

From: [Christina Giannelia](#)
To: [Budget Committee](#); [Mayor Chow](#); [Andrew Pulsifer](#)
Cc: [Wendy Rading](#); [Shana Hillman, Director of Operations](#); [Nadijah Robinson](#); [Mick Brambilla](#); [Derek Spooner](#)
Subject: [External Sender] Local Arts Service Orgs 2024 Budget
Date: January 30, 2024 10:04:47 AM
Attachments: [LASO Letter to Mayor Chow October 2023.pdf](#)
[LASO Info Sheet 2023-2024.pdf](#)
[2023 Arts Day at the City Infographic.pdf](#)
[LASO Deputation 2024.pdf](#)

Dear Mayor Chow and the City of Toronto Budget Committee,

We appreciate the immense amount of work that has been put into the creation of the 2024 budget, considering all the challenges the City is facing.

We are writing to you today, to remind you of the work of Toronto's **Local Arts Service Organisations**, how crucial it is to support the lives of Torontonians, and how it is imperative that the funding for the LASO envelope increase. The **LASO funding portfolio has been flatlined for 6 years**. Considering inflation, we are not able to sustain our service levels without a much needed increase in funding.

Our ask to you is to ensure that the Arts Services department at the Division of Economic Development and Culture **keeps your promise to increase the LASO funding so that thousands of Toronto residents living outside the core get the arts services they deserve.**

In your election platform, **you pledged to double the LASO budget**. This came to us as a huge vote of confidence for the arts and culture scene outside the downtown core. We appreciate that you understood this to be a relatively small investment in relation to the City's budget as a whole and yet it can make a HUGE impact on the community.

Considering the hundreds of thousands of residents **we serve across 21 wards (84% of Torontonians)** through festivals, art courses, public art and more, the additional 1.8M to the LASO budget you pledged will go far and wide.

In our letter to you sent in the fall (attached here), we recognized that the increase cannot all come in one year, and so we proposed a gradual increase over the next 4 budget cycles, **starting with a \$900K increase in 2024.**

We thank you kindly for your attention to the Local Arts Service Organisation's needs.

Attached you will find:

- Our letter to you from fall 2023
- Information Sheet on the LASO impact
- Arts Day at the City Information, with the LASO budget increase ask from a wide range of Toronto Arts Orgs incl. TAC, TAPA and others
- LASO 2024 Budget Deputation from Jan. 23 2024

Sincerely,

LASO Executive Directors:

Christina Giannelia ([North York Arts](#)), Wendy Rading ([Arts Etobicoke](#)), Nadijah Robinson

([Lakeshore Arts](#)), Mick Brambilla ([UrbanArts](#)), Shana Hillman ([East End Arts](#)) and Derek Spooner ([Scarborough Arts](#))

Christina Giannelia (she/her)

Executive Director | North York Arts

in office: Mon.- Thurs; alternating Fri.

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Uplifting Artists, Celebrating Communities. North York Arts is a Canadian registered charity: #78092 3892 RR0001. [Donate Today!](#)



October 19, 2023

Dear Mayor Chow,

Congratulations again on your successful election to Mayor this past summer. We are very excited to have you lead our wonderful city. You are a champion of the arts. We know you share the idea that the arts are a cornerstone in building a healthy, connected and inspired city.

We would like to take this opportunity to revisit **a promise in your platform: to double the funding for Toronto Local Arts Service Organizations (LASOs)**, bringing more arts and culture to all communities and neighbourhoods in Toronto. Thank you for acknowledging the importance of arts investment in all corners of Toronto, by including the commitment for a much-needed funding increase in your election platform.

As you know, the LASOs are community arts service organizations, delivering arts and culture programs to the neighborhoods outside the downtown core. We have a shared mission to provide accessible and quality programming to these communities every day.

The LASOs collectively:

- Serve 84.2% of the population of Toronto, a total of 2.73M people*
- Represent 21 Toronto wards (all wards except 4, 10, 11 and 13)
- Receive \$1.8 million in operational City of Toronto funding, annually for 6 organisations
- Generate an additional \$2.5 million in revenue, contributing to the local economy
- Provided employment to over 850 artists in 2022
- Engaged over 450,000 community members in 2022 with high-quality public community arts programming.

It is important to note: **LASO funding has been flatlined by the City since 2019 - half a decade.** We are struggling to deliver on our missions. The LASOs are uniquely positioned to deliver on the City's priorities to equitably offer important arts and culture programming and support to residents, artists and community. Funding allocated to LASOs goes directly into communities.

Furthermore, arts funding is disproportionately allocated to organizations and initiatives downtown. Doubling the LASO budget indicates a commitment towards more equitable funding to the majority of Torontonians who live in all corners of the city. We acknowledge and appreciate City investments such as Nuit Blanche, ArtworxTO, ShowLoveTO and Cultural HotSpot have in recent years prioritized out-of-the-core activities. We have all supported these programs to ensure their success. However, the inequities in funding disbursement across the City continue to perpetuate the under-funding and under-supporting of arts programming in communities outside the downtown core.

By increasing investment to the LASOs, the City will guarantee that funding is targeted to the residents who make up the majority of the City's population, some of whom have historically been left behind in City investments.

* source: 2016 census



By doubling operating funding, the LASOs will:

- Provide more free and accessible arts programs and activities for all ages. Activities like these bring economic opportunities outside downtown neighbourhoods, beautify spaces and build pride among residents.
- Provide more jobs, entrepreneurship, and learning opportunities for artists living in the community, for whom downtown may have become too expensive and inaccessible.
- Have more capacity to support grassroots arts collectives, organizations and ad hoc initiatives to flourish in their communities.
- Catch up to the past years where there has been no funding increase, despite record high inflation rates for goods and services.

We would like to work with you to reach your promise of doubling funding to Toronto’s LASOs. We appreciate the City is facing unprecedented financial constraints, yet we are steadfast in our commitment to continue to advocate for increased arts funding outside the core.

How we can get there:

We ask that you as Mayor, the Budget Committee and City Councillors **support our request that Arts Services add \$900,000 to the LASO envelope in the 2024 budget** to support the equalization of LASO funding across the City including to Scarborough and North York, while not cutting other LASOs’ much needed operations funding.

We ask that the remaining \$900,000 investment be spread out across the following 3 years, with \$300,000 increases each year in 2025, 2026, 2027.

We stand firm in our belief that communities outside the downtown core deserve fair and equitable access to participation in the creation of art, at home, in their own communities. We look forward to taking an important role in Toronto’s new Art and Culture Plan, prioritizing arts in all neighbourhoods in Toronto, creating vibrancy and cultural identity within the community where people live.

Thank you for your attention. We know that our combined efforts will enhance the arts and cultural landscape in Toronto for generations to come. We also kindly request a meeting to discuss the importance of LASOs in delivering arts services across Toronto.

Thank you on behalf of the LASOs.

Sincerely,

LASO Executive Directors:

- Wendy Rading, Arts Etobicoke*
- Shana Hillman, East End Arts*
- Theo Walker-Robinson, Lakeshore Arts*
- Christina Giannelia, North York Arts*
- Derek Spooner, Scarborough Arts*
- Marlene McKintosh, UrbanArts*



Cc:

Ward 1 Councilor Vincent Chrisanti
Ward 2 Councilor Stephen Holyday
Ward 3 Councilor Amber Morley
Ward 5 York South-Weston Councilor Frances Nunziata
Ward 6 York Centre Councilor James Pasternak
Ward 8 Eglinton-Lawrence Councilor Mike Colle
Ward 9 Davenport Councilor Alejandra Bravo
Ward 12 Toronto-St. Paul's Councilor Josh Matlow
Ward 14 Toronto-Danforth Councilor Paula Fletcher
Ward 15 Don Valley West Councilor Jaye Robinson
Ward 16 Don Valley East Shelley Carroll
Ward 18 Willowdale Councilor Lily Cheng
Ward 19 Beaches-East York Councilor Brad Bradford
Ward 20 Scarborough Southwest Ward_20@toronto.ca
Ward 21 Scarborough Centre Councilor Michael Thompson
Ward 22 Scarborough-Agincourt Councilor Nick Mantas
Ward 23 Scarborough North Councilor Jamaal Myers
Ward 24 Scarborough-Guildwood Councilor Paul Ainslie
Ward 25 Scarborough-Rouge Park Councilor Jennifer McKelvie

Pat Tobin, General Manager, Economic Development and Culture

Joe Sellers, Acting Director, Arts And Culture Services

Julie Frost, Manager, Arts and Culture Services

Andrea Raymong-Wong, Seniors Arts Development Coordinator, Arts and Culture Services

TORONTO'S LOCAL ARTS SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS



The LASOs are community arts service organizations, delivering arts and culture programs & services to the neighborhoods outside the downtown core. Our shared mission is to provide accessible and quality programming to these communities every day. The LASOs include Arts Etobicoke, East End Arts, Lakeshore Arts, North York Arts, Scarborough Arts, and UrbanArts.

Our arts programs provide opportunities for residents of all ages, skill levels and interests. We engage children, youth, families, seniors, volunteers and artists of all disciplines. We support local communities through arts programming, activities and events.

The LASOs are a key strategic investment that supports Toronto's Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy and the City's arts & culture priorities, ensuring that arts and culture are accessible throughout Toronto.



**LASOS SERVE 84.2% OF THE
POPULATION OF TORONTO,
A TOTAL OF 2.73M PEOPLE
AND REPRESENT 21
TORONTO WARDS**

Vibrant arts and culture support a livable city by:

- Bringing people together to connect and celebrate arts and culture
- Supporting mental health & social determinants of health
- Beautifying communities and builds pride and a sense of identity in communities
- Providing opportunities for residents to create and share together, (sharing our stories and hear the stories of our neighbours, we develop understanding, empathy, and build community)
- Contributing to local tourism though art festivals and public art pieces
- Providing youth with a safe place to gather and self-express
- Combating isolation among seniors and supports newcomer integration

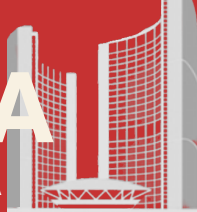


North York Arts - The Animation Project (photo by Maria Vega)

LASO funding has been flatlined by the City since 2019 - half a decade.

It's time to re-invest in our growing city.

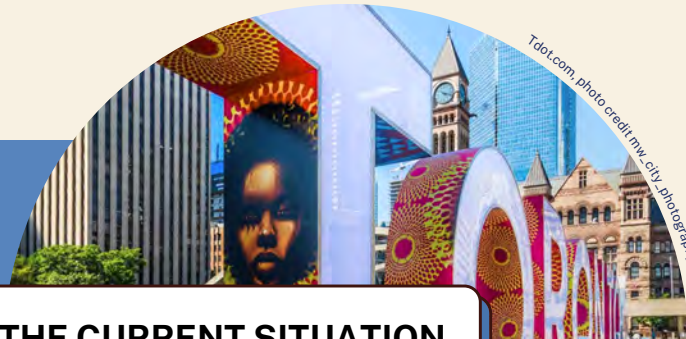
- Receive \$1.8 million in operational City of Toronto funding, annually for six organizations
- Serve 84.2% of the population of Toronto, a total of 2.73M people
- Generates an additional \$2.5 million in revenue, contributing to the local economy
- Provided employment to over 850 artists in 2022
- Engaged over 450,000 community members in 2022 with high-quality public community arts programming.



THANK YOU!

A new **Culture Plan** sets the stage for a healthy future. Work is now underway on an action plan for Toronto's Culture Sector. We asked and you are delivering.

Public stakeholder engagement in the culture plan including **equitable access** for the **entire arts and culture community** is more important than ever.



THE CURRENT SITUATION

THE CITY DEFICIT



SAFETY & SECURITY ON PUBLIC TRANSIT



HYBRID WORKING MODELS

EMPTY DOWNTOWN CORE



AFFORDABLE HOUSING

SHELTERING REFUGEES

SOCIAL HOUSING

THE CITY IS UNDER PRESSURE TO PRODUCE RESULTS

EXPENSES

NEW REVENUE GENERATION IS REQUIRED



REVENUES

The City of Toronto faces a **\$1.5B deficit in 2024**
Toronto needs a new deal with the province

YOUR PROBLEMS ARE OUR PROBLEMS

BETWEEN 2022 - 2023

44% of City-funded arts and culture organizations posted a deficit

Combined, all deficits totaled \$13.6M

Closure of affordable live-work spaces is **triggering an exodus of artists from Toronto***

*as per impressions from arts orgs city-wide

Young People's Theatre, photo credit Erin Nantais



ART CONNECTS COMMUNITIES

AUDIENCES, ARTISTS, AND ARTS WORKERS LIVE IN EVERY WARD

This map represents 3 organizations that collect audience demographics (in collaboration with Canadian Opera Company, National Ballet of Canada, Toronto Symphony Orchestra).

Imagine this map... if we added all cultural activity in Toronto.



WHAT ONTARIANS ARE SAYING

Stats provided by the Ontario Arts Council and Nanos.

- 3 of Ontarians believe that an active local art scene helps communities attract business
- 3 of Ontarians believe that making the arts available to communities is an important Government investment
- 3 of Ontarians believe that the arts are important to their mental health

LET'S WORK TOGETHER ... DIFFERENTLY

- Arts and Culture is an easy investment with high return on investment. \$1 invested leverages \$17 in revenue
- Invite artsworkers and arts organizations to discuss and solve our complex problems
- The City needs to implement municipally-focussed data gathering



WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM OTHER CITIES?

INVESTMENT CREATES RETURNS

- 

More than **\$200M** is invested in Montreal's Quartier des spectacles, attracting **7M attendees** per year- **effectively creating an essential cultural destination**
- 

Calgary made an **\$80M investment** towards the Arts Commons Transformation (ACT) project to generate **\$424M in contributions to GDP**
- 

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We ask...

The campaign pledges declared by Mayor Chow be fulfilled:

- to **increase** Toronto Arts Council funding by **\$2M** annually for 5 years
- to **increase** Local Arts Service Organizations' funding by **\$1.8M**
- to work across the sector to **champion accessible, affordable, and sustainable spaces** for artists to live and work





Date: January 22, 2024

**LASO 2024 City of Toronto Budget Deputation:
The Value of Community Arts in the City of Toronto and
For the People Who Call it Home**

Good afternoon, members of the Budget Committee. My name is Anuja Thakar and I am a volunteer board member with Arts Etobicoke. I am speaking today on behalf of the six **Local Arts Service Organizations (LASOs) of Toronto:**

- Arts Etobicoke,**
- East End Arts,**
- Lakeshore Arts,**
- North York Arts,**
- Scarborough Arts, and**
- UrbanArts**

The LASOs are community arts organizations which have a shared mission to provide free, accessible and quality programming to the communities we serve, every day.

The LASOs

- Serve 84.2% of the population of Toronto, a total of 2.73M people*, specifically communities outside the downtown core.
- Represent 21 Toronto wards (all wards except 4, 10, 11 and 13)
- Generate an additional \$2.5 million in revenue, contributing to the local economy
- Provide paid work to over 800 artists annually
- Engage over 450,000 community members annually with high-quality public community arts programming such as festivals, murals, art courses and more.

The arts are a cornerstone in building a healthy, connected and inspired city. The arts improve health, mental well-being, alleviate social isolation, inspire us all to live better lives and create jobs that contribute to a growing economy. This is particularly important in light of the Toronto Foundation's [Vital Signs report](#) which highlights Toronto's increasing lack of connectedness among its residents. The arts bring people together through shared opportunities like celebrations, events, and learning opportunities.

What does access to community arts mean?

To us LASOs it means:

- providing free and accessible arts programs and activities for all ages, **close to home;**
- bringing free events, festivals and artworks, like murals or sculptures, **into local spaces;**
- providing jobs, entrepreneurship and learning opportunities **for artists living in the community**



In spite of our disproportionately limited resources, the LASOs deliver on these objectives year-round, in and with their communities.

Arts outside the downtown core

We all deserve access to the arts. The LASOs continue to advocate on behalf of communities that need it the most.

It used to be the case that you had to go downtown to see a play or join an art course or get an arts job. We stand firm in our belief that times have changed and communities outside the downtown core deserve **fair and equitable access** to participation in and the creation of art. The LASOs are uniquely positioned to deliver on the City’s priorities to equitably offer important arts and culture programming and support to residents, artists and community. Funding allocated to LASOs goes directly into communities outside the core, which are communities that are most often faced with limited access and barriers to arts services.

It is important to note that LASO funding has been **flatlined by the City since 2019 - half a decade**. Specifically, just 1.8M has been distributed annually across 6 organisations with collective catchment areas that cover 84.2% of the population of Toronto, a total of 2.73M people. Considering inflation and increased expenses over the years, while being faced with budget flatlining, we are struggling to deliver on our missions. Considering a budget that is 17B large, 1.8M is a drop in the bucket. Support is crucially needed to advance the work that has been invested in and be able to address growing needs.

Mayor Oliva Chow recognized the importance of the LASOs contributions and the challenge faced by our limited resources when she included a promise to double the LASO funding envelope in her election platform. She did this alongside pledging for increases to the Toronto Arts Council as well as addressing the need for affordable live/work space for artists in the City, which we also support.

Therefore, OUR ASK is:

- for Mayor Olivia Chow, the Budget Committee and City Councillors **deliver on the promises** made to double the LASO budget.
- Specifically, we ask that the Budget Committee and City Councillors **support our request that Arts Services add \$900,000 to the LASO envelope in the 2024 budget** to support the equalization of LASO funding across the City including to Scarborough and North York, while not cutting other LASOs’ much needed operations funding.
- We ask that **the remaining \$900,000 investment be spread out across the following 3 years**, with increases each year in 2025, 2026, 2027.

While asking this, we understand that the 2024 budget is faced with unprecedented constraints, many of which are a result of structural issues that put pressure on many city services.

By doubling operating funding, the LASOs will:

- Provide more free and accessible arts programs and activities for all ages. Activities like these combat social isolation, build social cohesion, create third spaces for all age



groups within their communities, bring economic opportunities to outside downtown neighbourhoods, beautify spaces and build pride among residents.

- Provide more jobs, entrepreneurship, and learning opportunities for artists living in the community, for whom downtown may have become too expensive and inaccessible.
- Have more capacity to support grassroots arts collectives, organizations and ad hoc initiatives to flourish in their communities.
- Catch up to the past years where there has been no funding increase, despite record high inflation rates for goods and services.

We thank the City for its support of arts outside the downtown core over the years, in particular in 2023, and we ask that this support continues in 2024 and beyond.

Thank you for your attention and we trust that our combined efforts will enhance the arts and cultural landscape in Toronto for generations to come.

Thank you on behalf of the LASOs.

Sincerely,

LASO Executive Directors:

Wendy Rading, Arts Etobicoke

Shana Hillman, East End Arts

Nadijah Robinson (interim), Lakeshore Arts

Christina Giannelia, North York Arts

Derek Spooner, Scarborough Arts

Mick Brambilla (interim), UrbanArts