

Strategic Plan  
2011–16

# Strengthening Connections

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## Summary

The Canada Council for the Arts is launching a new strategic plan, *Strengthening Connections*, to further invigorate and deepen the artistic and cultural experience of Canadians. It balances a concern for stability and continuity with an ongoing commitment to relevance and renewal.

The Council sees the next phase of its work as one that enriches, diversifies and intensifies the links between various parts of the ecosystem in which the arts function. By strengthening the connections between artists and their publics, the Canada Council and other funders, the public and private sectors, different regions, cultural communities of Canada, and Canada and the rest of the world, the Council will help to ensure that the arts continue to play a dynamic and transformative role in our society.

*Strengthening Connections* continues the vision and strategic directions of the Council's 2008-11 plan, *Moving Forward*, while reflecting changes in the larger environment in which it operates. It responds to the urgency for more collaboration and sharing of resources in a period of constrained growth, embraces the opportunities that new technologies offer for better connectivity, and broadens the public conversation on the place of art and culture in our lives. *Strengthening Connections* emphasizes responsiveness and adaptability and envisions a stronger relationship between the Council, the arts community and the Canadian public.

## Background

Culture is the connective tissue that binds humanity together.

It is the songs we grow up with, the stories we share, the design of everyday objects, and the languages we speak. It is the code we use to order the sensory chaos of the outside world, to recognize who we are, and to give meaning to our lives. It is what remains of human endeavour when all else disappears.

For thousands of years some people have played a special role in advancing the cultural dimension of life – writing poems, designing buildings, singing, dancing, sculpting, painting and engaging in a range of other creative and interpretive pursuits. We identify these people as artists.

Artists commit time, effort and thought to creative expression, often extending the definition of art itself and inviting greater engagement with communal life. The role of artists is to hold up a mirror to society, offer diverse perspectives on the human experience, give us pause to question our world and our actions, to provoke, inspire and connect us. As a testament to the value and impact of the artist, a complex network of arts-related activities, organizations and industries has developed over time, in Canada as elsewhere in the world.

The Canada Council for the Arts was established in 1957 to encourage and support this creative sector in Canada. Over its 53 years of operation, the Council has developed a diverse and evolving

**Excerpt from the Canada Council's First Annual Report, 1958:**

To get good value the Canada Council will have to exercise every device of philanthropic leverage – matching grants, teaching the teachers, multiplying the results of successful experience, backing success – thus encouraging others – and singling out and emphasizing by every means the importance of creative talent.

One paramount objective in the interest of our national well-being must be to increase the recognition, the prestige and the power conferred on the scholar and the creative worker. Upon them largely depend the quality of our people and the image we have of our country.

range of programs and services that have played a vital role in forging the Canada of today. The Council's current budget of approximately \$195 million supports the work of thousands of professional artists and arts organizations in a sector estimated to employ over 600,000 cultural workers and 140,000 artists<sup>1</sup> and generate over \$45 billion in economic activity annually.<sup>2</sup> There is every indication this sector will continue to grow in both size and importance for many years to come.

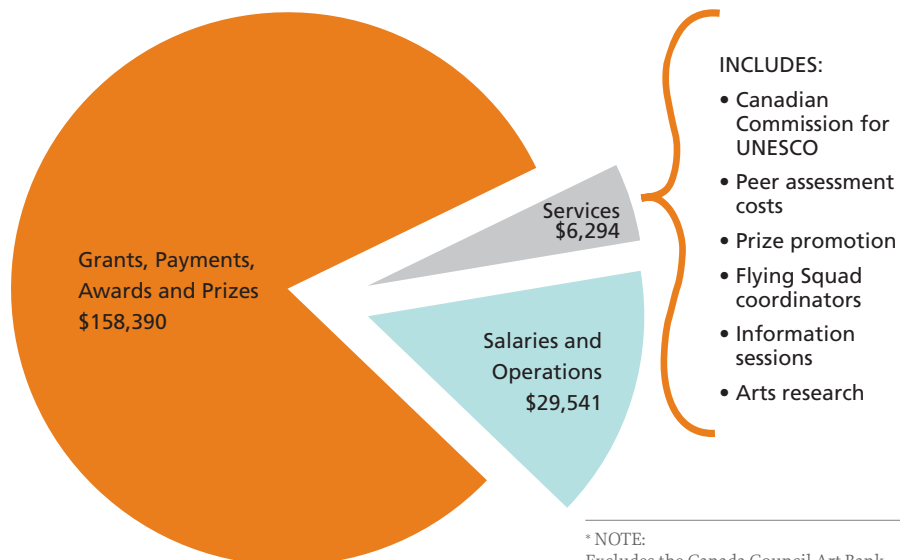
## Moving Forward

2008-11

In October 2007, the Canada Council released a strategic plan for the period 2008 to 2011 entitled *Moving Forward*. The plan was informed by the largest stakeholder consultation in the Council's history, and identified five directions to guide it for the next three to five years:

1. Reinforce the Council's commitment to **individual artists**, working alone or collaboratively, as the core of artistic practice in Canada.
2. Broaden the Council's commitment to **arts organizations** to strengthen their capacity to underpin artistic practices in all parts of the country.
3. Enhance the Council's leadership role in promoting **equity** as a critical priority in fulfilling Canada's artistic aspirations.
4. Make **partnerships** with other organizations a key element in the Council's approach to advancing its mandate.
5. Enhance the Council's **capacity to support the arts and implement change** by strengthening its structure, staffing and services.

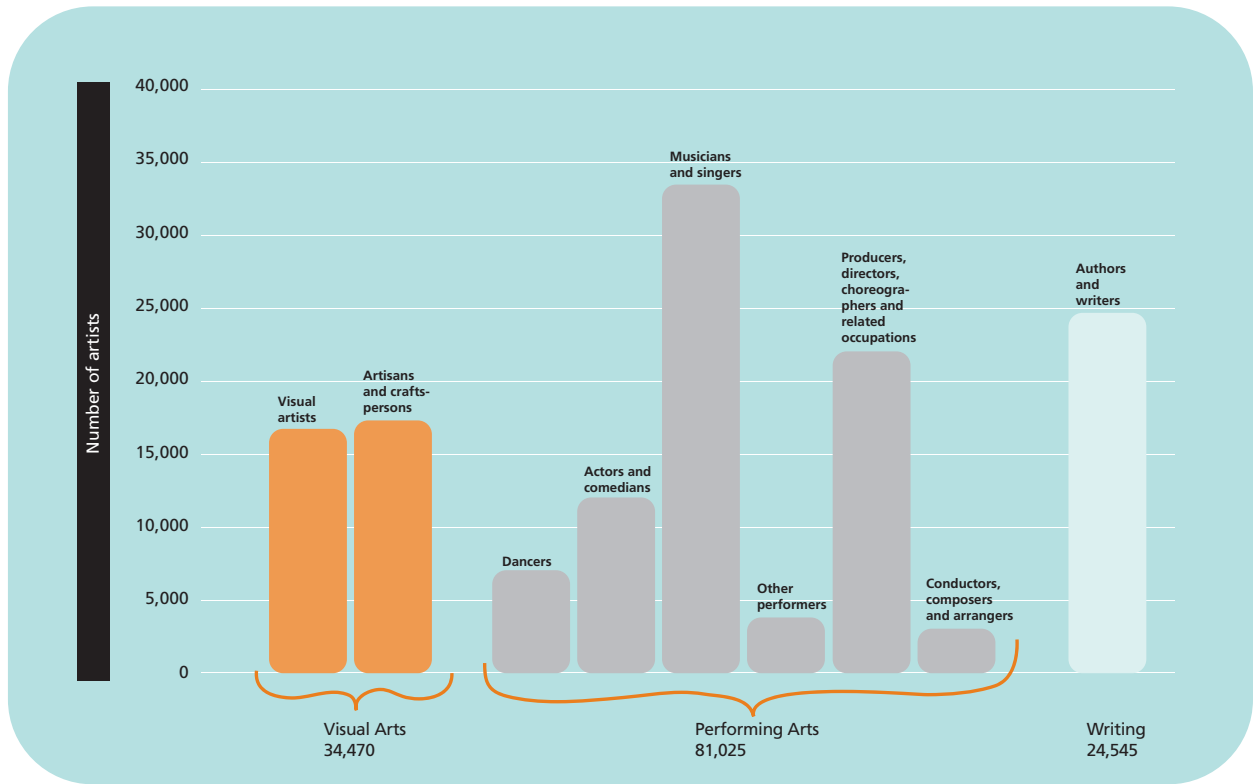
### Canada Council Total Expenditures, 2009-10\* (in thousands of dollars)



\* NOTE:  
Excludes the Canada Council Art Bank which operates as a cost recovery centre.

## Artists in Canada by Occupation Group, 2006 (Statistics Canada)

Total number of artists in Canada: 140,040\*



\* SOURCE:

Analysis by Hill Strategies Research based on a 2006 census custom data request. Occupation groups are based on Statistics Canada's National Occupational Classification for Statistics 2006 (NOC-S 2006) and do not necessarily reflect the definitions used at the Canada Council. There were 140,040 artists in Canada who spent more time at their art than at any other occupation in May 2006.

The Council followed up in February 2008 with an Action Plan outlining how these directions would be implemented and how the \$30 million increase in the Council's ongoing Parliamentary appropriation would be allocated. Since then the five directions have provided the framework for setting annual budgets, performance goals, and corporate reporting.

The Council believes that these directions provide a solid base for its work now and in the future. Many of the initiatives identified in the Action Plan have been successfully implemented while others are underway or are still in development. A progress report (2010) shows that the increased investment in artists and arts organizations has allowed for greater equity of access and more sustainability, more capac-

ity to innovate, and higher profile for prize winners. Further, new frameworks for research, partnership and equity are completed or well underway and progress has been achieved in strengthening the Council's ability to serve the arts community and implement change.

## What Has Changed

The biggest change for the Council since *Moving Forward* was written in 2007 has been the **global economic downturn** that exploded on the scene in 2008 and is still with us today. The arts sector, like other sectors, has felt the impact of reductions in virtually all sources of revenue, and many artists and arts organizations are turning to the

Council for additional help to stabilize their circumstances, putting greater pressure on the Council's resources.

The Council in turn is facing greater constraint in its capacity to keep up with demand than existed three years ago. The release of *Moving Forward* coincided with an increase of 20% in the Council's ongoing Parliamentary appropriation.

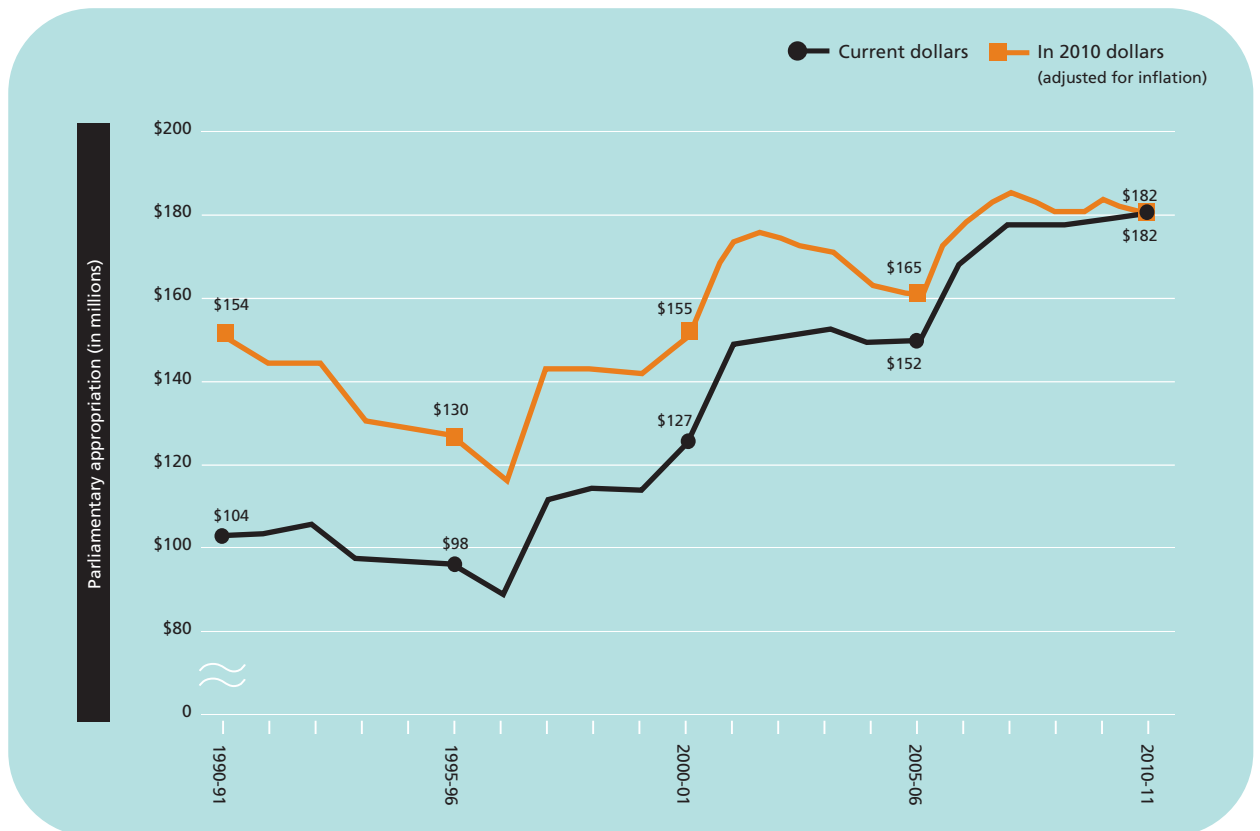
Since then, however, the **Council's budget has remained essentially flat**. Most public sector planning is taking place in an environment of fiscal restraint, and the Council's planning is no exception.

The Council's experience in implementing the current plan has demonstrated that a **three-year operating cycle is too short** to achieve the kind of significant

### Parliamentary Appropriation to Canada Council, 1990-91 to 2010-11

(in current dollars and 2010 dollars)

Parliamentary appropriation in 2010-11: \$181,637,816



change to which it aspires. For example, a large percentage of the Council's funding is dedicated to multi-year grants which require at least two granting cycles to make an impact. Three years have proven to be insufficient to fulfill the ambitious vision of *Moving Forward*.

The theme of **public engagement** in arts and culture is increasingly on the policy agendas of governments worldwide, including

concerns for cultural rights, arts education, expressive life, citizen participation, social cohesion, and cultural diversity. While the Council has had a long and deep commitment to connecting Canadians to the arts, public engagement has a greater currency today than it had in the past.

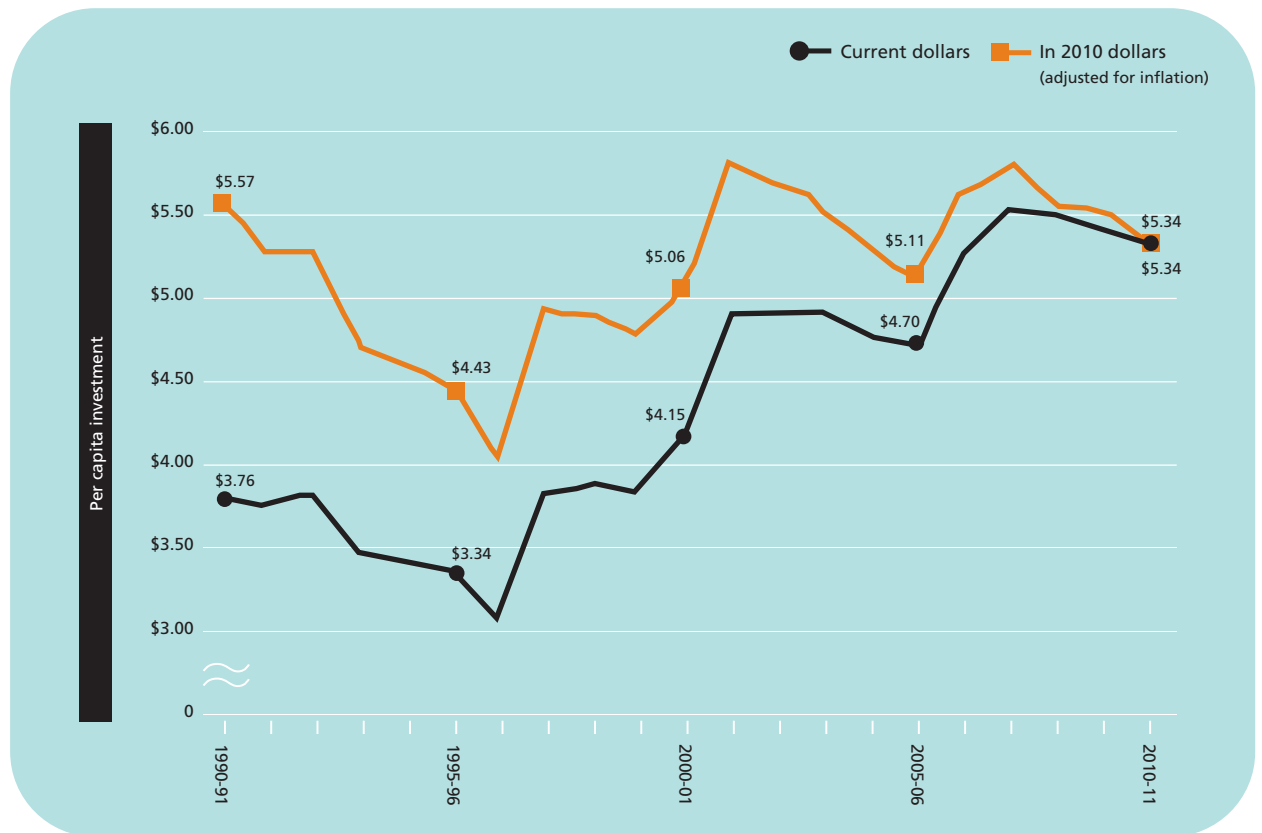
Similarly, **new technologies** have evolved in ways unforeseen in 2007, especially social media,

and all arts practices are being touched – and in some instances transformed – by the transition to a digital society. The arts play a critical role in the development of Canada's digital advantage, and as technologies change, so too does the role of artists in adapting and advancing technologies.

### Per Capita Parliamentary Appropriation to Canada Council, 1990-91 to 2010-11

(in current dollars and 2010 dollars)

Per capita Parliamentary appropriation in 2010-11: \$5.34\*



\* NOTE:

The per capita investment in 2010-11 was calculated using population estimates as of April 1, 2010. All other years were calculated using the annual Consumer Price Index (CPI) and population estimates as of July 1 of each year.

### Canada Council Values

- Respect for artistic merit
- Historic commitment to diversity and equity
- Quality of decision-making and responsiveness
- Expertise and commitment of Canada Council's staff
- Adaptability and flexibility while remaining an effective and efficient organization
- Transparency and accountability of Canada Council's operations

– *Moving Forward 2008-11*

## Stakeholder Consultation

In January 2010 the Council launched a six-month stakeholder consultation to gauge support for its current strategic plan and solicit advice on what its next plan should look like. It began with internal discussions with the Canada Council Board of Directors and staff before opening the discussion to the public at large with the release of a discussion paper and online survey in April 2010. More than 2,500 respondents completed the online survey – over twice the response rate of the Council's 2007 survey – including individual artists, arts organizations, arts professionals, enthusiasts, and other arts funders.

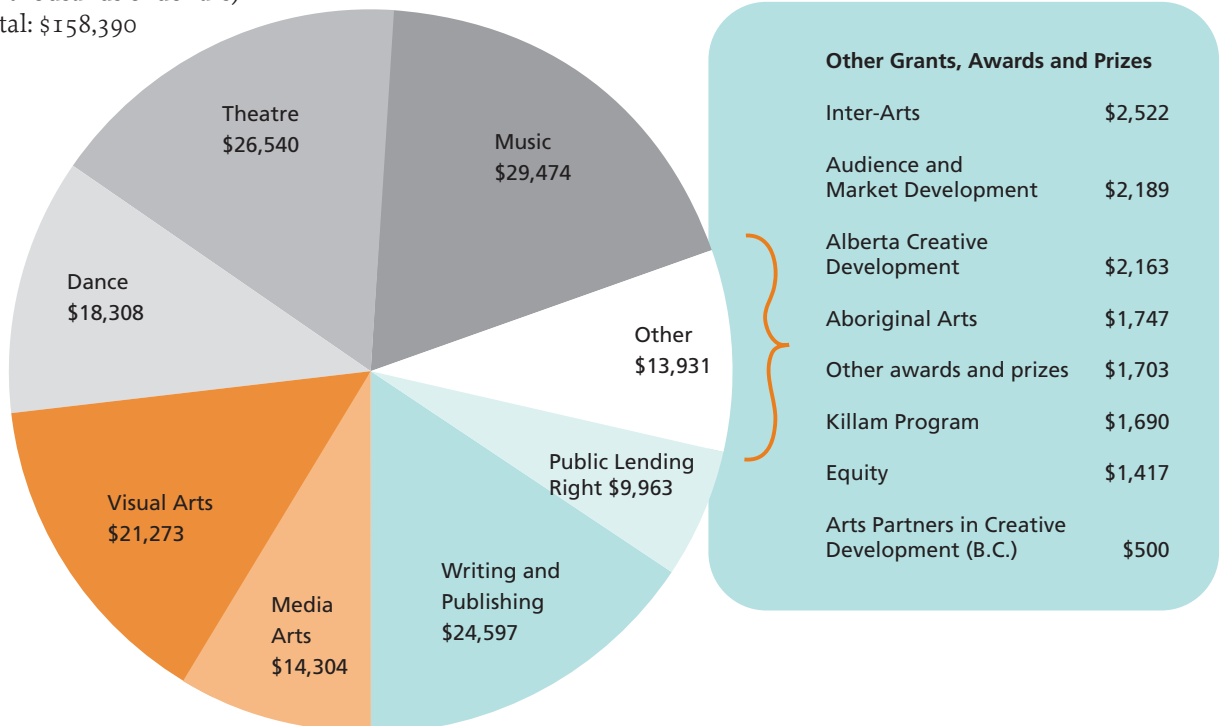
The external consultation results showed that a large majority of respondents believe that the Council is doing well and heading in the right direction. Over half believe the Council should continue to implement the existing elements of the current plan, but needs to adjust its course to reflect some of the emerging trends affecting the arts and society.

The trends stakeholders ranked as most important to address were public engagement, response to the economic downturn, the impact of new technologies, and social innovation. They also noted that the Council must maintain its core focus on support to artists and arts organizations, and provided critical commentary on the need to reduce bureaucracy and deal with inequities.

### Canada Council Grants, Payments, Awards and Prizes, 2009-10

(in thousands of dollars)

Total: \$158,390





## Strategic Plan 2011-16

To reflect what it has learned since releasing *Moving Forward* in 2007, the Council is taking a different approach in framing its new strategic plan, *Strengthening Connections* 2011-16.

**As a starting point, the Council will expand its planning timelines to better support the implementation of change going forward.** It will extend its operating cycle from three to five years – this plan will be a five-year plan rather than a three-year plan – with annual check-ins to measure progress and adjust as needed to stay current. In the process, it will strive for greater flexibility in providing support to new or previously under-represented interests without compromising the funding stability of established practices.

**The Council will continue with the five directions already in place – individual artists, arts organizations, equity, partnerships, and organizational capacity – along with the ongoing values articulated in the last plan.** These values and directions were validated through the 2007 and 2010 consultations with the arts community, the Council's partners, and other stakeholders. The directions adhere closely to the Council's mandate and allow it to have the maximum impact on artists and arts organizations while maintaining flexibility and administrative simplicity. The bottom-line vision remains the same: fulfilling the artistic aspirations of Canadians through its support of professional arts practice.

**The Council will facilitate greater synergy within the existing arts infrastructure to enhance sustainability and adaptability.** The concept of arts infrastructure set out in *Moving Forward* will continue to infuse the Council's work in program delivery, research and arts promotion. Through *Strengthening Connections* the Council will play a more active role in using its national mandate and extensive networks and contact base to bring people together to share experiences and ideas and better optimize the use of existing resources.

**The Council will increase its focus on the impact of the transition to a digital society on the arts.** Every part of the system in which the arts operate – from the creator to the consumer and everything in between – is being radically transformed by new technology, and the Council will enhance its role in ensuring the arts sector is not left behind in the digital age. In addition, the Council will upgrade its own use of technology in an effort to increase productivity and better serve its mandate.

**The Council will respond to the growing priority of public engagement in the arts.** It will take a more active role in advancing a public conversation on the expressive needs and aspirations of the citizenry at large, and by broadening its messaging to make clearer how the Council's work in the professional arts sector benefits all Canadians. While staying true to its ongoing focus on professional arts practice, it will highlight the contribution that art and artists make to everyday life, and how

its mandate relates to enhancing public engagement in Canada's cultural life. In the process it will find direct and indirect ways to help artists and arts organizations deepen and expand their engagement with audiences.

Through this plan the Council aims to be a catalyst for connections within the arts and beyond. Over the next five years it will concentrate its energies on consolidating the work it began in 2007 and expanding its focus to better reflect changes in the broader environment.

### Arts Infrastructure

For sustainable professional arts practices, a community needs excellent individual artists, excellent arts organizations that support, employ, present, exhibit, publish or provide other resources for artists, engaged audiences, a supportive public, an enlightened funding and public policy environment, and facilities for the practice of art. Together, these positive forces provide the basis for a sustainable arts sector, which in turn creates the foundation for the community's cultural life and shared values.

– *Moving Forward* 2008-11

**1,926**  
communities in  
Canada in which  
grants, prizes and  
Public Lending  
Right payments  
were awarded in  
2009-10.

*(of which 536 communities  
benefited from grants,  
awards and prizes)*

## Next Steps

The Council will translate its thinking into action over Fall 2010. It will prepare a Corporate Plan to guide its operations for the next five years based on the thematic priorities of *Strengthening Connections 2011-16*. It will clarify which of the 2008-11 Action Plan activities will continue, will be revised or have been completed.

The Corporate Plan will outline the integration of the new themes of developing synergies, impact of new technologies, and public engagement through its implementation of the Council's five ongoing directions—individual artists, arts organizations, equity, partnerships, and organizational capacity. It will translate these into a set of outcomes, actions and measures the Council will use to track and report on its progress.

The Corporate Plan will be developed through an internal collaborative process, where staff and Board will draw on information from the consultations, elaborate and integrate the new themes into the five directions, evaluate progress on current activities, and rely on the feedback of peer assessors, advisors and stakeholders within and beyond the arts. The Corporate Plan will include horizontal, disciplinary and divisional strategies for the coming five years.

In the meantime, the Council will continue with the systematic review of its existing programs already underway to define more clearly what outcomes its programs aim to achieve, what indicators

would signal success, and how to achieve greater flexibility and responsiveness. This exercise builds on what has been learned from the Special Examination,<sup>3</sup> Strategic Review,<sup>4</sup> and program architecture analysis completed during the term of its last plan. The review process will increase program effectiveness, improve understanding among artists and arts organizations of program objectives, and lay the foundation for future evaluation, carrying on the continuous improvement process the Council has pursued for many years.

The Council will use its annual budgeting process to allocate resources going forward, giving it the flexibility to respond to changing circumstances without abandoning its commitment to existing values and directions. Within the limitations of the resources available it will provide stability to a sector struggling through a period of economic uncertainty.

## Conclusion

The Canada Council has always been a leader in its approach to supporting the arts, and it continues to innovate while safeguarding the values at the heart of its work. It has nurtured the growth of diverse artistic practices, cultural communities, and organizational models integral to the arts ecosystem and has been recognized as a role model for how it has done so.

The Council is seeking to broaden its interaction with artists and arts organizations beyond the transactional to the relational,

and proposes to spend the next five years developing and implementing a more proactive approach to flexibility, adaptability and responsiveness. Artistic practices and standards continue to evolve, pressing forward into new areas of engagement, technological transformation, and diversification, and as the artistic milieu changes, so must the Council.

Through *Strengthening Connections*, the Canada Council will do even more to reinforce the transformative capacity of the arts in the lives of all Canadians.

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.hillstrategies.com/docs/Artists\\_Canada2006.pdf](http://www.hillstrategies.com/docs/Artists_Canada2006.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/13-010-x/2008004/t/tab10-eng.htm>

<sup>3</sup> In 2008, the Canada Council underwent a Special Examination by the Office of the Auditor General of Canada (OAG), a requirement for all Crown corporations every 10 years. The Auditor General concluded that the Council's systems and practices "had no significant deficiencies. In fact, the Canada Council's systems and practices have contributed to its success in several areas." The OAG also provided the Council with seven recommendations to strengthen its operations and policies.

<sup>4</sup> Strategic Reviews are government-mandated assessments of all direct program spending to ensure programs are managed effectively and efficiently. The Canada Council underwent a Strategic Review in 2009 which determined that its programs are aligned with the needs of Canadians.

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Robert Sirman

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## Mandate

The Canada Council for the Arts is a federal Crown corporation created by an Act of Parliament in 1957 “to foster and promote the study and enjoyment of, and the production of works in, the arts.”

The Council offers a broad range of grants and services to professional Canadian artists and arts organizations in music, theatre, writing and publishing, visual arts, dance, media arts and integrated arts. It further seeks to raise public awareness of the arts through its communications, research and arts promotion activities.

The Council also awards prizes and fellowships every year to approximately 200 artists and scholars. The Canadian Commission for UNESCO and the Public Lending Right Commission operate within the Council. The Canada Council Art Bank houses the country’s largest collection of contemporary Canadian art, which it rents to the public and private sectors.



Canada Council  
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts  
du Canada

About the photos

# *Hylozoic Ground*

*Hylozoic Ground* is an installation inspired by “hylozoism,” the ancient belief that all matter has life. This five-year project is a mesmerizing marriage of art and science that is comprised of “tens of thousands of lightweight digitally-fabricated components that are fitted with microprocessors and proximity sensors that react to human presence.”

The interactive nature of *Hylozoic Ground* parallels the role the arts and design play in our lives – it is a moving, breathing, responsive network that inspires and connects us. Canadians will have an opportunity to see this spectacular and moving work in a planned tour to galleries across the country in 2011.



Details of *Hylozoic Ground* at the Canada Pavilion of the 2010 Venice Biennale. Developed by PBAI (Philip Beesley Architect Inc.), in collaboration with the University of Waterloo School of Architecture; designed by Philip Beesley with collaborators Rob Gorbet (engineering director) and Rachel Armstrong (experimental chemistry advisor).

The Canada Pavilion of the Venice Biennale is supported by the Canada Council for the Arts and the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada.

PHOTO: © PBAI / Photo by Pierre Charron