

2024 Local Arts Service Organization (LASO) Grant Allocation

Date: April 16, 2024

To: Economic and Community Development Committee

From: General Manager, Economic Development and Culture

Wards: All

SUMMARY

Local Arts Service Organizations (LASOs) are independent, not-for-profit, community arts organizations that deliver customized and responsive arts and culture programs, events and services at a local level in outside-the-core neighbourhoods across the city. There are six LASOs and they advance Economic Development & Culture (EDC)'s divisional strategic direction of promoting cultural vibrancy, offering low-barrier, free and low-cost arts participation opportunities to communities across the city. The LASOs also provide critical support and capacity-building opportunities to local artists and arts organizations.

Through EDC, the City of Toronto, provides financial support to the six LASOs, subject to annual contribution agreements. The 2024 Operating Budget for Economic Development and Culture includes a total of \$1,817,494 to fund the six LASOs: Arts Etobicoke, East End Arts, Lakeshore Arts, North York Arts, Scarborough Arts and UrbanArts. The LASOs received an additional \$80,000 inflationary increase through the budget process, bringing the 2024 budget to \$1,897,494.

In accordance with Council direction, the purpose of this report is to provide the recommended funding allocation for the LASOs for 2024. This funding recommendation is based on the LASOs' 2023 financial and performance reports, reviewed by EDC staff, and is aligned with the City's Community Grant Policy and EDC's grant reform efforts to make EDC's grant process more equitable, inclusive and transparent.

Funding to the LASOs is a critical component of the City's support for arts and culture in communities outside of the core. LASOs play a key role in providing essential arts services, working to meet identified community needs and deliver programs to serve artists, children and youth, seniors, newcomers, 2SLGBTQIA+, Indigenous, Black, Persons of Colour and equity-deserving community members.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager, Economic Development and Culture recommends that:

1. City Council approve the Economic Development and Culture Division's 2024 funding allocations, totalling \$1,897,494 to the six LASOs as follows:

Organization	Funding Allocation
Arts Etobicoke	\$425,906
East End Arts	\$226,010
Lakeshore Arts	\$305,966
North York Arts	\$299,908
Scarborough Arts	\$310,374
UrbanArts Community Arts Council	\$329,330
TOTAL	\$1,897,494

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no current year financial implications resulting from the recommendations contained in this report. The base funding of \$1,817,494 for LASO grants is included in the 2024 Operating Budget for the Economic Development and Culture Division. The LASOs received an additional \$80,000 inflationary increase through the budget process, bringing the 2024 budget for LASO grants to \$1,897,494.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the information as presented in the Financial Impact Section.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on February 14, 2024, Toronto City Council increased the 2024 Operating Budget for Economic Development and Culture by \$0.08 million to provide an inflationary increase to Local Arts Serving Organizations, offset by a corresponding decrease in the 2024 Operating Budget for Corporate Accounts of the \$8 million in total contributions related to 2024 emergent budget priorities.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.MPB15.1>

At its meeting on May 10, 2023, Toronto City Council approved Economic Development and Culture Division's 2023 funding allocations, totalling \$1,817,494 to the six Local Arts Service Organizations.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2023.EC3.11>

At its meeting on February 7, 2023, Toronto City Council approved EDC's approach to a grant reform in order to make its grants more transparent and equitable while ensuring that they are aligned with the City of Toronto Community Grants Policy.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2023.EC1.4>

At its meeting on June 18 and 19, 2019, Toronto City Council approved the 2019 funding allocations for the Local Art Service Organizations.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2019.EC5.7>

At its meeting on May 22, 23 and 24, 2018, Toronto City Council approved the 2018 funding allocations for the Local Art Service Organizations.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2019.EC5.7>

At its meeting on February 17, 2016, City Council approved an increase of \$372,000 to the Local Arts Services Organizations grant budget, bringing it to a total of \$1,705,400.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2016.EX12.2>

At its meeting on May 17, 2011, City Council approved Creative Capital Initiative: An Action Plan for Toronto which recommended founding two new Local Arts Service Organizations (LASO), North York Arts and East End Arts in order to broaden the LASOs' service area across the city outside of the downtown core and to support the mandate of the four original LASOs.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2011.ED3.3>

COMMENTS

The LASOs are an important part of Toronto's arts ecosystem, providing local opportunities for people of all ages to engage in arts and culture, supporting emerging artists and providing paid opportunities to local youth, artists and creatives. They offer locally relevant and responsive free and/or affordable arts programs, events and services that encourage artistic growth for both emerging and established artists, contribute to the economy through employment and professional development opportunities for artists, promote community-building, inclusion and equity, support social change and help develop a robust arts and culture scene at a neighbourhood level. In alignment with the City's Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy and the Youth Equity Strategy, the LASOs operates in underserved communities and in Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs) and impact outside-the-core communities through programs and services that are:

- inclusive, with a focus on engaging Indigenous, Black and equity-deserving communities, with programs including artists residencies and exhibitions for Black artists, creative writing programs for Indigenous, Black and equity-deserving communities, arts programming in a variety of media for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth focusing on creating inclusive spaces, creative expression, health and resilience, creative workshops for seniors and programs focused on mental health in collaboration with Workman Arts; and,
- accessible to the public, with no or low admission fees, reducing residents' barriers to participation in arts and culture and increasing sense of belonging,
- responsive to both local community and sectoral needs, with diverse programs and services that include mentorships, professional development and paid opportunities for Indigenous, Black, Persons of Colour and equity-deserving artists and high-quality cultural programming in local neighbourhoods

The six LASOs work collaboratively, sharing resources such as operational and facility management and human resources policies and partnering on programs where applicable, with the intention of increasing operational efficiencies (i.e. HR, marketing), leveraging assets and deepening the impacts of their programming and services to collectively, better serve the public. Their diverse programming is at street level, with offerings that range from instructional workshops in shopping malls, to mural art and community festivals that engage all ages and feature IBPOC and 2SLGBTQIA+ artist-led activations and experiences.

Based on the 2023 annual reports, some of the demonstrated cultural and economic impacts reported by the LASOs include:

- 2.73 million engagements across 21 Toronto wards in skill-building arts programs, community cultural festivals, gallery exhibitions, film screenings, performances, and public art such as the annual Winter Stations and murals.
- Provided employment opportunities to 1,108 artists, including newcomers, new career, youth and equity-deserving artists;
- Offered essential services, such as providing micro grants, professional development and networking opportunities for emerging and equity-deserving artists and acting as trustees for small unincorporated grassroots community organizations, who often have limited access to funding because they may not meet other funder's eligibility criteria.

Since amalgamation in 1999, the City of Toronto has provided support to the LASOs. In 2021, the LASO grant program moved to a multi-year granting cycle, with a formal application process every three years and annual funding allocations determined and issued based on the review of submitted annual reports.

Drawing on Economic Development and Culture (EDC)'s grant reform efforts, in addition to aligning to the Community Grants Policy, which specifies a formal grant intake application process with clear funding criteria, the allocation of the LASOs' program funding is determined based on the review of the 2023 annual reports with consideration of input from an external peer advisory panel that reviewed the LASOs' 2022 grant applications. The external review panel members were selected based on their experience and expertise in addition to their general knowledge of the arts and culture sector and their review of applications is focused on cultural impact, public impact, organizational resiliency and financial management and accountability. Additionally, LASO annual funding allocations are also accessible to the public through City of Toronto's Open Data portal and on the City's website.

Notably, while LASOs are independent not-for-profit organizations, the City remains their primary funder. Efforts are underway to ensure that the funding allocations to individual LASOs from the City's program budget are transparent, equitable and reflective of operational demands and outcomes sought and achieved. A need to rebalance LASO funding levels persists, with some LASOs funded at more than twice the level of other LASOs, when clients served or per capita considerations are applied. The City is committed, as with all its funding programs, to develop equitable funding

approaches that provide Council confidence that funding is being distributed in a transparent and accountable manner.

As part of their efforts to increase and improve their service delivery, support to local artists and community responsiveness, the LASOs have also committed to reviewing the priorities of the respective communities they serve, in order to obtain a more nuanced understanding of the current needs of local artists and community groups, which will inform and improve future program and service delivery and deepen community impact. These efforts are happening in tandem with the development of new strategic plans, program forecasts, targeted data collection and engagement and consultation with local stakeholders and rights holders.

Next Steps

The next LASO multi-year funding application will be released in the final quarter of 2024. In alignment with the City's Community Grant Policy, an external advisory panel with diverse representation will review and evaluate the applications received, and will subsequently provide funding recommendations for 2025. Throughout 2024, the LASOs will collectively offer a continuum of local programming and services in accordance with the submitted 2024 LASO program plans. The LASOs will submit a report on 2024 program and service level results in the first quarter of 2025, which includes programming, financial and statistical reporting (i.e. audited financial statements), submission of strategic and financial plans and relevant policy documents.

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SIGNATURE

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