

ONLINE DISCUSSION FORUM

Summary of Themes and Ideas

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INTRODUCTION

We have been using BC-based www.placespeak.com/CRDArtsFuture as our online platform for the duration of this public consultation process. Anyone can look at all of the information on that site, including reports, events and the discussion forum without registering on the site. To post comments, users have to register on Placespeak. We do not have access to any private information through this registration process.

The site has received over 2,000 views; with close to 200 visitors recorded for the Discussion topics.

Discussion Forum

We created an initial set of discussion topics that were based on the CRD Arts Development Service's Strategic Arts Plan. That plan provides an overarching framework that we have been using in this public consultation process to talk about how to best *build our #CRDArtsFuture together*. This summary covers comments from the time the site launched in mid-July to October 4, 2016.

Unique participants

There were 11 individuals plus the moderator who have contributed via the online discussion forum. This, in essence, constitutes a robust online focus group. As such it has succeeded to create an alternative input and participation mechanism.

Topics

The topics by number of comments:

21 comments by 9 individuals: What are your priorities for arts in CRD? - If you could achieve one big thing for the arts, artists, or arts organizations in the CRD in the next two or three years, what would it be?

12 comments/6 individuals: Increasing awareness of the role of arts in everyday life.

10 comments/6 individuals: Specific, identified gaps or opportunities for arts facilities.

9 comments/5 individuals: Increasing access - What are some barriers to participation?

7 comments/5 individuals: What does sustainable growth of arts/organizations mean to you?

2 comments/2 individuals: CRD Arts Service effectiveness and accountability.

2 comments/2 individuals: Tourism and arts organizations - How do you view tourism as an opportunity to strengthen the arts in the CRD and increase economic activity?

RESULTS

Results are summarized here. These comments reflect the commenters' views, not the consultants'. Editorial comments related to either the online survey of the arts community or the series of community workshops in September are in boxes.

Value Proposition for the Arts and Public Funding of Arts

- There is a need to make the case for public funding for the arts more clearly. There is also a desire to better understand how current funding works that is provided by various levels of government as well as the impact that the arts and public funding has socially, economically, culturally.
 - “There is an abundance of social science that powerfully demonstrates that the arts are a vital part of any healthy, happy and prosperous community. This is our value proposition.”
 - “Sport is promoted as part of a healthy life. We need to bring that kind of focus to arts: It makes us whole.”

We also saw this need to clarify and articulate the case for the arts and public funding of the arts in the results of the online survey of the arts community.

Access equals participation not merely attendance

- Art should not be merely for a few to produce and the masses to consume, but creative and artistic expression should be encouraged for all citizens.
 - “... embrace the ideals of the Nanaimo Arts Council's annual Festival of Banners. People (seniors, families, children, professional artists and emerging) participate by painting a banner -- the paint and canvas are supplied and so is the space at the Woodgrove Mall. At the end of year, the banners are sold. Some are on permanent display in the Mall.”
- Make art ubiquitous and obvious in daily life of the region and its residents.

We discussed this concept during the series of community workshops; participants were interested in this aspect of access regardless of whether the CRD Arts Service would be best positioned to take action on this aspect.

Access is also about Marketing

- Develop a common system to promote arts events in more places.
- Develop a best practices guide for marketing local arts events in a multi-channel environment.
- Develop partnerships for in-hotel TV screen listings targeting tourist/visitors.

83% of respondents in survey of arts community said “yes, the CRD Arts Service should be a promoter of the arts.”

Support the Arts Eco-system from Volunteer Groups to Professional Artists

- There is a continuum of artists from those creating arts for their own recreational or health purposes, to emerging or up-and-coming artists developing their practice to professional artists who seek to make their primary living being professional artists and creators. A healthy arts eco-system includes all activities across artistic disciplines.
- Consider where government resources are best used to effect strengthening the arts-ecosystem as a driver for quality of life, vibrancy of the community, as an employer and as an economic driver.
- Ensure the CRD connects to existing volunteer groups across the region who are already helping the arts and artists (sic local arts councils). Help them be more successful and sustainable and help raise awareness of their work to local residents and tourists.
- Look at stepping stones from amateur to professional artists and consider funding programs to assist that and help retain emerging talent locally.
- Victoria has many artists and creatives, yet, there is serious concern about not being paid sufficiently to work as an artist or musician to make a living.
- Create a better system to access professional artists for professional work; educate organizations on how to hire and pay artists.
- Industry dynamics have shifted so that live performance is more important for musicians than sales of recorded music. That makes connections to live venues much more important. At the same time musicians can try to use digital technologies to find their own audiences.
- Need to pay much more attention to integrating artists with disabilities into the mainstream arts scene and film. Consider developing specific training programs to create work opportunities for people with disabilities.
- Why are we not making the unique First Nations arts central to the region's arts scene? This could offer a distinctive aspect for tourism not found elsewhere.

This discussion also took place during the community workshops as many participants came from volunteer organizations as well as professional arts organizations.

Facilities

- Desire for funding a new inter-generational creative arts studio space in Esquimalt, modeled on Arts Centre at Cedar Hill Recreation Centre
- Desire for a community-oriented performance space on the West Shore that is accessible, affordable, and multi-purpose in terms of the artistic disciplines.
- Be more creative in finding non-traditional spaces to display art
- Ensure arts spaces are on public transit routes and in walkable areas.

The online survey of arts community showed that most (including those who identified primarily as audience members) believe there are significant gaps in arts facilities, and often related to affordability of spaces. Respondents also want facilities to do many different things for the community.

- Consider available unused spaces in the region owned by local governments to repurpose them as arts spaces of various sorts; in part to avoid building more underutilized infrastructure.

Sustainable Growth for Arts and Arts Organizations

- Organizations need a very broad mix of funding sources and participants so that community members develop a personal stake in the activities.
- Sustainability should not only be considered in terms of maintaining a status quo but also encouraging a wide range of innovative practices. Some shifting of current funding may be needed to achieve that.
- Balance municipal programs through Parks and Recreation and volunteer driven organizations; also consider how artists can be supported to achieve a professional level and thus paid work as artists in Canada. As long as non-Canadians are hired for local professional positions in music for instance there is a clear need to think about career development for Canadian artists.
- Growth in the arts means education and development of new ideas, sustainability means ensuring that the value is recognized through consistent funding.
- Consider the concept of adaptability rather than sustaining a status quo.
- Consider collaboration between arts projects rather than encouraging more organizations requiring not-for-profit boards to operate and compete for volunteers.
- Evolve music and festivals using local talent to be a major tourism driver and provide employment for artists locally.

The online survey of the arts community showed “helping arts organizations grow and develop sustainably” as the number one priority.