TORONTO

REPORT FOR ACTION

First Annual Report on the Implementation of Culture Connects: An Action Plan for Culture in Toronto (2025-2035)

Date: May 26, 2026
To: Economic and Community Development Committee
From: General Manager, Economic Development and Culture
Wards: All

SUMMARY

In November 2024, Toronto City Council adopted Culture Connects: An Action Plan for Culture in Toronto (2025-2035) following a city-wide engagement process involving over 4,000 residents, comprehensive research on the state of the Toronto cultural sector and a review of best practices from leading cities across the world. The Action Plan sets out to strengthen Toronto's cultural sector by identifying four priorities - Culture Everywhere, Culture for All, Culture for the Future and Culture Beyond Our Borders.

Each priority identified in Culture Connects includes urgent actions to address the pressing challenges facing culture today, and longer-term actions to drive systemic change. In total, there are 28 actions, where 15 urgent actions are to be initiated between 2025 and 2027. Key investments and tactics for Year One (2025) were outlined to protect, retain, and build up culture and creative industries and to connect communities to culture and to each other. The Action Plan complements sector-specific strategies and is closely aligned with the Reconciliation Action Plan, the Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism, and other Council-approved plans and strategies.

As directed by City Council, this report provides an annual update on the implementation of Culture Connects, with an overview of the work in 2025 and early 2026 towards achieving urgent actions through Year One commitments to investment and connection, highlighting key accomplishments and milestones. One year into implementation, over 82 percent of the plan's original 28 actions are in progress, with significant key accomplishments. Attachment 1 provides details of the status and an update for all actions within Culture Connects. Additionally, sections of this report include responses to Council directions since Culture Connects was adopted. While not necessarily directly related to the plan's original actions, emerging challenges and opportunities continue to arise with an impact on Culture Connects' four priorities and the specific actions and targets set.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, recommends that:
1. Economic and Community Development Committee receive this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no immediate financial impacts resulting from the adoption of recommendations contained within this report. Economic Development and Culture will continue to implement the actions in Culture Connects: An Action Plan for Culture in Toronto that can be advanced within the division's annual budget in 2026.

For 2027 and future budget processes, EDC will continue to advise Council of resource requirements including staffing impacts, to advance recommended actions that are currently unfunded.

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 April 22 and 23, 2026, City Council directed the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, in consultation with Fire Chief and General Manager, Toronto Fire Services and Explosive Disposal Unit, to review the process by which surrounding residential and commercial notification requirements related to City-permitted pyrotechnic events are determined and applied, and report back to the Economic and Community Development Committee with proposed process improvements by the end of the second quarter of 2026, with such a review to consider a standardized notification protocol with a longer notification period, wider catchment area and expanded media platforms for a clearly-defined category of high impact activities which may be reasonably expected to have significant community impacts.
https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2026.MM40.38

At its meeting on March 25 and 26, 2026, City Council directed the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture to provide an update on the Council-approved direction to engage with the Distillery District on a year-round activation strategy supporting small businesses and report back through the progress report of Culture Connects - An Action Plan for Toronto’s Culture Sector.
https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2026.EC26.2

At its meeting on March 25 and 26, 2026, City Council directed the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture to engage with the Toronto Garlic Festival to support in finding a new host location for the Fall 2027 event, and around options to pursue a Citywide Garlic Week Activation, prioritizing locations for the festival where

possible in Ward 10, including the Distillery District, as part of the Council-approved approach to engagement with the Distillery District on a year-round activation strategy and report back in the annual progress report of Culture Connects - An Action Plan for Toronto's Culture Sector.
https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2026.EC26.2

At its meeting on March 25 and 26, 2026, City Council directed the General Manager, Parks and Recreation, in collaboration with the Liberty Village BIA and Liberty Village Residents Association, to promote and enable the activation of the spaces in particular for small-scale festivals in Lamport Stadium Park and 34 Hanna Park, and to work with event organizers to promote using active transportation to these venues and report back in the annual progress report of Culture Connects - An Action Plan for Culture in Toronto.
https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2026.EC26.2

At its meeting on May 21 and 22, 2025, City Council directed the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture (EDC) to establish the Creative Industries Grants Program as a grant program with two funding streams: Creative Industries Skills Development Grants and Creative Industries Sector Development Grants, in accordance with the City's Community Grants Policy.
https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2025.EC20.2

At its meeting on March 26 and 27, 2025, City Council authorized the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, to enter into a five-year agreement with the Toronto Arts Council for the administration and distribution of arts and culture funding on behalf of the City of Toronto and to develop a collaborative framework articulating how the City and Toronto Arts Council will work together on shared funding and sector development priorities.
https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2025.EC18.1

At its meeting on November 13 and 14, 2024, City Council adopted Culture Connects: An Action Plan for Culture in Toronto (2025-2035) and directed 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 Q4 2025, and annually thereafter, on implementation progress and outcomes of the actions in Culture Connects.
https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.EC16.1

COMMENTS

Culture Connects: An Action Plan for Culture in Toronto (2025-2035) envisions a city where everyone, everywhere, can discover, create, and experience culture, and where culture is valued as an integral part of healthy communities at any scale. It provides a ten-year roadmap to strengthen Toronto's cultural sector through four priorities - Culture Everywhere, Culture for All, Culture for the Future and Culture Beyond Our Borders. There are 28 actions within these priorities, with 15 urgent actions identified to be initiated between 2025 and 2027. Key investments and tactics for Year One are outlined to protect, retain, and build up culture and creative industries and to connect communities to culture and to each other.

Culture Connects is strategically aligned and linked with Sidewalks to Skylines - An Action Plan for Toronto's Economy through their shared vision of promoting economic and cultural vibrancy for a more equitable, liveable, and prosperous Toronto. It also supports other sector-specific strategies produced by the Economic Development and Culture (EDC) division with the support of Council Advisory Bodies such as the Toronto Film, Television, and Digital Media Board, and the Toronto Music Advisory Committee. The Action Plan further aligns with broader City strategies including the Corporate Strategic Plan, the Reconciliation Action Plan, the Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism, and others. Additionally, Culture Connects helps advance inclusive employment and sector pathways in alignment with the City of Toronto Inclusive Economic Development Framework.

This report provides an update on changes to the cultural landscape and a status update on the first year of implementation of Culture Connects, including key learnings from Year One implementation with implications for future direction. This status update focuses specifically on work done toward Year One goals as a result of the implementation of Culture Connects and is not intended to list the business-as-usual activities undertaken by the City to support culture. A complete list of status updates for all 28 Culture Connects actions is provided in Attachment 1.

Toronto's Cultural Landscape

Consisting of the arts, museums and heritage, and creative industries, Toronto's culture sector remains a significant and growing economic and social force, creating a wide range of jobs, driving cultural tourism and spending, and contributing to the social cohesion and well-being of communities and residents across the city. As articulated at the Inaugural Mayor's Culture Summit, culture is core to the project of Toronto's economic and cultural sovereignty and "when Toronto is strong, the country is strong."

With this in mind, the City has made historic investments and established a strong policy framework through Culture Connects. Progress has been made through Year One with a primary focus on investment and connection, however evidence indicates that increased investment through funding alone is not sufficient to address the persistent structural challenges in the arts and culture sector.

Toronto's cultural vitality is evident in the record tourism levels reported in 2025, with 9.1 million overnight visitors and 19.1 million day-trippers spending $9.1 billion.[1] However, precarity persists in the culture sector, driven by rising costs, shifting consumer behaviour, the impact of new technologies, and variability in public funding and commercial sponsorships. By scale, Toronto remains Canada's cultural powerhouse, but recent trends are seeing other jurisdictions grow cultural employment at much faster rates. Despite having the largest cultural workforce in Canada, Toronto experienced the slowest growth in creative sector employment among Canadian Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) at 15% between 2015-2025 compared to significantly higher growth rates

1 Destination Toronto Annual Report 2025

in Calgary (72%), Edmonton (44%) and Vancouver (33%).[2] This discrepancy is even more pronounced in the acceleration of creative employment growth in surrounding CMAs, led by London (380%) and Oshawa (222%) signalling a geographic broadening of the creative labour market. To sustain the cultural workforce that drives the sector's success in Toronto, the City must maintain its level of support while actively exploring new approaches to growing Toronto's cultural sector.

Over the same period of 2015-25, the City of Toronto has significantly increased its investment in arts and culture with a total of $665 million invested and a 59% increase in annual investment between 2015 and 2025.[3] Figure 1 reflects this steady investment and the additional increased funding captured through the first year of Culture Connects implementation, where $3.4 million was added to the City's overall annual investment. The City of Toronto's historic level of investment in culture has significantly outstripped growth in investment by other orders of government, commercial partnerships or philanthropic giving in Toronto's culture sector. By comparison, federal funding for arts and culture has declined from 2023-2026 both in actual dollars and as a share of total federal spending.[4]

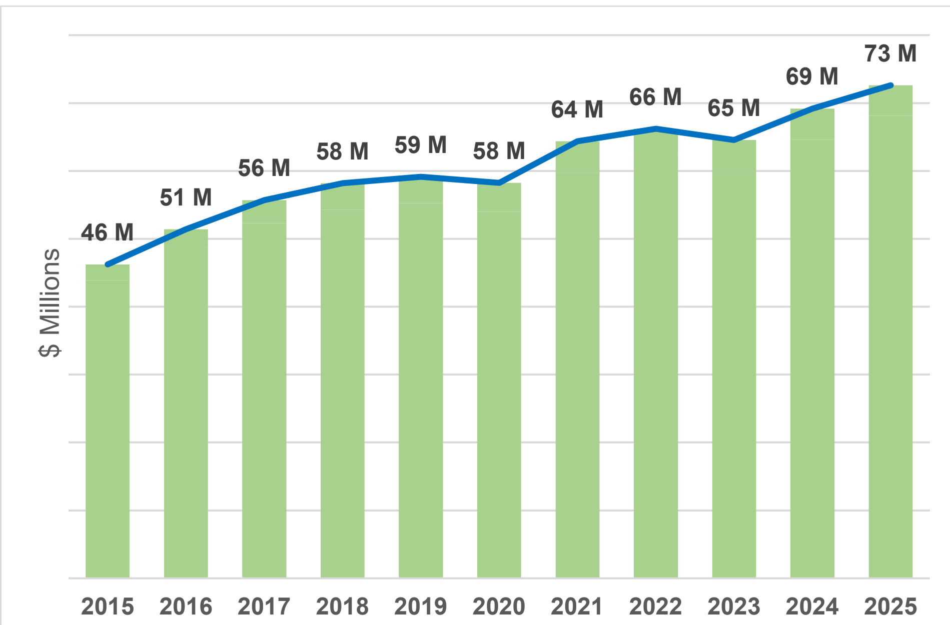

Figure 1: City of Toronto Arts and Culture Investment (2015-2025)
Source: City Budget 2015-2025

While the City of Toronto's increased investment has helped stabilize the sector, it has also contributed to masking underlying financial and structural pressures, including rising costs, persistent operating deficits among small and mid-sized organizations, and growing reliance on municipal funding as other revenue sources decline or stagnate. With a strong focus on granting as a primary lever for stabilization, the current distribution of grant funding limits system-wide innovation and renewal. Funding

2 Statistics Canada and EDC calculations

3 City Budgets 2015-2025

4 Artworks: The Economic and Social Dividends from Canada's Arts and Culture Sector

remains concentrated among a relatively small number of established organizations while newer and emerging organizations receive proportionally less support, introducing issues of fairness in funding along intergenerational and geographic lines.[5] For the Toronto Arts Council, the top 20 largest operating grants represented $8.1 million or 47% of operating funding awarded, averaging $407,800 per organization. The remaining 53% was distributed among 226 organizations, averaging $40,858 per recipient. In 2025, EDC and TAC collectively awarded operating funding to 269 organizations. Of these, the top 20 largest operating grants represented $13.4 million or 52% of all operating funding awarded, averaging $671,974 per organization. The remaining 48% was distributed among 249 organizations, averaging $50,520 per recipient.

While 'anchor organizations' are critical to the sustainability and growth of the local cultural sector, the high level of funding tied to large, legacy institutions restricts the City's ability to address the needs of new entrants, which are more likely to be reflective of newer forms of cultural expression, be led by or serving diverse communities, and operate outside the city core. A result is a trend towards geographic concentration, with only 32.4% of City cultural funding going to the 21 wards outside the downtown core that are home to 83% of Toronto's residents.[6] This distribution model, combined with limited innovation in funding programs, contributes to barriers for new entrants, constrains sector renewal and growth, and requires ongoing funding increases to maintain sector stability and cultural access for residents, which is not sustainable over the long term.

The Toronto Arts Council (TAC) is the City's primary vehicle to support the local cultural sector. The TAC operates as an independent non-profit organization to distribute cultural grants on the City's behalf. In 2026, TAC is receiving $31,221,946 from the City, which represents 98% of the organization's budget. TAC projects that 87.6% of City funding will be spent on grants in 2026, with 12.4% spent on operations and services. TAC's allocation represents 70% of the City's 2026 cultural grant budget. The City has significantly increased the TAC budget in recent years both by increasing their operating grants and transferring high value clients to TAC stewardship, while also supporting the TAC's request to increase the portion of City funding allocated for administration. To ensure that TAC funding addresses pressing issues in the local cultural sector and best delivers on the objectives of Culture Connects, EDC will be articulating a new collaborative framework with the organization to maximize the impact of City cultural resources and address rising precarity in the sector. This framework, developed as directed by Item 2025.EC18.1, will be brought to City Council in early 2027. Staff will review options to align the collaborative framework with either TAC's 2026 Annual Report to ECDC, or the Year 2 Culture Connects implementation report.

Culture Connects Implementation Updates for Year One

Since its adoption in November 2024, there has been significant progress in the implementation of Culture Connects where all key investments and tactics identified for Year One have been completed. Of the 28 overall actions, 23 (82%) are currently in

5 EDC analysis of CADAC data

6 Toronto Arts Council and EDC reporting data

progress including 13 of the 15 actions (87%) that were identified as urgent for initiation between 2025-2027. Attachment 1 provides details on the status of all 28 actions with key updates. The sections below outline the key achievements and learnings and additional key milestones for each of the four Culture Connects priorities.

Year One Key Achievements

Key achievements from 2025 are:

- Increased funding for arts and culture to support equity, stability, and sustainability for artists and organizations across the city including a $2 million increase for the Toronto Arts Council, a $379,000 increase for Local Arts Service Organizations and a revised funding formula to better address equitable distribution of funds, and an inflationary increase of 2.5% for arts and culture grants.
- Increased support for festivals and special events including support to over 130 events, expanding intergovernmental coordination to improve federal/provincial government support, and advancing sector-wide safety readiness through the Festival and Event Safety Summit. The Summit engaged 120 event organizers and safety experts to help festivals respond to public safety requirements. Additional actions are captured in Toronto's Festival Strategy, a five-year sector-specific strategy which was adopted by City Council on March 25-27, 2026.
- Toronto's Screen Future: A Strategic Plan for Continued Growth 2025-2030 was adopted by Council on March 25-27, 2026 and is the City's new five-year roadmap to keep Toronto a leading, film-friendly global production hub. It outlines thirteen actions across four priority areas, focusing on studio and infrastructure growth, workforce development, competitive incentives, sustainability, and client service to defend and grow Toronto's market share while better supporting domestic production. Toronto's efforts in support of film were recognized in May 2026 with the City's Film Office being celebrated as the leading Film Commission in the world.
- Beginning in July 2025, Old City Hall was opened to the public and activated with a series of free weekly and weekend cultural programs, welcoming over 15,000 visitors between July and December. The initiative featured diverse programming including exhibitions, expert talks, heritage experiences and community events that brought new life and public access to the 126-year-old landmark. This work reflects the City's ongoing commitment to reimagining Old City Hall as a vibrant, inclusive space that celebrates Toronto's history while serving its present and future communities.

Implementation Update: Culture Everywhere

Loss of venues, access to space, affordability, and sustainability have been identified as critical pressures on Toronto's culture sector, positioning access to cultural space as a significant challenge to be addressed over the next decade. Space constraints remain a critical pressure and there is an opportunity for innovation, particularly regarding how cultural space is considered and supported at the inception of new precinct development. A key initiative launched during Year One to support this necessary innovation is the development of a new Cultural Infrastructure Study in collaboration with OCAD University and the University of Toronto's School of Cities. The study will capture a comprehensive inventory of cultural space across Toronto and identify strategies to develop new and protect existing cultural infrastructure. Results from the study will be included in future reports on the implementation of Culture Connects.

EDC made progress towards the urgent actions of Culture Everywhere to develop new cultural space and expand and protect existing space. Key highlights of this work include:

- The City protected close to 400 residential and non-profit cultural tenancies that were at risk of sale during Artscape's receivership. This included the City's purchase of affordable rental units for artists previously managed by Artscape at Triangle Lofts (38 Abell Street) and 210 Simcoe Street.
- EDC has expanded the use of City-owned facilities for short-term cultural programming. The temporary use of 32 Lisgar was expanded to include programming by Glad Day Lit and Watah Theatre. To date, six licences have been issued for short-term use, and a process is underway to secure a long-term tenant. In 2025, over 15,000 attendees participated in cultural activities at this site.
- EDC, Social Development, and Corporate Real Estate Management secured City Council approval for a new Community Space Tenancy at 5220 Yonge Street with the Neighborhood Group Community Services, enabling the delivery of integrated social, cultural and community services programming through a multi-partner model community space.
- EDC's Office for Cultural Space supported the review of development plans and proposals that, if approved, could contribute an estimated 120,000 square feet of new cultural space in the coming years.

Responses to Directives Impacting Culture Everywhere

As the City pursues its goal to expand cultural space and activity, this will include an intensification of such activity on private property. The City will need to be ready to mitigate the potential nuisances that residents may face with the expansion of cultural activity on private property. Based on Council direction through Item 2026.EC26.2, City staff committed to explore common challenges with large-scale events on private property and suggest improved mitigation measures that could be adopted. EDC conducted a jurisdictional scan of approaches used in several comparable municipalities and an analysis of City data on events on private property to assess the nature of the issue. The results of this review point to immediate areas for improvement in City efforts to mitigate the spill-over effects of large events on private property, including clearer definitions for large-scale, impactful events on private property, that when invoked, would trigger enhanced mitigation efforts by City staff working with event organizers. The staff review, which included the experience of other large Canadian cities, indicated that a new universal by-law would not be feasible to implement. As a result, staff are recommending an updated framework to provide clarity to residents, event organizers and City staff to mitigate the spill-over effects of large-scale events on private property. Among efforts, this would include clearer direction to event organizers regarding relevant City supports and permits, based on the specific attributes of their events, past performance of the event organizers and concerns raised by residents.

Analysis of available City event data on private property events was conducted to assess whether there are common community impacts specific to events on private property. Across the City, there are only a small number of events that occur on private property. In 2025, the total number of festivals and events attracting more that 2,000 attendees and lasting for longer than one day was thirteen (13). The analysis revealed that the impacts of these events on surrounding communities vary widely depending on event type, scale, and location, with no consistent pattern that would lend itself to a uniform regulatory approach.

The jurisdictional scan included seven Canadian cities and found that most municipalities use a model similar to Toronto's where events are regulated through permitting and regulatory tools related to the event's activities and impacts, not through a single 'Special Event Permit'. The municipalities reviewed that have Special Event Permits or By-laws that include regulations for events on private property have noted challenges with the compliance and enforceability of by-laws for events on private property. Further, despite the finding that the mitigation of community impacts is not substantially improved as compared to Toronto, the operational and financial impacts of replicating the by-laws present in other jurisdictions is significant. Municipalities that provide Special Event Permits to allow events to occur have a staff to event ratio of 1:75. The City of Toronto's current ratio is 1:422.

These factors make it challenging to recommend either a Special Event By-law and/or a Special Event Permit that extend to private property at this time. Instead, it has been the determination of staff that the City's most effective tools for mitigating community impacts of events on private property are education, collaboration, and targeted mitigation through the Special Events Advisory Team (SEAT) and the forthcoming Good Neighbour Guide.

This is not to say that these events on private property are without community impact nor is it intended to suggest that those impacts don't require continued work to address, but rather that the impacts are specific to discrete events and individual communities and need to be addressed as such. The common impacts of events on private property are the same community impacts generated by events in the public realm and the City has effective mitigation tactics already at its disposal.

The SEAT is an established interdivisional/agency table with a mandate to provide oversight, planning, guidance, information and decision-making on large and/or complex City produced and third-party special events. It works across City divisions to assess events, both on private property and in the public realm, using an assessment framework to understand the impact of events on the community, based on risk, scale, and event activities. Informed by the jurisdictional scan and analysis of event data, the assessment framework has been modified to add additional criteria to better assess the complexity of events and make appropriate recommendations to organizers. The updated framework includes the following;

- Event size, including anticipated attendance, peak crowd volumes and density.
- Duration, including single-day, multi-day, or seasonal operations.
- Hours of operation, including evening, late-night, or early-morning activity
- Location sensitivity, such as proximity to residential areas, schools, hospitals, transit hubs, or high-traffic corridors.

- Public realm impact, including effects on roads, sidewalks, transit, noise levels, waste generation, emergency access, and accessibility.
- Cumulative impacts, including the frequency of events at the same location over time.

Using these updated criteria, the SEAT can then provide direct support to event organizers, based on the complexity of the event. These criteria allow the City to direct organizers to the appropriate City permits and to make recommendations for strategies to reduce any negative impacts of the event on surrounding communities. More complex events with greater potential for community impacts would be directed to appropriate City tools and processes to help mitigate these impacts, including the development of a Traffic Management Plan, Street Event Permit, Noise Exemption Permit, etc. This approach also allows the City to provide tailored support and specific recommendations for each individual event, as the challenges associated with large-scale festivals and events across the city vary widely.

With the new Good Neighbour Guide to be deployed by end of Q1 2027 and the modified criteria, the SEAT will be able to provide stronger support to event organizers on proactive management of community impacts. Stronger engagement with organizers, communities, and local Councillors, through the SEAT, will help ensure that events on both private and public property are better integrated into neighbourhoods and contribute positively to the social and economic life of the area.

Further to this, some cultural activities that are not widely publicized and are not public events, as is the case with film shoots, may impact surrounding neighbourhoods. A recent example is described in Item 2026.MM40.38 with reference to recent "shock and awe" cinematic effects filmed at Downsview. In response to lessons learned, the City will work with key interest holders to ensure that high impact film activities which may be reasonably expected to have significant community impacts are appropriately addressed above and beyond the City's existing filming notification protocols. This will be achieved by clearly defining what constitutes a "high impact" activity in this context and the appropriate enhanced notification protocols that such a designation would trigger. Specific details about the proposed enhancement to notifications are included in Attachment 2.

Implementation Update: Culture for All

While granting alone cannot solve all the challenges facing the arts and culture sector, investing in Toronto’s cultural ecosystem is essential to strengthening the city’s creative capacity, supporting artists and organizations, and ensuring access to cultural experiences for Torontonians across all communities. For Year One, Culture Connects committed to increasing funding to the Toronto Arts Council (TAC) to expand strategic programs and enhance the support it provides to artists and cultural organizations across the city; providing more locally focused, responsive programming by increasing resources for Local Arts Service Organizations (LASOs); better connecting residents across Toronto to culture through improved discoverability and promotion; and animating the City's civic squares with accessible cultural experiences.

With City funding of $29,221,946, TAC awarded 954 grants in 2025, supporting 438 individual artists and 516 organizations and collectives - 315 of which were receiving support from TAC for the first time. This funding included a $2 million increase, along with an inflationary increase of 2.5%, enabling TAC to provide increases to operating grants for 197 organizations, 52 of which received increases of more than $10,000. As noted above, TAC remains an active partner in addressing capacity gaps in the local cultural sector. Of note, efforts will be made to ensure access to resources for newer organizations, seeking greater balance with the resources historically allocated to older, larger organizations.

In 2025, six Local Arts Service Organizations (LASOs) received a 2.5% inflationary increase totalling $56,912 which helped bring the 2025 total investment in LASOs to $2.33 million in operating funding. This total represents an increase of $379,000 or 19% in operating funding over 2024. Arts Etobicoke, East End Arts, Lakeshore Arts, North York Arts, Scarborough Arts and UrbanArts are all registered charities offering critical access to essential arts and culture programming and services in communities outside the downtown core, serving 21 wards and working with residents and local agencies to meet identified community needs to deliver programs for artists, children, youth, seniors, newcomers, 2SLGBTQIA+, Indigenous, Black, racialized persons and other equity-deserving community members. This enhancement to funding supported a more equitable allocation to the six LASOs, who have been funded according to pre-amalgamation levels over many years. A more equitable allocation was defined through a new funding formula accounting for population served and priority populations including the number of youth and seniors in the community, the prevalence of low-income and the availability of shared services. As an example of the impact of this change and the importance of ensuring granting is supported by intentional policy approaches, Scarborough Arts was able to expand partnership programming by 55%, increasing service to Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs).

Additionally, EDC operates 10 historic sites across the city under the Toronto History Museums banner. These museums support the Culture for All priority by removing barriers to participation, offering free general admission and delivering inclusive, community-driven programming that reflects Toronto’s diverse populations. Through partnerships with Indigenous, equity-deserving and local communities, they amplify a wide range of voices while expanding access to cultural experiences for residents.
In 2025, Toronto History Museums welcomed 371,847 visitors, exceeding its annual goal by 5%. Free public programming included the Indigenous Arts Festival, Canada Day celebrations, fall festivals, a weekly Etobicoke farmers’ market and more. Visitors to large-scale events, public programs and drop-in experiences consistently rated their experiences highly, particularly for fostering social connection within and across communities. A survey of more than 3,000 visitors found that 90% rated their overall experience as “excellent,” and approximately 92% said their visit inspired them to explore other cultural offerings in Toronto. Nearly 70% of Toronto residents surveyed were first-time visitors, highlighting the museums’ success in creating meaningful, accessible connections to arts and heritage within local neighbourhoods.

To support the discoverability of cultural events across the city for visitors and residents alike, EDC launched a revised Festival & Events calendar. Some features added in 2025 include improved accessibility criteria; locations and availability of gender-neutral washrooms in event descriptions; and Indigenous, 2SLGBTQ, and public markets added as discrete event categories. The total number of Festival & Events calendar page views remained consistent year-over-year with 849,112 page views in 2025. In addition to the City's Festival & Events calendar, EDC is also working with key partners, including Destination Toronto and the Toronto Arts Council's TOgether Through Art initiative, to improve the alignment of cultural event listings in support of consistent audience discoverability. This collaboration represents an initial step toward a more intentional approach to supporting audience development, which will be a key priority for future implementation.

To that end, efforts to animate the City's civic squares with easily accessible cultural programming are ongoing with additional commitments to supporting greater impact at civic squares outside the downtown core outlined in the recently adopted Festival Strategy. EDC is also working with the Toronto Arts Council (TAC) to develop a pilot program supporting free programming in civic squares, similar to TAC's Arts in the Parks program which provides family-friendly, inclusive, and free arts events in parks across Toronto throughout the summer. In collaboration with the City, TAC will pilot a program in 2027. The initiative responds to the decline in recent years of cultural animation at Toronto's civic squares as outlined in the table below.

Square	**2024**	**2025**	**% Change**
Albert Campbell Square	18 events 18 programmed days	12 events 16 programmed days	12% decrease in programmed days, overall increase in multi-day events
David Pecaut Square	12 events 79 programmed days	13 events 45 programmed days	75% decrease in programmed days; 8% increase in number of events
Mel Lastman Square	30 events 162 programmed days	35 events 97 programmed days	67% decrease in programmed days; 17% increase in number of events
Nathan Phillips Square	52 events 179 programmed days	52 events 213 programmed days	19% increase in programmed days

Responses to Directives Impacting Culture for All

In addition to animating civic squares, EDC continues to support and promote cultural animation across the city, including in specific instances as recently directed by Council:

- As directed by Council, Lamport Stadium Park and 34 Hanna Park activation opportunities have been discussed with Parks & Recreation and the Liberty Village BIA. As a first step, the Parks and Recreation (P&R) division and the

Liberty Village BIA have scheduled a site visit to review concerns around infrastructure necessary to support events. Following this, the Liberty Village BIA will assess their operational capacity to activate these spaces and P&R will engage in consultation with the Liberty Village Residents Association to ensure alignment. P&R will continue to keep the local Councillor informed of progress. EDC and P&R will also work in collaboration to promote opportunities based on remaining capacity to the organizers who make up the City's Festival and Events Network and nascent Festival Association. Resulting increases in activation are anticipated in 2027 as the area is already at capacity for 2026 with FIFA World Cup activity.

- EDC has been engaged in supporting the Toronto Garlic Festival - an annual one-day festival that uses Ontario-grown garlic as a practical entry point to support Canadian agriculture and culture, migration, sustainability, and local economic activity - in their move to a new location in 2026. This will serve as a pilot for a permanent change in 2027 and beyond. The Toronto Garlic Festival organizer has also proposed a scope and vision for a future Toronto Garlic Week activation. As an initial pilot, EDC will look to align this proposal to existing work toward a new city-wide activation celebrating the breadth and diversity of Toronto's food scene.
- EDC is engaged with key interest holders including the Distillery Historic District (DHD) to support a year-round activation strategy that supports local businesses, enlivens the neighbourhood and provides family-friendly programming such as an annual Easter Egg Hunt, the Distillery Winter Village, hosting third-party festivals such as Toronto Fringe Festival and ICFF's IncluCity Festival, and a range of smaller events and pop-up activations. EDC is also actively connecting the Distillery District to festivals and events interested in producing on their site and is working with Soulpepper Theatre Company and the Toronto Fringe Festival to further leverage their skills and expertise as cultural producers in animating the site.

The work outlined above offers small examples of the City's unique ability to act as convener, bringing together key interest-holders to support the collaboration and consolidation around shared goals and vision that are necessary to realize economies of scale. This will be an increased area of focus for implementation moving forward.

Implementation Update: Culture For the Future

Strategic and sustained cultural investment enhances economic vitality, fosters social inclusion, and contributes to the cultural vibrancy that defines Toronto's identity and helps build a resilient sector. Within the first year of implementation, Culture Connects committed to indexing all cultural grants to inflation; expanding funding programs for festivals to manage rising costs; enabling non-profit organizations to implement substantive operational changes through the Catalyst Transformation Fund; providing mentorship and guidance to non-profit organizations to secure private sponsorships through artsvest Toronto, delivered in partnership with Business/Arts; hosting the inaugural Mayor's Culture Summit; and launching programs that offer a cohesive approach to cross-sectoral collaboration and capacity building for creative businesses. This work speaks further to the City's role in bringing interest-holders together to amplify impact and to the importance of novel and flexible funding programs that target specific, nuanced, and time-limited needs.

In 2025, City Council approved a 2.5% inflationary increase for all cultural grants for the first time. Providing a regular inflationary increase offers stability for organizations that are facing rising costs linked to inflation, operational expenses, increased rent, security, and facility maintenance. Faced with these compounding costs, several prominent organizations have been forced to scale back public programming, and some have even paused or ceased operations due to cash flow challenges. Regular inflationary increases are key to protecting the festivals, venues, and cultural organizations that have long contributed to the city's artistic and social landscape.

The City increased investment for festivals through the Cultural Festival Funding Program (CFFP), which saw a 37% increase in budget from 2024 to 2025, bringing the number of festivals supported from 47 to 64. This included 35 festivals receiving funding for the first time and 2 organizations receiving operational funding for the first time. Investment in the Special Events Stabilization Initiative (SESI), which was relaunched in 2025 after its initial one-year pilot, supported 98 festivals to address rising public safety, security, and insurance costs and was secured as an ongoing funding program through the 2026 budget process. Additional supports for festivals are outlined in Toronto's Festival Strategy, developed over the course of 2025 and adopted by Council in March 2026 with implementation beginning in May 2026.

The Catalyst and Transformation (CAT) Fund, delivered by Work In Culture, supported 19 Toronto-based organizations to plan for and implement substantive changes to their business models to improve their sustainability and encourage innovation. One example of an organization leveraging this fund was Small World Music, which presents approximately 50 concert experiences and an annual festival featuring established international artists and emerging local talent, and was funded to develop and implement strategies and engage expertise to transform capacity and explore new directions. This type of funding program is critical to supporting sector development and the sector-driven innovation necessary to a sustainable arts and culture ecosystem. The City's founding investment in the CAT Fund leveraged funds from other funders, including the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, the Metcalf Foundation, and the Azrieli Foundation to help extend the impact of the program. The City is working with Work In Culture and funding partners to plan for a new round of the CAT Fund in 2026.

Artsvest Toronto, administered by Business/Arts, accepted 15 organizations into the program in 2025. These organizations participated in capacity-building workshops to improve their ability to secure private sponsorships. As a result, participants were able to raise $146,000 in private sponsorship. This initiative is a prime example of using an outcomes-focused approach to support cultural organizations by addressing issues of financial pressure through the lens of capacity-building.

With continued consideration for the importance not only of capacity-building but also cross-sectoral collaboration, multiple new or enhanced initiatives were introduced in 2025 and offer a foundation for continuing this work across the full life cycle of Culture Connects implementation. Examples of these initiatives include:

- The City hosted its second annual Night Economy Town Hall, engaging 140 in-person and 185 virtual attendees in panel discussions highlighting the differences of bricks and mortar vs. public spaces and discussing the new Rogers Stadium venue. A keynote address was provided by Mathieu Grondin, Nightlife Commissioner, City of Ottawa. Directly addressing capacity building, an Information Marketplace was new in 2025 and included staff from the City of Toronto, the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario, Destination Toronto, SmartServe, and the TTC. This allowed attendees to find out more information on licensing, health and safety, transportation, crowd management, and more.
- The Youth Cultural Incubators Stabilization Initiative (YCISI) strengthens the capacity of Toronto's youth-led and youth-serving arts and culture organizations through funding and workshops and provided $615,000 of capacity-building funding to support nine emerging youth-led/serving organizations and seven established arts organizations with full year mentorships. YCISI organizations engaged with over 40 new community partnerships collectively, directly impacting Indigenous, Black, 2SLGBTQIA+, youth, racialized persons and equity-deserving communities, and collectively offered 15 new or expanded programs, better meeting the needs of community. As a result of participation, many organizations implemented new financial controls achieving increased audit readiness and CRA compliancy, and adopting financial and fundraising tools such as cash-flow models to better forecast financials. Three mentee organizations gained not-for-profit status in 2025 as a result of this grant.
- The City's investment in the OCADU Cultural Policy Hub is reflective of EDC's commitment to support better data gathering and analysis in the cultural sector, to better inform investments for durable impact. The Cultural Policy Hub has supported studies and public presentations on key policy issues including a recent report on precarity in the cultural sector and a roundtable and policy recommendations for Canada's federal AI strategy. The Policy Hub has also supported the development of key City policy projects including research support for Culture Connects and the development of Toronto's Festival Strategy.

Finally, the inaugural Mayor's Culture Summit was hosted on April 20, 2026, featuring 58 speakers from a variety of sectors, including a cross-section of arts and culture, banking, and advocacy. The event attracted 300 registrants representing 290 organizations and including artists, presenters, promoters, advocacy groups, funders, and more. In addition, 30 local performers were showcased at the event. While the outcomes of this event are still being compiled, participants made clear the value of the City's unique role and ability to convene a broad cross-section of interested groups and individuals and to provide space and opportunity for networking, collaboration, and ongoing advocacy. The Summit demonstrated the necessity of more deliberate convening efforts across the breadth of the culture sector, by the City and its partners, to support more structural collaboration, aiding in responding to sector precarity.

Implementation Update: Culture Beyond Our Borders

As stated in Culture Connects, partnerships, exchanges, export development and investments play a crucial role in fostering Toronto's culture scene by expanding opportunities for artists and creative industries locally and beyond our borders. In Year

One, Culture Connects committed to increasing funding to creative industries and promoting these sectors to attract international partnerships and investment.

Toronto’s film, music and creative technology industries contribute significantly to the goals outlined in this priority with the City offering grants and sponsorships to make pathways to employment more accessible, expand business opportunities for creative entrepreneurs and showcase Toronto’s industries to engage residents, visitors and the world. In 2025, the City provided 113 grants to 96 not-for-profit organizations focused on sector development and growth within creative industries for a total investment of $1.46 million, representing a 74% increase in number of grants, a 48% increase in grantees, and a 62.5% increase in funding over 2024. This financial support was coupled with active industry engagement through existing advisory bodies as well as key trade missions.

In July 2025, there was a "Mayor’s Mission" to London and Dublin to promote Toronto's screen industry, strengthen its international production profile, and respond strategically to potential US tariffs. The mission included 30 meetings and 2 key networking events, generating 60 new industry contacts and securing relationships with leading partners including BBC, Shinawil, and Sky Studios, with a focus on co-production opportunities and attracting VFX and production work to diversify Toronto’s incoming projects and enhance its domestic creative capacity. Additional work to support the film industry specifically is outlined in Toronto’s Screen Future: A Strategic Framework for Continued Growth 2025-2030, which was adopted by Council in March 2026.

In addition to the original commitments made for Year One, EDC worked in 2025 to prepare for 2026 as an exceptional year with FIFA World Cup 2026™. In response to this unique opportunity to showcase Toronto to the world, EDC has focused on extending this platform by providing additional opportunities for local culture. Funding provided through the Community Celebration Support Fund (CCSF) will support local organizers in delivering vibrant, community-driven cultural projects that celebrate Toronto’s “World in a City” theme. The program saw strong demand and 64 projects were selected to receive a total of $1.7 million, with at least one funded project in every ward to ensure geographic equity. Funded initiatives span a diverse range of activities, including festivals, parades, concerts, art installations, sports activations, public viewings, workshops, and cultural showcases. While this funding is unique and specific to the circumstances in 2026, it provides a potential model for how large-scale attracted events can be leveraged to increase investment in and profile for Toronto’s local organizations and events.

Next Steps

Building on the momentum and key learnings from 2025, year two of implementation of Culture Connects will advance new initiatives, such as implementing the Festival Strategy and Toronto's Screen Futures Strategic Plan, addressing key opportunities articulated at the Inaugural Mayor’s Culture Summit, and introducing the Culture Dashboard, which will provide updates on the Action Plan’s actions and share real-time metrics and data about the state of culture in Toronto. The City will also continue preserving and expanding cultural spaces, by advancing the Cultural Infrastructure Study to identify space needs in neighbourhoods across Toronto.

The availability of new cultural data and analysis will enable the City to better target its investments in addressing risk in the local culture sector and amplifying the sector's significant strengths. With persistent precarity across the sector, it remains clear that the core issues facing the arts and culture sector are systemic in nature and cannot be resolved through grant funding alone. This is a reinforcement of what was reflected in Cutlure Connects but highlights a shift in focus and urgency as implementation continues into Year Two. To improve outcomes and maximize the impact of municipal investment, a more holistic and balanced approach is required, combining grant funding with additional policy and program levers, including:

- Reallocation of existing funding to support renewal, improve access for new and emerging organizations, and reduce reliance on continuous funding increases.
- Enhanced sector development initiatives, including leadership, governance, and organizational capacity-building, as well as supporting collaboration and consolidation to realize economies of scale.
- Targeted audience development efforts to strengthen demand, improve marketing and discoverability, and increase earned revenue opportunities.
- Strategic use of non-funding tools, including regulatory, taxation, and land use planning mechanisms, particularly in the development of new cultural precincts, to address structural cost pressures and support long-term sector sustainability.

Taken together, these measures support a transition from a primarily grant-based model of support toward a more sustainable, outcomes-focused approach, ensuring that the City's continued investment delivers the stronger economic, cultural, and community impacts envisioned in Culture Connects.

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Culture Connects - Year One Implementation Status
Attachment 2: Enhanced notification measures for filming with “high impact” pyrotechnic events