



REPORT FOR ACTION

Bid to Designate Toronto as a UNESCO Creative City of Media Arts

Date: April 24, 2017

To: Economic Development Committee

From: General Manager, Economic Development and Culture

Wards: All

SUMMARY

Toronto is recognized locally, nationally, and internationally as a vibrant creative capital. The city's cultural assets are a key economic driver, contribute to social cohesion and strong neighbourhoods, and enhance Toronto's reputation as one of the best places in the world to live, work, and travel.

Toronto's arts and culture scene is particularly well-known for its accomplishments in the field of media arts - encompassing film, music, digital media, and other forms of cultural expression using technology. In recognition of the city's global achievements in the field, this report seeks City Council's endorsement of an application to designate Toronto as a UNESCO Creative City of Media Arts.

The designation of Toronto as a UNESCO Creative City will create opportunities for international partnerships with the Network's 116 member cities, encourage collaboration and innovation in the media arts sector, and celebrate the tremendous achievements of Toronto's artists and cultural organizations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, recommends that:

1. City Council direct the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, to submit an application to designate Toronto as a UNESCO Creative City of Media Arts.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no application fee to submit a bid for designation to UNESCO, and there are no annual membership dues to retain standing in the Network. Costs related to preparing the application will be covered within Economic Development and Culture's 2017 Approved Operating Budget. Costs related to maintaining Toronto's membership in the Network if the bid is successful - including staff time for supporting research, partnerships, and participation in annual forums - will be incurred in 2017 and future years, and will be covered within Economic Development and Culture's base Operating Budget as requested through the annual budget process.

The application for designation will include a description of arts and culture programming delivered and supported by the City. Costs related to delivering arts and culture services are included within Economic Development and Culture's 2017 Approved Operating Budget. Costs related to arts programming for future years will be requested as part of upcoming annual budget processes.

The Deputy City Manager & Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

DECISION HISTORY

In June 2015, Executive Committee requested that the City Manager work with appropriate City divisions and cultural organizations to seek to have the City of Toronto designated as a UNESCO Creative City, and report back to City Council with a strategic plan to move forward on securing the designation.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.EX7.36>

COMMENTS

UNESCO Creative Cities Network

The UNESCO Creative Cities Network was launched in 2004 to foster international cooperation with and between cities that have recognized creativity as a key factor for sustainable urban development. Currently, there are 116 cities from 54 countries that received designation from UNESCO in one of seven creative fields – crafts and folk art, design, film, gastronomy, literature, music, and media arts.

Every two years, UNESCO issues a competitive global call for applications to join the Network, and receive the symbolic designation of Creative City. Benefits to receiving the designation include:

- **Stronger International Partnerships:** The UNESCO Creative Cities Network will facilitate direct city-to-city relationships with the 116 other member cities across the globe, allowing for increased knowledge sharing, cultural partnerships, and trade opportunities.
- **Global Recognition of Toronto's Cultural Vibrancy:** The designation will showcase Toronto's rich and diverse cultural assets on the international stage, and highlight the City's commitment to supporting the development and growth of the sector.
- **Collaboration and Growth in the Media Arts Sector:** A successful bid will bring together the media arts, education, and digital innovation sectors, and create opportunities for cross-sector partnerships and development.
- **Marketing and Promotions:** The UNESCO Creative City designation can complement existing destination marketing to attract cultural tourists to Toronto.

There is only one UNESCO Creative City in Canada – Montreal, which has been designated as a City of Design. No other Canadian cities are expected to apply for the designation in 2017.

A Global Leader in Media Arts

Candidate cities may choose only one of the seven creative fields listed above for designation. Staff have proposed pursuing a designation for Toronto as a city of media arts based on the broad range of local artists and arts organizations working in the field, Toronto's international reputation for creativity and innovation in media arts, and consultation with community and government partners. Staff have reviewed UNESCO's evaluation criteria for bids and believe that an application in the field of media arts offers Toronto the best chance of success. UNESCO has previously awarded the media arts designation to nine cities: Austin, Texas; Tel Aviv, Israel; Dakar, Senegal; York, United Kingdom; Sapporo, Japan; Gwanju, South Korea; Lyon, France; Linz, Austria; and Enghien-les-Bains, France.

Media arts refers to a broad range of works of art and cultural expression that have been produced using technology, and can include film, music, animation, video art, interactive art installations, children's media, photography, design, and more. Media artists leverage technologies to explore new modes of content creation and audience engagement, and demonstrate the potential of digital technologies to drive innovation in the creative sector. Some of Toronto's achievements in media arts include:

- **Canada's premiere music scene**, home to over 18,500 songwriters, creators, composers, and beatmakers, more than 540 live music venues, 180 music education institutions, and internationally-acclaimed classical, opera, and dance companies.
- A diverse community of **independent media artists producing** and exhibiting original works in neighbourhoods across Toronto, and in cities around the world.
- A **vibrant film and television production industry**, which achieved a record-breaking production investment of \$2.01 billion in 2016, supporting over 1,400 location film projects and 25,000+ jobs.
- **Major special events that introduce new audiences to media arts**, including City-produced events such as Nuit Blanche, and over 80 community-run film festivals - including the Toronto International Film Festival, the world's largest public film festival.
- A **hub for digital media innovation and creativity**, led by Toronto's globally-recognized research institutions, advanced technology companies, and start-ups, with expertise in cutting-edge new technologies such as augmented and virtual reality, artificial intelligence, and mobile apps.

The City is a longstanding supporter of media arts in Toronto. Through the Toronto Arts Council, the City directly supports media artists and arts organizations with peer-reviewed grants, awarding operating and project funding to over 60 visual and media arts organizations and 45 individual media artists in 2016. In 2016, Toronto became the first city in Canada to appoint a Photo Laureate to serve as the City's ambassador for the visual and photographic arts. Media arts also features prominently in the City's public art program. The Luminous Veil - the largest public art project completed to date in Toronto - is a celebrated work of media art that illuminates the Bloor Viaduct nightly with dynamic light patterns responding to changes in wind direction, velocity, and ambient temperature.

The designation of Toronto as a UNESCO Creative City of Media Arts is an opportunity to look to the future of cultural production and expression. It will encourage emerging leaders and youth working in media arts and new technologies to collaborate and innovate, and leverage the potential of media arts for economic growth.

Community and Partner Engagement

A bid to designate Toronto as a UNESCO Creative City in Media Arts has broad support from community and government partners. The University of Toronto has offered to work in partnership with the City to develop a bid for designation, and will provide the expertise of its faculty to prepare application materials, and conduct community outreach.

On April 18, the University of Toronto's McLuhan Centre for Culture and Technology held a community panel discussion exploring the concept of Toronto as a Creative City,

which was attended by over 100 residents. Panelists included Luigi Ferrara (Dean, Centre for Arts and Design, George Brown College), Shoshanah Goldberg-Miller (Assistant Professor, Ohio State University), Geoffrey James (Toronto Photo Laureate), Shawn Micallef (Writer), and Councillor Joe Mihevc. Panelists and audience members spoke to the diversity of Toronto's creative assets, and voiced broad support for policies and programs that recognize and support Toronto's development as a creative city.

Industry partners, including the Canadian Media Producers Association and the Canadian Film Centre, have been consulted and are encouraging the City's application.

The Canadian Commission for UNESCO, part of the Canada Council for the Arts, has also indicated its strong support for a prospective bid from Toronto. City staff will work with federal colleagues at the Canadian Commission for UNESCO to prepare the application, and the Commission will submit the bid on the City's behalf.

Application Process and Next Steps

If a bid for designation is endorsed by City Council, staff will work with project partners at the University of Toronto and the Canadian Commission for UNESCO to finalize and submit an application. The proposal will include a description of Toronto's media arts assets, and the City's support for the cultural sector. Results are expected to be announced in fall 2017.

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SIGNATURE

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