

## Culture Connects: An Action Plan for Culture in Toronto (2025-2035)

**Date:** October 8, 2024

**To:** Economic and Community Development Committee

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

**Wards:** All

### SUMMARY

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*Culture Connects: An Action Plan for Culture in Toronto (2025-2035)* sets an ambitious 10-year vision for Toronto as a city for culture and creativity, where everyone, everywhere, can discover, experience, and create culture. This vision positions Toronto as an undeniable global cultural capital, celebrated for its exciting and expansive cultural and creative industry offerings as well as its accomplished talent. Culture is engrained in this city, making Toronto a better place to live, work, and visit. It drives economic growth, strengthens community bonds, and promotes social well-being, helping to create thriving, healthy communities.

It has been over a decade since the City's last culture plan, *Creative Capital Gains*, was introduced in 2011. Since then, there have been significant economic, cultural, and societal shifts – and a devastating global pandemic. Emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic, Toronto's culture sector is at an inflection point and faces great instability. Challenges include access to space, affordability, equity, changing audience habits, and sponsor supports. As emphasized in public consultations, the Action Plan also has a significant focus on ensuring culture becomes more available to people across the city, wherever they live, close to their homes, and embedded in their communities. A new Action Plan is needed to address the current obstacles and seize the opportunities of the next 10 years. Inaction would threaten Toronto's vibrancy, liveability, and prosperity. Now is the moment to invest in culture, chart a forward path, and reinforce and reimagine culture in Toronto.

*Culture Connects: An Action Plan for Culture in Toronto (2025-2035)*, included as Attachment 1, has been shaped and guided by community input. The Action Plan includes 28 actions grouped into four priority areas: 1) Culture Everywhere; 2) Culture for All; 3) Culture for the Future; and 4) Culture Beyond our Borders. These priorities are based on input shared by more than 4,000 residents throughout the Action Plan's community engagement process, comprehensive research conducted by the University of Toronto, and best practices from leading cities from around the world.

This report outlines the need for an action plan, detailing the engagement process and key results as well as the Action Plan's vision, priorities, and core components. This includes the Year One focus, the framework for ongoing engagement, and accountability measures, such as regular progress reporting.

The Action Plan includes both urgent actions to immediately address critical challenges, and long-term actions to drive systemic change. The urgent need to invest and connect will be the focus of Year One of the Action Plan, including increased support for the Toronto Arts Council; funds to support stabilization and transformation for cultural organizations; and hosting the inaugural Mayor's Culture Summit. Throughout its implementation, the Action Plan will focus on impacts and outcomes, continued engagement, transparency, and accountability. With Culture Connects, the City presents a bold strategy to transform current realities and seize opportunities to create a vibrant and prosperous future for culture in Toronto.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

1. City Council adopt and direct the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, to implement the actions in Culture Connects: An Action Plan for Culture in Toronto (2025-2035), as outlined in Attachment 1 to this report.
2. City Council direct the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, and other relevant City divisions to include the staffing and resources required for implementing Culture Connects: An Action Plan for Culture in Toronto (2025-2035) for consideration through the 2025 Budget process and subsequent years budget processes.
3. City Council authorize the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, to negotiate, enter into, and amend any agreements necessary to support the implementation of Culture Connects: An Action Plan for Culture in Toronto (2025-2035) and these recommendations, within the resources included in the operating or capital budget, on terms satisfactory to them, and in forms and terms satisfactory to the City Solicitor.
4. City Council direct the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, to develop an online dashboard to report on the impacts of Culture Connects: An Action Plan for Culture in Toronto (2025-2035).
5. City Council direct the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, in collaboration and consultation with other relevant City divisions, agencies and corporations to report to the Economic and Community Development Committee in 2027 on implementation progress and outcomes of the actions in Culture Connects: An Action Plan for Culture in Toronto (2025-2035).

6. City Council forward Culture Connects: An Action Plan for Culture in Toronto (2025-2035), outlined as Attachment 1, to the following provincial ministries for their consideration: Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming and Ministry of Sport; and Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation, and Trade; and request these ministries work with the City to address the urgent need for actions to address funding, stability, and affordability for the cultural sector and collaborate with City staff to advance the Action Plan.

7. City Council forward Culture Connects: An Action Plan for Culture in Toronto (2035-2035), outlined as Attachment 1, to the following federal departments for their consideration: Canadian Heritage; Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario; Innovation, Science, and Economic Development Canada; and request these departments work with the City to address the urgent need for actions to address funding, stability, and affordability for the cultural sector and collaborate with City staff to advance the Action Plan.

## FINANCIAL IMPACT

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This report presents and seeks City Council approval for *Culture Connects: an Action Plan for Culture in Toronto (2025-2035)*, a comprehensive 10-year plan. While aspects of this work will proceed with existing resources, new and future investments will be required to achieve the vision and outcomes of the Action Plan. Further, as the Action Plan is designed to be responsive to emerging opportunities and needs over its 10-year span, future requests may be brought forward through future year budget processes.

The 2024 Operating Budget for Economic Development and Culture Division (EDC) included an increase of \$0.800 million to support the implementation of this Action Plan. These funds are being allocated as follows: \$0.400 million in enhancements to the Toronto Arts Council, \$0.180 million supporting sector stabilization through funding for organization transformation and capacity building, and the balance supporting the development of a Cultural Infrastructure Study to identify city-wide cultural space needs, a dedicated staff position to lead the implementation of the Action Plan, expertise to strengthen data collection, analysis, and performance measurement, and initiatives to ensure ongoing communications and engagement as part of the plan implementation.

As listed in the Culture Connects Workplan for 2025-2027, located in Attachment 2 to this report, urgent action items, except those noted below, can be implemented within existing resources including funds approved for the Action Plan in EDC's 2024 Operating Budget. To continue actions in 2025, EDC has reviewed the current capacity and staff resources and has identified additional funding requests for consideration as part of the 2025 Budget Process.

The following operating resource requirements to advance Urgent Actions in the Action Plan are planned and subject to approval through the 2025 Budget Process.

To implement the Action Plan, the following increases are recommended to the Operating Budget of the Economic Development and Culture Division:

1. To expand and improve funding programs to support artists and arts organizations through the Toronto Arts Council, an increase of \$2.000 million will be required annually for the next five years, starting in 2025.
2. To increase funding to Local Arts Service Organizations, by doubling funding from 2024 levels and applying an equitable distribution approach, an increase of \$0.379 million will be required annually for the next five years, starting in 2025.
3. To enhance investment to support festivals and special events and deepen investment in creative industries, \$1.065 million will be required in 2025, with an incremental increase of \$0.200 million in 2026 and \$0.100 million in 2027, including:
  - a. \$0.565 million for enhanced investment to support festivals and special events in 2025, with an incremental increase of \$0.200 million in 2026.
  - b. \$0.500 million to deepen investment in the creative industries in 2025, with an incremental increase of \$0.100 million in 2027 will be required consisting of:
    - i. \$0.300 million for the development of targeted community engagement and training initiatives to enable historically underrepresented groups to access opportunities in Toronto's film and interactive digital media sectors.
    - ii. \$0.200 million for incubator programs that support organizational capacity development and financial sustainability for creative entrepreneurs and small creative businesses in Toronto's film and interactive digital media sectors.
4. To establish and implement tools to strengthen and protect cultural districts as directed by City Council in [2021.EC25.3](#), \$0.365 million will be required annually starting in 2025.
5. To enable and increase the audience development efforts of local arts, heritage, and cultural organizations citywide with investments in audience development, collective marketing, and discoverability, \$0.075 million is required annually starting in 2025.
6. To advance investments in cultural tourism and promotion, \$0.050 million is in 2025, with an incremental increase of \$0.050 million in 2026.
7. Staffing resources to support the implementation of the actions described in the Action Plan will be required. This would include 5.5 FTEs at \$0.346 million in 2025, an incremental cost of \$0.365 million in 2026 and \$0.005 million in 2027.
8. To add an automatic annual inflationary adjustment to Cultural Grants, effective January 1st of each year commencing in January of 2025.

Table 1: 2025 Incremental funding requirements and future year impacts

<b>Initiatives (\$ thousand)</b>	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Positions</b>	<b>Year 2 Increase</b>	<b>Positions</b>	<b>Year 3 Increase</b>	<b>Positions</b>
Toronto Arts Council	2,000.0		2,000.0		2,000.0	
Local Arts Service Organizations	379.0		379.0		379.0	
Festivals	565.0		200.0		0.0	
Creative Industries	500.0		0.0		100.0	
Cultural Districts	365.0		0.0		0.0	
Discoverability	75.0		0.0		0.0	
Cultural Tourism Promotion	50.0		50.0		0.0	
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>3,934.0</b>		<b>2,629.0</b>		<b>2,479.0</b>	
Staffing cost	346.6	5.5	365.5		5.6	
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,280.6</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>2,994.5</b>		<b>2,484.6</b>	
Inflationary increase to Cultural Grants*	966.1		839.8		904.2	
<b>Total including inflationary increase</b>	<b>5,246.7</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>3,834.3</b>		<b>3,388.8</b>	

\* Inflationary increase is based 2.5% in 2025, preliminary 2% in 2026 and 2027

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has been advised of the financial impacts associated with this Action Plan to be considered along with the other priorities in future budget processes.

## RECONCILIATION AND EQUITY IMPACT

Throughout the engagement process, communities shared how systemic discrimination, including inequitable access to resources and lack of representation, continues to negatively impact Indigenous, Black, racialized, and equity-deserving groups in Toronto's cultural and creative industry sectors. They called for an action plan that centres on First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, as well as equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility.

*Culture Connects: An Action Plan for Culture in Toronto (2025-2035)* details actions that support programming, investments, and other initiatives to address challenges and

reduce barriers faced by Indigenous, Black, and equity-deserving creatives, cultural workers, and communities seeking access and a broader range of experiences. Key actions include collaborating with Indigenous communities to support Indigenous-led arts, culture, and creative initiatives; improving community access to cultural spaces across neighbourhoods; enhancing grant and funding programs to meet evolving community needs beyond the downtown core; and addressing employment barriers in cultural and creative sectors for youth, newcomers, and others. These actions are designed to help address the inequitable access to funding currently experienced by Indigenous and racialized creators and cultural organizations in Toronto, leading to higher levels of burn-out among racialized cultural leaders, precarity for their organizations, and departures from the city of diverse talent. The Action Plan seeks to increase civic and community engagement by providing more opportunities to experience culture city-wide and by fostering community connections, a sense of identity and belonging, and shared experiences.

The City will engage with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples as well as Black and equity-deserving groups throughout the Action Plan's implementation to understand and reflect their interests and needs. The Action Plan will also facilitate collaboration among City divisions to advance reconciliation and equity priorities, including the Reconciliation Action Plan, the Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism, the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan, and others.

## **DECISION HISTORY**

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At its meeting on July 24 and 25, 2024, City Council directed the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture (EDC) to ensure that the needs of equity-deserving communities and youth, especially those outside the core and racialized youth facing barriers to cultural access and participation, are considered in strategies to achieve a more equitable distribution of cultural funding, and that the forthcoming Action Plan for Toronto's Culture Sector provide concrete steps on the allocation of resources in these important areas.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.MM20.35>

At its meeting on May 22 and 23, 2024, City Council directed the General Manager, EDC to report on the current distribution of City-funded cultural events across Toronto and on a plan to strengthen investment in areas outside the downtown core, especially in Urban Growth Centres as outlined in the Official Plan, as part of the Action Plan for Toronto's Culture Sector.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.MM18.19>

At its meeting on May 22 and 23, 2024, City Council directed the General Manager, EDC to report back prior to the 2025 budget process on the timelines to achieve equitable funding across the Local Arts Service Organizations to the Economic and Community Development Committee.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.EC12.4>

At its meeting on February 14, 2024, City Council increased the 2024 Operating Budget for EDC by \$0.8 million to support the implementation of the forthcoming Action Plan for

Toronto's Culture Sector benefitting organizations such as the Toronto Arts Council, local arts service organizations, and other crucial actors in the culture sector, 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, City Council directed the General Manager, EDC to develop strategies to support the long-term sustainability of Toronto's not-for-profit cultural sector, including strategies to support major cultural institutions beyond grants and to increase municipal support to new and emerging cultural organizations, and to include any such strategies as part of a forthcoming Culture Plan for Toronto.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2023.EC3.12>

At its meeting on May 17, 18 and 19, 2011 City Council adopted Creative Capital Gains: An Action Plan for Toronto, the previous action plan for the culture sector in Toronto.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2011.ED3.3>

## COMMENTS

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### Background and Context

In May 2011, City Council adopted [Creative Capital Gains: An Action Plan for Toronto](#) to grow the city's cultural sector and position Toronto as a global creative capital. Most of the actions outlined in that plan have been accomplished, as detailed in Attachment 3. However, the past decade has brought profound cultural, societal, and economic changes that have deeply impacted Toronto's arts, heritage, culture, and creative industries. Awareness of the importance of Truth and Reconciliation has increased, as have responses to confront anti-Black racism, to enhance equity and inclusion, and to advance disability justice. However, the financial sustainability of artists and cultural organizations in Toronto has become more precarious in recent years. The onset of the global pandemic in March 2020 led to widespread closures among cultural producers, disrupting the local cultural economy and exacerbating longstanding equity and sustainability issues within the sector.

Nationally, recovery across the cultural sector has been uneven and further challenged by inflation and cost escalations, leading to significant instability in the sector. Given the concentration of cultural activity in Toronto, these trends have heavily impacted the local cultural sector. Loss of cultural spaces and a lack of affordability are displacing artists and organizations, rising costs and volatile labour markets have left many in precarious positions, and a generation of creatives can no longer afford to live and work in Toronto. There is an urgent need for both new strategies and investments to support culture in Toronto, particularly more accessible and inclusive experiences that reflect the city's diversity and are distributed throughout the city. Toronto residents consulted in the development of this Action Plan were clear that proximity mattered and that they sought more cultural opportunities closer to where they live, in all parts of the city. Today's challenges require bold, decisive action and dedication to meaningful structural support and change.

It is also a time of immense opportunity and potential. Toronto is a global creative and cultural hub renowned for its artists, festivals, arts, museums, and creative industries. It is through the work of Toronto's creators that many people worldwide learn about this city. Toronto's talent-rich cultural sector makes contributions to the city's vibrancy, social health, connectivity, and adds to Toronto's appeal as a great place to live, work, and visit. With *Culture Connects: An Action Plan for Culture in Toronto (2025-2035)*, the City sets forth an ambitious strategy to tackle crucial challenges and to transform visionary possibilities into future realities.

### ***Cultural Audiences, Participation, and Well-being***

Prior to the pandemic, Toronto's audiences consumed more culture than the national average, participating in 2.5 cultural experiences per month.<sup>1</sup> Attendees were most attracted to activities that fostered community and belonging, social connections, and lively and new experiences. However, since the pandemic, there have been shifts in cultural participation.

Often, the main barrier for cultural participation in Toronto is the lack of cultural offerings close to where people live. Those consulted in the preparation of this Action Plan also cited as a barrier the feeling that cultural activities are "not for someone like me."<sup>2</sup> In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, inflation, and rising costs, Torontonians now are also more accustomed to staying home, have less disposable income, have less energy or time to make long commutes across the city. Some are simply unaware of the arts, heritage, and culture happenings. They also find that events and venues are not always accessible.<sup>3</sup>

Research demonstrates that cultural participation frequently leads to broader civic engagement. Torontonians who are more civically engaged report higher quality of life satisfaction, larger social networks, more frequent interactions with friends and neighbours, and a stronger sense of community.<sup>4</sup> Since the pandemic, social isolation has increased, leaving many feeling less connected to friends, family, and their community. This decline negatively affects Torontonians' mental well-being and social capital and left unchecked, aggregates into declining trust and social cohesion.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Business / Arts, LaPlaca Cohen, Nanos Research. Culture Track Ontario, 2019.  
[https://www.businessandarts.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Culture-Track-Ontario\\_103118-FINAL.pdf](https://www.businessandarts.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Culture-Track-Ontario_103118-FINAL.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Monumental Projects, What We Heard report. See Attachment 5.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Toronto Foundation and Environics Institute, Toronto Social Capital Study, 2022.  
[https://www.environicsinstitute.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/tf---scs2022---final---digital-final-ua.pdf?sfvrsn=d96d1e9d\\_0](https://www.environicsinstitute.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/tf---scs2022---final---digital-final-ua.pdf?sfvrsn=d96d1e9d_0)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



## ***The City's Funding for Culture***

Since 2012, Toronto has increased cultural grant funding by 49%, from \$25.3 million to over \$37.5 million, significantly boosting support for artists and cultural organizations.<sup>6</sup> This increase has enabled the Toronto Arts Council to provide over \$6 million in net new grants to the sector, reaching new clients and establishing programs to advance priority initiatives, including new support for Indigenous, Black, and newcomer artists, as well as programs for arts in parks, libraries, and historic sites in neighbourhoods across Toronto. Local Arts Service Organizations (LASOs) also saw an 130% increase, including the establishment of two new LASOs, North York Arts and East End Arts, in 2011 and 2013 respectively. This funding growth has led to more stable operating grants, with total operating funding increasing by 58%. The number of cultural organizations receiving annual operating funding from the City and the TAC rose by 27%, from 196 in 2012 to 249 in 2022.

However, funding remains concentrated in downtown Toronto. In 2022, 77% of municipal arts funding went to four downtown wards. Wards outside of the city core, where 90% of the population resides, received just 23% of funding, despite housing the great majority of the city's population and its economic activity as well as many equity-deserving communities.<sup>7</sup> The current investment pattern concentrates a large amount of City cultural funding in a handful of large cultural organizations. For the City's annual operating grants to cultural organizations, 20 organizations received half of all operating funding in 2023, with grants averaging \$680,000 per organization. The remaining 50% of operating funding was distributed among 229 other organizations, with an average grant amount of \$60,500. This funding imbalance corresponds to a lack of cultural infrastructure outside of the core, making space for culture city-wide a critical priority. New investment is required to enable newer cultural organizations, frequently led by or serving equity-deserving groups, to access the resources necessary to get traction, scale, and ensure renewal in Toronto's cultural sector. This dynamic also represents a challenge to intergenerational fairness in public support for culture in Toronto.

## ***Developing the Action Plan***

A comprehensive process was undertaken to develop the Action Plan, including research and community engagement. To ensure that the Action Plan would be driven by community, the City, in collaboration with the Toronto Arts Council and Foundation, undertook expansive community engagement to discuss needs, identify gaps, and understand the priorities of the public, the cultural sector, and the creative industry community.

The City also partnered with the University of Toronto to conduct research on the state of culture in Toronto, including a detailed analysis of Toronto's economic dynamics and

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<sup>6</sup> Funding increases outpaced inflation and population growth; between 2012, inflation increased 26% and Toronto's population increased 7%.

<sup>7</sup> This analysis is based on CADAC data that examined municipal cultural funding using 2021-2022 numbers (\$27.6 million). The population totals reflect 2021 Census data from Statistics Canada (City of Toronto 2,794,356).

changes in the cultural sector between 1991 and 2021, included as Attachment 4 of this report.<sup>8</sup> The University of Toronto's work was complemented by research led by City staff, including a jurisdictional scan of best and next practices of 14 cities and organizations worldwide, as well as an assessment of recent economic impacts and trends related to culture.

Together, this comprehensive research and engagement directly informed the development of the Action Plan, ensuring its actions will meet the needs of the sector and Torontonians alike.

## ***Engagement Methodology and Process***

Monumental Projects was engaged by the City to design and deliver a creative and inclusive city-wide engagement process to seek input into the development of the Action Plan. More than 4,000 people participated in consultations through various in-person and virtual activities and other means. These sessions were designed to engage people in the culture sector (such as artists, not-for-profit organizations, creative industries, and more), cultural audiences, and the general public.

The engagement activities included:

- *13 Community Conversations* featuring deep-dive conversations with a diverse and intersectional group of participants on the key issues and trends facing artists, creatives, and the culture sector.
- *5 Themed Sessions* based on critical issues and trends facing the sector.
- *3 Sessions with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples as well as, Black and equity-deserving community members* facing disproportionate barriers in the culture sector.
- *5 Sector-Specific Sessions* with members from specific cultural sectors, including creative industries (two sessions), museums and heritage, post-secondary educational institutions, and LASOs.
- *5 Creative Facilitator-led Sessions*: Creative-led engagement sessions held across the city.
- *8 Community-Led Sessions*: The City created a toolkit for residents and organizations interested in hosting community conversations. Eight organizations and resident groups led discussions using the toolkit.
- *2 Virtual Town Halls*: Two virtual town halls engaged the public, seeking feedback on the Action Plan's emerging themes, community priorities, and participants' future vision for culture.
- *Council Advisory Bodies*: six Council Advisory Bodies were engaged to gather feedback and to identify priority issues.
- *2 Online Surveys*: The City deployed two online surveys during the development of the Action Plan. The first (January-March 2024) gathered feedback from those working across culture sectors and the broader public on sector priorities and

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<sup>8</sup> See Attachment 4, Vinodrai, T. Toronto's Cultural Sector, Economic Dynamics, and Change, 1991 to 2021, School of Cities, University of Toronto, July 2024.

audience experiences. The second survey (August-September 2024) sought to gather input on the draft direction of the Action Plan.

In addition to the engagement activities listed above, throughout the Action Plan's development, staff from the Economic Development and Culture (EDC) Division worked closely with an Advisory Panel, co-chaired by Councillor Shelley Carroll, the Mayor's Economic Development and Culture Champion, and Maxine Bailey, the Executive Director of the Canadian Film Centre. Consisting of leaders from across cultural sectors and creative industries, the panel shared their insights, guidance, and feedback in 11 engagement sessions held across 2023 and 2024. A complete list of Advisory Panel members can be found in Attachment 1.

### ***Engagement Themes and Community Priorities***

The key themes that emerged from the extensive engagement included centring First Nations, Inuit, and Métis knowledge and approaches; fostering authentic relationships with Indigenous communities; prioritizing inclusion and accessibility; improving City processes; and pursuing ambitious and innovative solutions. Addressing the city's diminishing cultural and creative spaces, increasing awareness of and participation in cultural activities, and promoting Toronto's cultural vibrancy locally and globally also emerged as community priorities. Additionally, fostering community connections and re-imagining funding and granting processes for greater accessibility and reduced administrative burden along with other supports were identified as essential to ensuring Toronto's prosperity in the future. In Attachment 5, the "What We Heard" report from Monumental Projects summarizes the findings from the community engagement process and additional City-led consultations with the sector.

Additionally, from August 14 to September 12, 2024, the City collected feedback from residents through an online survey on the draft summary of the Action Plan. The 457 responses highlighted Toronto's cultural life as vibrant and diverse but also expensive and underfunded. The survey confirmed the alignment between the Action Plan's priorities and community needs and perspectives.

### **Culture Connects: An Action Plan for Culture in Toronto (2025-2035)**

Based on research and the voices of community, the Action Plan articulates a vision and desired future state for culture in Toronto:

*Toronto will be a city where everyone can discover, create, and experience culture.*

This is a vision for a Toronto that will inspire and be inspired through culture; a Toronto where culture is valued and prized as an integral part of everyone's daily lives and of complete and healthy communities citywide. It articulates a city where everyone can discover and engage with culture in ways most meaningful to them. It also envisions a future of culture and creativity in Toronto that is diverse and inclusive, innovative and sustainable, as well as global and entrepreneurial, all within a city affordable for artists,

cultural workers, and creative businesses. To realize this vision, five guiding principles will inform and underpin the Action Plan over the next 10 years.

- *Centre Indigenous Cultures and Creativity* – celebrate diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis knowledge and knowing, cultures, and artistic processes and work to support the deepening of Toronto as a centre for Indigenous cultures, creativity, and leadership.
- *Prioritize Equity and Access* – prioritize opportunities and eliminate barriers to access for Indigenous, Black, disabled, and equity-deserving communities to create and experience culture in neighbourhoods across the city, thereby ensuring that we have a culture sector that is relevant and accessible to everyone.
- *Champion Artists, Creatives and Creative Industries* – recognize and promote Toronto's creatives and cultural sectors as essential components of city building, shared prosperity, and community well-being.
- *Attract and Build for Audiences* – increase opportunities for everyone to discover, create, and engage with meaningful and impactful cultural programs and events.
- *Foster Innovation and Enable Creativity* – cultivate an environment that supports and encourages technological innovation, financial sustainability, entrepreneurial thinking, and risk-taking.

The guiding principles are rooted in the priorities identified through community engagement, aligned with City priorities, and informed by research of international best practices in cultural and creative industry sectors.

These guiding principles will infuse the implementation of 28 actions over four priority areas, as detailed in Attachment 1: 1) Culture Everywhere; 2) Culture for All; 3) Culture For the Future; and 4) Culture Beyond Our Borders. These actions include urgent actions to address immediate concerns and imminent opportunities, as well as long-term actions designed to drive systemic change over the next decade.

### ***Priorities of the Action Plan***

The four priorities of the Action Plan are detailed below:

**Culture Everywhere** addresses the persistent challenge of ensuring safe, accessible, and affordable cultural space by outlining actions to protect and grow cultural infrastructure across Toronto, with a focus on ensuring cultural space throughout the city as an essential component of complete communities. The Action Plan includes an ambitious target to support the development of one million square feet of new cultural space over the next decade. This will be achieved through a range of actions, such as identifying neighbourhoods in need of cultural infrastructure; protecting existing spaces from displacement; and unlocking both public and private spaces for cultural uses. With a focus on truly accessible space, the City also seeks to make culture more inclusive for everyone, including artists, creatives, residents, and visitors, by reducing financial, proximity, and other barriers.

The **Culture For All** priority addresses this by advocating for increased equitable funding; simplified application processes; the expansion of the definition of culture to include Indigenous knowledge and practices; and increased opportunities for people to engage with culture across the city. The Action Plan sets a target of providing every resident with access to at least one free City-supported cultural experience per month in their neighbourhood.<sup>9</sup> Immediate actions include addressing barriers to cultural resources for Indigenous, Black, and equity-deserving artists and cultural organizations; taking immediate action to support resiliency and sustainability in the culture sector; and amplifying Indigenous-led programming; and providing resources for people across Toronto to access culture.

Looking ahead, the **Culture For The Future** priority is designed to support innovation, sustainability and adaptability within Toronto's cultural and creative industry sectors and expand opportunities for Torontonians. Technology is evolving quickly, creating new opportunities for creation, production, audience engagement, and revenue generation. Alongside these developments, supporting entrepreneurial thinking and cross-sectoral collaboration, and accessing international partnerships and markets can also grow these sectors in sustainable ways. The Action Plan's target includes increasing investments by \$35 million over the next ten years to retain, rebuild, and reimagine culture in Toronto, aiming to build capacity, incubate creative sectors, and promote experimentation, talent and organizational development, as well as sector-wide sustainability. Additionally, the Action Plan outlines actions to collect and share sector-wide data to better demonstrate the impact of culture in the city, and to better equip sector leaders and policymakers to make data-informed decisions.

Lastly, the **Culture Beyond Our Borders** priority aims to solidify Toronto as a global centre for culture and creativity. Over the next decade, the City will support 1,000 new creative export and artist exchange projects while hosting major international events focused on innovation, technology, and creativity. Signature initiatives, including cultural programming aligned with the 2026 FIFA World Cup to make culture a defining feature of our hosting activities, will solidify Toronto's presence as a global cultural capital.

### ***Invest and Connect: Year One Implementation Plan (2025)***

During the first year of implementation, the Action Plan will address two critical issues: the need to invest and connect. Achieving the necessary change over the next decade requires first turning the page on the crisis of instability facing artists and cultural organizations. To advance this, the City will focus on stabilizing cultural organizations, supporting artists, and bringing communities together. Year One's actions will pave the way for a stronger and more resilient cultural landscape:

- **Invest** - The City will boost support for culture in Toronto through increased funding and new initiatives. Increased support for the Toronto Arts Council (TAC)

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<sup>9</sup> Toronto's official 158 neighbourhoods are listed here:  
<https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/data-research-maps/neighbourhoods-communities/neighbourhood-profiles/about-toronto-neighbourhoods/>

aims to expand strategic programs and additional festival funding will help events manage rising costs while staying community focused. To ensure the stability of cultural organizations, the City and its partners will fund the Catalyst and Transformation Fund. Administered by Work in Culture, this fund assists with operational changes toward long-term sustainability encouraging the partnerships, mergers, and shared resources that can contribute to greater sector sustainability. Moreover, with an investment in artsvest Toronto, the City will help address the financial pressures facing arts organizations by providing mentorship and guidance to non-profits in securing private sponsorships, delivered in partnership with Business / Arts.

- **Connect** - With a focus on community-building and collective action, the inaugural Mayor's Culture Summit in 2025 will enable the cultural sector to engage in collective priority setting, peer-to-peer learning and partnerships as well as assess the progress of the Action Plan. The City also plans to promote cultural activities, creating deeper and increased opportunities for residents to engage close to where they live and year-round, including via the City's network of civic squares. Through the new Cultural Districts program, local leadership and placemaking projects will be strengthened. Increased support for LASOs will expand arts programming outside the downtown core.

## ***Strategic Alignment***

Toronto's Official Plan recognizes that everyone should have access to what they need to flourish in their day-to-day lives, including convenient and safe access to arts and culture as well as entertainment venues. It also signals that Toronto must work with honesty and integrity to create and repair relationships to support truth, justice, and reconciliation with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, with Toronto being a city where Indigenous worldviews, cultures, and ways of life are respected and celebrated.

The Action Plan is a comprehensive long-term strategy that aligns with the Official Plan as well as key city-wide strategic plans, including the Corporate Strategic Plan, the Reconciliation Action Plan, the Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism, and other City initiatives. It is informed by several Council-approved culture sector-specific strategies and calls for ongoing development or renewal of sector-specific strategies, such as the forthcoming Film Strategy from the Toronto Film, Television and Digital Media Board. The Action Plan recognizes that these strategies will continue to be the primary guide for sector priorities and actions.<sup>10</sup>

Recognizing culture as driver of economic prosperity, the City has developed this Action Plan in close consultation with the Action Plan for Toronto's Economy. The two action plans are designed to work together, fostering a more equitable, prosperous, and vibrant Toronto.

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<sup>10</sup> These include the Visitor Economy Strategic Directions Report (2023-2028), Toronto Music Industry Strategy (2022-2026), Toronto History Museums Strategic Plan (2020-2023), Public Art Strategy (2020-2030), Spotlight on Toronto: A Strategic Action Plan for the Film, Television and Digital Media Industry (2017), and more.

## ***Equitable Distribution of Funding and Events***

At its meetings in May and July 2024, City Council directed the General Manager, EDC to pursue the equitable distribution of cultural funding and events (MM20.35; MM18.19; and EC12.4).

The Action Plan addresses these Council directives by focusing on Indigenous, Black, and equity-deserving communities and youth, with steps to develop cultural spaces in underserved areas, support self-determined Indigenous spaces, and improve accessibility to cultural venues and events. It aims to better distribute cultural funding, addressing discrepancies that exist in geography, among cultural communities, and between generations. This approach will better support diverse artists, creatives, and businesses citywide, while also investing in emerging talent and expanding youth-focused initiatives.

The Action Plan also responds to the directive in 2024.EC12.4 by advancing the equitable funding of the city's six LASOs over five years (2025-2030), contingent on approval of funding in the 2025 and future year budget processes. The equitable funding process will be informed by research, data analysis, a funding formula based on factors including population, per capita funding and community need, and engagement with the LASOs.

On the whole, the Action Plan will promote inclusive, community-driven programming, strengthening culture citywide and collecting data to better identify and address investment and programming gaps across Toronto.

## **Measuring Progress: Measurement, Evaluation, and Learning**

In the coming months, the City will develop a framework to track and evaluate progress, focusing on gathering information about activities, processes, and urgent and long-term actions. By focusing on outcomes, the City can assess the Action Plan's impact on communities across Toronto and measure its progress.

In the interim, EDC will track the following key success indicators: year-over-year increase in cultural space square footage, measured against the 2024 baseline; attendance at and geographic distribution of City-funded programs; growth in sector employment and economic impact, measured through census employment data and Gross Domestic Product growth; and growth in Toronto's cultural and creative industries global rankings, measured through economic, export and tourism data. The framework will then provide a more fulsome list.

A central deliverable of the framework will be an online dashboard to report on the key performance measures and implementation of the Action Plan. The City aims to prioritize standardized data collection across all cultural programs, services, and activities to better measure the wide-reaching impacts of Toronto's cultural and creative sectors, while also reducing the reporting burden on cultural grant recipients.

## Next Steps and Implementation of the Action Plan

If the Action Plan is adopted, EDC will manage its delivery, collaborating and consulting with the TAC, relevant City divisions and agencies, and others. EDC will also lead the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the Action Plan.

Developed with substantial community input, the Action Plan commits the City to ongoing engagement and communication with the community and accountability on the progress of the Action Plan. To further this commitment, the City will hold the first Mayor's Culture Summit in late 2025. This event will bring together creatives, industry leaders, and investors from across sectors for an opportunity to connect, identify, and collaborate on innovative solutions and promising ideas to strengthen Toronto's culture sector. The Summit will enable the City to provide updates on progress against the key initiatives of the Action Plan, ensuring accountability to the community. With a focus on peer-to-peer learning, the Summit will address the critical issues highlighted by the Action Plan and collaboratively refine the next steps and implementation strategies. Staff will provide an update on the implementation of the Action Plan to the Economic and Community Development Committee in 2027. Additionally, staff will regularly review the Action Plan to ensure that it continues to respond to community priorities and deliver strong results throughout its lifespan.

The actions in *Culture Connects: An Action Plan for Culture in Toronto (2025-2035)* aim to generate a lasting impact. By 2035, culture and creativity will be essential components of every neighbourhood, as the City and its partners ensure all residents and visitors can discover, create, and enjoy vibrant cultural experiences both locally and at key destinations. The cultural sector will be thriving; it will be widely accessible and more equitable, and positioned to lead through innovation, and grow into the future. With this Action Plan, the City is dedicated to continuing the work of championing Toronto as a global creative capital, known for its unparalleled cultural offerings and as the top destination in which cultural sector and creative industries can grow and flourish.

## CONTACT

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Aderonke Akande, Director, Arts and Culture Services, Economic Development and Culture, 416-397-5257

Karen Carter, Director, Museums and Heritage Services, Economic Development and Culture, 416-392-9135

Marguerite Pigott, Film Commissioner and Director of Entertainment Industries, Economic Development and Culture, 416-392-3376



## **SIGNATURE**

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Patrick Tobin  
General Manager, Economic Development and Culture

## **ATTACHMENTS**

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Attachment 1: Culture Connects: An Action Plan for Culture in Toronto (2025-2035)

Attachment 2: Culture Connects Workplan for 2025-2027

Attachment 3: Looking Back: Creative Capital Gains Since 2011

Attachment 4: Toronto's Cultural Sector: Economic Dynamics and Change, 1991 to 2021

Attachment 5: What We Heard – Summary of Feedback from Community Engagement