/OB and the 'mother' organization important information regarding, for example, workshops and resources that could potentially fund the ASO/OB staff within the mother organization (KI-04). This arrangement gives the ASO/OB the flexibility to operate as a semi-autonomous organization with the 'mother' organization, adding legitimacy and relieving the burden of administrative demands that are both very difficult to fund, and typically fall on the shoulders of nonprofit staff. This option aligns with the Fiscal Sponsorship model described in ***Appendix V: Models of Governance and Organizational Structures***.

Define roles and responsibilities

This subsection focuses on KIs comments on the importance of having an organizational chart and clear decision-making processes. Identifying positions, developing job descriptions and evaluation processes are components of Phase Two and/or Phase Three.

It is very important for board members to know their role within the organizational structure. They should come to the organization to share and be in service to the mission (KI-01). Since there is no one definition for CEA, terminology can be quite fuzzy. Members may have experience in the field but a different understanding, focus or scope of practice than the organization's mission (KI-02). Dedicate time to ensure there is common understanding of the terminology, and of what the organization intends it to mean, i.e., the context, premises and assumptions (KI-02). Support the identities and needs of stakeholders. "Never assume that all participants know about everybody's culture… People have preconceived notions…" (KI-08). It is helpful to have a mediator to assist with difficult conversations. Additionally, disputes regarding 'how to' achieve the aims and objectives may arise. Board governance ensures the mission is central in their decision-making process, and the commitment to reach identified goals remains firm (KI-01). A strategy for conflict resolution should be included in the organization's Policy and Procedures Manual.

Organizational chart

A couple of KIs consider an organizational chart contributes to transparency by identifying relationships of responsibility and accountability. It is a visual representation of the organization's structure depicting the relationships and reporting pathways between the various positions and components. Discussion and dialogue during creation of an organizational chart greatly contributes

to sorting through the logistical intricacies of people and positions, as well as the organization's priorities. KIs indicate that an organizational chart that is easy to read and readily accessible is definitely needed in order to understand how the organization functions. People want to know the processes and procedures, the working relationships, who is accountable to whom, and who would mediate issues that may arise, as well as how to resolve them (KI-08). There needs to be transparency—"[w]here the leadership is coming from and why the leadership is who they are. How people can participate" (KI-06). The organizational chart will assist in ensuring responsibilities and workloads are manageable, so that people are not expected to "bite off more than they can chew" and the person is making the proper connections (KI-06).

4.2.2 WORKPLACE STRUCTURES

The ASO/OB's mission and priority objectives assist in determining the organization's workplace structure. A primary consideration is the type of space and location(s) the organization needs to meet its mandate of supporting cultural workers leading community-engaged arts across the province, with a focus on the needs of Northern Ontario practitioners. Delineating between where the ASO/OB's purpose, mission, strategic objectives and best practices end, and where individual cultural worker practices begin is necessary. Affordability and sustainability are also key considerations.

Decisions around workplace structures are deeply intertwined with people and place, e.g., who they are, their capacity, and relationships within the organization and communities where they may be situated. As an arts organization starting out, "You can establish an arts organization nearly anywhere you want, but establishing those relationships with community partners and community members themselves, that's where the real work really begins, before you even start thinking about projects. There's very little you can do as an arts organization if you don't establish yourself in those communities." (KI-08).

The needs of the ASO/OB and contextual factors, and thus, logistics may change over time, but initial discernment is important in identifying workplace requirements, priorities and weighing the advantages and challenges of each option. Discerning questions include, Where are staff best located and supported in their jobs? Where will engagement and program delivery supports for cultural workers transpire? Is there a need for ongoing fixed, physical location(s), an occasional space, perhaps rented or provided by a partner, a virtual place, or a combination thereof?

Key informants provide opinions on a variety of workplace structures including: a central office/headquarters; decentralized facilities; 'bricks and mortar', whether it be rented or ASO/OB owned space; mobile units; or a hybrid or remote and central location-based work. There is caution against a fixed building or space due to the sheer expense of it, as well as recognition of the importance of ASO/OB staff being accessible to community-engaged cultural workers and the broader community.

Fixed, physical locations

Physical offices, in contrast to virtual or home offices, allow for people to drop by and ask questions (KI-05; 08). It could also facilitate the creation and maintenance of a resource library, archival material, and a dedicated space for delivering workshops should they be offered on a frequent basis (KI-02). Archival space is seen as contributing to capacity building, knowledge sharing and succession planning. KI-02 explains that there is a demographic that has accumulated years of experience working in the field who would like to establish an archive and share their knowledge with others. Aging leaders are wondering what to do with their knowledge and experience and how to "turn their legacies into something useful, and where do we put it?" (KI-02). A physical archive, a physical library, would allow people to actually go there to access it. There is a lack of archive space in Canada. It raises questions around where the archive should be located? In Toronto because of the population or in the north, the "Algoma region because someone's there? And how do people get there? (KI-02). Then you're into virtual collections and I think that is a really great idea, but that is a huge life job, right? So somebody's got to have the skills and the big desire to do that… It would allow you to attract different pockets of funding which would also make it more costly…" (KI-02).

An archive could support professional development. There is concern that a number of artists have taken up community arts "in a 'wobbly way' that would greatly benefit from the knowledge, experience and wisdom that has been brewing within community-engaged arts organizations" for more than 15 or 20 years (KI-07). As well, CEA practitioners, generally, and younger artistic directors, in particular, are working in challenging times. Access to previous workers' processes and solutions would build their capacity. This may be how "you help them rather than give them money and say encouraging things to them, or give them jobs" (KI-02). Knowledge sharing and succession planning is not limited to one region. Conversations could span to other practitioners across the country regarding how others are mobilizing succession planning to ensure the work carries forward (KI-10).

The following two insights speak to inviting people to participate in community-engaged art activities, rather than workspace for an ASO/OB employee. There is, however, merit in considering staff's visibility and accessibility to the public in supporting community change and social justice. A more visible presence may heighten awareness and encourage the growth of practitioners as well as increase the effectiveness of the ASO/OB's advocacy efforts.

Nonprofit arts organizations operating within their own bricks and mortar space (e.g., art gallery, museum) tend to operate from that fixed location, inviting people to join them there. Such places are not necessarily where or how community health and wellbeing are generated (KI-04). As a result, more institutional organizations are not as effective in surfacing citizens' concerns and initiating change (KI-04).

"**We have the least amount of resources going into rent**. [W]e go to where people are [in delivering programs]. And I think that has always been one of our strengths as well, is that we don't have a fancy studio. [W]e have had studios… We can invite people in, but usually those are more in

their neighborhoods… going to where they are at, where they are comfortable is also something that's really important in the work" (KI-06).

Fixed, central headquarters

There probably needs to be a fixed headquarters with satellite offices or branches in different regions because geographical representation is very important (KI-05). Countering a fixed central office location is the opinion that an office is no longer what workers want, and, if the ASO/OB is provincial, a fixed office location is even less needed (KI-07).

Location of a fixed central headquarters

The location of physical work spaces brought forth the following perspectives, with some wary of the organization's headquarters being rooted in the metropolis of Toronto or the surrounding area, as it "just **exacerbates all the things that we already have**." "The idea that somebody from a metropolitan urban environment goes into a small rural community, and it's very much like, we're here to show you how it is. Or, this is the way it's going to be. There's not much listening [and] acknowledgment of the community building… It's very much about resource extraction of the human and creative kind. **We kind of know who we are and we have a sense of identity and autonomy**. And then you want us to do something that's not related to our geographic selves and the way things work. [It] really erodes people… can erode confidence, and… **it's another hierarchy**. The urban way is the way, there's a kind of city attitude." (KI-07).

One of the biggest weaknesses of provincial organizations is their **huge investment in brick and mortar** headquarters in metropolitan centers, centring all the activity in a single place. There is an absolute need for face to face contact beyond one location in meeting a provincial mandate. A decentralized "headquarters" where core staff have flexibility and resources to travel is foundational. It is absolutely impossible to have a provincial mandate without face to face contact for essential buy-in and a feeling of participation and ownership by the potential constituents, you have to have some point of planned contact (KI-03). "Don't invest in bricks and mortar. It will drain you" (KI-03). There are existing organizations and businesses to partner with that can host events. "[T]here's benefits to both sides in that kind of partnership." (KI-03). **Reduce brick and mortar footprints and reallocate those resources** to being able to be present and participate in communities outside of the GTA (KI-03), particularly to effectively serve the needs of Northern Ontario.

Another research participant provides a more pragmatic approach grounded in available financial resources. "I want to be mindful of where the hub would be in relation to the geographic outreach that we want to facilitate. I'm probably going to want to **look at existing frameworks that are out there in terms of, how do school boards look at their outreach, how do they look at what makes sense from an economic impact**? I probably want to look a little bit at where a lot of the **funders are at in terms of areas that they're supporting**, areas that are receiving a lot of dollars or are not receiving a lot of dollars, and just go ahead and develop those. A lot of these funding

organizations want to give away as much money as possible. So if you **put yourself in the best position to receive those dollars**, you're going to be able to get them. And it's really just about building those relationships to achieve those results. You want to have **a fixed location that you can operate out of**. You need that **administrative stronghold** in order to ground the work itself. You need to have a place where **people know that they can come and see you**. You just need to have a **space to organize**" (KI-10).

Decentralized facilities

"Ontario is so huge and **the experiences are vastly different from down south to Northern Ontario**. There would always need to be **awareness and consideration. It's almost like you would need branches**, because the needs are different, the audience is different, and opportunities are different. There would have to be that focus, because you can't serve everyone–the needs are so vast. You need to understand that they're not the same" (KI-09).

"Having that provincial mandate is very difficult. The nature of community engagements really requires existing relationships within that community. Ensure that you have staff resources to be able to be present in the key communities that you're at least starting out with. The only way I could see it working is if you **pinpoint** specific areas to start in. Dedicate your staff resources there, and have **a model that's moving over time**, if you want to be provincially-mandated. I have honestly not ever met a provincially-mandated ASO that's been able to really say we are delivering on our provincial mandate" (KI-03).

Any organization that is looking at a provincial mandate must understand how to scale resources over time. Start small, and develop community contacts as representatives or advocates or champions for the work. Regional reps can work from home, but would be required to travel through their area extensively, meeting with other organizations, attending events, and delivering programing and professional development workshops in different communities within their regions (KI-03). **Regional staff funded through a grant fostered peak engagement, however**, "[t]he moment those staff reps finished their one-year term, we saw a **huge peak of dissatisfaction** and a huge drop in all of those same areas" (KI-03).

Decentralized offices allow for **wider board and staff representation**, and increased accessibility; however, there needs to be an accompanying organizational culture that supports remote-based people. Invest in activities that build relationships across the province by connecting board members and regional staff, e.g., joint strategic planning sessions, and staff get togethers though regular video meetings (KI-03).

In reference to the organization's representative presence from across the province, KI-01 suggests a model where community members elect the board of directors from different communities, allowing for regional coverage as well as recruiting content experts and folks with interest. This, too, would be dependent upon technological infrastructure.

Hybrid model

A hybrid model, with offices in the region, would be worth considering if technology (i.e., high speed internet) and a budget to cover remote overhead costs and travel are available. (KI-01). Staff could work regionally, connecting virtually with other staff. Hybrid is about meetings, but gathering underpins the work of CEA. "The one-off projects don't build relationships. You're just there as a novelty" (KI-07). This speaks to the importance of having a longer-term presence in various communities to foster respect and connection.

Mobile units

Mobile units traveling to specific areas would assist in providing provincial coverage, particularly in the north where they do not have the same access to resources that urban centers have. While a phone call or an email may suffice, an **in-person conversation with a subject matter expert** provides a better understanding of what resources are available. A travel schedule to specific locations and identified meeting spaces would **facilitate connecting CEA cultural workers within the area, supporting sharing, and thus building capacity in a range of skill sets between and among practitioners** (KI-08).

4.3 People

Key informants identify that valuing and supporting people through attraction, retention and succession planning strategies are important aspects of a healthy organizational culture that respects interrelationships.

4.3.1 ATTRACTING AND RETAINING PEOPLE

A successful operation requires people with an array of skills, experience and knowledge, across the entire organizational spectrum. For a new organization, particularly one that will likely rely on public funding to some extent, recruitment and retention strategies are key. The current labour market is very challenging with employers from diverse sectors experiencing workforce shortages. Contributing factors include the rapidly shifting political and economic contexts, coupled with changing work attitudes and expectations, demographics and volunteer patterns. Since the pandemic, many people have been inclined to work fewer hours in an effort to maintain a better work-life balance. Attracting people who are passionate about the arts and understand what kind of work it entails is very difficult. The sector, as a whole, experiences perpetual issues around fair compensation, limited upward mobility, long hours, job insecurity; often poor working conditions, and lack of recognition, and thus their value, regardless of the duration of one's career (KI-01; 05). A large number of longtime nonprofit employees are aging out, or withdrawing from service, creating stiff competition for knowledgeable and committed board members, staff and volunteers.

KIs strongly urge the ASO/OB to carefully consider attraction and retention strategies to ensure they respect and value peoples' contributions. Following are key aspects of the workplace that are deemed to be important.

Centring relationships is key to success. In terms of the larger picture, KI-10 advocates for a "**diverse set of voices that are helping you facilitate the work on a day to day basis**" with an eye to the type and purpose of relationships that are being developed within and beyond the organization. In terms of respectful relationship building, KI-07 states that "[t]here needs to be stability to attract, retain and empower people… you do all the courting, you have the relationship, you do the gig, and then off you go, like you feel so forgotten." KI-09 adds "Without having staff support, it just makes everything really challenging, even though we have all these great partnerships."

Collective capacity and capabilities

KI-01 notes there are a myriad of capabilities the organization collectively needs to possess, including subject specific people that know either the community, the stakeholder group or the tasks that the organization is undertaking or plans to execute. The compositional mix should consider equity, diversity and inclusion, and be representative of the community it is serving. "Standard structure, board, executive director, staff. Board in committees, 2 or 3 different committees or standing committees. Ad hoc committees from time to time. Organizational members are the people who usually make up the board of directors, so how you construct your membership is important." (KI-01). A person who could provide legal advice regarding human resources, or someone the organization could easily access, is very important, so that you are educated, both where the person and where the organization sits. "Knowledge alleviates so many problems… Human resources is something that is always there. It's what causes the most trouble in our lives." (KI-04). If people have an issue they know what steps they can take, and solutions. Having a mediator in place is also important (KI-08).

Due to limited financial resources, rather than the value proposition being a high wage, recruitment strategies could **focus on the operational value, or the impact of the position**, appealing to personal values, i.e., what art can do in the world. It would be an opportunity for the candidate to contribute, learn and grow (KI-01).

Value employees

How an organization demonstrates that it values its staff may vary considerably from one nonprofit to the next. It is important that there is dialogue and discussion around how staff feel regarding the workplace, their aspirations and opportunities. The KIs offer flexible work and staffing models, decent pay, a variety of incentives and reducing pay disparities between employees as a means of valuing people.

Employees should feel that they are the most valuable part of the organization (KI-05). Create an organizational culture that is attractive: one that helps people succeed in their jobs and empowers

them. Ensure that sufficient attention and resources are focused on supporting staff, including dedicating time and space to develop trusting relationships, and being flexible whenever (KI-05; 09).

Flexible work and staffing models

A flatter, more horizontal organizational structure fosters a team approach that functions more effectively, particularly when resources are limited. It encourages people to **draw on each other's strengths and abilities** to achieve shared goals. It facilitates **collectively reorganizing job descriptions** should someone leave, require time away, or when the organization is between funding cycles or preparing to launch a new initiative. It is a **consultative process**, where the team considers the required tasks and is given the opportunity to revise their scope of work, either give up or take on as much responsibility as they wish to handle, and identify tasks that are important to them and align with their skills sets, interests, aspirations and passions. The process builds deeper understanding of the team members, and creates space for trusting relationships, garnering a sense of collective community, of caring for each other, and that they are valued and will not easily be cast off as situations arise. In a precarious job market, this can offer some means of stability knowing that while their original position may be ending, there could be opportunity to be retained. People appreciate having flexibility in the workplace and positions that can change over time as their capacity and/or interests evolve. Organic processes, such as work redistribution, are absolutely necessary in being adaptable for constantly changing environments (KI-05).

Rather than have a core team of primarily in-person full-time staff, **a more effective mix is a few full-time employees with a majority being part-time or contracted**. It enables the organization to pay better wages and reduces burnout by having a job description that has a discrete focus. "Where we used to layer responsibilities into full-time jobs, we now have discrete focuses and that gives people the ability to go deep, and to feel like they're succeeding in the area that they're responsible for. That structure brings a lot of resilience to the organization and extends the depth and meaning of our organizational relationships. Staff are happier. Staff are staying longer" (KI-03). Staffing priorities that intentionally focus on hiring artists who are working on their existing careers and who, therefore, have the ability to understand the sector and really support their peers is a much better staffing model.

Decent work

KIs state **decent work remains a high priority**. "Without a pension, without a dental plan, [and] all these things, your life is quite different from the people who are comfy… **Fair compensation, a sense of security, a sense of work-life balance, recognition, where people are in their career and their life, that is another problem with the arts**. Like it does not matter for the most part, if you've just started your creative path or you've put in 25 years into it, you're going to get paid the same… If I was a doctor, that wouldn't happen, right? Organizations need to really look at that and quit minimizing artists in that way. **The hierarchies are hanging onto the hierarchies**." (KI-07).

Decent work is about making shifts in the workplace that genuinely support fairness, stability, productivity, equity, inclusion, and more. It's a movement founded on collective action that builds resiliency at the organizational, community and sector levels, extending from compensation to include a healthy workplace culture and reflection of community values. The Ontario Nonprofit Organization's ***Decent Work Project*** page features a Decent Work Charter and free resources for organizational reference and mobilization.

Incentives

Incentives such as the ability to bank overtime hours and take **lieu time** and a **four-day work week**, should be considered. Other perks may include **professional development opportunities** such as attending industry events to network and meet other people, and others may appreciate the organization covering a percentage of the **cost of their telephone** (KI-05).

Compensation inequities

Some KIs consider hierarchical employment practices problematic, creating divisions between leadership and staff. They include longer-term, well-paid positions with health benefits offered to more senior positions, while other employees, despite years of experience, do not receive any perks or incentives that would ease the increasing cost of living and reduce income disparities (KI-07). Granted, the organization may be facing financial limitations and/or service providers' criteria. Even though organizations may not be able to offer benefit packages, some are implementing policies that **intentionally close the wage gap between executive positions and other employees** (KI-05).

Benefits packages

For some employees a benefits package may boost their confidence, suggesting the organization considers them worth investing in, thereby increasing their desire to remain with the organization and continue investing their time into the work (KI-10).

Mental health supports

Mental health support has emerged as an endemic need in organized workplaces and self-employment situations alike. This is echoed by key informant interviewees in this study, and applicable to all members, board and staff, across the organization. In the course of their work, arts workers face a variety of challenges and conditions that can adversely impact their mental health. Growing concerns have prompted studies internationally that reveal the extent of these pressures and the need for widespread support of arts workers' mental health and wellbeing (Reid, 2024). Among a long list of factors contributing to "mental ill-health in the arts" (Reid, 2024) are precarious work and financial realities, competition-driven stress, and burnout. Refer to ***Appendix VI: Mental Health Supports*** for a more detailed overview.

One KI had much to say on the topic, pointing to the need for funding to provide supports for mental health awareness and supports in arts organizations, noting that "as the [person] working in any community-oriented organization, you take on a lot of stuff, and a lot of things happen, and some things are out of your control"; recommending that a "go-to" person host check-ins between team members and participants to ensure that emergent problems are addressed (KI-08); offering that "as an artist… or as an organization, you're not really trained to… go about mediating those conversations. Then you become stuck"; and noting that "you want to be in the right mindframe… to see your project to fruition. [Without] the opportunity to decompress… from all the stresses and all the things that come with creating anything, you can have some troubles to get to the end result" (KI-08).

These concerns are considered equally valid for potential ASO board and staff whose goal is to support CEA practitioners. Everyone will need to be prepared to address a wide range of circumstances that may arise through this work.

Recruitment of Executive Director

The Executive Director is the linchpin in the success of the ASO/OB responsible for operationalizing the mandate and strategic objectives, and reporting to the board of directors/the governing members. Key informants offer three varying points of view regarding the timing of hiring the founding Executive Director, i.e., when it is best to bring them onboard. They are: i) hire an inspired and capable person to shape the organization, engaging them in the visioning and development of the organization (KI-07); ii) first have a clear vision for the ASO/OB, what is possible and what it wants to do (KI-06) then find the person; or, iii) define the organization to a certain point and then seek a leader (KI-02). Considerable discussion was generated regarding the selection of the person to lead the organization. "Very **rarely do these organizations get to have the ability to hire more than one person**. An organization that's dealing with so many disparate groups and activities, you know, it can be a **recipe for burnout**. Very good to narrow the objectives and the goals" (KI-02). The position needs to be focused and manageable.

The Executive Director needs to be knowledgeable in all aspects of CEA and human resource management because everyone will be relying on their expertise to guide them (KI-01). Recruitment challenges revolve around the **value proposition** that a nonprofit can offer, given that wages are considerably lower than similar positions in for-profit enterprises. Non-monetary items such as **flexibility to work from home, professional development opportunities, and an opportunity to work to achieve the mission can be incentives** (KI-01).

There is a need for subject matter experts within the organization, including the lead person and board members to ensure operational capacity and compliance (KI-01). They also **need to be visionary** (KI-02). There is concern that a number of leadership candidates with the desirable depth of experience in the field would be practitioners currently engaged in community arts work and leading companies, and would not necessarily want to be siphoned off to run an arts organization.

The geographic scope of the organization poses an additional challenge when attracting staff and leadership. It is not a Toronto-based organization where there is a concentration of experienced people, but provincial in nature, encompassing rural, remote and culturally diverse populations (KI-02).

The hiring committee is responsible for having a sound understanding of the desired leadership capacities and recognizing whether or not candidates possess the required attributes and experience. Be realistic in what is being asked of potential candidates and whom you are attempting to recruit (KI-02). One KI suggests the lead person could be mentored. If mentorship is an option, the mentor and resources for such would need to be determined (KI-01). As a counterpoint another KI cautions that hiring people who need to be educated as they come on board is very challenging, noting many artists do not understand what community arts entails because it is not part of the traditional training. Thus, it is paramount to have people in these positions who understand very clearly what this work is about (KI-06). A component of the selection process centres on what aspects of operating and guiding a service organization can be learned compared to intangible qualities that an individual may possess such as passion, dedication, commitment that drive and sustain individuals and collectives (KI-10).

The above mentioned considerations apply not only to the organizational lead(s) but extend throughout the entire organization, to board members (if applicable) and staff. To be an effective organization everyone must have a sound understanding of what community arts is and the various contexts in which it is operating (KI-02) in order to collectively serve its mandate and meet its objectives.

Invest in succession planning

Succession planning is key in enabling leaders to step away from the work and have it continue. "[O]rganizations that are mindful of it tend to succeed a little more because they're having those **genuine conversations** within and understanding about the kinds of support structure that needs to be developed and curated to support [successioning]" (KI-10). Succession planning involves building relationships over time, incorporating different voices, youthful voices within the work, providing people a real connection to the community, encouraging them to stay. As people **age out of their roles, fewer people are stepping into that work behind them to carry the work forward** (KI-10).

Onboarding

Onboarding new people to the organization is an important component in reducing the risk of vision and mission drift or conflict, in general, and when successive directors or staff join the organization, in particular (KI-02). It is also a key strategy for retaining people throughout the organization. Taking the time to orient newcomers by sharing the policy and procedure manual, the organizational chart and historic and current planning documents provides them with an overview of operations, linkages

and expectations, helping them to bond to the organization and with others, fostering a sense of community. As well, it provides direction on who to turn to if they need more support or should issues arise (KI-02).

4.3.2 ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Engagement and communication involves reaching out to people and communities, and providing them with a clear message of the ASO/OB's purpose, offerings and opportunities. A research participant captures the underlying challenge quite well: "How do you engage people that aren't engaged that you want to be engaged or should be engaged?" (KI-09). Finding the right mix of methods is a process of trying different things over time. Outreach could include a combination of social media, website, email, messaging, podcasts, in-person and digital meetings, phone, and mailings.

Engagement and communication strategies are intertwined, both requiring investment and intentional planning. "[They] cannot be an afterthought… otherwise people don't feel like there's a face to the organization. It feels institutional instead of something that's supportive. It has to be layered into every staff position. There has to be a really good staffing structure of communication as well, to ensure that what is being communicated is on an organizational level, everybody understands and everybody is able to speak to it and able to connect the person who is asking questions with the right resources and more help. We build our annual marketing plan together and we have regular check points with the whole team around marketing specifically" (KI-03). "I think if you're planning an organization that is based in growing community, its tone and its way of being cannot be authoritative. It has to be genuinely invitational. And that requires staff resources for communication… allotting time for the follow-up that happens… ensuring people are able to tap into resources and get their questions answered. So, building in around communications that is dialogical." (KI-03). Also of importance is learning about and addressing context and location-specific barriers in places where the work is unfolding, and of adopting "considerate, respectful, inclusive ways of communicating and engaging. Make those investments to be inclusive and then back to the human connections. Working together, we can have transformation. Meaningful relationships would be the thing." (KI-07).

Utilize a variety of storytelling strategies, virtual, digital and in-person to connect with people in a meaningful way. Be transparent in conveying the ASO's purpose, mandate and operations, ensuring people understand the work and its impact on a project/program basis. Each storytelling platform has its nuances but ideally it should include ways for audiences to see the important underlying 'connective tissue', i.e., how the organization is meeting CEA needs, and why it may be pivoting in response to changing circumstances. Clarify 'how you got from A to B' (KI-10). Include aspects such as who is leading the work, and what motivates them to engage in CEA. Connecting on a personal level though sharing stories is key, especially in Northern Ontario. It takes special people to become successful in rural and remote areas. CEA are not always motivated by money, but rather by passion, and residents appreciate others' efforts. Communicating the sincerity of the work and "commitment to growing a community makes it a lot easier for individuals to step in and support that work" (KI-10).

Podcasting continues to be a very popular platform, allowing geographically-dispersed people to connect to the work without being engaged. It could serve as a recruitment vehicle, reaching out and connecting people through the types of conversations the organization is having (e.g. CEAs, community leaders, MP, MPP, community facilitators). It helps people learn about the work and the energy that you're putting out there for others (KI-10).

To reach people (virtually or in-person), build on the knowledge, experience and networks that exist. Draw on current relationships, and partner with local, regional and/or provincial organizations (e.g., Immigrant Settlement Services, food banks, arts and health organizations) to connect with people and communities across sectors. It takes a lot of resources to foster new relationships within each community. Those already present have insights specific to their locale, and are familiar with places that potential participants may frequent. Leverage relationships to identify place-based champions, weaving relationships together. These organizations can also be an important distribution pathway for the ASO's communications (KI-02; 03; 05; 07).

Meeting in-person is very desirable but not often practical. Should travel be feasible, develop a stakeholder or an ecosystem map to situate the locale within its socioeconomic and cultural context. Identify any key known players and their needs. Sketch an engagement process to elicit information you are seeking and ways you may be able to assist (KI-01). Engagement is a mutually beneficial activity, a conversation of sharing and listening to what the members served by the ASO have to say in terms of how they can be best reached, engaged and supported (KI-01). Try to coordinate visits with community events and locate hubs of activity and gathering places (KI-03), and remember—regarding all outreach and communications efforts— that "Making an honest effort to be visible and relevant in all places served is very important." (KI-01).

Discussions focusing on engagement often include issues related to access to, and people's capacity for, utilizing the internet. Not everyone has broadband access, are familiar with the multitude of platforms or have the means to upgrade their skills. This issue is certainly not unique to the cultural sector. Life in the digital age is very limited, across the entire spectrum, without the tools to engage and participate. It is also important to remember that needs and challenges regarding engagement and communication faced in one part of the province—for example, Northern Ontario—could differ from those in another and, as such, may also require different strategies and solutions.

4.4 Policies and Procedures

A Policy and Procedures Manual is a foundational operational component outlining the organization's rules, guidelines and processes, ensuring consistency across all aspects of operations. It reflects its culture, values and operational practices. Policies, guidelines, and good communication between organizational members is essential to avoid creating a culture of exclusion or a sense (perceived or otherwise) of abuse of power. The development of the manual typically occurs after by-laws are developed (if applicable) and prior to employees being hired. It is a useful tool for

onboarding, providing new people with an understanding of the entire scope of the organization. Updating the manual to reflect government regulations and organizational changes is an ongoing process. Although the manual will be developed as part of Phase Three, KIs provide the following recommendations.

4.4.1 MEANINGFUL AND EMBEDDED GOVERNANCE POLICIES

"**The general function and structure of a board is necessitated by law**. But the ability of that structure to always be effective and serve the best interests of the organization and the community is certainly not always the case. Ensure that there is a very meaningful and **embedded set of governance policies** that help the board culture to continually review what their responsibilities are and really make clear that line between governance and operational responsibilities" (KI-03).

Ensure that the embedded governance and operational culture are aligned, and annual reviews of the policies are conducted by the group that the policies are owned by. This practice supports the organizational commitment to always be effective and serve the best interests of the organization and the community. Policies that include specifics regarding board responsibilities and duties to be met throughout the calendar year assist in keeping the board engaged over time. The structures are in place so boards are not overstepping and/or not contributing (KI-03). "Ownership over the health and impact of the organization is **shared by the entire organization, the board and the entire team of staff, not just the leadership or the lead person**" (KI-03).

"A really good policy structure that's embedded and transparent" for the board and staff provides cohesiveness within and between these groups, and helps them understand how they work together in service of the organization (KI-03).

While policies are important overarching guiding practices, assessing requests on a case by case basis demonstrates humility when it comes to understanding people and communities (KI-07). Adhering too rigidly to rules risks overlooking regional nuances and needs. "Try to avoid being so **much into concepts or into visions that are ethical, so ethical that you cannot breathe**" (KI-04). It is important to maintain a balance between the foundational purpose of clear guidelines and consistently applied policies, and being flexible and open to understanding the person(s) involved, the local context, the different ecosystems across the province, and how arising issues might be best addressed with care and listening to the situational concerns. "Try to stay flexible, stay in the moment, **stay with your values**, your own personal values… in how humans should treat each other" (KI-04). In other words, reflect on organizational values, what underpins the work, rather than being so tied to regulations, timelines and processes that the human element is lost. It is important to find ways to navigate challenges whenever and wherever they may arise, from personnel to policy development to strategic planning and implementation, throughout internal and external operations. In recognition that "Some of the language of organizations alienates people." (KI-07), policies and procedures should be written and expressed in inclusive, approachable ways.

PHASE ONE: IDENTIFYING THE MODEL

5.0 Feasibility and Financial Sustainability

This section provides key informant perspectives regarding feasibility of launching an ASO/OB at this time, as well as how a new provincial ASO or organizing body might be initially funded. The first subsection captures responses relating to feasibility, and in the second, comments focus on financial sustainability.

5.1 Feasibility

When speaking to the feasibility of launching an ASO/OB at this time, a number of KIs reiterate the need for such an organization, particularly given the changing contexts, underscoring the urgent need, and the benefits it would provide to practitioners, and thus, participants and communities. Poignantly, one KI says that CEA is the type of programming that is needed "in many, many communities. Actually strengthens people and creates society and civil respect. And I think we need that more than ever right now." (KI-03). KIs are aware of the long-term negative effects that the COVID-19 pandemic is having on the culture sector and the broader community, as well as the uncertainty within the current political climate and the perpetual challenge of building a compelling case for the work. Within this context, the interviewees offer their insights and recommendations.

LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated revenue generation problems that nonprofits were already facing. Some nonprofits "expressed that they were facing a triple threat: lost revenues due to the cancellation of fundraising events and drop-off in donation levels, unprecedented human resource challenges, and a significant increase in demand for services" (Ontario Nonprofit Network, 2023). These wounds are unlikely to heal, nor these pressures ease, in the current, increasingly uncertain nonprofit and social climate. Nonprofits are being advised to "[e]xpect more disruption–and prepare accordingly" (CanadaHelps, 2025, p. 5).

The COVID-19 pandemic decimated the already under-resourced culture sector, forcing droves of professionals to find other livelihoods. Many individuals, organizations and businesses have not fully recovered. A Canada-wide study captures ways in which some pivoted during this time to become more innovative, including redefining their space, adopting new practices, and developing

technology-based products (Hill Strategies, 2022). Their strategies, however, are reliant upon having the staff, financial resources (a number of which were COVID-related), and access to skill sets to produce and market production to new audiences. The suitability of the genre to technological adaptation is also a factor. Not all arts and culture practices are transferable to online experiences, nor does everyone have access to broadband internet services.

POLITICAL CLIMATE

The coming years are going to be tough (KI-09). As the world becomes more stressful and chaotic, people need to be nurtured and fed through the arts. It offers alternative ways of doing things, looking at the world, and ways of working together which are essential right now. Sharing with others, connecting people who are creating alternatives and those seeking alternatives to what's going on is very important at this time (KI-06). The strong right-wing political climate has weakened the arts sector every decade. Despite experiencing push back and challenges people are tenaciously engaged in the work, with a sense of moving forward. Recently, however, that sense is not prevalent (KI-06).

"We're heading into hard funding times, as you know, and then on the other hand we will come out of them on the other side one day. It swings–political cycles, funding cycles. Anticipate it will get worse now, and it'll get better again in however many years. Have a long view and tough it out. You need to have a big picture view" (KI-02). The federal government's objectives for the artistic and cultural communities have vastly changed over the last five years. New objectives have been introduced without any money or support, and ad hoc groups are now eligible for funding from the Department of Canadian Heritage. Many new organizations have recently formed, seeking project and operational funding from the current envelopes. Securing funding is significantly more competitive now. Launching an ASO would be difficult due to the high number of organizations asking for funding that's just not there (KI-05). Information provided by the Ontario Arts Council demonstrates that, with the exception of one project stream intake, 2024 applications to their three community-engaged arts funding streams outnumbered grants awarded, i.e. they were oversubscribed. Further, applicants to these streams can be quite broad, and "include community-engaged artists, organizations and groups, but also non-CEA groups, and even non-arts groups such as the YWCA and other social service organizations… [as well as] schools, school boards, and education authorities" (A. Acheampong, A. Forslund & C. Stasko, e-mail communication, October 7 to 28, 2025).

"From a national and global economic perspective. It's a very difficult time. There is a very clear need from communities to have that kind of programming because it does have ripple effects in terms of the health and well-being of the community, its economic impact, and how it can be a more resilient community through new relationships, grassroots need becomes stronger during harder economic times. It's a necessary support for Ontario. Governments and funding agencies are starting to shift their parameters of assessment and need based on health and economic impacts. It can certainly

deliver on those two pieces. Access to resources, to government funding, individual donations, and even community resources is even harder" (KI-03).

SCALE OPERATIONS

"**Planning and designing the organization around scalability is really critical**. What does it take to start out small? What would the initial quantitative and qualitative measurements be for the impact that it's bringing to that initial work? And then how can those be scaled? Not necessarily up, but wider over time. The organization will have the trust and reliability then of government funders and individual donors and also community and supporters: seeing the care and then also being able to be part of the journey of growth. Instead of coming out with a huge bang, we're starting here, but this is where we see ourselves going" (KI-03).

KI-08 echoes the importance of "starting as a small team, tackling 1 to 2 projects the first year to establish yourself as an organization. You can just rent out a little closet in the band office, whatever, just to store your space. And that's your organization. Then you start growing a little bit bigger the next year because you have more people buying into what the work is you're doing for the community" (KI-08).

REVIEW PAST INITIATIVES AND CONDUCT A FEASIBILITY STUDY

Reviewing similar past initiatives for guidance, and conducting a feasibility study is how KI-10 suggests determining pathways forward. "Let's take a look at other efforts in the past that were launching a similar initiative. What was entertained, why; if it was successful or it wasn't successful; and why it fell apart. You're probably going to run into a lot of those socio-economic examples that make it a struggle to start up today. But entertaining the feasibility perspective, I think is definitely worth it because at the end of the day, you have your questions asked and answered, and it allows you to move from there. Feasibility studies are definitely something that should be pursued" (KI-10).

"I think it's probably feasible, but I think it's a monumental task." (KI-01). It becomes more feasible if there is a lead person who can drive the work, and energetic people with the heart, mindset and willingness to implement plans (KI-08). "The impossible can become possible with the right energy and person" (KI-02). It could be a feasible venture dependent upon advice the organization receives regarding funding opportunities (KI-02). It is feasible if the preparatory, back-end work is complete, the timeline is considered, the desire is there, and someone can take the leadership (KI-02). Research into the scope and feasibility of the work that this and past research projects provides will determine its feasibility (KI-06).

Noteworthy is that two key CEA organizations, ***ArtBridges*** and the ***International Centre of Art for Social Change***, have recently announced they are pausing and hibernating their organizations, both

citing tight funding or severe funding challenges. ***ArtBridges***, a registered National Arts Service Organization, was serving a community of partnerships and collaborations of over 395 community-engaged arts/arts for social change initiatives across Canada (ArtBridges, n.d.) with 2024 marking 15 years of service. Their website now states "At this point, we are taking a pause, as funding is tight, however we're remaining available to our community for any questions or connection through email." "We are also participating in monthly ASCN (Arts and Social Change Network) discussions to connect with other organizations in the field in Canada." The ***International Centre of Art for Social Change*** website now indicates that "As of January 1, 2024, ICASC/JMP is in hibernation after over 40 years of operations. Despite the joys and successes of recent activities, this decision comes because of severe funding challenges. The toll of working in a near-constant state of precarity with access only to short-term, inconsistent resources makes it impossible for us to continue our current programs. We are not alone. According to one study, of some 400 Canadian organizations doing community-engaged arts for social change work, 38% have closed or gone into hibernation over the last few years."[6]

This underscores challenges that need to be carefully considered by the people who carry this research forward into the next phase. It also provides insight into the size of the CEA sector that now appears to be without a strong organizational front to address the increasing demand for services that assist in healing communities.

5.2 Financial Sustainability and Revenue Sources

Research participants suggest a range of potential initial funding and longer-term sources ranging from government grants, foundations, donations and sponsorships, to earned revenue such as memberships and fundraising. As well as speaking to the limitations, they share thoughts regarding ways to build a case for investment and the importance of scaling operations and relationship building.

Overall, nonprofits and charities must diversify the complement of revenue sources that support their work. The ONN recommends **investigating and implementing social finance streams** to supplement government grants, foundation grants, and donations and/or **fee for service** offerings that exist within a variety of different models, strategies, practices and opportunities. Remaining competitive by staying up to date, utilizing free tools and resources (including those available through ONN) for fundraising and digital engagement, sharing knowledge, and prioritizing capacity building were also recommended (***Ontario Nonprofit Network***, 2023).

[6] The ***website message*** regarding ArtBridges' pause was initially accessed by research team members in November 2024. ICASC's hibernation was announced through a ***website message*** dated January 1, 2024, as well as via email circulated in November 2023.

GOVERNMENT GRANTS

Many nonprofit organizations are very reliant upon government funding. Due to its prevalence in the arts and culture sector, some KIs do not see any other way to fund the ASO/OB (KI-05; 09).

Ontarians show strong support for government investing in the arts. A recent post-pandemic study states that three quarters of Ontarians strongly (36%) or somewhat agree (38%) that the government should spend public dollars to invest in the arts. A majority also strongly (42%) or somewhat agree (36%) that investing in the arts to make them available to Ontarians is an important government commitment. In Northern Ontario, the percentages are considerably higher. The report indicates that 67% of residents strongly agree, and 79% somewhat agree that the government should spend public dollars to invest in the arts; and, 77% strongly agree and 74% somewhat agree that helping make the arts available to people in Ontario is an important government investment (Ontario Arts Council, 2023).

Within the disposition toward government funding, the research participants include many cautionary notes. “Do not overly rely on government funding. Try to the best of your ability to have a diverse revenue. Being really careful about diving into project grants that push you too far away from strengthening your core. Use project grants towards a scalable model. Develop your own self earned revenue streams” (KI-03). Another states that reliance on government grants is an endless cycle of applications that is difficult to break away from, due in part, to the time spent preparing them leaves little time for searching for the relatively few alternative sources (KI-07). One interviewee’s concern centres around a shift in focus that it may instil. Applying for government grants can also draw attention away from original purpose and programming plans. “It’s great to have ambitious plans, but you have to have the responsiveness to make them happen in a good way and an ethical way. Where does the money come from? How do we fund things but have genuine agency” (KI-07). Moreover, trying to manage human resources and programming during four to five months of uncertainty contributes to the precarity of working in the nonprofit sector’s reliance on government funding (KI-07).

A number of specific government agencies and potential sources of funding that research participants suggest include Ontario Arts Council (operating and project funding); the Canada Council for the Arts (Engage and Sustain, Sector Innovation and Development grants); the Ontario Trillium Foundation (program funding); FedNor, and the Ministry of Culture (KI-01; 02; 03; 04; 06).

KIs urge Phase Two participants to seek funds to start the organization. A one to three year grant that includes the development of a revenue generating plan as part of the criteria (KI-06), or an initial two year grant of approximately $180,000 to $200,000 from, perhaps, the Ministry of Culture (KI-04). Ensure the necessary baseline operating funds include human resources and a contingency plan, otherwise staff would have to allocate some of their valuable time to searching for their income (KI-05), and there would be no funds “for rainy days… to have something to fall back on if something doesn’t work out” (KI-04).

One KI indicates that "[s]trategically, it is not a bad time in terms of OAC operating funding. They are shifting their assessment structures with the specific intention of being able to reallocate funding. While this is considered to be positive, the down side is that their overall funding budget has not increased. Operating funding from the OAC is certainly a benefit if you can secure it" (KI-03).

Regardless of the funding source, KIs provide insights into how to develop a sustainable organization and a case for investment. Approach the **structure of your organization as a business**. **Consider its "[s]calability** to expand or contract without damaging the core things. At least have a five-year plan of how you build out your financial resiliency and income beyond that. ***The Thriving Non-Profits program*** [helps nonprofits build financial resilience and impact]" (KI-03). Scaling the operation surfaces a second time, offering framing questions. "**Over time, I don't think there's any way around it in a neoliberal market. You have to find ways to generate your own sources of income**. That tends to be where a lot of organizations tend to stop growing. The vehicles that you invest in, how are they self-sustaining? So the goal isn't necessarily to make money, it's to be self-sustaining. **How can you start small and grow incrementally over time to get to that vision that you want to get to? Especially in a rural area like this, you have to think strategically. How much do I need to be able to offset my costs?**" (KI-10).

Relationship building is a key aspect of advocating for the sector, in general, and individual projects in particular. It is important to create relationships and links with decision-makers to explain its importance (KI-05) and move lobbying efforts forward (KI-10). Develop relationships with MP and MPPs to increase their understanding of the impact of CEA activities on a specific demographic or community. "It becomes a hyper-political position" says KI-10, referring to lobbying efforts necessitating the development of relationships with MPs, MPPs and ministries, and the understanding of community needs: knowing and balancing multiple perspectives and priorities, while being mindful of limits on advocacy/political activities. It is also necessary to provide metrics that share the information (KI-10).

Making a compelling case for CEA, or an ASO/OB dedicated to serving its practitioners is challenging. Assessment metrics defining economic development and tourism initiatives do not necessarily align with CEA values, objectives or evaluation frameworks. While there is significant impact, funders often require proof of contribution to the economy. KI-02 succinctly expresses the hurdle. "I don't know if it's possible to make a really compelling case for a community arts service organization. It's not like it's inventing. It's something that's coming out of a history that is a… different thing. There's a gap" (KI-02).

Communicating the value of culture-based activities, in general, to decision-makers and across community sectors in ways that resonate with various audiences is a long-standing challenge. Hurdles include justifying investment within traditional economic frameworks developed in the industrial era that portray sector activity as tangible outputs of cultural products with limited viability in generating wealth. These frameworks track peoples' main source of income, and since the majority of creative workers are employed outside of the sector culture-related revenue does not necessarily

appear. Social impact measurement frameworks are attempting to recognize the range of individual and collective benefits the sector yields, but many indicators remain tethered to statistical economic data (Ortiz, 2017).

CEA practitioners face further barriers due to the nature of the practice. They engage in robust co-creative practices that support community and drive social change (rather than creating artistic outputs enmeshed in systems of commercial value), while upholding and championing the artistic merit and excellence of the form within the broader arts ecosystem. Demonstrating the quality and rigour of the resulting artistic work within arts-specific funders' assessment criteria does not often capture the significant and broad impact the work engenders.

The culture sector remains largely unmeasurable in terms of participation numbers and its impact. Most evaluation methods fail to capture its essence and invaluable role as a complex web of human capital development and social relationships that create the underlying conditions that lead to, and support, societal and economic development and innovation. Decision-makers often consider qualitative data to be of lesser value; however, storytelling, narratives and social relationships form the basis of community (Ortiz, 2017).

PARTNERSHIPS AND SPONSORSHIPS

Gaining support from localized business and existing nonprofit organizations is a possibility, and there are a lot of existing resources in terms of facilities and networks to draw on to assist with such (KI-03). "Partnerships, generally and especially in the performing arts, are a way to access financial and human resources. People are being more careful with their money, but the high-income (1% of the population) does exist and they may be tapped, and encouraged to invest. Individual donor development is possible, but with the realization that it takes time because it is also very much a relationship building piece. A good approach is an outreach campaign to particular donors and specific communities. Consider the timeframe it will take to develop as well as the process. You are going to need people within that community to tell you who those (wealthy) people are" (KI-03).

Ongoing corporate sponsorships are identified as a possible revenue stream (KI-01), as are community partnerships, but many do not have a lot of money to contribute a small (or large) sum. It is, however, well worth asking for, as any support is meaningful. Consider what kind of community partnerships can be established to realize CE artists' goals (KI-08). Create projects that touch on and are going to benefit arts, like a social benefit of the arts that may also support other organizations (KI-05). One KI cautions against making ambitious plans without having the capacity to realize them "in a good way", noting particularly that funding and support must be responsibly and thoughtfully secured from ethical, aligned sources (KI-07).

A CEA ASO/OB could work to actively identify, and advocate for, new and innovative opportunities to generate funding while raising awareness of the practice and making the case for its impacts.

These need not be large, flashy efforts: regionally-specific opportunities, or those rooted in local communities, can still provide much-needed support and amplification. An example of such innovation and advocacy in Toronto is the successful lobbying to secure "either all or the majority of" tax revenue generated through billboard taxes "which was millions of dollars. And they won. There was a big surge in Toronto Arts Council arts funding" (KI-02).

DONATIONS

Many nonprofits receive donations of cash and in-kind goods and services from individuals, businesses and foundations to support their work. Tax receipts for such (i.e. charitable donations), however, can only be issued by registered charities[7]. The Income Tax Act, administered by the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA), differentiates qualified donees (i.e., charities) from non-qualified donees (may not issue charitable donation receipts) (Edwards, 2023; Wu, 2021). Without the ability to incentivize donations, non-qualified donees may not receive as many (Wu, 2021). Nonprofits can consider forming a charity/non-charity partnership enabling non-charities to benefit from their partner's status as a registered charity to aid in attracting both charitable donations and funding from granting foundations. Charity/nonprofit partnerships are being practiced throughout the nonprofit/voluntary sector. Decreased overall funding in the nonprofit sector, a need for nimbleness, and a desire by funders to support community more directly are among the trends driving the formation of such partnerships which vary widely between organizations, but which must fundamentally maintain compliance with the Income Tax Act to preserve the charitable partner's status (Ramsundarsingh & Falkenberg, 2017, pp. 53, 54, 56, 60, 67, 68).

Reports note that generally, charitable giving in Canada has been declining over decades (Fuss & Munro, 2024; Ontario Nonprofit Network, 2023). Following rapid growth between 1995 and 2007, the 2008-09 recession triggered "a sharp decline" (Ontario Nonprofit Network, 2023). CanadaHelps, a digital donation portal serving over 85,000 registered charities, indicates despite a "modest" rebound in 2010, the rate of giving has never recovered (CanadaHelps, 2025, p. 9). Three current "micro-trends" in Canadian charitable giving are: i) the number of small donors is decreasing; ii) donations are increasingly concentrated among high income donors; and, iii) giving is down primarily to smaller organizations pursuing less mainstream causes (Ontario Nonprofit Network, 2023). Such a reliance on fewer donors exposes the sector to "economic shocks, donor fatigue, and generational turnover" (CanadaHelps, 2025, p. 5). Additional current and imminent factors such as tariffs, recession fears (Sethi, 2025) and concerns about a renewed postal strike are impacting charitable giving, as channels for giving are narrowed and individual resources tighten up (CanadaHelps, 2025, p. 9). Historically, culture sector charities attract a very small portion of donations through ***CanadaHelps***, with the 2023 ***The Giving Report*** indicating sector donations represented only 1.5% of all Canadian donations (Business/Arts, 2024).

[7] For more information regarding registered charities, see ***Models of Governance and Organizational Structures***.

One KI's comments underscore the importance of durational donor development, noting that in the current economic climate, access to resources–including individual donations–is tough, and that organizational scalability planning is essential: starting out small, measuring and adjusting approaches in order to build the organization, while building trusting relationships with funders, supporters and donors informed about the work over time (KI-03). The same KI notes that people "are being more careful with their money" but that wealthy prospective patrons exist; finding them necessitates building relationships with the community, while securing their support requires individual donor development over time (KI-03). There was a notable lack of input from KIs regarding donations and donor development. This could reflect KI sector experience with culture sector charities generally attracting only a small portion of donations.

PRIVATE FOUNDATIONS

To diversify revenue streams, alongside public funders (e.g. government grants), organizations may make appeals to public and private foundations. The ***Ontario Trillium Foundation*** (OTF), a public foundation, is an agency of the Government of Ontario and Canada's largest granting foundation (***CLEO Connect***). The ***McConnell Foundation*** is an example of a private foundation. About one third of Canadian foundations are grantmaking foundations—they provide grants and donations (Ayer, 2020). In the past, many grantmaking foundations were restricted to granting and gifting to other charities. Recent changes to the Income Tax Act in 2022 have eased limitations on charity/non-charity partnerships somewhat, making it more possible for non-qualified donees to receive grants from charitable foundations (Holder, 2024; Krynitzki, 2024).

A few KIs note accessing foundation funds, or being aware of opportunities to do so, through the Ontario Trillium Foundation (KI-01; 02; 03). Another notes that the Metcalfe Foundation funds "new strategies for art survival and other initiatives", and noted the importance for nonprofits of either finding a charitable partner, or securing their own charitable status, in order to access this funding (KI-02). Alongside regulations governing who grantmaking foundations are able to make grants to, their mandates often dictate specific grantee and project criteria that inform their funding decisions.

EARNED REVENUE

Earned revenue, including contracted services, membership, and fundraising are mentioned as possible sources of revenue (KI-02; 04; 08). Depending upon the organization's capacity and expertise, services could be contracted by a variety of organizations and businesses. Government service contracts are one example. "Use the **government contracting system as revenue**. So there could be areas of special focus where your organization is actually able to deliver the objectives for a government program. And that can be a pretty stable source of income" (KI-03).

MEMBERSHIPS

Membership fees can be quite controversial in terms of equity, access and CEA practices regarding charging people money (KI-02). Organizational memberships may be a source of revenue but they must offer a clear benefit, a defined package, of what the membership provides. A tier-structured membership that scales fees may allow smaller organizations to pay less. While membership fees may provide a revenue stream (KI-05), they may not be able to sustain the organization over the long term (KI-09).

FUNDRAISING

Fundraising is possible, but the KIs note that hosting gatherings is not really a viable revenue stream as they do not really generate money. Other organizations can make financial contributions, but the sector is not strong enough right now, and attempting to sustain an organization through fundraising is very challenging (KI-06).

PHASE ONE: IDENTIFYING THE MODEL

6.0 Supporting CEA Practitioners

If the development of an ASO/OB is deemed not feasible at this time, the key informants recommend the following support for individual cultural workers and organizations. Many requests align with the purpose of an ASO/OB and its various roles as discussed throughout this research report. Some echo supports identified in previous studies.[8] To consolidate participant voices across studies, data surfacing from this research is organized around the categories established in ***The Story of Our Stories*** (Meschino et al., 2020, pp. 36-38). The following points identified as *(New)* do not appear in earlier reports, or they refer to different aspects of previously mentioned items. Although the need for professional development was noted in past reports (strengthening regional arts administration and human resources infrastructure: specifically for region-specific, e.g. northern arts admin training, workshops), it was not presented as a category. In this study, the final section, Professional Development, provides insight into areas that would support capacity building, knowledge sharing and succession planning that emerged during key informant interviews.

Advocacy and public education support

KI data points to desires for advocacy in terms of:

- Identifying advocacy opportunities and supporting advocacy functions on behalf of, and alongside, organizations;
- Recognizing CEA as an important, defined, artistically meritorious and socially beneficial practice;
- Supports in navigating tough times in the sector and the work;
- Dedicated, increased and sustained funding for CEA projects and organizations that support community benefit;
- Shifting bureaucratic systems and measurement standards to be more supportive of building meaningful relationships within the work, (relationship-centred) and impact-focussed, and therefore, appropriate for CEA *(New)*;
- Relaxing funder expectations/repercussions about organizational advocacy around matters of importance to the community (i.e., circulating petitions) *(New)*; and,
- Access to high speed internet.

[8] Previous studies: ***The Story of Our Stories*** (Meschino, Sutherland & Bouchard, 2020), and *Weaving It All Together Gathering* (Forslund, 2025).

Networking and mentorship support

Interviewees express that connecting practitioners through networking and collaborative relationships is better than working in isolation:

- A network is needed to facilitate referrals, consultancy and mentorship opportunities and job postings. While job boards exist, there is not one for community arts *(New)*;
- Art symposiums, or multi-art showcases working with other organizations that are present in each community to bring people together; and,
- In-person or online workshops or gatherings that get people connected to this work for the underlying principles and as an alternative to pursuing an individual career in art.

Business and communications support

KIs request assistance with building capacity in the following administrative areas:

- Organizational structuring, strategic planning, and developing clear objectives to be better able to prioritize actions, attract the right partners to advance your mandate and assess progress in meeting objectives *(New)*;
- Developing policies that are well suited and customized *(New)*;
- Sample grant proposals, contracts, collaborative agreements that others could access, centrally held and updated *(New)*;
- Communications support including the development of infographics and targeted fact sheets conveying what is happening, the impact and the reach, serving to attract people to participate as well as advocating for their activities *(New)*; and,
- Grant writing clinics to access funding from all levels of government for a range of activities including printing, and workshops offered through ***Canadian Artists' Representation/Le Front des artistes canadiens (CARFAC)***. CARFAC is a federally incorporated nonprofit, the national voice of Canada's professional visual artists. Clinics focus on ways to hold institutions accountable and suggest ways institutions could help artists.

Human resources support

Within individual practices and/or when working collectively there is a need for:

- Legal advice and conflict management *(New)*; and,
- Decent work and professional recognition.

Supporting cross-sector connections

To build ecosystem resilience:

- Options for sharing resources and creative strategy *(New)*; and,
- Cross-sector partnerships to facilitate learning opportunities through the arts where everyone benefits through generation and sharing of practical knowledge *(New)*.

Professional development

Supporting CEA practitioners' professional development would increase their capacity in a number of crucial areas, and thus, their impact. Foremost is understanding the practice, what it entails, its relationship to individuals and communities, and its potential for social change and justice. KIs call for programming providing sound practice fundamentals, approaches, further resources and the creation of a learning network of artists.

Establishing an archive is seen as another way to build sector capacity through sharing knowledge, wisdom and experience of others working in the field. It would provide a sound foundation and guide practitioners in their various practices, potentially avoiding the adoption of 'wobbly ways' when launching new initiatives or expanding areas of practice. Furthermore, an archive would contribute to succession planning, retaining successes and advancing individual, collective, and community engagement across sectors and the country. It may also serve as a repository or foundation for advocacy efforts. The notion of creating a website to showcase some photos and content from CEA organizations was mentioned in a previous study, but the concept of an archive greatly expands on the initial idea and is driven by the desire for a legacy project to support other practitioners.

The call for advocacy support for CEA practitioners and organizations is a recurrent theme across KI feedback in this study, as well as the broader field of practice. CEA is a cross-cutting discipline spanning multiple sectors including, among others, the arts, health, community and economic development, and tourism. The outcomes, impacts and learnings achieved by and through CEA projects and initiatives–and therefore, their value–can be difficult to measure and report on within various sectors' assessment and evaluation frameworks, not least of which is because they frequently appear as longitudinal changes and benefits, typical within the fields of community development and social change. Further, community projects don't always roll out according to plan. Many new opportunities and/or solutions may emerge that are well worth investigating as they arise. A focus on excellence, however, can drive a desire to achieve perfect results over messier, though more meaningful, impacts (KI-07).

PHASE ONE: IDENTIFYING THE MODEL

7.0 Next Steps

The ten key informants participating in this research (Phase One) provide a wealth of insights that significantly advance the dream of establishing an ASO/OB dedicated to supporting cultural workers and organizations in the field of community-engaged arts, with a focus on the needs of Northern Ontario practitioners. Their input contributes to the process of selecting a governance and organizational model, informing its underlying culture, approach and shape, as well as identifying a number of important considerations regarding attracting and retaining people, policy and procedures, and feasibility and financial sustainability to keep at the forefront when establishing an ASO/OB.

Of the eight critical components of governance–Purpose, Strategy, Organizational Culture, Resources, Governance Design (Governance Culture, Organizational Structure, People, and Policies and Procedures), Engagement, Assets, and Compliance–Phase One includes all aspects except for strategy, assets and compliance. Strategic direction, safeguarding assets and complying with regulations, relevant laws, and accountability including evaluation and assessment frameworks, are part of Phase Two that involves identifying funding and investment opportunities, and developing an operational plan.

Phase Two entails an iterative, multi-step process of weaving together the various elements of governance and structure within the context of purpose, priorities, capacities, existing relationships and networks, and financial opportunities, nested within the larger picture of uncertainty and precarity in which nonprofit groups are enmeshed. Continual attention and decision-making is required to ensure the many interconnected and interdependent aspects support each other in a manner that enables the governance culture to facilitate the organizational structure in serving the ASO/OB's purpose. The governance style and organizational structure that best suits the ASO/OB's initial needs in launching the initiative may be different than what is needed in the longer-term. Sustainability issues driven, for example, by growth in demand in services, or community and/or political changes may encourage scaling operations or spark a change in model over time.

The KIs note specific tasks stemming from this research that would support Phase Two, the identification of funding and investment opportunities and the development of an operational plan. They are:

1. **Define** the ASO/OB's purpose and priority areas by conducting an environmental scan of existing supports within/outside the CEA sector;

2. **Identify** its scope by determining what constitutes cultural workers and organizations working in the field of CEA;
3. **Prepare** a clearly stated mission statement;
4. **Select** a governance and organizational structure that facilitates meeting the mission;
5. **Develop** an operational plan for meeting the ASO/OB's provincial mandate including the type and location of workplace structures;
6. **Conduct** a feasibility study to assess the practicality, potential viability, and the issues that may arise in evaluating what is feasible and manageable at this time; and,
7. **Seek** partners and investors.

Three recommendations for moving forward are:

Have a firm development plan, co-created with key stakeholders

To further refine the purpose and organizational structure, "start with the people who are doing the work. They need to be the ones to develop the framework of what it is they need. It's not a top-down kind of model where we're going to do this for you, and we're going to initiate these things." (KI-06). A firm plan, co-created with key stakeholders, would contribute to the development of the organizational structure. "[It] ensures equity and you can nurture and develop an equitable, or a sustainable relationship." (KI-07).

Host a summit meeting to align strategies

A summit meeting with funders, community representatives and members to initiate a frank discussion about what this work is, and present the challenges. Subcommittees could be struck to address some of the key challenges that professionals are experiencing (KI-10). They include attraction and retention, capacity building, succession planning, organizational and community infrastructure (e.g., internet) and funding. The subcommittees or working groups could develop solutions and/or pathways for addressing them through the ASO/OB in partnership with investors, with other governing agencies and broader ecosystems to ensure continuance, impact, growth and sustainability, as mentioned over the course of the research.

Conduct a feasibility study

Review similar past initiatives for guidance. "Let's take a look at other efforts in the past that were launching a similar initiative. What was entertained, why; if it was successful or it wasn't successful; and why it fell apart. You're probably going to run into a lot of those socio-economic examples that make it a struggle to start up today. But entertaining the feasibility perspective, I think is definitely worth it because at the end of the day, you have your questions asked and answered, and it allows you to move from there. Feasibility studies are definitely something that should be pursued." (KI-10).

The pausing and hibernation of two CEA pillar organizations, ***ArtBridges*** and the ***International Centre of Art for Social Change***, both citing tight funding or severe funding challenges, is a cause for concern on two fronts. First, the feasibility and sustainability of a new ASO/OB, and second, the unmet needs and loss of potential avenues for local community development and healing opportunities that

CEA practitioners facilitate. ***ArtBridges*** was serving over 395 community partnerships with 2024 marking 15 years of service, and the ***International Centre of Art for Social Change***, following 40 years operations serving more than 500 Arts for Social Change organizations. As Jackson, Jarvis & Fernadez (2024) note, the absence of and importance of establishing a dedicated ASO/OB is timely: "Without a dedicated arts service organization for community-engaged work, practitioners have few formal supports for networking, critical dialogue, co-learning and the sharing of their stories."

In sum, the key informants express the importance of the work, the processes and ethics underpinning CEA, and the increasing demand and need for engagement of this nature for individual and collective health, wellbeing, and resilience. Much more can be achieved when working as an organization, networking and collaborating, than as individual practitioners. Collectively the key informants provide clear 'next steps' in advancing this work. The establishment of an ASO/OB "is not impossible"… It may be "a monumental task" (KI-01), but the impossible can become possible with the right energetic people who have the heart, mindset and willingness to drive it and implement the plans (KI-02; 08).

TIME ALLOTMENT

Time allotment for Phase Two is dependent on a number of factors. It would include the time required to: form an advisory group to lead the process; formulate and conduct consultative and advice-gathering summits, events and individual meetings to identify funding and investment opportunities and partnerships; analyze the data; and, compile it into an operational plan within the context of a feasibility study. Phase Three, operationalizing the model, would be dependent upon the outcome of the feasibility study, whether the project is deemed feasible in its entirety or a scaled version is proposed, and if the leadership group remains the same or a new team is gathered to oversee the implementation process.

In moving forward, ***The Story of Our Stories: A Regional Community-Engaged Research Project*** (Meschino et al., 2020) serves as a resource for retaining an emphasis on Northern practitioners. It captures the impacts of CEA practice, the motivation for engagement, and the challenges as identified by those living and working in the region.

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PHASE ONE: IDENTIFYING THE MODEL

Appendix I
An Overview of Community-Engaged Arts (CEA)

About CEA

As described in previous research (Meschino, Sutherland & Bouchard, 2020), Community-Engaged Arts (CEA) can be broadly defined as "a multi-faceted approach to making art, whose main defining factor is that it involves professional artists working alongside populations who do not self-identify as artists to co-create professional art products, making it a uniquely relational form of art making." CEA is further distinguished by basic principles including the creation of value rooted as much in the co-creative process as in the final outcome; place-based focus, reflective of community stories, inclusive of community participants, and informed by community needs or concerns; and the generation of social impacts and benefits to communities served. The form, and its definition, can be seen as "ambiguous, confusing and amorphous" (pp. 10-11).

Community-engaged arts (CEA) are "collaborative creative processes" that bring together professional artists – those "who [have] developed skills through training or practice, [are] recognized by artists working in the same artistic tradition, [have] a history of public presentation or publication, [seek] payment for their work and actively [practise] their art" (OAC, n.d.) – and other community organizations, groups and individuals to co-create projects whose developmental processes are as important as their artistic outcomes. Many terms have been used to describe CEA over time, "each with its own nuanced goals and practices" (ICASC, 2016, p. 1; Pacific, 2001, p. 172): community- or socially-engaged art, "art for social change… community arts, animation culturelle, community cultural development, cultural mediation, social arts, participatory arts" (ICASC, 2016, p. 1), and others. CEA links artists and community partners as co-creators; emphasizes the impacts of the collaborative creative process; and activates partners as participants (Lee, 1998, p. 7). Though seen as an emerging field that is gaining respect "within the Canadian arts ecology" (Hutcheson, 2016, p. 7), CEA is not a new form; indeed, artists have long supported and celebrated the communities they belong to (Lee, 1998, p. 7; Hutcheson, 2016, p. 7). CEA shares commonalities with other artistic disciplines, but is unique in its focus on the principles of co-creation and collaboration, relationality, reciprocity, participation, inclusion, and its socially transformative nature (Jumblies Studio, 2014, p. 16). The form challenges "restrictive definitions of 'art'", and distances itself from "elite perspectives, forms and institutions" (Hutcheson, 2016, p. 6).

The CEA artist is a community facilitator whose roles include supporting and enhancing projects and their outcomes (Jumblies Studio, 2014, p. 17), contributing ideas and frameworks "that [allow] others' work to shine" (Pacific, 2001, p. 181), keeping the focus on local contextual and community relevancy (Hutcheson, 2016, p. 5), and modelling respect, collaboration, inclusion, appreciation of difference, and generosity of spirit (Hutcheson, 2016, pp. 9-10). They are given great responsibility, and "asked to be social workers, psychiatrists, politicians, caretakers, humanitarians as well as great artists! No amount of training could accomplish that unless they have the temperament, willingness and full understanding of the task" (Kai Chan, n.d., as cited in Lee, 1998, p. 10). The care-infused CEA process brings myriad benefits: projects support communities to self-express, tackle big ideas or challenges, meet important milestones, build social capital, nurture resiliency, share stories, revitalize cultural traditions, promote active citizenship (Hutcheson, 2016, p. 11), and more. CEA fosters cultural democracy by "enfranchising the disenfranchised, providing the context for silenced voices to be heard, and creating alternatives to the global cultural agenda of marketing and consumption. It is about groups of people discovering power in a situation of perceived powerlessness" (Pacific, 2001, p. 193). Hospitality, care, and inclusivity are embedded within facilitation of CEA (Reason, 2022, p. 52), where hands-on artmaking unfolds.

CEA has emerged, developed, and been defined differently worldwide; specific research has been done on CEA in countries including England, Australia, the United States and Canada (Pacific, 2001, pp. 171-194). In the Canadian context, CEA has been practiced for more than 50 years (ICASC, 2019, p. 1), has emerged at different times and in unique ways, province to province (Lee, 1998, p. 8), and encompassed more than 500 organizations nationally as of 2019 (ICASC, 2019, p. 2). As in England, Canadian CEA is linked to the labour arts movement and these connections helped to eventually catalyze the establishment of CEA-specific funding programs and support initiatives in Ontario (Lee, 1998, p. 33). Many well-known Canadian CEA artists/practitioners (Dale Hamilton, Ruth Howard, Cathy Stubbington and others) were inspired by the community play form, which emerged in the United Kingdom (Jumblies Studio, 2014, p. 25). Tracing a detailed timeline of CEA's development, either globally or nationally, is complicated: among the web of people involved in the form, and the diversity of their perspectives, "it is often only the least marginalized companies and artists that manage to weather the storms of inconsistent or inadequate funding" (Hutcheson, 2016, p. 8). It is crucial to recognize that, for many Black and Indigenous artists, and artists of colour, "community arts is the manner in which they have worked and developed as artistic creators throughout their lives", that "[their] struggle with arts institutions and agencies for access and recognition of their arts practices has largely paved the way for community arts" (Lee, 1998, p. 8), but that their perspectives may not be as present in conversations regarding the field of practice given this marginalization.

As CEA has become better known and practiced, it has become more widely studied (ICASC, 2016, p. 12), though despite growing interest, little research has been focussed specifically on the field compared to the broader arts sector (ICASC 2016, p. 1). A growing body of research into CEA accordingly "hails from a diverse range of fields, including art criticism, social work, education, cultural studies, and epidemiology" and more, to best understand the interplay "between art practices and psycho-social and/or socio-cultural transformation" (ICASC 2016, pp. 11-12); and it has

been noted that the field is changing quickly as it is "integrated with areas of public life that have not previously been identified with the arts: community economic development, activism, planning, community health promotion, trade unions, and so on" (Pacific, 2001, p. 171). The formation of partnerships and programs within educational, training and research organizations and institutions is promising for furthering research, take-up, capacity and case-making in CEA. In Canada, America and worldwide, formal post-secondary CEA programs are becoming more common; socially-engaged creative practices have been "lately formalized and integrated into art schools, more or less along with academic literature that addresses the phenomenon", and many scholars–including among them Claire Bishop, Tom Finkelpearl, Grant Kester, Miwon Kwon and Shannon Jackson–are providing key perspectives on the practice's form, background and issues (Helguera, 2011, p. ix). Numerous CEA organizations – including their senior leadership (Hutcheson, 2016, p. 8) – provide informal, community-based training and mentorship programs; this serves to holistically develop local engagement and inclusion, attract arts engagement and patronage, and support personal and professional learning (Proctor, 2020, p. 119). The creation of such specialized, recognized training programs, such as Jumblies Theatre's Artfare Essentials, has raised the profile of CEA.

CEA and the COVID-19 Pandemic

Though impacted by social distancing and lockdown measures during the COVID-19 pandemic, CEA organizations and practitioners globally adapted their approaches accordingly, and continued their work. Based on data collected through the Survey on COVID-19 and Mental Health, "[b]y the end of the pandemic… more than 8 out of 10 people in Canada reported experiencing negative impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic" (Government of Canada, 2025). There is increasing recognition that participation in the arts, including CEA, brings many benefits to those involved, among them the cultivation of social connections, individual and collective understanding, a sense of belonging, and space for sharing– all activities that in turn support mental health. The delivery of many socially-connective arts-based activities and events, especially those occurring in-person at public venues, was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic (Perkins et al., 2022, p. 2), which increased the need and demand for supportive, and often free, CEA programming, as widespread cancellations and closures precipitated significant revenue losses to many ticketed arts organizations, programs and events. CEA practitioners and organizations adapted quickly to meet these needs, conducting workshops, outreach and communications via social media and platforms such as Zoom and WhatsApp (Heng & Yu, 2020, pp. 2-3), a departure from the "usual [in-person] way of connecting with the community prior to the pandemic." (Nordicity, 2021, p. 13).

This brought on a number of challenges for CEA practitioners and participants alike. Nordicity (2021) notes these included adapting to create meaningful engagement in virtual contexts; feeling daunted by the breadth of new skills and knowledge required to pivot; requiring increased equipment, infrastructure, resources and dedicated funds; feeling unable to reach and serve target audiences; challenges collecting feedback; gaps between eligible relief expenses and real needs; and tensions between earned revenue strains and free programming (pp. 7, 13, 18-24). Reason (2022) cites radical

challenges to established, familiar approaches, and the stress of working from an "extremely low base" of prior experience with online program delivery (p. 60). Heng & Yu (2020) identify struggles with compatibility of artistic mediums to virtual environments (p. 6.), and setting aside fearfulness to mediate "the technological boundaries that keep out the most vulnerable in the community" (p. 14). Many CEA practitioners and organizations also managed these shifts while caring for community and self (p. 7), balancing multiple jobs and/or functions, postponing or cancelling projects prematurely, and reconceptualizing and experimenting within their work (pp. 9-10).

While "[d]ata specific to the impact of COVID-19 on Community Arts is lacking," even four years on, "there has been research on arts engagement and participation during the pandemic more broadly" (Nordicity, 2021, p. 7). Findings show that participant responses to adapted art programs and activities "[indicated the] durability in the role of the arts to support social connections, including during times of crisis", substantiating "the role of the arts in supporting social public health" (Perkins et al., 2022, p. 5). While not entirely non-existent prior to 2020 (Reason, 2022, p. 52), increased digital CEA programming in the pandemic era provided participants with more options, value, enjoyment (Nordicity, 2021, p. 47), as well as expanded potential opportunities for skills development, creativity, and building artistic confidence and capacity (Mak, Fluharty & Fancourt, 2021, p. 2). CEA practitioners delivering such programming increased potential opportunities to reach more, and sometimes new, participants, especially those "isolated from community activities or [living] in areas with high levels of deprivation and few activities available" (Mak et al., 2021, p. 2). Adapted CEA activities helped people to cope collectively, allowing them through participation in the arts "to feel part of, and belonging to, something bigger than themselves" and "to feel part of a collective 'COVID experience'" (Perkins et al., 2022, p. 5). Many participants found online offerings supported their fuller participation, allowing them to remain anonymous (alleviating "social anxiety and similar barriers to in-person participation"), providing alternative engagement formats, such as chat functions (Nordicity, 2021, p. 15), and enabling them to join safely from home. When studied, many participants indicated "there will be at least a minimal place for online programs in their cultural life" beyond re-opening (Nordicity, 2021, p. 8).

The pandemic also highlighted important matters of inequality/inequity, accessibility and inclusivity of various identities and needs, and the existence of a digital divide (Reason, 2022, p. 59). Some CEA participants found adapted programs alienating, citing the time investment required to build trust and comfort (Heng & Yu, 2020, p. 3); participation barriers regarding required technology and skills (Nordicity, 2021, p. 26); and virtual programming's "uneven cultural impacts on historically marginalized communities" (Nordicity, 2021, p. 20), which impacted participants in both rural and urban situations. Participating online from communal spaces, or spaces that were unsafe, unsupported, or ill-equipped (Reason, 2022, p. 62), shifted the stakes of participation. Online programs meeting participants in their homes raised questions around privacy, confidentiality and support (Reason, 2022, p. 63), while participants without home internet access, or relying on public hotspots, may have felt further marginalized, isolated, and "cut off from participation in society" (Sohn, n.d., as cited in Holpuch, 2020). CEA organizations and practitioners worked to address such barriers by offering multiple engagement and participation options (Nordicity, 2021, p. 15). Provision

of virtual programming invited wider reach and engagement (Nordicity, 2021, p. 13) which expanded audiences as well as notions of community. Where resources permitted, digital divides were addressed with technology loans, accessibility supports, and training. Participants and practitioners learned together that "digital inclusion… is more than the provision of equipment or of internet access, but about human-to-human interaction and the generation of inclusive capital." (Reason, 2022, p. 61).

CEA practitioners and organizations leaned into pandemic lessons and opportunities that also included wider collaborations without added travel costs (Nordicity, 2021, p. 12); increased multi-generational household participation (Nordicity, 2021, p. 14); a wider array of tools available for data collection, such as polls (Nordicity, 2021, p. 18); mobile and self-directed programming formats; flexible scheduling to support work-life balance (Nordicity, 2021, pp. 24-25); increased skills and capacity development, through experience and training (Reason, 2022, p. 64); and increased flexibility to defer projects and funding (The Highrise Project. n.d.). Many adopted hybrid programming models long-term (Nordicity, 2021, p. 11), to further support accessibility and inclusion. Carrying such lessons forward and building guidelines to support ongoing learning, best practices, updated protocols and infrastructure development (Nordicity, 2021, pp. 50-51) continues to strengthen and support CEA's impact and future development (Reason, 2022, p. 53).

CEA Sector Governance

CEA is a simultaneously established and emerging field of practice that impacts and informs the broader arts and culture ecosystem. Despite CEA's growing recognition by and within the arts sector as a legitimate and unique field of practice (Hutcheson, 2016, p. 7), a persistent lack of awareness of CEA burdens practitioners with the constant need to define and case-make for the work (ICASC, 2019, p. 3). This creates unintentional exclusion of CEA from funding and public view, and perpetuates "missed opportunities for creating a more just society" through CEA programs and projects (ICASC, 2019, p. 3). Further, ongoing negative perceptions of CEA as "bad art", not "a serious mode of cultural representation" (Barndt, 2010, p. 8), and as producing artistic outcomes "of lower status than more traditional approaches to art" (ICASC, 2016, p. 8) persist. It has been noted, however, that CEA "is not just about art that changes society, but also about art that changes art… it has the power to shift the way art is thought of and practiced" (Howard, 2014, p. 68). Its unique linking of social concerns and artmaking makes CEA "an entirely new field" that marries aesthetic excellence and community benefit (Cleveland, 2005, p. 6) and "[addresses] complex issues, working for positive change at micro (personal/intra-psychic), meso (group/community) and macro (policy/systems change) levels" (ICASC, 2016, p. 2).

Arts funders at all levels have the power to shift perceptions about CEA by investing in it (Hutcheson, 2016, p. 58); yet despite increased interest from artists and the public, funding support for CEA remains inconsistent, (largely) short-term and project-based, and in some instances reduced or discontinued, which in turn undermines the slower timelines of CEA projects (Cleveland, 2005, p.

7; ICASC, 2016, p. 5). The burden of finding support – increasingly, from private and community-based sources – is ongoing (Hutcheson, 2016, pp. 57-58); frustratingly, "translating" the work to suit arts and non-arts funders in endless grant appeals can obscure the multi-faceted, rich nature of the practice (Cleveland, 2005, p. 119) while taking energy away from projects (ICASC, 2016, p. 5). As new CEA initiatives take shape and funding dries up, competition for resources and visibility among CEA practitioners and organizations increases (ICASC, 2016, p. 5). Founding organizations, companies and collective bodies is often a strategy employed by CEA practitioners to formalize their work and attract funding for it, while entrenching it in mainstream consciousness and visibility. By one account, "[f]orming a new company… bypassed all the problems of institutional resistance, impetus, and gradual shift… although it raised ongoing problems of survival" (Howard, 2015, p. 70). Increasingly, non-arts funders in education, health, social enterprise and other fields are recognizing their alignment with CEA approaches (ICASC, 2016, p. 6). Further, institutions – arts and otherwise – are also taking note of and adopting principles of CEA to build strategic community engagement and relevance; this includes hiring dedicated CEA staff, often for time-limited projects (Hutcheson, 2016, p. 56). Some critics question the appropriateness of such adoption of "counter-institutional" CEA practices, but their presence aims to democratize, redistribute power, and shed light on "the social relationships between art, artists, cultural institutions and communities" (Ting, 2010, p. 22). Of key importance is ensuring that artists, artmaking, and social and environmental justice remain at the centre of such efforts, resisting misappropriation (ICASC, 2016, p. 3).

The energy invested by CEA practitioners in writing about their work is supporting interest among scholars, increasing its support by research funding bodies, and "helping to link academic scholarship with community knowledge and expertise" (ICASC, 2016, p. 8). The multidisciplinary tendencies, strategies and modes of inquiry widespread in CEA nurture "expression and dialogue through the integration of different 'languages' and ways of knowing" (ICASC, 2016, p. 2; Burnham, Durland & Ewell, 2004, p. 29), complementing and nurturing cross-disciplinary inquiry, study and exchange. CEA's close connections to "arts education, creative art therapies, Popular Education, and creative leadership processes" (ICASC, 2016, p. 1) are not surprising; and often, CEA practitioners themselves study fields beyond the arts to find further "language, models and resources" that deepen and strengthen their approaches to CEA (Burnham et al., 2004, pp. 7-8). CEA practitioners have called for more opportunities to connect, collaborate, exchange, build awareness of the work, and network with each other (ICASC, 2016, pp. 7-8): working across distances of regional geography and borders, "as well as across perceived categories of art" (Howard, 2014, p. 70), can isolate practitioners and organizations from each other. In May 2004, Art in the Public Interest - whose primary program was the Community Arts Network - hosted a conference in Arden, North Carolina to reflect on the state of the field. The report notes that the 27 long-time CEA practitioners convened there resisted the notion of founding a professional service organization to serve the needs of the field, in recognition of "how massive the task would be" (Burnham et al., 2004, p. 7).

CEA practitioners and organizations form an ecosystem, "an interconnected and interdependent web of networks… [with] dense internal networks of relationships within and across sectors (economic, social, environmental and cultural) as well as having important external links" (Torjman,

2007, as cited in Ortiz, Meades & Broad, 2010, p. 14). This frequently includes partners from "a wide range of other types of organizations from those whose primary focus is a local community (community centres, libraries, not-for-profit social services organizations, etc.) to large mainstream arts organizations (museums, ballet companies, etc.)"; as well as other CEA organizations, and non-arts partners in justice, health, social and environmental justice, social innovation, community and economic development (Leacock & Marcuse, 2018; Burnham et al., 2004, pp. 7-8). CEA is well-aligned with projects, initiatives and organizations focused on community development, social change and innovation, activism, and grassroots organizing. CEA projects drive contemporary cultural sector development by artfully integrating community economic and social development principles of meaningful inclusion, social engagement and neighbourhood building (Proctor, 2020, p. 119); asset-based thinking and community organizing (Borrup, n.d., as cited in Burnham et al., 2004, pp. 25-26); expanding accountability to, responsibility for and respect of community members through their inclusion and involvement in the work (Cleveland, 2005, p. 105); integrating arts and culture into community development and municipal planning processes; leveraging organizational structures and power to act as a facilitator of projects between governments and communities (Ortiz et. al., 2010, pp. 16-17); tapping into local knowledge and networks by partnering with and within the communities where they intend to work (Weigler, 2009, p. 36); activating community-engaged research principles through artmaking that nurtures social change (Weigler, 2009, p. 32); and more. CEA projects democratize access to and participation in the arts in ways that activate community engagement in addressing community needs, concerns and resiliency. The presence of arts and culture can make development and research projects, as well as opportunities for activism and advocacy, more approachable to the community, and more possible for them to participate in.

Appendix II
Key Informant Questions

Key Informant Questions

1. Jurisdiction

- Which geographic area and communities of practice do you represent, or work within, or work with?
- Do you know of any organizations that are serving the needs of CEAs in your area, provincially, and/or nationally?
- Do you know of any organizations that could potentially provide services and support to CEAs?

2. Organizational Structure

- What organizational structure(s) do you have experience working within, working with, or observing? (e.g. registered nonprofit, ad hoc, cooperative)
- What works well within these structures? (i.e., culture; hierarchy; relationship between people and their roles and responsibilities? Examples?)
- If launching a new provincial ASO or organizing body for CEAs, how would you structure it? Why? (e.g. fixed headquarters; decentralized facilities; regional staff; online/virtual hub; hybrid work)
- What pitfalls or challenges would you try to avoid?
- How much time would you allot to this task?

3. Engagement and Communication

- What best practices have you come across for reaching, engaging and communicating with people who are geographically dispersed?
- Do you have suggestions on how to reach those who might not have high-speed internet?

4. People

- What human resource challenges would you expect to encounter if launching a new provincial ASO or organizing body? How might you mitigate them? (e.g. workplace culture, location, professional development, travel; internet; compensation; job security; workload)

5. Financial Sustainability

- How might a new provincial ASO or organizing body be initially funded? Over time?

6. Supporting CEAs

- Do you think it is feasible to consider launching an ASO or organizing body at this time? Why, why not?
- What sort and sources of support (ie., organizational support, increased funding, etc.) do you think CEAs would most benefit from at this time?
- Do you have any other thoughts or would like to mention anything else?

Appendix III
The Nonprofit Environment

1.0 Trends and forces impacting nonprofit governance design

1. **Systemic oppression:** Colonialism, racism and whiteness are three interconnected systems of power that encompass, justify, and maintain all of the various relations of power. Must intentionally work toward equity, diversity and inclusion;
2. **Financial instability:** Significantly reduced funding with projected zero increase, shifting to project based initiatives with no funding for core operational functions;
3. **Human resources:** Toxic work environments; burnout and turnover; difficulty attracting and retaining qualified staff due to low wages and limited upward mobility;
4. **Meaningful engagement** of staff, board, those served, stakeholders, etc. is now a core expectation and essential practice;
5. **Partnerships and collaboration:** Funding direction: must locate potential partners whose mandates, values, openness, transparency, capabilities and risk aversion align; pivoting to a relations-based culture that enables developing respectful partnerships processes requires dedicated time and resources;
6. **Changing demographics:** Younger population engenders different values; increasing demands for services; increasing complexity of issues; changing patterns of volunteerism challenging attraction and retention;
7. **Data and digitization:** The technological divide, those who digitalize work, capture data and utilize it strategically, is becoming a differentiator between nonprofits that are thriving and those that are facing challenges. (Lalande, 2018; ONN, 2019; ONN, 2021b; Righting Relations, 2023).

2.0 Promising practices

Three elements that shape effective nonprofit governance are: i) fluid structures, not hierarchical or cemented into charts; ii) more broadly shared decision-making; and, iii) the increasingly multifaceted set of skills, experiences and knowledge required to govern well (ONN, 2021b).

> *"While passion for the mission is essential, governance leaders must also be adaptive, entrepreneurial, technologically savvy, and able to span boundaries. They must be proficient risk managers, use data strategically, and be comfortable with complicated financing models. If organizations are struggling to recruit for all these competencies, then they should be creating more innovative governance structures and approaches that extend beyond the board to draw from a larger network of people with the right mix of skills, experience and knowledge to contribute to governance."* (ONN, 2021b, p. 9).

SIX PROMISING PRACTICES ARE:

1. Purpose-driven and principle-focused

A purpose-driven organization ensures its decision-makers have a clear understanding and directive of ***what*** it does, and centers those it serves. The board commits its duty of care and loyalty to the purpose of the organization, rather than only its sustainability. A governance culture that is purpose-driven values collaboration as an intentional and strategic imperative both within the organization and with its partners. Equally important is ***how*** the organization operationalizes its purpose through its practices and processes in meeting its mandate. Essentially, it is a reflection of the organization's culture (ONN, 2021b, p. 4).

Approaches that are principle-focused and equity-centred are based on values that are ethically grounded and meaningful: rooted in values about what matters and based on evidence about how to be effective. Rather than being prescriptive, they require judgment in application and must be interpreted and applied contextually, offering direction, informing choices at forks in the road, and allowing for opportunities to adapt to different contexts. They guide the ongoing internal and external engagement practices and processes. Intentional, deep conversations reveal assumptions and shift norms, and build trusting relationships that foster the creation of a learning organization–a cogenerating knowledge network–to support one another (Ortiz, 2022, pp. 12, 17). Addressing system inequities requires actioning this work at three scales: i) within the organizational team; ii) the design and implementation of work the organization undertakes in meeting its mandate; and, iii) the organization's position within the greater ecosystem (ONN, 2021b, p. 15).

2. Meaningful engagement for effective interventions

Embed processes that enable regular, meaningful, respectful and reciprocal engagement of board members, staff, those served, stakeholders, partners and ecosystem supporters in the development and design and delivery of services/interventions and the evaluation of their social impact in relation to achieving its goals (ONN, 2021b, p. 18; Ortiz, 2022).

3. Data-informed decision making

Ongoing evaluation instills a culture of continuous reflection and assessment by linking evaluation to strategy. Indicators that are co-created through authentic engagement of beneficiaries and stakeholders, and robust qualitative and quantitative data gathered through a variety of tools, provides an authentic and multi-perspective context for analyzing operational and organizational effectiveness (Ortiz, 2022).

4. Partnerships, collaboration and cogeneration

Regardless of where the organization is positioned along the continuum of engagement between organizations, it progresses through trust as it moves from coordination, to cooperation, to collaboration. Building trust is learnable. It is a values-driven, intentional, ongoing practice that works from the inside out (Weaver, 2022). Establish a shared understanding of the scope of work to be undertaken and how it is to be actioned, and ensure it is continually revisited as the relationship progresses. Interaction has the potential to scale to partnership learning, creating a cogenerating knowledge network between those engaged (Ortiz, 2022).

5. Shared governance

Leadership identifies what functions need to be performed, "the decisions that must be made and who can best inform the work", and then structures are built to achieve it. This approach allows for various forms of shared governance to be explored and adapted as circumstances change.

Leadership may be considered within a continuum of collaborative, changemaking and disruptive-emergent leadership. Weaver, Fulton, & Hardin (2020) speak to the need for effective forms of leadership to support deep, durable transformative change in navigating through the uncertainty of the current context of the global pandemic, social inequities and economic challenges. A leadership culture that invites and inspires people to 'step into their own power' contributing in areas where they are strong while increasing their capacity in others, advances the entire organization, galvanizing others to participate in meaningful ways (Fenech, Jaimes, Rutsch, Schoen & Muehlenbein, 2022, p. 56). "Authentic leadership is an inside out process; only by practicing and embodying it is it possible to transfer its value and impact to your participants, your strategy, and your other stakeholders." (Fenech et al., p.22).

6. Attraction and retention strategies

- Prioritize engaging younger people;
- Onboard new members providing orientation care, support and resources to understand the commitment and the work and fully participate;
- Workplace location(s): central headquarters, hybrid; and/or remote options;
- Opportunities for professional development/organizational learning: financial literacy; strategic planning; evaluation and metrics; and,
- Governing frameworks that support innovative structures and new approaches to the way governance is fulfilled (Lalande, 2018; ONN, 2019).

Appendix IV
Nonprofit Governance as a Framework

1. Organization's Purpose
Develop the organization's purpose (what it does, for whom and why; typically expressed in a mission statement), keeping it relevant to the communities served and at the centre of all governance decisions.

2. Strategy
Develop strategic directions that clearly advance the organization's purpose and address the changing environment. Anticipate and respond to emerging strategic opportunities and issues.

3. Organizational Culture
Provide leadership in setting and communicating shared values, ethical standards and desired organizational behaviors. Confirm that they are reflected in all the ways the organization works.

4. Resources
Ensure the strategies are developed and implemented to attract, retain and grow the right resources (e.g. financial, people, infrastructure and social capital) for achieving the organization's purpose. Determine that the resources are mobilized effectively.

5. Governance Design
Design the organization's governance (structures, processes and people), continuously measuring its performance and adapting the design to changing circumstances.

6. Engagement
Ensure the strategies and processes are in place to meaningfully engage the right internal and external stakeholders, including community partners, in advancing the organization's purpose.

7. Assets
Safeguard the organization's assets (e.g. people, financial, property, data and reputation) as tools to advance the organization's purpose.

8. Compliance
Ensure the organization is adhering to all relevant laws, regulations and other compliance commitments, including meeting its accountability requirements (ONN, 2021a, p. 5).

Appendix V
Models of Governance and Organizational Structures

Organizational Design

Within the categories of incorporated or unincorporated organizations, there are a myriad of ways a group may choose to coalesce.

Vakil (2014) describes organizational design as "the grouping or organizational functions" within a nonprofit that comprises the backbone of its structure (pp. 323-324). Common designs include functional grouping, primary functions served, and programs; however the programs and functions in smaller organizations are often organized around people. Robbins and Langton (2003) outline three traditional organizational designs, followed by four newer options.

THREE TRADITIONAL DESIGNS

The Simple Structure features low departmentalization and formalization, wide control, centralized authority and a 'flat' structure, and is most suited to small organizations. This structure is common among small organizations and businesses with few staff (pp. 467-468).

The Bureaucracy encourages specialization, formalization, functional departments, centralized authority, narrow control and chain-of-command decision-making; it is efficient and effective for ensuring application of policies, practices and accountability. Organizations and businesses operating within this structure tend to involve larger staff teams grouped into specialized departments, and include banks, department stores and government offices (pp. 468-469).

The Matrix Structure features two forms of departmentalization – grouping similar specialties to pool and share resources, and departmentalizing products to support on-time completion and budget targets. The Matrix Structure can foster coordination, improve communication, support flexibility and keep organizational goals centred in the work; however confusion, power struggles and stress placed on individuals working in this design can be problematic. Examples of organizations employing this structure include hospitals, government agencies and universities (pp. 469-471).

FOUR NEWER ORGANIZATIONAL DESIGNS

The Team Structure, used by organizations to "[break] down departmental barriers and [decentralize] decision making to the level of the work team", requiring employees to be both "generalists as well as specialists" as they coordinate and complete work activities (p. 471). Many small nonprofits and businesses make use of this structure.

The Modular Organization, whereby a small organization outsources services from other providers, assembling talented time-bound teams from network contacts that respond directly and nimbly to client needs and environmental pressures with creative offerings, flexibility and cost-effectiveness. The organization can then focus its technical and managerial strength on critical activities, though some control over organizational activities is lost through the inclusion of outside providers. Examples noted of modular organizations include companies such as Nike, Reebok and Dell (pp. 471-473).

The Virtual Organization joins different firms together to pursue specific opportunities or common goals, encouraging interdependence without necessarily needing a central office, an organizational chart, or a hierarchy. These alliances may take many forms "from precompetitive consortia to coproduction, cross-equity agreements, and equity joint ventures with separate legal entities" (Robbins and Langton, 2003, p. 473) and enable cost- and skill-sharing, though can blur boundaries of control and require highly-developed managerial skills. Examples of virtual organizations cited by the authors include instances of alliances formed between companies, such as Air Canada and United Airlines, as well as ING Direct and Canadian Tire (pp. 473-474).

The Boundaryless Organization's goals include eliminating vertical and horizontal boundaries within the organization, flattening the hierarchy by instituting talented teams from several organizations and participatory decision-making, and removing barriers between the company and its customers and suppliers by engaging mechanisms like Globalization, strategic alliances and linkages This can nurture cooperation and responsiveness to the environment, but can also pose time-efficiency and management difficulties, given the number of stakeholders involved. This term originated with former General Electric (GE) chairman Jack Welch to describe his vision for the company (p. 475).

Various Ways of Shaping Governance and Operations

Within the categories of incorporated and unincorporated organizations, there are multiple ways a group may shape its governance and operations including member benefit organizations, public benefit organizations, social enterprises, as well as sharing governance within and across organizations. Following are a few examples.

MEMBERSHIP BENEFIT ORGANIZATIONS

Membership benefit organizations (MBO) serve their members, who often pay membership fees and manage the organization in volunteer roles. MBOs can be further classified as organizing either around "self-help" or "expressive" purposes and interests; or work and professional activities, such as trade organizations serving members sharing an occupation, as well as credit unions and co-ops (Murray & Seel, 2014, pp. 9-11). The ***Ontario Nonprofit Network*** (ONN) is an example of a member benefit organization.

PUBLIC BENEFIT ORGANIZATIONS

Public benefit organizations (PBO) include charities who provide services "for persons other than those who run them or volunteer for them" (Murray & Seel, 2014, p. 11). PBOs are distinguished between those who provide services, and those who provide advocacy, the latter of which need to monitor scope and volume of such activities to preserve their eligibility to be registered as charities (Murray & Seel, 2014, pp. 11-12). Public Health Associations are a common example of a public benefit organization.

SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

Social enterprises are businesses, but not a legal business form. Rather they are an approach to business that is value-based and principles-focused that promise "blended return on investment; financial, social, environmental and cultural"; they can be owned by a nonprofit organization (Elson and Hall, 2010, as cited in Murray & Seel, 2014, p. 13) or be independent businesses, and can be nonprofit or for-profit. Their activities may include providing consultancy services, organizing professional development and training activities, selling donated goods or providing labour (Vakil, 2014, p. 322). Social and economic pressures, funding pinches, and competition within and outside of the nonprofit sector encourage nonprofits to engage in social entrepreneurial activities, and this "may generate other forms of organizations" (Vakil, 2014, p. 321) and a source of revenue to sustain the nonprofit. An example of a nonprofit operating a social enterprise is ***Grocer 4 Good*** (G4G) located in Sault Ste. Marie. It is a registered nonprofit charity that employs neurodiverse people who face barriers to employment. It has since expanded its operations with Cafe 4 Good (C4G) providing employment to youth with a focus on positive skill building, community connection and establishing healthy habits.

WORKER SELF-DIRECTED NONPROFIT

The worker self-directed model offers decentralized governance where each program operates through a semi-autonomous circle of staff and volunteers, that is nested within larger circles of accountability. This decision-making process enables each staff member to propose projects and

take significant leadership roles, optimizing individual autonomy and collective responsibility. The ***Sustainable Economies Law Center*** (SELC) in Oakland, California, was launched as a worker self-directed nonprofit in 2009 (Sharp Eizinger and Martin, 2023).

SOCIOCRATIC STRUCTURE

The Sociocratic structure is a governance system, not a specific legal structure in itself, and can be implemented within various legal structures like cooperatives, nonprofits, or even traditional companies. The Sociocratic structure uses interconnected committees of workers, known as nested circles. Each circle has its own decision-making responsibilities, aims and goals to fulfil, and each is connected to another by double linking: two people from one circle are also part of another. This structure aims to balance the effectiveness of hierarchy with the inclusion of people from across the organization (Wilder, 2022).

FISCAL SPONSORSHIP

Fiscal sponsorships are relationships that lighten an organization's administrative load, whereby "programs, initiatives, and whole organizations can operate under the tax status of another organization, utilizing as much of [its] support as the two parties agree to". This can include serving as critical intermediaries for emerging or under-resourced organizations (Sharp Eizinger and Martin, 2023).

AN ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT MODEL: JUMBLIES THEATRE

A-CEA-specific organizational development model is ***Jumblies Theatre***'s Offshoots. These independent CEA initiatives–including Arts4All, MABELLEarts, and Community Arts Guild–are self-sufficient organizations sparked by Jumblies' residencies and productions (Jumblies Studio, 2014, pp. 7-8) that took place in Toronto neighbourhoods and communities between 2001 and 2012 (Jumblies Theatre, n.d.a.). During the legacy and sustainability phase of each residency, a new organization was established that continued to work locally after Jumblies Theatre moved on from the Davenport West neighbourhood in 2001 (***Arts4All***), Etobicoke in 2005 (***MABELLEarts***), and Scarborough in 2008 (***Community Arts Guild***). Each is an independent locally-based organization with their own distinctive practices, leaders, initiatives and projects; each is led by a former Jumblies artist; and inter-organizational relationships, support and collaboration continue to this day (Jumblies Theatre, n.d. a,b,c.).

SHARED GOVERNANCE WITHIN ORGANIZATIONS: LEADERSHIP STYLES

Leadership and co-executive directorships support the inclusion of diverse talent in decision-making processes, sustain the roles and efforts of leaders, support mental health and wellbeing in the workplace, and place organizational importance on collaboration, skill-sharing and power-sharing (Sharp Eizinger and Martin, 2023). "Leadership often requires the ability to shift between being a leader, an enabler, a supporter, and even a follower. It means knowing when to lead and when to facilitate, when to speak and when to let others speak, when to drive change and when to co-lead with others. These different roles require different capacities, mindsets and skills. For this reason, it is crucial to build the capacity of leaders to listen and to be fully attentive to their present context so that they can determine what kind of leadership role or approach is most appropriate. In order to do so, leaders must be able to listen deeply, recognize what is happening around them, and exercise empathy." (Fenech et al., 2022, p. 57).

SHARED GOVERNANCE ACROSS ORGANIZATIONS: PARTNERSHIPS, COLLABORATIONS AND ALLIANCES

The current environment "provides an incentive to organizations to merge, ally with others, or face closure," and nonprofits spark the formation of alliances in the form of networks, umbrella organizations, coalitions, strategic alliances, joint endeavours and mergers to succeed and sustain. In such instances, "nonprofits retain autonomy but share the benefits of collective action" (Brock, 2014, pp. 230-233). Alongside resource sharing and development, including of audiences (Kaiser & Egan, 2013, pp. 162-163), coalitions can provide "critical mass to influence policy trends and decision-making processes… without jeopardizing individual relations of nonprofits with state actors." (Acosta, 2012, as cited in Brock, 2014, p. 233). At times, various kinds of partnerships are funder-imposed, but this does not automatically mean they will be successful or sustainable: such alliances "may be useful for leveraging funders' dollars, [but] be costly in execution or inefficient in operation. Rarely do funders cover the real costs of building partnerships or merging organizations." (Brock, 2014, p. 232).

Of considerable concern when partnering or collaborating with other organizations is clarifying the processes and scope of engagement including: how the relationship is governed; if governance is shared, and if so, by whom; what are the underlying decision-making processes; and, what are the boundaries of responsibility and accountability.

Collective Impact Model

The collective impact (CI) model is an example of a network alliance in which organizations collaborate in stimulating the purpose, structure and scope of organizational interaction. It is an evolving practice first popularized by John Kania and Mark Kramer's (2011) article in the ***Stanford Social Innovation Review.*** The model has gained recognition around the world as a proven approach for addressing complex issues through generating innovative solutions and engaging various sector

and community leaders. Kania, et al. (2022) revised the CI definition to "Collective impact is a network of community members, organizations, and institutions who advance equity by learning together, aligning, and integrating their actions to achieve population and systems-level change" (p. 38). Collective Impact initiatives have also been conceptualized as co-created or shared innovation spaces of learning and experimentation where allies can work and experiment together on taking action around common concerns in a shared space (Cheuy, 2020, p. 3).

There are five conditions that distinguish the CI initiatives from other types of collaborative projects. They are the development of: i) a common agenda; ii) shared measurement tools; iii) mutually reinforcing activities; iv) continuous communication; and, v) a backbone team (or organization) dedicated to aligning and coordinating the work of the group. Typically a CI is a collaboration of organizations across sectors; the model, however, may be adopted by a group of organizations wanting to address a particular issue. An example of a sector-focused collective impact model is the Women of Ontario Social Enterprise Network (WOSEN), operating from 2019-23 and targeting the women's entrepreneurial ecosystem. While not engaging all community sectors to affect change, it was composed of five diverse organizations from across the province with a common mandate of social innovation: specifically, supporting and strengthening organizations and businesses that put people and the planet first. The initiative engaged founders and ecosystem supporters (e.g., business developers, coaches, funders/investors) in emergent collaborative and co-creative practices that provided space for knowledge sharing and cogenerating innovative pathways forward to support women-owned and women-led ventures (Ortiz, 2023).

Appendix VI
Mental Health Supports

In the course of their work, arts workers face a variety of challenges and conditions that can adversely impact their mental health. Growing concerns have prompted studies internationally that reveal the extent of these pressures and the need for widespread support of arts workers' mental health and wellbeing (Reid, 2024).

A "range of contributing factors" (Fleming, n.d., as cited in Sherwood, 2022) leading to "mental ill-health in the arts" (Reid, 2024) have been identified to date, including work precarity and job insecurity, financial instability, "unrealistic job demands, inadequate support and opportunities, housing stress, poor organizational justice, and instances of bullying, violence and poor conflict management" (Reid, 2024); burnout, feelings of failure to meet expectations and potential, self-confidence issues, social isolation, and competition-driven stress (Beyai & Harper, n.d.); performance anxiety, the rigorous demands of touring, maintaining public personas, long work hours, tight deadlines (Robertson-Hart, 2025); low pay and poor working conditions (Sherwood, 2022); the personal vulnerability inherent to artmaking, persistent stigma around mental health and its effects (real or perceived) on securing work opportunities, and limited care options offering support of emergent schedules as well as the intense nature of the work (Attuned Psychology, n.d.), given indications that artists are "roughly twice as likely to experience anxiety, depression, and substance misuse compared to other sectors" (Eynde et al., 2016 and Support Act, 2022, as cited in Attuned Psychology, n.d.). Additionally, living and working through the COVID-19 pandemic has further aggravated many of these factors (Beyai & Harper, n.d.; Attuned Psychology, n.d.).

Arts workers within the community-engaged arts (CEA) field face further challenges yet. While CEA can, in itself, provide avenues of expression, connection and relief to community members, those leading and facilitating the engagement may also be in need of support. CEA works in part to surface and express tensions and injustices among participants and communities. The CEA artist is a community facilitator whose roles include supporting and enhancing projects and their outcomes (Jumblies Studio, 2014, p. 17), contributing ideas and frameworks "that [allow] others' work to shine" (Pacific, 2001, p. 181), keeping the focus on local contextual and community relevancy and modelling respect, collaboration, inclusion, appreciation of difference, and generosity of spirit (Hutcheson, 2016, pp. 5, 9-10).

As community-engaged processes deepen, an increased need for mental health and wellbeing supports can present. The burdens of facilitating this work, listening carefully to participants, and making necessary connections to appropriate services, fall to the arts workers who must additionally navigate vicarious trauma while experiencing for themselves the hardships of working in the arts, further amplifying the adverse impacts of this important work upon their mental health. Indeed, workers in the field are given great responsibility, and "asked to be social workers, psychiatrists, politicians, caretakers, humanitarians as well as great artists! No amount of training could accomplish that unless they have the temperament, willingness and full understanding of the task" (Kai Chan, n.d., as cited in Lee, 1998, p. 10). Over time, artists and arts workers "have catalyzed their mediums for social justice, and played critical roles as activists and changemakers in political, social and cultural movements" (Spanos, 2021, and Lara-Guerrero and Rojon, 2022, as cited in Cid-Vega & Brown, 2023); and "[s]tudies have found that those engaged in activism and human rights work may be at high-risk of concerns like PTSD, depression, burnout, and moral injury" (Pfeffer et al., 2022, and Joscelyne et al., 2015, as cited in Cid-Vega & Brown, 2023).