

**EX11.5**

CITY OF  
TORONTO  
PUBLIC ART  
STRATEGY

**WHAT WE  
HEARD**

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# What is the Toronto Public Art Strategy?

The City of Toronto is developing a new 10-year strategy to renew its vision for and commitment to public art. The strategy is intended to identify shared objectives and recommendations to guide the advancement of public art across the city, and enhance the impact of the City's public art programs for all Torontonians. This report is a summary of what was heard through the engagement process.

The City embarked on the strategy development process in 2018, following direction from the [Economic Development Committee](#) to consider the recommendations of [Redefining Public Art in Toronto](#), a joint report from OCAD University and the University of Toronto calling for a bold re-visioning of public art in Toronto. The strategy will be presented to City Council for consideration in fall 2019.

## Engagement Overview

The City engaged PROCESS, a creative engagement, urban and cultural planning firm, to design and facilitate inclusive public and stakeholder consultations for the strategy. The objective of the consultation process is to ensure that the public art strategy is reflective of a diversity of perspectives. Specifically, the consultations are intended to:

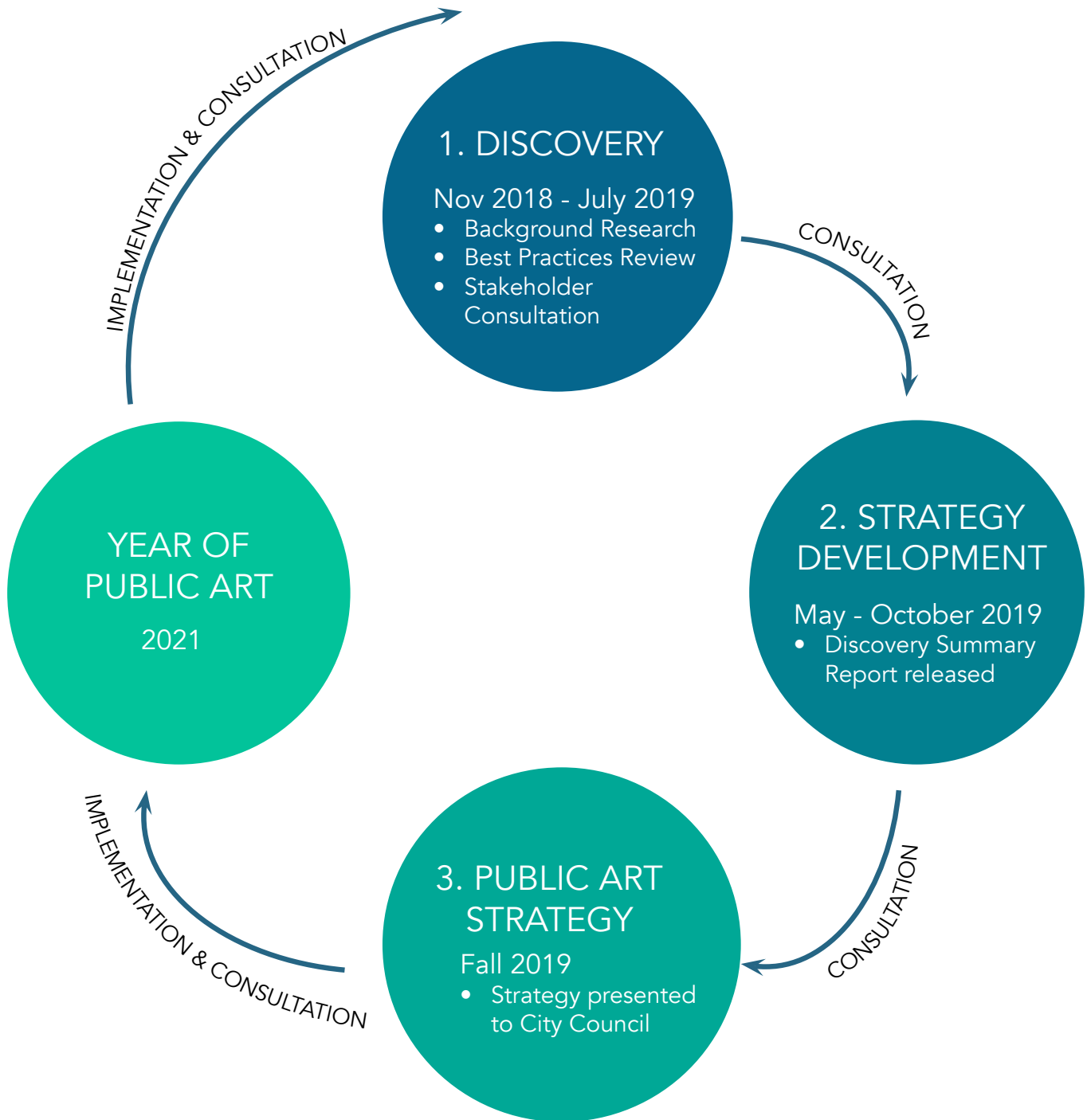
- Engage a broad spectrum of Torontonians in the development of the public art strategy. This includes collecting feedback and input about people's experiences with and perspectives on public art that can be incorporated into the strategy.
- Raise awareness and education about public art and the public art strategy in Toronto.

## About This Report

This report summarizes the key messages that emerged during the stakeholder and public consultations held between May and July 2019 as part of the Public Art Strategy process. The feedback will be used to inform the final recommendations for the strategy.

This report focuses on the feedback that we received on public art in Toronto, but we also heard from many consultation participants about other important issues facing the culture sector in Toronto. This includes: access to affordable, sustainable studio and living space for artists; income and employment precarity for artists and cultural workers; and the need for greater support for skills development and training for artists. While such issues fall outside the scope of the public art strategy, the City recognizes their importance for maintaining a vibrant cultural sector, and is working to address these challenges through other policies and plans, including the [Economic Development and Culture Divisional Strategy \(2018-2022\)](#), among others.

## The Public Art Strategy Process



# How We Engaged

PROCESS and the City developed an engagement strategy that included many different opportunities to consult widely. City staff formed an Advisory Committee of artists, curators, academics, developers, architects and community leaders to guide the development of the new public art strategy for Toronto (see **Appendix A** for list of committee members). Public and stakeholder engagement included:

## Artist-led public engagement activities

A public art strategy for Toronto must have artists and communities at the heart of the conversation, which is why we asked six community-engaged artists (“Artist-Facilitators”) to facilitate conversations in their neighbourhoods across the city about public art. Artist-facilitators attended an introductory session facilitated by PROCESS to explain the objectives and overarching questions for the engagement. For their consultation events, the artist-facilitators were free to design their consultations using whatever creative methods best fit their practices and the communities they were working in, as long as they provided some level of context on the public art strategy and asked questions about their current experiences of public art and how they want to experience public art in the future.

**Collectively, the six artist-facilitators reached approximately 250 people through arts-based activities. These included activities at events and small group workshops:**

1. [Daniel Rotsztain](#) developed and facilitated an activity at an annual Korean Bazaar at the Salvation Army Community Church in North York.
2. [Hiba Abdallah](#) hosted a workshop and conversation about public art at Lakeshore Arts in Etobicoke.
3. [Melanie Fernandez-Alvarez](#), an associate artist at MABELLEarts worked in partnership with MABELLEarts. She explored experiences of public art at an Iftar Night celebration in Mabelle Park, and through two workshops at MABELLEarts in Etobicoke.
4. [Sari Zon](#) sought feedback through a creative arts activity station at the Art Starts Street Art Festival on Eglinton Avenue, and at the Art Gallery of Ontario’s Indigenous Peoples Day Celebration.
5. Tamla Matthews, with her organization Roots and Branches, engaged with Scarborough residents at the Berner Trail Community Centre and the Malvern Library.
6. [Vanessa Dion Fletcher](#) connected with the housing co-operative community that she lives in located at Sherbourne and Carlton Streets in the downtown core.

# 250+

people engaged across Toronto by artist-facilitators

# 125

attendees at Public Art Strategy Community Conversation

# 56

participants in expert focus groups



Five of the six artists participating in an introductory session at Tea Base, a cozy community arts space, tucked away in the heart of Chinatown.



Daniel Rotsztein talking to a participant in North York



Workshop in Mabelle Park facilitated by Melanie Fernandez-Alvarez



Poster created by Hiba Abdallah for her roundtable event at Lakeshore Arts

## Stakeholder Focus Groups

PROCESS facilitated in-depth policy conversations with eight stakeholder focus groups, all with specific subject matter expertise in visual arts or previous experience in public art policies and practices. These meetings were intended to provide in-depth, critical thinking about the City's existing public art processes, and how the City can renew its vision and commitment to public art in the future. Focus groups included meetings with:

- 1) professional artists working within the existing policy frameworks for major capital projects;
- 2) street and graffiti artists;
- 3) producers, curators, and institutions in the visual arts community;
- 4) communicators and critics;
- 5) real estate developers;
- 6) architects, urban designers and landscape architects;
- 7) public art consultants; and
- 8) the Indigenous arts community.

## Community Conversation (Open House)

On July 9, 2019 over 125 people attended a community conversation about the public art strategy at St. Paul's on Bloor. This event was open to the general public, but naturally drew many participants who are involved in Toronto's art scene as artists, curators, and administrators, or as arts enthusiasts.

Participants first took part in an art walk led by PROCESS team members and City of Toronto staff. The art walks explored both how public art can and has transformed the public realm within the area. Once returning back to St. Paul's, City staff provided a brief overview of the objectives and process for the public art strategy. After this introduction, a panel of artists and art consultants (see following page) shared their experiences working in public art, and participated in a question and answer period moderated by PROCESS. Afterwards, participants provided feedback on the strategy's draft focus areas, and other insights into their experiences and ideas for the future through different activity stations.



Public Art Walk before the open house



Community Conversation Open House at St. Paul's

# Community Conversation Panelists

**Camille Georgeson-Usher** is a Coast Salish / Sahtu Dene / Scottish scholar, artist, and writer from Galiano Island, British Columbia which is the land of the Pune'laxutth' (Penelakut) Nation. Usher completed her MA in Art History at Concordia University. She is currently a PhD student in the Cultural Studies department at Queen's University and is looking at how Indigenous protocols intersect in urban centres. She was awarded the 2018 Canadian Art Writing Prize and is the Executive Director of the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective as the organization shifts to a non-hierarchical structure.

**Helena Grdadolnik** is the Director of Urban Design and Culture at Workshop Architecture, a studio based in Toronto that delivers creative solutions for buildings and public spaces. She is a member of the City of Toronto's Public Art Commission and the Metrolinx Design Review Panel. Helena developed one of the major cultural projects for the London 2012 Olympics and has helped a number of municipalities develop or rethink their public art programs.

**Hiba Abdallah** is an artist and organizer who often works collaboratively. Her practice utilizes design and social engagement as ways for exploring locality and civic agency in different communities across North America. Abdallah received her BFA from the University of Windsor in 2012 and MFA from the University of Guelph in 2017. Recent exhibitions and public projects include Nuit Blanche Scarborough, Museum of Contemporary Art Toronto, Watershed+, Contemporary Art Gallery Vancouver, CAFKA in Kitchener, ON, and Centre[3] in Hamilton.

**Mahmood Popal** is an Afghan - Canadian, Toronto based multi-disciplinary artist and designer. Popal graduated from OCAD University with a focus on product design and fine art. In 2011, Popal launched his creative studio, MAAST, that focuses on commercial interior design projects, private commissions and public art projects.





# Key Messages

The overall feedback throughout all consultations are included below. The feedback is categorized by the following:

- Defining Public Art;
- Describing Success;
- Identifying Opportunities for the Strategy; and
- Year of Public Art 2021

## Defining Public Art

For the purposes of the new strategy, the City originally developed a working definition of public art: Public art is art in any media that has been commissioned for a public space, that is intended to be accessible to all.

The City collected feedback on the definition. Recommendations included the following:

- Include reference that public art should be produced by an artist, to recognize that professional artists are the driving creative force behind public art.
- Define 'artist.' The Ontario Arts Council definition of 'artist' was identified as a good example to look into.
- Define 'accessible.' Does accessible refer to visual, physical or conceptual accessibility?

"Art can agitate, make you question. It puts demands both on the artist and on the viewer Good public art is experiential"

- Participant from artist-facilitator Sari Zon's activity at ACO's Indigenous People's Celebration

Based on this feedback and after additional research, the City refined the definition:

***Public art is art in any media that has been produced by an artist for a publicly-accessible space.***

This updated working definition is intended to capture a broad range of artistic practices, including but not limited to sculpture, murals, street and graffiti art, digital media or performance art. It encompasses art

## How does public art work in Toronto?

There are three public art programs managed by the City. These include:

- [City-owned public art](#) – a collection of 300+ monuments and art works commissioned by or donated to the City of Toronto.
- [Percent for Public Art Program](#) – based on policy direction from the City's Official Plan, the City Planning Division secures private funds for public art works, and applies public art policy and urban design guidelines to secondary, master, precinct and other plans.
- [StreetARToronto](#) – a suite of innovative street and graffiti art programs designed for streets and public spaces, and a central feature of the City of Toronto's Graffiti Management Plan.

works of varying durations – including long-term installations (often referred to as “permanent”), or shorter-term, ephemeral temporary public art. It also distinguishes that public art is to be created by an artist. Building on the Ontario Arts Council definition of a professional artist, the City is considering a public artist to be someone who has developed skills through training or practice, is recognized by artists working in the same artistic tradition, seeks payment for their art, and actively practices their art. The City also has a history of supporting emerging artists through the StreetARToronto program, who may not necessarily meet all of the above criteria at this stage in their career. While the definition of public art will not exclude non-artists from participating in the process (an artist may collaborate with community members, or be part of a team that includes designers, architects, or others), the artist must play a leading role in the creative process.

This working definition also refines the word ‘accessible’ to ‘publicly-accessible.’ This is intended to ensure that public art is created for and installed in a location that is publicly-accessible, such as parks, community centres, bridges, underpasses, or publicly-accessible spaces on private properties.

## Describing Success

- Many participants describe **successful public art** as being thought provoking, having a civic function, sparking dialogue, engaging with the public and being relevant to the site (both historically and contextually).
- **Successful public art programs** were described as having a clear vision/ objectives and a flexible, non-prescriptive process that allows for risks.

## Identifying Opportunities

Many consultation participants recommended opportunities to redefine and re-envision public art in Toronto. At the same time, we heard from many people – particularly those working in the field of public art – that the City’s programs have served artists, private developers, and the community well, and that any recommendations in the strategy should not be looking to replace existing programs, but rather enhance their reach and impact. For instance, we heard praise for the support that the StreetARToronto programs offer to both emerging and established artists, particularly from dedicated program staff. We also heard about the flexibility and choice afforded to developers through the Percent for Public Art Program. The strategy should build on these strengths when considering the future of public art in Toronto. What follows is a summary of key recommendations identified through the consultations:

### **Develop an overarching vision for the strategy.**

Many participants identified the need for the City to articulate a clear vision and objectives to ensure a holistic approach to public art. There were also recommendations to incorporate opportunities to measure success. Many participants further requested that the strategy allow for flexible and non-prescriptive processes, which is easier to achieve when a clear vision is established.

### **Incorporate different public art types and artists in the city.**

Most participants discussed the need for processes and approaches that better integrate new types of public art, typically not seen in Toronto. This includes ephemeral, temporary artwork, event-based and performative artwork, new media, as well as socially-engaged practices. There was concern from some participants that incorporating new artworks could replace the traditional public art opportunities that exist today.

### **Create inclusive public art processes that are accessible to many artists.**

Many expressed that they find it challenging to participate in the creation of public art in Toronto. There were complaints that current processes and requirements favour a limited number of artists who can participate in the City's public art programs, and that the City's competition processes favour established career artists. There were suggestions to explore opportunities to engage diverse artists, including emerging artists, through mentorship programs. For instance, one suggestion is to provide emerging artists with smaller-scale sites for shorter durations (1-2 years), which allows for more risk-taking and experimentation. There were further recommendations to broaden efforts to reach artists from equity-seeking communities.

### **Prioritize artists in the public art process.**

Many participants from across the groups consulted with, indicated a sense that there are increasingly 'non-artists' (such as architects and fabricators) applying for and winning large-scale public art competitions.

Moreover, it was mentioned many times that public art is seen as an afterthought to construction projects. Recommendations to better support artists included:

- Ensuring artists/people knowledgeable about art are on the juries;
- Defining 'artist' (to ensure artists can compete in the processes);
- Engaging artists earlier in development processes and within other city building work, to allow for greater collaboration.
- Providing larger maintenance budgets could allow for more creativity and different types of public art (it had been mentioned that a fear of maintenance results in "risk-averse" public art).

### **Increase equity and representation of public art across the City.**

The majority of public art is seen to be located in the downtown core, with exception of street art which is dispersed throughout the City. Many people who participated in consultations outside the downtown core, had never heard of public art as traditionally defined by the City, or only thought of it as graffiti or community art programming. Therefore, many participants indicated the need to disperse public art geographically. For instance, some participants from Malvern, Scarborough and York-Eglinton areas discussed how public art could be used to shift perceptions of their areas through beautification and community development. Additional opportunities identified include:

- Develop partnerships with diverse communities and nonprofits outside the downtown core (such as community centres, libraries and the TDSB);

- Pool funds to disperse public art budgets within districts, instead of by project;
- Encourage developers to contribute to off-site public art projects, where appropriate.

### **Incorporate opportunities for deeper community engagement.**

However, it is first important to note that community engagement means different things to different people. To some, specifically those familiar with City processes, community engagement refers to public consultations, where, traditionally, participants attend meetings to share input on public art. To others consulted, community engagement refers to socially-engaged art practices, where artists work closely with specific community groups to develop a project. Both examples of community engagement hold much nuance and complexity. In either instance, there was recognition that by nature of having art in publicly accessible spaces, members of the public will necessarily be involved at some point in the process (which could be prior to an artist developing work or once it is completed and presented). In terms of traditional community consultations, there was mixed sentiment as to whether members of the public should be involved in selecting artworks for their communities. Some suggested that artists should be given freedom when making art in public space in order to advance challenging conceptual art works. Most participants felt that the traditional approaches to community consultation are problematic because a) they can only reach specific people within a community; and b) this often small group of people should not decide on what kind of art is incorporated into the public. Instead, the City should

rethink how public consultation processes are designed and implemented, which involves engaging community members earlier on in the process to build capacity (not necessarily make decisions). Others favoured opportunities for longer-term and deeper engagement, not reflected in typical consultation processes. This could include socially-engaged artworks and practices.

“The future of public art needs to go beyond installing the piece. It needs to be an ongoing multi-channel engagement of strategies to raise awareness, understanding and importance of pieces (why they exist and where they exist).”

- Participant Response from the Community Conversation July 9th, 2019

### **Encourage public art that sparks dialogue.**

Participants recommended the need for public art to address some of the City’s most pressing issues, such as climate change and housing affordability. There were also discussions that public art could create debate and controversy in communities. While some may love a public artwork, some may dislike it. In some cases, artwork that was once despised – often due to a lack of information about the work, or misunderstandings about its purpose – ends up being embraced and loved. For instance, many participants pointed to the Henry Moore pieces in Grange Park and at Nathan Phillips Square. While they were once widely disliked for their “abstract” qualities, and perceived as a waste of public money, they are now loved by many.

## **Integrate public art within the public realm and design of the city.**

There were comments that public art can currently seem to be an afterthought within public spaces, not necessarily relating to the context of the site. Many participants across all consultations identified the need for public art to be connected to place, and help connect residents to the places they are in. Recommendations to address this were identified and are included below:

- Involve curators for major projects with knowledge of art and urban design to help consider how public art can speak to its site and context.
- Develop public art plans and districts within the City's larger city planning studies.
- There were many ideas about incorporating artists earlier in processes to establish collaborative practices and to ensure public art is not an afterthought in public spaces.

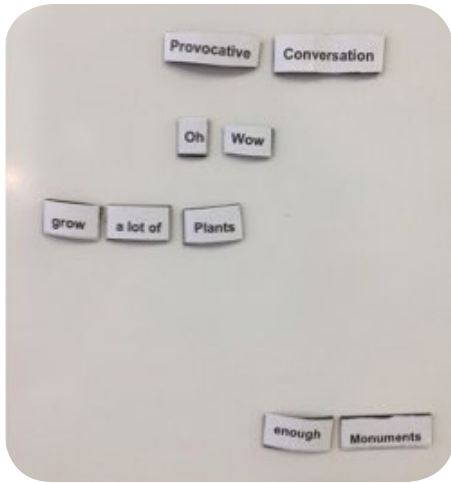
Promote opportunities for communications and awareness raising. The majority of participants identified the need for better communications about the public art that exists today. Suggestions for interactive maps, apps and programming were consistent across all consultations. There were also many recommendations to include artists and curators in animating public art, through performance-based and socially-engaged art projects at permanent public art sites. Lastly, there were suggestions to better collaborate with City agencies, such as the Toronto Public Library, to host an archive.

## **Establish clear and transparent processes.**

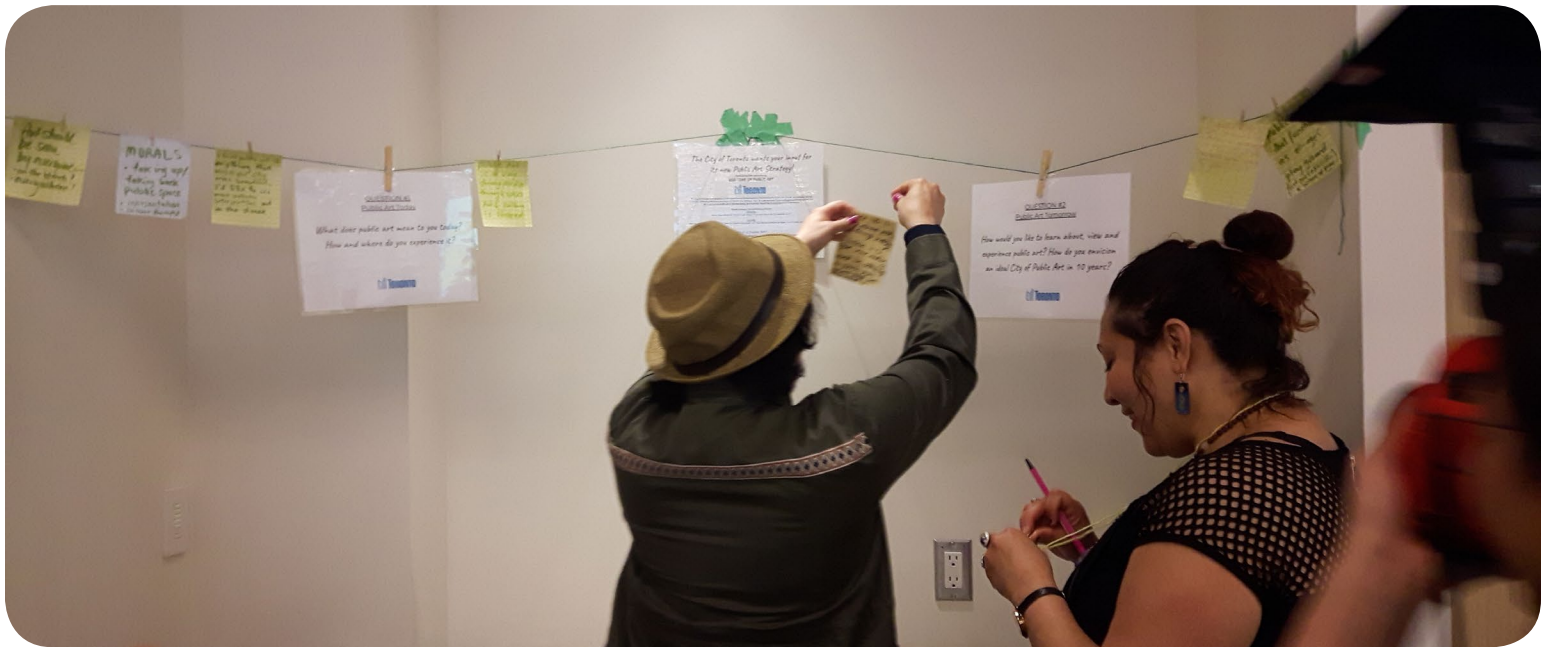
Some participants requested more transparent decision-making processes, specifically related to who sits on juries. There were also requests to have a transparent process when making decisions for the Year of Public Art. In many of our focus groups, we also heard that the separation of public art into three departments is confusing. Many artists, members of the public and some people working in the field were unclear as to why responsibility for public art is spread across three separate City divisions, and were uncertain how to find out about public art programs and opportunities based on the separated departments. Many suggested that the three divisions do not make sense from a user perspective.

## **Year of Public Art 2021**

There was a mix of excitement and concern for the Year of Public Art. Namely, there were concerns that the City has not announced a budget and that it is fast approaching. A number of participants requested that the City commit meaningful resources towards delivering a Year of Public Art, and suggested that the Year of Public Art could act as an opportunity to communicate the public art strategy, animate the public art that exists today in creative ways, and develop deeper partnerships with and support for nonprofits, collectives and diverse communities, including Indigenous artists.



For Vanessa Dion Fletcher's workshop, she made public art word poetry with participants



Sari Zon collects feedback at the Art Gallery of Ontario for Ontario's Indigenous People's Day Celebration



Melanie Fernandez-Alvarez leads a workshop at MAEBELLEarts

# Detailed Summary of Feedback

## Community Conversation

At the community conversation, we asked participants to provide feedback on the value of public art, how they experience public art today and how they imagine the future of public art (both for the Year of Public Art 2021 and beyond). We also asked participants to provide feedback on draft focus areas. The feedback received through the community conversation event is incorporated below.

### The Value of Public Art

Questions: What does public art mean to you? What makes it valuable?

#### **There are many different reasons why public art is seen to be valuable.**

Participants reflected on the value of public art, noting that it not only adds beauty and joy to the everyday through surprise and discovery, it also can spark conversations in communities, allows people to (re)discover place and is often a point of pride and inspiration for people. Some participants pointed to public art's educational value, as well as its economic value through tourism. Others pointed to art that is "not about selling anything" but is rather an expression of diverse values within our built environment.

### Public Art Today

Questions: How do you experience public art in the City? What's working well? What's not working?

**Participants indicated that they experience public art daily.** Many of the people who commented on their experience with public art in Toronto mentioned that they encountered it inadvertently, in their everyday daily lives. While some people noted that they enjoyed these spontaneous encounters, others seek out art in their neighbourhoods and across the City. Most felt there was a lack of information on where the city's public art is located.

"I experience it as I walk through the streets as an arts administrator. I tend to look at public art with both critical analysis and sense of wonder. I enjoy stumbling on new pieces."

"Although I love "stumbling upon" it, I know I have not seen/experienced most of it, yet I've lived here for decades"

**There are limitations to the public art that exists today.** While there is recognition that public art is able to animate public space in interesting ways, many participants felt that there is a lack of diverse public art types, and that public art is concentrated in specific geographic locations.

“Public Art from previous decades doesn’t reflect today’s Toronto”

“There is not enough deep, meaningful work...too much decoration.”

“What is working well is the animation of public space, especially around new condo developments.”

“The best work I can think of are ephemeral... the dance performance at Bentway... the gates and banners at Allan Gardens...”

**There is a lack of representation within current public art processes.** Many expressed that they find it challenging to participate in public art in Toronto. They also discussed the difficulties of living as an artist in the city more generally.

“Many times I see the ‘established’ artists getting all the work, and wonder how we can make it easier for emerging artists to find work.”

**The majority of participants indicated they favour public art that is “interactive” and can be engaged with.** Many participants commented on enjoying public art that is interactive; either through community engaged public art processes (where people can participate in art-making and storytelling) or through physical and virtual interaction (that allows participants to get up close, climb on or walk around a piece and/or take photographs of it/with it).

“We need more community consultations to ensure that public art accurately represents communities, and they interact with passers-by.”

“I love seeing more and more projects that involve the community as storytellers or art makers.”

**Barriers to accessing public art exists.** Many participants felt that it was difficult to access public art due to both location and lack of information.

“Currently, unless there’s a guided tour, I tend to stumble upon works. The trouble with that is seeing the work and not having context or a way to engage a wider age range. It would be great to have an app that lets me find out the background of a particular piece- maybe something interactive that I can show my 10 year old ... Is there a map listing all the public art in Toronto?”

## The Future of Public Art

Questions: How do you envision the future of public art in Toronto? What are the opportunities? What are the barriers?

**Incorporate strategies for engagement, education, communication and discovery of public art in the city.** Participants recommended opportunities to better communicate the public art that exists in the City, such as by developing interactive maps or apps as well as guided tours and programs. There was also a desire for longer term and different forms of engagement, to ensure that “public art goes beyond installing a piece.” This includes more long lasting partnership with non-profit art organizations, community centres, libraries and the TDSB. There were also recommendations for deeper engagement and collaboration with communities, with specific reference to areas outside of the downtown core.



"More guided tours or programs designed to educate or interact with the public and work through various issues that the artist may be addressing through their work."

"Works that truly engage the community and reflect current issues there, and around the world. Collaborate with non-profit arts orgs and support their long standing efforts."

"...Engage with communities and areas outside of the downtown core to reflect their vision for public art. Community centres, libraries, and the TDSB can be tapped to become recipients from the communities ideas/vision for public art."

### **Include opportunities for emerging**

**artists.** Many participants felt that there could be stronger mentorship initiatives or opportunities for emerging artists to create works on smaller, less daunting projects (such as temporary work). Others recommended looking into the art councils programs for emerging artists.

"I'd love to see more opportunities for emerging artists to create public art and make the transition from smaller scale work to large scale work in a way that is less daunting than, for example, having to create a huge work out of bronze. This could be achieved through temporary projects-maybe 1 or 2 years for the work to exist- and through a strong mentorship program where an emerging artist is paired with an established artist."

**A flexible strategy is required.** The majority of participants suggested that a flexible and non-prescriptive strategy could ensure a diversity of public art processes, types and artists are encouraged. In addition, some participants feared that a new strategy could lead to more restrictive requirements for public art programs, which would discourage creativity and risk-taking.

### **Diverse types of public art are required.**

Specifically, participants discussed the need for more opportunities for ephemeral work, as well as new media, digital art.

### **Increase equity and representation**

by engaging communities outside the downtown core.

**Measure success.** There were questions about how and when public art will be measured and evaluated. Similarly, there were questions about the criteria for selecting artists.

### **Public art should respond to broader dialogues and be used as a tool for engagement.**

Participants indicated that public art should do a better job of addressing some of the City's most pressing issues, like climate change and housing affordability. Some also recommended that artists can act as a partner or a facilitator to connect different communities.

### **Provide support and funding for artists and public art in the city.**

Others suggested partnerships with philanthropists and international art programs to help fund public art in the city.

## Focus Areas

The City presented draft focus areas for the Public Art Strategy and asked for feedback. An overview of comments are included below:

### Creating an Enabling Environment for Public Art

Participants agree that creating an enabling environment for public art is important. Some specific suggestions include:

- Provide more flexibility for artists to choose sites and propose ideas (DIY art spaces);
- Encourage a culture of making and experimenting by having street art walls in communities and opportunities for temporary art;
- Permit funding for longer term, engaged and less “product-focused” public art.

### Equity and Representation

Many were in agreement that there is a need for diversity of artists (including artists of different abilities, genders, ethnicities, ages and socio-economic backgrounds). There were questions about how the City intends to measure equity and representation. There were further questions about who gets to select public art in the city.

### Creativity and Innovation

Participants provided ideas for creative and innovative approaches to public art in the city. These included establishing hubs that have resources for artists and communities from neighbourhood improvement areas (like a public art incubator). There were other ideas of pairing artists with residents to co-

create. While there were many in support of temporary and ephemeral public artworks, there were also questions about the environmental impacts of temporary works. Lastly, there were questions about how to measure the value and impact of a proposal.

### Communication and Engagement

Ideas for communication and engagement include broader consultation with arts organizations in the City, outreach to equity seeking communities, animation of public space and interactive apps/new media.

### Indigenous Truth and Reconciliation

Participants indicated this is a necessary focus area. Many suggested the need for meaningful consultation and opportunities for Indigenous and settler communities to collaborate on projects that could help with truth and reconciliation.

# Artist-led consultations

In addition to the Community Conversation, the six artist-led consultations reached a diversity of Toronto's residents. While some of the participants were tapped into Toronto's art community, most of the people engaged had no previous experience in public art. We therefore received a range of viewpoints. After the workshops were completed, all the artist-facilitators came together for a sense-making workshop, where we discussed the key messages from the various events. These key messages are included below:

## The value of public art

Public art was seen as a way to engage and collaborate with communities. Across the various neighbourhoods, many participants identified that public art can unify community members, change perceptions of neighbourhoods, act as expressions of identity and culture, assist with community development, act as placemaking and as a destination/attraction to diverse neighbourhoods.

An important note is that even though people had different experiences and understanding of public art, there was a recognition that a strong public art strategy for Toronto is important.

"Public art engages you and makes you think".  
– Participant from Sari Zon's consultation

"Art can bring people together"  
– Participant from Daniel Rotsztain's consultation

"Public art can eradicate elitist attitude about art and get it out of the gallery."  
– Participant from Vanessa Dion Fletcher's workshop

## Public art today (experiences)

Many participants had never thought of or noticed public art (some were unfamiliar with the term 'public art'), which was especially true for those living outside the downtown core and for those with English as a second language.

Those who do experience public art were mostly aware of murals and graffiti (such as graffiti alley). In North York, Daniel Rotsztain heard that "many associated public art with downtown, the Annex, and subway stations. Those who spent time downtown described seeing public art every day and described the proliferation of public art beside new buildings in the last 10 years." Those who spend most of their time outside the downtown core had a different interpretation of public art, with most citing street art and murals as the type of public art that they experience in their neighbourhoods. Others identified public art as community engaged projects (where they are involved in making), small-scale community initiatives (such as decorative window painting in a housing co-operative community) or as expressions of self and identity. For instance, artist Melanie Fernandez-Alvarez in Mabelle Park noted that participants discussed their own hair styles or their front doors as public art.



Tamla Matthews speaking to residents in Malvern, Scarborough

## Public art in the future

### Public art types: Interactive

For the most part, participants at all consultations were interested in seeing more interactive public art, where people could play with it and take photos with it. In North York, Daniel Rotsztein noted that many participants were interested in seeing new media (screen-based art) in the city. They reflected on how this is a common type of public art in South Korea, where the majority of participants were from.

### Public art themes: Environment Issues, Community Development and Beautification

At many of the events, there were also specific references to incorporating public art that raises awareness of environmental issues and to consider environmental process for artmaking as much as possible.

Others focused on how public art could be used as a tool for community development and beautification. In Malvern, Tamla Matthews heard from many respondents that they hoped public art could assist with changing perceptions of the area and addressing stereotypes. In the York-Eglinton area, where the Eglinton Crosstown is currently being built, Sari Zon heard from many people that they wanted construction sites to be beautified.



At the Korean Annual Bazaar in North York

## New processes and representation

There was also a desire to include public art by people of different ages and experiences, with different types of practices. During Hiba Abdallah's workshop at Lakeshore Arts, the group discussed new ideas for the public art process. This includes allowing for a range of public art (including temporary and ephemeral) and encouraging opportunities for prolonged engagement. They further discussed the need for artists to understand local context and community, instead of creating "helicopter" art, where art is dropped into a place without consideration of the context.

### Artist-Facilitator Recommendations

Based on what was heard at these different events, the artists came together to provide recommendations for the strategy:

- Define a vision and goals for public art in the city.
- Ensure opportunities for community ownership of public art.
- Develop a more transparent process (how artists are selected).
- Incorporate information about public art (both on site as well as online).
- Explore a range of public art types (including temporary and community-engaged art). This may mean creating a new process that supports different models of public art.
- Consider more opportunities for free expression, beyond juries. This could include 'pilot' projects, and more process-oriented works.

# Focus Groups

PROCESS facilitated eight focus groups with experts working in the field of public art. The focus groups were intended to seek in-depth feedback on policy issues, and on the City's public art programs and processes. A full list of focus group participants is included as **Appendix B** to this report. Key takeaways from the focus groups are included below:

## **Architects, Designers and Landscape Architects**

- This focus group of leading architects, designers and landscape architects shared their vision for public art in Toronto, and their insights from working on a wide range of projects that incorporated public art. They believe that successful public art in the City should be impactful, encourage risk-taking, and reflect high-quality form and design.
- Drawing on their past experience, the group observed that there is currently a lack of diversity among artists who participate in large-scale public art projects, in part due to competition requirements that favour those with previous technical experience. They also observed that there could be better integration of public art with the public realm and built form, and that consultation with architects, designers and landscape architects is key to greater success in this area.
- Participants offered a number of recommendations to improve the existing public art processes. For instance, they suggested the City should consider a multitude of public art processes to encourage temporary public art and new artist involvement. This could include engaging artists earlier in the design process for all projects, better leveraging the expertise of the Toronto Public Art Commission, and considering a “district approach” to achieve a more holistic, unified approach to public art in Toronto, which could include pooling of funds/resources.

## **Artists**

- This focus group brought together a number of experienced artists who have produced successful public art projects in Toronto, other cities in Canada and around the world. These artists argued for the continuation of public art programs in Toronto, noting the successes that have been achieved to date in the city. Most felt that the existing public art policies and processes have served artists and the city well.
- The group emphasized that the public art strategy should be flexible and non-prescriptive, and be able to accommodate a diversity of types of art works (including large scale, monumental art works, and durational/event-based works, among others). There is concern that a strategy that is too strict will limit artists.
- Artists were asked to provide feedback on the City's current public art processes, and how these could be improved. Suggestions included improving transparency and communication in the jury process; ensuring that artists/people knowledgeable about art consistently serve on the juries; providing additional support to artists, where appropriate, during the design and build phases of a project; and delivering a range of competition types (such as open calls, by-invitation competitions, and artist interviews, among others).

- A lack of resources dedicated to maintenance was seen as an issue by the focus group. The fixed structure of maintenance budgets was seen to encourage “safer” and relatively “maintenance-free” artworks. Some suggested that a larger portion of a project budget could be allocated to maintenance for a more complex work.
- Others were concerned about the possibility of diverting resources from permanent public art projects to temporary ones, and suggested that if the City wishes to support more temporary works, that new, dedicated funding should be allocated for that purpose.
- Participants also requested that the City ensure transparency in decision-making related to both the Year of Public Art and the development of the new strategy. They strongly felt that, to be successful and meaningful, the strategy must be developed in close consultation with artists and art experts, and that the opinions of any one group must not take precedence over the public interest.

## **Communicators and Critics**

- This group of art writers, critics and thought leaders focused on opportunities to engage Torontonians with the City’s public art collection. They all agreed that public art in Toronto tells a story of the city – however, they also felt that too much of the story is focused on the downtown.
- Focus group members identified an opportunity to include a range of voices to communicate about public art, which includes community members, artists, and curators. There is also an opportunity to better engage with social media and create a citywide online database to communicate the public art that exists in Toronto.
- The focus group also highlighted the importance of developing a vision through the strategy that allows for different types of public art. Specifically, more temporary, ephemeral public art and screen-based public art can engage residents on different levels than permanent sculptural works. Performance art and events can act as tools to raise awareness of the existing public art collection in creative ways.

## **Curators and Producers**

- This focus group of curators, producers and institutional representatives began with an in-depth discussion of what makes public art successful. Drawing on their extensive experience in curating major art projects, the group felt that successful public art is thought provoking, has a civic function, is visible, and engages the public.
- The group felt that there is a need to open up the City’s public art process to be inclusive of a range of art forms and artists. With the current process and call requirements, there are typically only a handful of artists (or fabricators, architects, and art consultants) who are chosen to participate.
- Meaningful community engagement is also key to producing successful public art work. The group recommended that the City consider new approaches to community engagement, such as community-engaged art practices, engaging communities earlier, and sustainable engagement opportunities.

- The group also believed that the City should leverage curatorial thinking to advance and redefine public art in Toronto. This could include curatorial support for artists and in competition calls, and using curatorial expertise to better understand site-specificity and connection to place.
- There was also discussion of how to position the Year of Public Art as a pilot for the strategy and a real consideration for the future. Some cautioned that the Year of Public Art must avoid the ‘festivalization’ of public art by encouraging true participation, not only spectatorship.

## **Developers**

- Representatives of major developers attended this focus group to share their experiences working in public art in Toronto. Based on their past experience, public art is successful when it is relevant to the site (including both its history and social context), is interactive, and can start a conversation.
- The group felt that the existing Percent for Public Art Program provided a flexible framework for developers to successfully execute or contribute to public art projects. They suggested it will be important for the new strategy to retain this aspect of choice and flexibility.
- Some also believed that there are opportunities for public art to be better integrated with the public realm. This could be achieved by creating more master plans for public art, pooling funds for off-site projects in cases where a development site may not be appropriate, enhancing the role of the Toronto Public Art Commission, or assigning a curator to different districts to ensure that public art speaks to its sites and surrounding areas.

## **Indigenous Truth and Reconciliation**

- This focus group brought together Indigenous arts leaders for an in-depth discussion of how public art can advance issues related to truth and reconciliation. They recommended actions and principles to support Indigenous place-keeping through public art.
- The group believed that public art should respond to the land, acting as a land acknowledgment. Public art should be a space to share Indigenous stories (history and present). There is a need for public art to act as a catalyst for broader social change (or “art as activism”).
- The public art strategy process should be intentional and meaningful, based on relationship building. It should not be a linear path, where participation is only allowed at certain points. Consultation should be incorporated throughout the process. In addition to public art, there needs to be more representation of Indigenous peoples on City committees and in positions where executive decisions are being made.
- There is also a need for a greater representation of diversity among artists and art works. There should be a mentorship program where emerging artists can partner with experienced artists.
- The Year of Public Art: 2021 should be the year of INDIGENOUS Public Art – although, it was noted that 2021 may be an unrealistic time frame for a year of public art. Therefore, one participant asked: “Should it instead be a year of announcements?”

## Public Art Consultants

- Public art consultants contributed their insights gained from managing major public art projects in Toronto, other cities in Canada and around the world. They felt that public art programs are most successful when there is a clear vision/objectives and the process is flexible, non-prescriptive and allows for risks..
- Many opportunities for the future of public art were recommended, including developing an overarching vision for the City, bringing artists into development processes earlier, incorporating temporary public art projects, and considering a public art fund.
- There were concerns that the Year of Public Art lacks budget and appropriate timeline. There were recommendations that the focus of the Year of Public Art should be on education and awareness, through partnership development, funding of small arts organizations, branding and communications and animation of public art that already exists (through performance and art activations).
- The group provided input on the City's working definition of public art, and recommended that it be amended to include that public art must be created by artists, that works must be site-specific, and that the meaning of "accessible" be clarified.

## Street Artists

- This focus group brought together artists who have worked on a broad range of projects supported through the StreetARToronto program.
- Participating artists all agreed that the City's street art programs have been tremendously successful in supporting emerging and established artists, and advancing the impact of street and graffiti art in neighbourhoods across Toronto. They commended program staff for their unwavering support of artists and their creative aspirations.
- Participants felt that the term 'street art' is included within a broad definition of public art. The artists involved agreed that 'public art' can work as a catch-all term and can include murals and graffiti. Many indicated that 'street art' can be too narrow of a term and does not properly define their work. In contrast, public art is a more flexible term that can mean many art practices.
- The artists agreed that community-engaged processes define success: Projects are most successful when community members are engaged. At the end of the process, "the piece feels like a part of the neighbourhood". Finding ways to engage the public after completion is also important (through plaques, QR code, audio tours and other creative methods).
- Maintenance protocol for murals could be improved, especially for large scale projects.



## Next Steps

Based on the feedback received throughout the consultation process, along with in-depth research on best practices in public art from around the globe, the City will develop a draft strategy that will be presented to City Council for consideration in late fall 2019. If the strategy is adopted by City Council, staff will be directed to begin implementing its recommendations.

The City wants to hear from you if you have any additional comments that you would like staff to consider when developing the strategy. For information on how to submit your comments, please visit the [Public Art Strategy page](#) on the City's website.



# Appendix A

## Advisory Committee Members

The development of Toronto's new public art strategy is being guided by an Advisory Committee of community and cultural leaders. The Committee is meeting quarterly throughout 2019 to provide advice and feedback on the strategy and public and stakeholder consultations.

Advisory Committee Member	Title
Amir Akbari	Founder, Behind the Line
David Anselmi	Senior Director, Real Estate, Canada Lands Company Chair, Toronto Public Art Commission
Edward Birnbaum	Director of Legislative Affairs, Office of the Mayor, City of Toronto
Rebecca Carbin	Principal, Art + Public UnLtd
Kari Cwynar	Curator, Evergreen Brick Works
Bonnie Devine	Artist and Founding Chair, Indigenous Visual Culture Program, OCAD University (Retired)
Sara Diamond	President, OCAD University
Dean Drever	Artist
Helena Grdadolnik	Director, Workshop Architecture Member, Toronto Public Art Commission
Adrian Hayles	Artist and Curator, Hashtag Gallery
Layne Hinton	Co-Curator, Art Spin
Leah Houston	Artistic Director, MABELLEarts
Luis Jacob	Artist
Alexis Kane Speer	Executive Director, STEPS Initiative
Lila Karim	Executive Director, North York Arts
Gabriel Leung	Vice President, Development, Concord Adex
Mimi Joh-Carnella	Chair, Board of Directors, Partners in Art
Rui Pimenta	Co-Curator, Art Spin
Asad Raza	Producer and Curator
Tamira Sawatsky	Architect, Public Studio
Anjuli Solanki	Director of Community Programs, STEPS Initiative
Dan Silver	Associate Professor, University of Toronto

The Strategy is also being informed by an internal working group of City staff led by the Economic Development and Culture Division, with representation from City Planning, CreateTO, Environment and Energy, the Indigenous Affairs Office, Long Term Care Homes and Services, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, Solid Waste Management Services, Toronto Public Library, Toronto Transit Commission, Toronto Water, Transportation Services, and Waterfront Toronto.

# Appendix B

## Focus Group and Small Meeting Participants

The following is a list of participants in focus groups facilitated by PROCESS. Those who participated in one-on-one consultation meetings with City staff are in italics.

### Architects, Designers, and Landscape Architects

Adrian Blackwell  
Brent Raymond  
Chris Pommer  
Chris Veres  
Janet Rosenberg  
Roland Rom Colthoff

### Artists

Daniel Borins  
Eldon Garnet  
Gareth Long  
Jennifer Marman  
Anonymous - 2

### Communicators and Critics

Jayne Wilkinson  
Jessica Johnson  
Nicholas Brown  
Shawn Micallef

### Curators and Producers

Ala Roushan  
Andrea Carson Barker  
David Liss  
Emelie Chhangur  
Mia Nielsen  
*Stuart Keeler*  
Tairone Bastien  
Ulrike Al-Khamis  
Vicki Clough

### Developers

Chris Wein  
*Gabriel Leung*  
*Herb Mah*  
Kathryn Randle  
Kristine Zwicker

### Indigenous Truth and Reconciliation

Bonnie Devine  
Camille Georgeson-Usher  
Clayton Windatt  
Cynthia Lickers-Sage  
Dean Drever  
Matthew Hickey  
Philip Cote  
Tash Naveau

### Public Art Consultants

Ben Mills  
Fern Bayer  
Helena Grdadolnik  
Irene Szylinger  
*Janine Marchessault*  
Judith Tatar  
Laura Berazadi  
*Rina Greer*  
Anonymous - 1

### Street Artists

Ann-Marie Power  
Christiano De Araujo  
Emily May Rose  
Marg Cresswell  
Marta Keller-Hernandez  
Nick Sweetman  
Philip Cote  
Tara Dorey  
Wayne Andrade