



## REPORT FOR ACTION

### Support to the Inaugural Toronto Biennial of Art 2019

**Date:** May 9, 2019

**To:** Economic and Community Development Committee

**From:** General Manager, Economic Development and Culture

**Wards:** All

#### SUMMARY

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The Toronto Biennial of Art (TBA) will launch its first 72 day visual arts program on September 21, 2019. TBA has been planning this event for five years with the support of private donors and sponsors, and all three orders of government.

TBA does not currently meet any existing City cultural grant program criteria, particularly as a biennial event. It meets many of the City's core objectives in terms of cultural programming. Access to all of the TBA's sites and artworks are free. There is an extensive arts engagement program planned, and the first edition of the TBA will focus on Indigenous history in Toronto and contemporary Indigenous art.

City Council has previously provided funding to initiate planning and the development of the biennial. As the City of Toronto has been partners in the creation of the TBA, it is recommended that Council support this first edition with an allocation of \$200,000 to be fully funded from the Major Special Events Reserve Fund (MSERF).

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

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The General Manager, Economic Development and Culture recommends that:

1. City Council increase the Approved 2019 Economic Development and Culture Operating Budget by \$0.200 million gross, \$0 net, fully funded from the Major Special Events Reserve Fund (XR1218), to provide a one-time grant to the inaugural edition of the Toronto Biennial of Art in 2019.

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

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This report recommends increasing the Economic Development and Culture Division's 2019 Operating Budget by \$0.200 million gross, \$0 net, fully funded by the Major Special Events Reserve Fund (MSERF) (XR1218), to provide a one-time grant to the inaugural edition of the Toronto Biennial of Art in 2019. The current uncommitted balance of the MSERF is adequate to support this grant.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

## **DECISION HISTORY**

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City Council at its meeting of July 12, 13, 14 and 15, 2016, supported the initial planning and development of Toronto Biennial of Art in 2016 with a \$50,000 contribution funded from the Major Special Events Reserve Fund.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2016.ED13.7>

## **COMMENTS**

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The art biennial has a long history of promoting and celebrating international art on the global stage, with the first held in Venice in 1895. As the name implies, biennials are held every two years and have spread to major world cities, including Sao Paulo, Sydney, Havana, Istanbul, Berlin, and Shanghai among many others. Until now, there have been only two biennials held in Canada, both in Quebec: Manif d'Art in Quebec City and Biennale d'art contemporaine (BACA) in Montreal, which filed for bankruptcy in February 2018 and has no online presence indicating any programming for 2020.

Over 250 cities worldwide have recognized the biennial as an effective way to reach international audiences. These curated, large-scale international exhibitions feature the best in contemporary art that enrich the host city in terms of attracting large numbers of tourists, offering residents the opportunity to experience art and culture in their own backyard, and supporting artists by showcasing the best through thoughtful curation.

Toronto, while emerging over the past several decades as a major international city for sports, finance and the arts, has never held art biennials -- until now. The inaugural edition of the Toronto Biennial of Art (TBA) is set for an exciting 72 day run from September 21 to December 1, 2019. Spearheaded by the Toronto Biennial of Art, a non-profit established in 2014, planning for this major event has been five years in the making. The TBA has developed a number of key partnerships including the City of Mississauga, Harbourfront Centre, Toronto Sculpture Garden, and Waterfront Toronto.

## **Governance and Operations**

The TBA is overseen by a non-profit board of directors of nine members with broad professional and community representation.

TBA has a staff of 13 producing the biennial. The lead curator for the exhibition is an internationally-renowned Indigenous curator who has committed to TBA for two editions: 2019 and 2021.

## **Funding and Support**

The total planned budget for the 2019 biennial is \$2.5 million. The project has support from all three orders of government, and the private and philanthropic sectors have been heavily engaged in backing the exhibition. For example, the Lassonde Family Foundation has made a \$1M commitment over three years in support of the biennial.

## **An Innovative Curatorial Vision**

While most biennials focus mainly on the international art market, the Toronto Biennial of Art will take a different approach by emphasizing local public access and community engagement, while simultaneously generating international respect. The first edition will feature Canadian artists and engagement with the local visual arts audience. There is an extensive arts engagement program planned, and for the first edition of the TBA, a major focus will be on Indigenous history in Toronto and contemporary Indigenous art.

To ensure accessibility for everyone, all exhibitions and installation sites will be free, funded by philanthropists and corporate sponsors who embrace the TBA's commitment to the value of democratic access to contemporary visual arts.

The 2019 biennial takes place across Toronto's waterfront, an area framed by the original boundaries of the so-called Toronto Purchase (1805), which ran from Ashbridges Bay to Etobicoke Creek -- a particularly meaningful location for First Peoples, who lived on these shores for over 15,000 years. The biennial will present international and Canadian contemporary art and public programs across 25 kilometres of Toronto's waterfront, spanning public, private, green and historic spaces. Confirmed venues include: Small Arms Inspection Building in the west moving through public spaces and parks to Ontario Place, Harbourfront Centre, The Power Plant, Union Station, Toronto Sculpture Garden, Lower Don River Valley Park and underused sites in the Port Lands, specifically 259 Lakeshore Blvd. E, a building that previously housed a car dealership and repair shop now operated by Waterfront Toronto.

## **Benefits to the City of Toronto**

The Toronto Biennial of Art benefits the City of Toronto by:

- Presenting the highest quality of public art: TBA builds on the approach taken by the City's Nuit Blanche Toronto for presenting challenging, engaging contemporary public art free of charge;
- Enhancing Toronto as a tourism destination: TBA will welcome and attract visitors. It has been named by a major tourism media outlet as one of the key reasons to visit Toronto in 2019;
- Building on previous support: In 2016, the City of Toronto supported the planning of the event through a grant of \$50,000;
- Spreading art to the suburbs: TBA's programming across municipal lines from Mississauga to Toronto provides the City the opportunity to collaborate regionally to support artists and visual arts exhibitions outside the downtown core;
- Providing a local and international stage for Indigenous artists: With an internationally-renowned Indigenous curator and an emphasis on highlighting Indigenous art and artists, the TBA puts Indigenous art at the very heart of the festival; and
- Anticipating the "Year of Public Art" in 2021: The second edition of the TBA will take place in 2021, coinciding with the Year of Public Art at which time the City can leverage its partnership with the TBA to extend the reach of public art and access to contemporary visual art installations.

## **Request for City of Toronto Support**

When the Toronto Biennial of Art (TBA) approached the City of Toronto for financial support for the festival, in the absence of a dedicated funding stream for recurring festivals, there was no formal City cultural grant program to which TBA would be eligible to apply. TBA has requested support from the Toronto Arts Council (TAC), but the amount they can expect from TAC is limited. TBA has requested funding of \$200,000 for its inaugural edition, representing approximately 8% of its 2019 budget.

Since the TBA falls outside of the guidelines for current City cultural grant programs, but still meets key outcome criteria (as tested against the criteria for the Major Cultural Organizations program - Festivals stream), staff are recommending a one-time special grant of \$200,000 for 2019. Staff will monitor the outcomes of the first edition of the Biennial and as part of a review of City support for festivals, may explore recommendations for more permanent funding for festivals in a future budget submission, if warranted.

Should Council agree to the recommendation to fund the event, the TBA will be required to execute a Contribution Agreement with the City of Toronto and report financially and

on its funded activities. The TBA will be required to comply with the City of Toronto Community Grants Policy.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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