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VITAL

Artist-Run Culture
Transforming Lives

December 20, 2011

VITAL is an affiliation of visual & media artist-run organizations concerned about the health of the arts in Toronto.

We applaud Toronto City Council for understanding our sector's needs. The City's support of the *Cultural Capital Gains Report*¹ is an indication of how imperative it is that the arts are definitively linked to our future success. The creation of the Mayor's Task Force on the Arts, as a response to the Core Service Review, further demonstrates a commitment to working with the arts community in finding solutions to budgeting challenges.

We are requesting that the City of Toronto:

- Plan to competitively invest in the arts sector
- Lead the way in championing our rich cultural assets
- Make affordable cultural spaces available across the City

Through our artist-run organizations, we provide artistically rich educational outreach activities to diverse communities across the city. As part of this broad vision for the arts in Toronto, we demonstrate that art and community go hand in hand. Artist-run projects across the city illustrate our role in fostering the development of neighbourhoods and communities, and encompass many aspects that are vital to making our city what it is.

At 18% of the Toronto Arts Council's total grants budget, our members play a pivotal role in the arts and culture system by acting as incubators for emerging and mid-career artists. The artist-run community provides opportunities that pave the way for the advancement of Canadian artists' careers, and these artists often go on to become nationally and internationally recognized. The grants we receive from the TAC are supplemented by thousands of hours of volunteer labour leveraging donations and grants from other sectors, both private and government.

People in this city value the arts, and do not want to see them cut. The following are some revealing statistics:

- 80% of Torontonians think that the government investment in arts in public spaces improves the local economy²;
- 89% of Ontarians believe that if their community lost its arts activities, people living there would lose something of value³;
- For every \$1 granted to an arts organization by TAC, \$17.75 is received from other levels of government, the private sector or earned revenue⁴;

¹ <http://www.livewithculture.ca/creative-capital-initiative/an-action-plan-for-toronto/>

² <http://bcbf.them.ca/bcbf.asp?id=23>

³ <http://www.arts.on.ca/Page3997.aspx>

⁴ <http://www.torontoartsfoundation.org/News/TAF-and-Friends-of-the-Arts-Call-to-Action>

- Over 25,000 volunteers spend over 540,000 hours working for TAC funded organizations; 15,000 artistic and administrative staff are paid by TAC funded organizations⁵.

Cultural workers in Toronto are important stake-holders. We contribute to the economy at every level, as well as using services such as our transit system, childcare centres and libraries. We have families, we pay rent and mortgages, we pay taxes, and we vote. We are vital to the life of the city.

We are eager to contribute to ongoing conversations about arts funding in the City of Toronto. These discussions should include innovative revenue-generation solutions. We recommend that you make a firm commitment to sustain Toronto's cultural sector and to continue to position Toronto as a leading centre of cultural production.

Budgeting Solutions

We feel that the suggestions made by the Wellesley Institute report titled *Countdown to Zero: Balancing Toronto's Budget*⁶ should be considered as a way to avoid cuts to arts programming funding specifically and community services more generally. Here are some significant points for consideration:

- \$131 million is being saved through measures already announced (TTC fare increase, other revenue increases).
- Reversing last year's property tax freeze and increasing this year's property tax rate by 3 percent, to a total increase of 6 percent — two years' worth of normal increases — would increase revenues by \$136 million.
- Matching the average amount the city has saved over the last five years through cost cutting and efficiencies will reduce costs by \$98 million.
- Assuming the 2011 surplus is consistent with the average surplus of the previous 5 years, \$181 million will be available.
- Accessing the \$88 million from the tax stabilization fund and readjusting the projected increase in costs of salaries and benefits to reflect a more likely increase of \$116 million (double last year's increase) will reduce the shortfall by \$188 million.
- The remaining \$41 million budget shortfall is less than the revenues lost through the cancellation of the Personal Vehicle Tax.

VITAL is intent on being actively involved in the dialogue with the City of Toronto, to ensure that the priorities as stated above are addressed in the current budget deliberations.

We look forward to working with the City as it attempts to address challenges as they relate to arts funding in Toronto.

⁵ <http://www.torontoartscouncil.org/ARTS-FACTS/Art-Stats>

⁶ <http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Countdown-to-Zero-FINAL.pdf>

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