



**Response from the Canadian Dance Assembly to the Canada Council for the Arts
2008-2011 strategic plan discussion paper *Creating our Future***

A summary of the national consultation process undertaken by the
Canadian Dance Assembly from May 25th – June 8th, 2007

Presented to the Canada Council for the Arts
June 17, 2007

INTRODUCTION

The Canada Council for the Arts has supported professional dance in Canada for 50 years. In that time, our national dance community has evolved at an accelerating pace into a dynamic ecology that encompasses many facets, including training, research and development, creation, production, education and outreach, presentation, dissemination, and preservation. The Council's role of contributing to the development of art and of art forms is demonstrated in its support for many of the links in the chain of the dance ecology. This support is a significant and meaningful contribution to the broader ecology, complemented by other stakeholders that, together, complete the picture of support for the arts in Canada.

To assist the Council in looking forward to how it can continue to contribute to the development of the dance milieu in a meaningful way, the Canadian Dance Assembly undertook an extensive, national consultation process between May 25th and June 8th, 2007 around the Council's discussion document *Creating our Future*. The CDA wishes to express three areas for consideration, which encompass a number of messages heard from our national community in this process.

ROLE AND VALUES

Take the Lead

Emerging from CDA's pan-Canadian consultation were strong expressions of support for the work of the Canada Council that repeatedly validated the Council as the funding agency that best understands the artistic milieu and is best equipped to respond to its evolving needs. Dance community members value the autonomy maintained by the Council at arm's length to the government and feel that it is well positioned to set standards and show leadership among its funding partners on a federal and regional basis.

Ways in which the Council can further its role as a leader in the arts and for dance, include:

-Continuing to uphold the core principal of supporting and developing excellence in Canadian art and art-making.

-Enhancing its efforts to promote the value of artists and the arts in Canadian society, provoking greater demand for and attention to the activity it supports. In doing so, the Council can play a role in raising public awareness and national pride in Canada's artists and artistic achievements at home and abroad.

-Augmenting its role as an advocate for increased and sustained government investment in the arts as a public good.

-Strengthening links with and between federal, provincial and municipal funding agencies and working with these agencies to improve government funding policies and overall support for the arts in all regions of the country.

-Drawing attention within the private sector to the role that artists and arts organizations play in fostering creativity and innovation in Canadian society. Intoning the role of the private sector as a stakeholder in the development of the arts in Canada.

-A sensitivity to the larger artistic ecology that encompasses the full range of artistic activity in Canada from training, development and creation, production, presentation, education and outreach, dissemination, and preservation, from professional to amateur, from Council funded activity to non-funded activity. The Council can play an important role in making strategic links among the many stakeholders. Members of the dance community expressed this idea as a fundamental value to add to the Council's list.

-Investing in research, so that artistic communities and the general public are equipped with tested sources of knowledge and information that promote a better understanding of: 1) the impact of the arts in society, 2) how the public engages in art, 3) the ecology that supports artistic practice, and 4) the forces that impact art and art-making.

-Assessing the impact of past funding policies and gathering learning from these decisions.

-Working closely with its National Arts Service Organizations as policy partners in order to achieve the above goals. Timely, and equitable engagement with these community-rooted organizations across all disciplines ensures that the voices of our many and varied artistic communities are informing the development of arts policy at the Canada Council.

PRIORITIES

Strengthen and Develop our National Organizational Infrastructure

As articulated in the Council's discussion document 'Creating our Future', the priority of strengthening the capacity and adaptability of arts organizations is one that resonates with many dance community members from all regions of the country. Entrenching support for existing infrastructure is important not only to those organizations and institutions, but to those who benefit from their leadership and from the resources and support they can extend to their communities when they are strong, healthy and adaptable to the ever-changing environment. However, relative to our sister disciplines in the performing arts, the dance sector is acutely aware of and impacted by the significant lack of existing infrastructure for dance across the country. A Council-wide priority to support existing infrastructure, such as the recent Supplementary Operating Funds Initiative (SOFI), highlights how dance can become stymied in its growth if its specific ecological context is not understood and considered within this priority.

While the results of the SOFI competition provided deserving organizations with added support, from an ecological point of view, dance as a discipline was not well served in this process. Criteria used to identify key institutions meant that for dance, only one form of practice received substantial support in only some regions of the country. The criteria also excluded artistic director-led working structures commonly found in dance, as well as many small, medium and large organizations who, despite their lack of scale, still play key roles within their respective communities and the national context. Many members of the dance community expressed that the Council did not convey their process and message around this competition in the typically fluid and transparent manner that we have come to expect. The message from the Council to

“dream big”, indicated to applicants that more significant levels of support were forthcoming, while the result caused much surprise and division between the successful and unsuccessful applicants throughout the community, and further contributed to destabilization within the milieu. The strategic priority to support existing infrastructure, with an emphasis on large institutions, did not at all reflect the clear and unified message, as presented to the Canada Council by the CDA and the Regroupement québécois de la danse (RQD) in March of 2006, articulating dance’s most pressing needs.

In devising priorities that impact the dance sector, it is incumbent on the Council to have a longer-term plan that looks forward towards developing a sustainable and adaptable range of Canadian dance artists and dance organizations that are reflective of the dynamic scope of dance activity across the country. A scope that considers a balance between the needs of individuals, collectives and organizations of varying sizes, as well as the full range of artistic practice that defines the Canadian experience, including cultural diversity, regional diversity, aboriginal arts, artists at varying career stages and emerging practices. While we recognize that with a new \$50 million one-time investment, the Council has taken the opportunity to bolster support for some of Canada’s important dance organizations, this strategy ultimately does not serve the goal of supporting a more balanced ecology through a representative scope of Canadian dance that speaks to a diverse and evolving Canadian public.

Ways in which the Council can improve its efforts to support and develop national infrastructure for dance, include:

-Increasing the capacity of our operating organizations, and ensuring that *more* of these organizations are supported in a consistent and predictable way, in all regions of the country. Increasing the capacity of dance organizations will ensure our small, medium and large companies have the necessary infrastructure to support the creation, production and touring of excellent presentations of dance. Improving the level of supported infrastructure for dance, in all regions of the country, will further ensure that we have strong, healthy organizations, rooted in our communities that can act as anchors and agents of development in their regions.

-Improving support for organizations that show leadership and provide access to resources and in-kind support within their communities so they have added means to augment this role.

- Considering disciplinary uniqueness and particularities when developing broad-based priorities, avoiding situations where policies result in throwing an already fragile ecology into a further imbalance, causing it to further destabilize, despite new investment.

-Improving the frequency of personal contact between Council and artistic communities in all parts of the country in order to ensure Council maintains a holistic perspective of the dance ecology in Canada.

-Periodically evaluating the peer-assessment process, to ensure that funding outcomes are in line with both immediate and longer-term goals that aim to improve the scope and diversity of dance activity across the country, inside the matrix of artistic excellence. Considering how the assessment process might differ for an organization with a long history of funding support at the Council versus a younger organization in an earlier stage of development.

Invest in the future

There is a delicate balance between sustaining and developing infrastructure and finding space to enable development at all levels in an artistic community that will nurture the future of the art form. Through our community consultation, the CDA has heard clearly that we cannot sacrifice one for the other. At every opportunity for new investment, there is never one part of the ecology that merits increased support over another, and we will find strength in taking a strategic and inclusive approach that looks far beyond what a single investment can achieve.

Historically, funding support for dance at the Canada Council has developed in a static relationship to the Council's overall granting budget. During the times that Council experienced changes in its funding appropriation, whether permanent or time-limited, this relationship has remained constant, despite exploding development in the milieu, particularly over the last two decades. The development of the dance ecology, including the development of diverse practice, regional diversity, aboriginal arts, new voices and emerging practices have been stagnated by the

historical funding patterns in dance at the Council. The dance community views new investment as an opportunity for the Council to think outside the box of historical funding trends, both in terms of the Council's current allocation to the dance sector, and in terms of the distribution of funds within the dance portfolio itself.

In consideration of the full scope of dance practice in Canada and the varying levels of infrastructure that remain grid-locked in their development, it is incumbent on the Canada Council to consider a forward looking plan that aims to take steps towards supporting a healthier, more balanced and sustainable future, reflective of a national perspective of the arts. In order to achieve a more sustainable ecological balance of dance activity across the country, dance requires a significant, and targeted investment.

Ways in which the Council can support development and growth in the dance ecology, include:

-Considering flexible and adaptable disciplinary funding allocations in order to better respond to the ebb and flow of artistic development between and within artistic disciplines.

-Developing a long-term plan to address funding imbalances associated with those organizations and individuals who continue to meet the rigorous criteria of artistic excellence, but whose funding is proportionately lower, due to the fact that they entered the funding system at later stages of the Council's existence.

-Maintaining openness to policy review as a means to respond to evolving artistic practices and working models. Continuing to monitor artistic and environmental trends and understanding how these practices and models are changing over time.

-Providing more programs of support that allow allocations of predictable funding on a multiyear basis, for both individuals and organizations.

-Considering new ways to provide peer juries with the tools and context needed to understand developing work that embraces emerging practices, new forms of practice and new working models.

-Expanding program eligibility criteria so artists and groups working outside conventional structures are not limited in their access to programs of support.

CONCLUSION

In offering this feedback, reflective of the overarching themes and ideas expressed by members of the national dance community, the Canadian Dance Assembly wishes to express to the Council that the responsibility of creating our future lies with all of us. The CDA is committed to working with the Council to design policies and plans that will propel the arts to the forefront of the Canadian experience. We appreciate the opportunity that has been extended to our community and to the CDA as a national arts service organization, to participate in the Council's strategic planning process. We look forward to continuing the dialogue.