



Vital Signs

ARTS & BELONGING



COMMUNITY
FOUNDATIONS
OF CANADA

VitalSigns.

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



CANADIAN ARTS
PRESENTING ASSOCIATION
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE
DES ORGANISMES ARTISTIQUES

WHAT IS BELONGING?

Simply put, belonging is being part of a collective *we*. It's about how much we believe we *fit* in a group or place – and how much that place or group welcomes or includes us. It's the result of connecting with others in rich relationships and engaging in our communities to make them better. Belonging is fundamental to our sense of happiness and well-being.

Each of us has a personal connection to the idea of belonging that is influenced by our experiences with the people, places and identities to which we feel connected. So where do we belong? What do we belong to?

A community, a workplace, a sub-culture – these are all things to which we may belong.

WHY BELONGING MATTERS

In 2015, CFC's national *Vital Signs* program began a multi-faceted exploration about the importance of belonging. From healthier and more meaningful lives; safer, more resilient and more inclusive communities; flourishing culture and identity and greater community participation; a greater sense of belonging has an extraordinary capacity to transform our lives and our communities. Yet our research found that **38% of Canadians don't feel like they have a stake in their local**

community.¹ So we asked: How can we strengthen belonging to each other and our communities?

One of those ways is through the arts.

In partnership with the Canadian Arts Presenting Association (CAPACOA), this national *Vital Signs* report shines the spotlight on compelling data and stories that demonstrate the power of the arts to build a greater sense of belonging to our communities, to our country, and to each other.

THANK YOU TO THE PEOPLE WHO HELPED MAKE THIS REPORT POSSIBLE:

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COMMUNITY
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About Vital Signs

Vital Signs is a national program led by community foundations and coordinated by Community Foundations of Canada that leverages community knowledge to measure the vitality of our communities and support action towards improving our quality of life.

About Community Foundations of Canada

Community Foundations of Canada is the national network for Canada's 191 community foundations. Together we help Canadians invest in making our communities better places to live, work and play.

THIS RESEARCH PROJECT WAS REALIZED WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE CANADA COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS AND THE ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL. THE OPINIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS IN THIS REPORT ARE THOSE OF THE AUTHORS AND DO NOT REFLECT THOSE OF THE CANADA COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS OR THE ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL.

CAPACOA

CANADIAN ARTS
PRESENTING ASSOCIATION
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE
DES ORGANISMES ARTISTIQUES

About CAPACOA

The Canadian Arts Presenting Association/l'Association canadienne des organismes artistiques (CAPACOA) serves the performing arts touring and presenting community through its commitment to integrate the performing arts into the lives of all Canadians. CAPACOA fosters skills development, knowledge sharing, policy advancement, collaboration and innovation within the performing arts community and society at large.



Canada Council
for the Arts
Conseil des arts
du Canada



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO
an Ontario government agency
un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario



There is a need for art that emphasizes our essential interconnectedness rather than our separateness. Art that evokes the feeling of belonging to a larger whole.²

SUZI GABLIK

WHY THE ARTS?

Whether we perform, applaud or volunteer, the arts breathe life into every community. They touch the lives of almost everyone. They can make us think, laugh, cry, dance or debate. We feel pride when local artists succeed. We reminisce about joining thousands in a special concert or festival. We gather in art spaces for special celebrations or at memorials for powerful remembrance. Relationships and belonging grow in that moment when our hearts and minds are open to new experiences and to one another.

The broad reach and deep emotional connections made through the arts prove they are powerful instruments to enhance belonging. This report focuses on performing arts like music, all forms of dance, theatre, storytelling and arts festivals. It also includes literature and visual arts. It's an exploration of the benefits of the arts as a catalyst for belonging for audiences, artists and communities.



WE ALL PARTICIPATE IN THE ARTS

Turn on the radio. Walk past a mural. Take in a show. Arts participation is universal. In 2010, 99.7% of Canadians participated in at least one arts, culture or heritage activity – a record level.³

More than 8 in 10 people attended at least one type of live performance or arts event in 2011⁴ – some attending multiple performances.

Nearly 6 in 10 were personally involved through donations, performance or artistic activity.⁵

In 2010, 10 million people aged 15+ visited a public art gallery or art museum, including attendance at special art exhibits.⁶

...AND WE WANT MORE

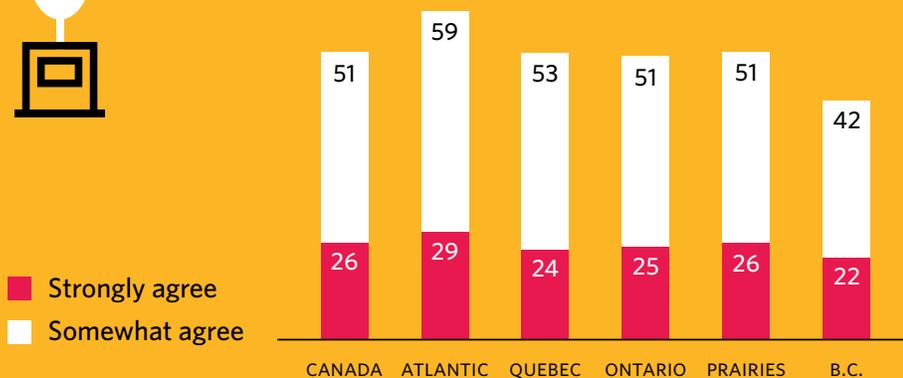
Art participation creates a virtuous cycle. The more we attend performances and visit museums, galleries or heritage sites, the more likely we are to attend again.⁷ The more we understand and appreciate the arts,⁸ the greater we perceive the importance of arts on our own quality of life.⁹

A majority of participants in Culture Days said as a result of past participation they participated in more arts and cultural activities throughout the year.¹⁰

57%



PARTICIPATION BUILDS BELONGING



77% of Canadians agree or strongly agree that arts and heritage experiences help them feel part of their local community.¹¹ Among them, regular arts attendees are three times more likely than non-attendees to say that the arts make them feel part of their local community.¹²

Source: Phoenix Strategic Perspectives, Arts and Heritage in Canada: Access and Availability 2012

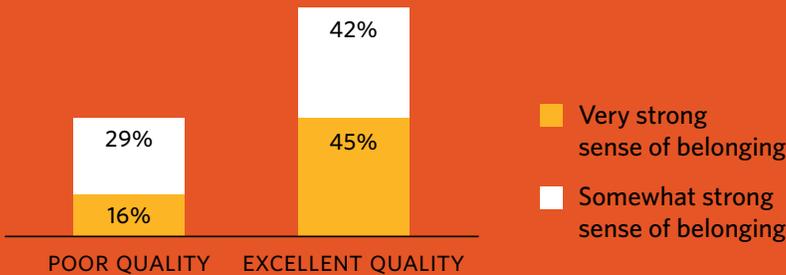
QUALITY ARTS PREDICT BELONGING

People who place great importance on arts and cultural institutions have a greater sense of pride in Canada's achievement in arts and literature and a slightly stronger sense of belonging in their community, town, province and country.¹³

Canadians who rate arts, culture and leisure in their city or town as "excellent" are 2.8 times more likely to report a "very strong" sense of belonging to their city or town, compared to those who rate arts as "poor".¹⁴

Regular live music lovers also have a stronger sense of belonging in their city. The same is true for regular library patrons.¹⁵

Rate the quality of arts, culture and leisure in your town



Source: Angus Reid Institute, National Survey on Citizen Engagement and Attitudes, 2015



THE POWER OF PRIDE

New analysis of Canada's General Social Survey shows that people who are very proud of Canada's achievements in arts and literature also have slightly higher sense of belonging to their community, town, province and country. They also have greater pride in being Canadian.¹⁶

This is important because pride is a predictor of belonging. Greater pride in being Canadian is strongly related to one's sense of belonging in Canada. While not as strong, pride in being Canadian also has a positive effect on sense of belonging in the local community, town and province.¹⁷



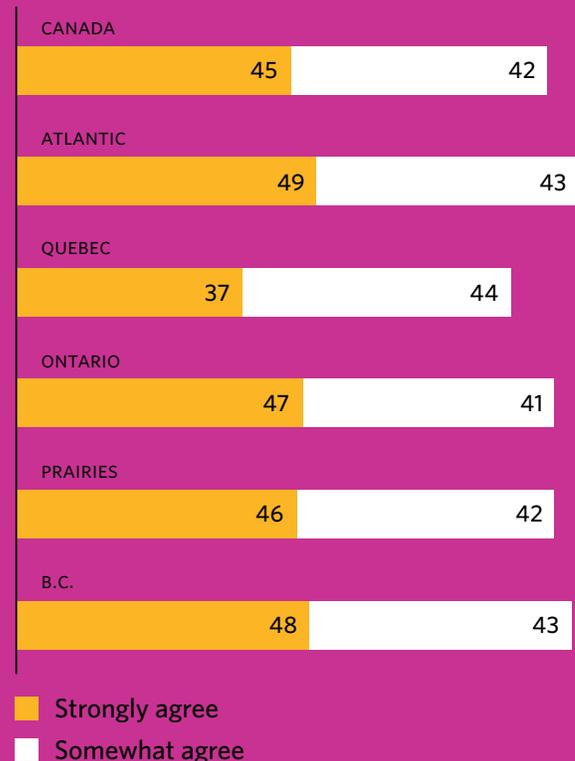
THEY HELP DEFINE OUR NATIONAL IDENTITY AND MAKE US PROUD

87% of Canadians agree or strongly agree "Arts/culture help us express and define what it means to be Canadian."¹⁸

95% of Ontarians believe the success of Canadian artists like singers, writers, actors and painters gives people a sense of pride in Canadian achievement, including two thirds who express strong agreement.¹⁹

87% of Canadians believe that performing arts venues foster a sense of community pride.²⁰

75% of first-time participants in Culture Days in 2014 said that they are a lot more proud of my community and what takes place in it.²¹



Source: Phoenix Strategic Perspectives, Arts and Heritage in Canada: Access and Availability 2012

Arts and culture make communities better places to live. They help define who we are, how we relate to one another and how we feel about ourselves and our communities. Whether on stage, in the audience or in the community, our research shows that participation in the arts fosters a greater sense of belonging.



The shared experience of art provides common ground for social interaction.²²

KEVIN F. MCCARTHY

FOR THE ARTIST

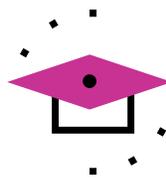
As an artist, participating in the arts means communicating through music, movement, expression or creation. Participants trust one another to play their part. In orchestras, dance troupes, drumming circles and choirs, they act as one to create something greater than the sum of its parts. These aspects may make art activities especially effective in opening up to new people and cultures and making new friends.²³

Community-engaged arts (CEA) are especially focused on building belonging. "As professional artists and community collaborate, important creative and personal relationships emerge that foster imagination, community connection, and a deeper sense of self."²⁴ In CEA, the process of building community is as important as the production, and finding a sense of belonging is often a specific program objective.²⁵

ARTS ENGAGE YOUTH



Longitudinal studies show students with arts-rich experiences have greater participation in extra-curricular activities and higher engagement in their communities like voting, volunteering and visiting the library.²⁶



High school students from low socio-economic (SES) backgrounds with arts-rich experiences participated in student government and school service clubs at four times the rate of low-SES students who lacked those experiences.²⁷

ARTS SUPPORT SENIORS

B.C.'s Arts & Health Project found that vulnerable seniors who participated in professionally-led community-engaged arts programming had significant improvements in health and an enhanced sense of community.²⁸



Relationships between artists and seniors' workers developed in the process of art creation.

A three-year American study also found quality arts programming for people aged 65-100 reduced isolation, helped maintain community ties and improved physical and mental health.³⁰



New friendships provided support outside the project in times of need.

"The significance of the art programs is that they foster sustained involvement because of their beauty and productivity. They keep the participants involved week after week, compounding positive effects being achieved. Many general activities and physical exercises do not have this high engaging, thereby sustaining, quality."³¹



Interactions increased and stronger relationships developed with the wider community as participants contributed in meaningful ways.²⁹

FOR THE AUDIENCE

Attending arts events means socializing with friends and meeting people. Participants experience “a feeling of community with other audience members.”³² They gain new or deeper insights and develop greater empathy by being exposed to different cultures, attitudes and experiences.³³


92%

92% of Canadians believe arts experiences are a valuable way of bringing together people from different languages and cultural traditions.³⁴



People with higher levels of interest in learning about other cultures are significantly more engaged in arts activities than those with little or no interest in learning about other cultures.³⁵

FOR THE COMMUNITY

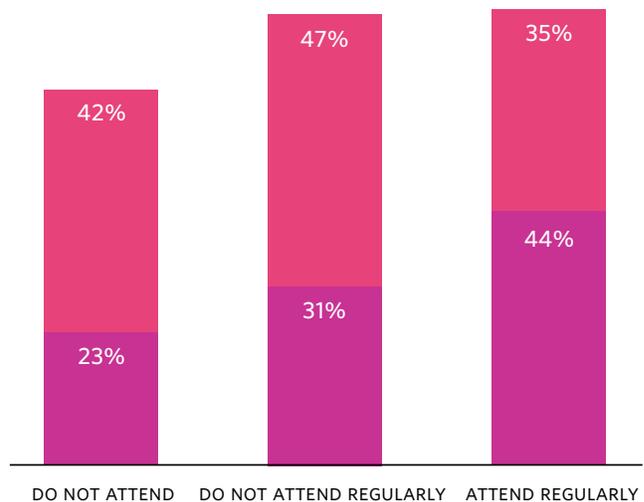
In a 2015 national survey on citizen engagement and attitudes, the Angus Reid Institute asked 1,530 Canadians if they go out to hear live music. Among those who regularly do, 44% had a very strong sense of belonging to their city or town.³⁶

Respondents who said “Yes, this is something I do regularly” were almost twice as likely to have a very strong sense of community belonging than those who responded “That’s not really me.”

The evidence is clear: people who regularly attend live music events have a greater sense of belonging to their city or town. The same is true of frequent library goers.³⁷

According to Hill Strategies Research, art gallery and historic site visits are also significant positive factors on sense of belonging to one’s province, even after adjusting for other factors.³⁸

Attendance of live music & sense of belonging to city/town



- Somewhat strong sense of belonging
- Very strong sense of belonging

Source: Angus Reid Institute, National Survey on Citizen Engagement and Attitudes, 2015

People who frequent arts venues have high rates of volunteering: up to two times higher than non-attendees, report better physical and mental health and report higher satisfaction with life.³⁹

900,000 people volunteer in arts and culture and contribute, on average, 120 hours/year – more than volunteers in any other type of organization.⁴⁰

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH VOLUNTEERS AND NEIGHBOURS

Arts volunteers are more likely than others to be motivated by the desire to network and to meet people.⁴¹

Canadians who attended a performance of cultural/heritage music, theatre or dance in 2005 were 34% more likely to do a favour for a neighbour than those who did not attend. Those who visited a public art gallery were 26% more likely and historic site visitors were 18% more likely to do so.⁴²

PRIDE OF PLACE HELPS COMMUNITIES FLOURISH

Canadians say performing arts in their communities provide energy and vitality, understanding between cultures and pride and belonging.⁴³



1 in 3 Canadians believe performing arts equally benefit individuals who attend and the community as a whole.⁴⁴

Our sense of place really matters. Social offerings—including vibrant nightlife, places to meet people, and arts and cultural opportunities—are one of the strongest predictors of sense of attachment in the local community.⁴⁵ Creative communities are a magnet for talent⁴⁶ and a tool to retain talented young people. Even when people do not participate in the arts, the entire community benefits from the vibe and from local pride.

P(ART)NERSHIPS THRIVE AND BUILD COMMUNITY

Just as relationships among people are at the heart of belonging, relationships between organizations are also critical in enhancing skills and capacity in the community.

Canadian arts presenters identify a stronger sense of community identity or community belonging as the #1 benefit their organization brings to the community (76%).⁴⁷

Partnerships can also deepen the community conversation and serve as a catalyst for community change.⁴⁸

WE VALUE OUR ART SPACES

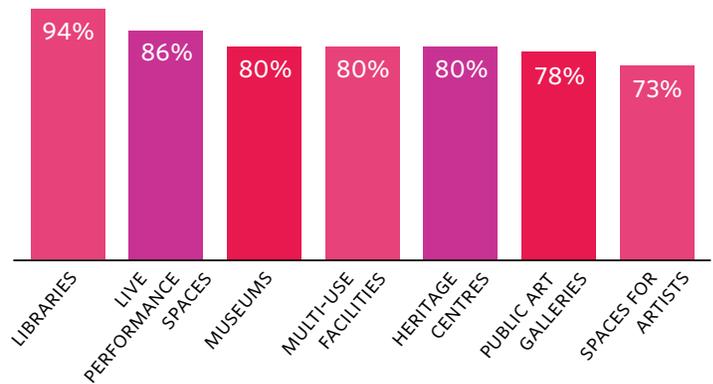
Cultural venues are critically important in Canadian communities.



Almost 90% of Canadians say performing arts facilities are important to quality of life, sense of pride in community and economic development.⁴⁹

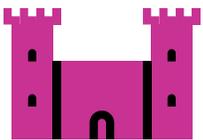
Even CEOs agree: “The quality of a community’s cultural infrastructure has a direct impact on quality of life and therefore on the competitiveness of communities in attracting people and investment.”⁵⁰

Contribution of local facilities to quality of life, positive ratings

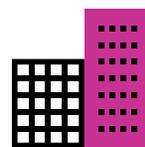


Source: Phoenix Strategic Perspectives, Arts and Heritage in Canada: Access and Availability 2012

ARTS FACILITIES GET A FAILING GRADE



Only 43% of Canadians say the number of arts facilities in their community is good or very good and only 53% think their existing facilities are good or very good.⁵¹



There is a sense of a persistent lack of professional performance spaces for Indigenous works.⁵² The sentiment is echoed in rural, remote and minority language communities.

While perhaps discouraging, these results have actually been improving over time and point to the importance people attach to their art spaces.⁵³

WHAT IS IT ABOUT CHOIRS?

Singing together is a quick way for groups to generate a sense of belonging, even among people who have never met before,⁵⁴ perhaps because of the way that singers’ breath and heartbeat become synchronized.⁵⁵ Research shows that being part of choirs increases our feeling of inclusion and connectedness, releases endorphins and promotes mental health.⁵⁶



ART AS AN ACT OF RECONCILIATION

Art creates opportunities for remembrance, dialogue and social change. As part of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the federal government commissioned a stained-glass window designed by Métis artist Christi Belcourt. *Giniigaaniimenaaning* or *Looking Ahead* "depicts the history of the residential schools, the cultural resilience of Aboriginal peoples, and hope for the future."⁵⁷

Unveiled in the Centre Block of Parliament in 2012, it creates an opportunity for dialogue, human rights education, broader understanding and, hopefully, social change.

While participating in the arts improves belonging for all of us generally, those benefits are especially pronounced for certain populations. As our research demonstrates the arts are a critical catalyst for belonging for newcomers, for rural and remote communities, for Indigenous people and communities, and for francophone minority populations across Canada.

FOR NEWCOMERS

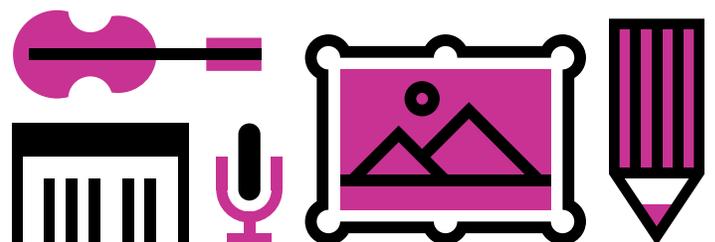
Newcomers to Canada, especially those who are part of a racialized population, tend to have weaker feelings of belonging in the first few years after arrival.⁵⁸ But the longer immigrants are in Canada, the more they integrate into the social, cultural and institutional fabric, and the more their sense of belonging grows.⁵⁹ In fact, more immigrants aged 65–74 expressed a very strong sense of belonging to Canada (80%) than did non-immigrants (73%).⁶⁰



Beyond belonging to a geographic area, newcomers naturally express feelings of belonging to their ethnic community.⁶¹ Through the arts they can maintain their own cultural heritage while sharing their identity with people of different backgrounds.⁶²

Yet while Canada is more diverse than ever and demand for multilingual culture products and services is increasing, programming in performing arts centres remains largely based on European traditions.⁶³ Increasing multi-cultural programming; reflecting diversity on the stage, screen and airwaves; and better integration of internationally-trained artists⁶⁴ could help people of all backgrounds feel more connected to the arts and build bridges between communities.

Research in Ontario found that almost 7 in 10 people take a strong interest in the cultural customs of their own cultural heritage and, those who did, were much more likely to be engaged in arts activity overall.⁶⁵



CULTURAL ACCESS BUILDS BELONGING

Since 2008, the Institute for Canadian Citizenship offers a Cultural Access Pass (CAP) to all new Canadians during their first year of citizenship. The pass provides complimentary admission to more than 1,300 Canadian museums, art galleries and discovery centres.⁶⁶

In September 2016, a survey found the majority of CAP users felt “welcomed, special and included in Canada.” It gave them more knowledge about Canada and helped them relate to Canadians more easily.

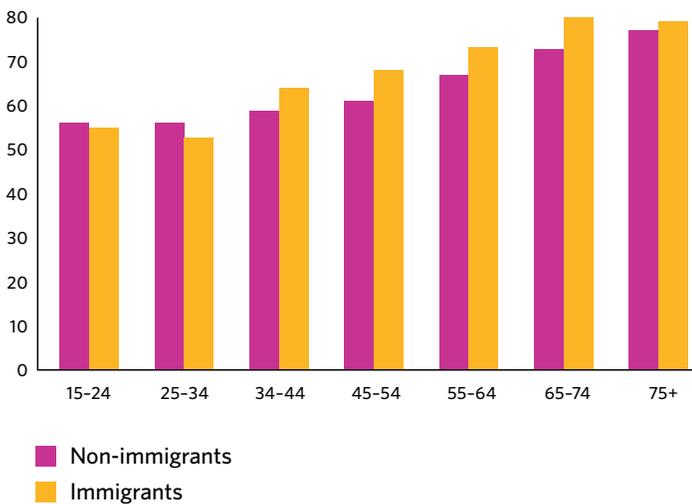


One in four said the CAP inspired them to get more involved in their community.⁶⁷

...SO DO COMMUNITY ARTS

Qualitative research on six cultural mediation projects in Montreal—initiatives that build bridges between the cultural and social realms—showed that community arts participants enjoyed getting to know one another, stimulating their creativity, and telling their personal stories in their new adopted language or through art. Through arts projects, they became less isolated, learned about community services and cultural opportunities. Participation affirmed their sense of belonging and of self-esteem.⁶⁸

People who described their sense of belonging to Canada as being very strong, by age group and immigrant status, 2013



Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2013

I'VE NOT ALWAYS BEEN CANADIAN



What does it mean to be Canadian? How is the experience of Canada different for newcomers? Looking beyond the glossy Canadian narrative, this interactive photo-essay and community conversation project in Victoria, British Columbia is sharing the voices and perspectives of newcomers as they reflect on what makes them feel Canadian, or alternatively, un-Canadian.

With support from the Victoria Foundation, the Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria is hosting a series of community conversations inviting immigrants, including newly arrived refugees and those who arrived in the distant past to share their stories. What were their first impressions and fears on arrival? What barriers to belonging did they face? How are they finding home and reconciling being from two places? What is lost and gained on the path to becoming Canadian?

The stories will then be translated into banner portraits that will help give broader meaning to the idea of Canadian identity – with the aim of facilitating a deeper emotional connection between the audience and the stories of the refugees and immigrants.

FOR RURAL & REMOTE COMMUNITIES

While rural communities often have less access to arts opportunities and facilities and have a greater reliance on volunteers, some evidence suggests the arts have a bigger impact in smaller places.

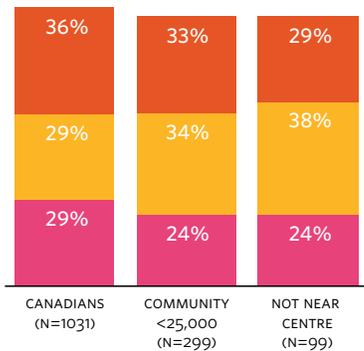
In smaller communities 34% of people feel the community benefits *more* from the presence of arts than the individuals who attend.

In communities that are far from a performing arts centre, 38% of people believe the community benefits more than patrons.⁶⁹

Arts, culture, and heritage are viewed not only as amenities to improve the quality of life, but as a foundation upon which the future of these rural/small communities rests. The arts and creative activities can profoundly affect the ability of a town not only to survive over time, but to thrive.⁷⁰

RAINFOREST CIRCUS, BY DEER CROSSING THE ART FARM
PHOTO CREDIT: CHLÔE LANGMAID

Canadians Report: Beneficiaries of Performing Arts



- Both equally
- The community as a whole
- Individuals who attend performing arts

Source: CAPACOA (2012), Supplementary report on rural and northern Canada

DISTANCE IS A FACTOR

Among Canadians who live further than 70 km from a centre with professional performing arts, only 57% had attended in the past year and 65% attended at any point in time compared to 93% among Canadians living near a larger centre.⁷³

People living in a rural or farm area were less likely to regularly attend live music events (22%) than people in small cities, suburbs, or large cities (28%). They were also less likely to regularly visit the local library or recreation centre (30% vs 36% in larger communities).⁷⁴

People living in rural or farm areas and in small towns who gave high ratings to the quality of arts, culture and leisure in their town had a greater sense of belonging in their town and greater sense of belonging in their neighbourhood. While this is consistent with national results, **the correlation between quality arts and belonging appears to be stronger in rural areas and small towns than in cities.**⁷¹

This new evidence points to the major importance of vibrant arts, culture and recreation in farm and rural communities – not only for belonging but also for attraction, integration and retention of local residents.⁷²

VOLUNTEERS CARRY A GREATER LOAD

In rural areas, community-based, volunteer-run presenting organizations dominate the landscape.⁷⁵ There is more pressure on volunteers, fewer resources, less funding and fewer skill building opportunities.⁷⁶



But the benefits may be greater

“The smaller the community and the further away from a centre it is, the greater Canadians believe the community benefit is.”⁷⁷

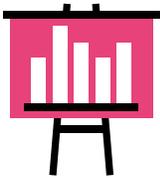
HONOURING COMMUNITY HERITAGE

The Hamiota Community Foundation and Mid-West Arts Council are working together to create an outdoor mural on a recently renovated heritage building in the heart of this small town in western Manitoba. The mural will celebrate the history, talent and pride that residents take in their community and will help to inspire a deeper understanding and connection with youth and newcomers to the community's history.

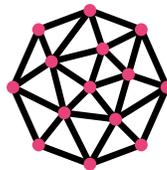
When completed, the mural and resulting community space will be a beautiful backdrop for markets and outdoor events that bring people together in this rural Manitoba community.



BUILDING COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS AND GREATER ENGAGEMENT



99% of presenters in small towns partner with other organizations - most frequently with community-based groups and schools. They focus more on community development and social involvement than their urban counterparts.⁷⁸



Cultural enterprises in rural communities become a community hub for common interests and joint projects. They also offer citizens the opportunity of being 'actors' in their own community and to take action in their village.⁷⁹



In small towns and rural areas, cultural activities facilitate interaction, build skills and relationships and help to create a vibrant, forward-looking environment that has the potential to counter the exodus to larger centres.⁸⁰

ATTRACTING A HIGHER PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION



Presenting arts organizations say: "when they fill a community space for a performing arts event they might have 10% of their entire population attending."⁸¹ This builds bonds and bridges in the community and creates a strong common point of reference.



In Brome-Missisquoi, Quebec presenters found it easy to attract audiences because the arts organization emerged from a community need, offered something unique to the community and often reflected the local community's history, tastes and talent.⁸²

FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE & COMMUNITIES

In some Indigenous languages there is no word for art because it “is fully integrated into everyday life.”⁸³ The survival of Indigenous art and culture is a success story in and of itself. For centuries, Indigenous art and cultural practices have been marginalized, threatened, banned, appropriated and often destroyed.⁸⁴ Yet Indigenous art has survived as a means of keeping history, skills, culture and identity alive. Creating art and performance has been used to help communities preserve or reconnect with lost languages, knowledge and stories.⁸⁵ It creates a catalyst for renewed cultural connection and understanding in Canada, and a platform to share talent with the world.

Today, Indigenous knowledge—including language, traditions and ceremonies—contributes in significant ways to Indigenous people’s sense of identity and belonging.⁸⁶ It’s an important activity and key aspect of well-being.⁸⁷



Canada’s 2013 General Social Survey, found that while Indigenous people were as likely as non-Indigenous people to feel proud to be Canadian (87%), pride for Canada’s achievements in the arts and literature was higher among Indigenous people than non-Indigenous people (57% and 51% respectively).⁸⁸

YOUNG CIRCUMPOLAR ARTISTS COLLABORATION, ALIANAIT FESTIVAL
PHOTO CREDIT: ED MARUYAMA

ELDERS AND LANGUAGE MATTER

Indigenous people—on and off reserves—feel a greater sense of belonging to their families than to their nation, province or to Canada.⁸⁹ So it makes sense that families are an important influence for exposure to art.

- Children with weekly interaction with Elders had 76% higher odds of cultural engagement than those with less frequent contact. Those with four or more siblings had almost 30% higher odds of participating in cultural events than those with only one sibling.⁹⁰
- Children who spoke an Indigenous language were also four times more likely to be involved in culturally related activities than children with no Indigenous language knowledge. Even children who understood but did not speak an Indigenous language had more than two and one-half times higher odds.⁹¹
- Language is so powerful that in B.C., “bands with higher levels of language knowledge (i.e., more than 50%) had far fewer suicides than those bands with lower levels and well below the provincial average for non-Indigenous youth. Bands with lower language knowledge had more than six times the number of suicides (96.59 per 100,000).”⁹²

EMBRACING INDIGENOUS TRADITIONS

Among First Nations youth, 85.7% feel that traditional cultural events are very important or somewhat important in their lives.⁹³

Inuit, Métis and off-reserve First Nations children who take part in cultural activities, participate in music or art lessons or groups, volunteer or belong to a club are more likely to participate in sports, take part in other extracurricular activities and had much higher rates of participation in cultural activities.⁹⁴

37% of self-identified Indigenous⁹⁵ respondents in Ontario report higher levels of interest in the cultural customs of their ancestors than the general public. Two-thirds reported participating in “performances, events or exhibits based on [Indigenous] culture and traditions” at least once a year, and 20% at least once a month.⁹⁶

According to the Assembly of First Nations, there are 634 First Nation communities, or reserves, and more than 50 distinct nations and language groups in Canada,⁹⁷ each with their own geographies, histories and traditions. In addition, many Indigenous people live in Canadian cities and towns where their experience of the connection between the art and belonging will vary.

Since 2005, Acting Out! But in a Good Way is a participatory-arts program in Southern Saskatchewan that uses theatre and visual arts-based workshops to engage Indigenous teens in exploring choices that affect health and wellness. The program blends arts with Indigenous knowledge, methodologies and practices to create a safe space for youth to re-ignite their imaginations and to express their views on health and wellness issues. The teens develop self-knowledge about their individual and cultural identities, experience positive social interactions with peers and adult role models and build trusting relationships.⁹⁸



THE COMMUNITY BENEFITS



Traditionally, the role of the Indigenous artist in his or her community is seen as sacred and many artists involve the community as an essential part of their process.⁹⁹



The 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples “documented the specific and unique importance of art to Aboriginal peoples, linking various creative practices directly to the vitality of individual and collective identity, strength, resiliency, and overall well-being.”¹⁰⁰



Art is an important component of individual and community identity and lineage¹⁰¹ so as it flourishes and evolves, so too does identity and pride.

...but better infrastructure is needed

To fully leverage the power of Indigenous art, gaps in infrastructure—arts organizations, training institutions, arts service organizations, venues and support for presenters¹⁰²—must be addressed.

Recognizing the importance of art’s power to promote understanding, to bring communities together, to heal and to move forward, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommended the establishment of a strategy for Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists to undertake collaborative projects and produce works that contribute to the reconciliation process.¹⁰³ The Vancouver Parks Board, for example, is at the beginning of a process to understand how to support and invest in Indigenous artists and Indigenous community cultural practice as a first step towards appropriate models for collaboration.¹⁰⁴ Indigenous artists are also supported in a number of ways by the Canada Council for the Arts.¹⁰⁵



WITNESS BLANKET

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada notes that “the arts have opened up new and critical space for Survivors, artists, curators, and public audiences to explore the complexities of truth, healing and reconciliation.”¹⁰⁶

Master Carver Carey Newman (Ha-yalth-kingeme’s Witness Blanket is a powerful example. Taking the form of a traditional blanket, the massive work is composed of pieces of residential schools, churches, government buildings and cultural structures, and serves to stand in eternal witness to the effects of the Indian Residential School era.

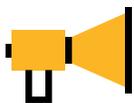
FOR FRANCOPHONE MINORITY POPULATIONS

For more than 400 years Canada's Acadian and minority francophone communities have fought to preserve their language and culture. While French minority language communities across Canada may be extremely diverse in size, concentration, resources, history and character, for more than 1 million people, the French language is at the core of their arts and cultural identity. For all Canadians, it's at the heart of Canada's linguistic duality.

To many members of official language minority communities, being able to fully enjoy a dynamic artistic and cultural life is as important as having access to a good education system.¹⁰⁷

ENTRELACS BY ALT-SHIFT, PRESENTED AT FESTIVAL QUARTIER DANSE
PHOTO CREDIT: JACKIE HOPFINGER

ARTS ARE VITAL TO IDENTITY



93% of people from official language minority communities feel it's important to their own identity to access a dynamic arts and culture community in their own language and to pass that on to the next generation.¹⁰⁸

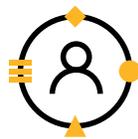


64% said they would miss it if they could not attend live, professional presenting arts in their community - much higher than the average in English Canada (59%) and in Quebec (53%).¹⁰⁹



Nearly 1 in 3 francophone respondents to an Ontario survey reported higher levels of interest in the arts and cultural customs of their ancestors than the general population.¹¹⁰

...AND TO COMMUNITY



73% of minority francophones say the community as a whole benefits equally or more than the individuals who attend performing arts presentations in their community — above the Canadian average (65%).¹¹¹



Recurring events and festivals that mobilize people from the community around a single project foster a sense of collective accomplishment and pride in their shared history and roots.¹¹²



Francophone performing arts presenters play a greater role in stimulating the community's sense of identity, in establishing partnerships in the community and in contributing to local economic development.¹¹³

[A] vibrant arts scene is an especially important means of engaging youth from minority communities—of enabling them to see themselves reflected in public discourse and public space and imparting a sense of belonging to a culture other than a generic North American one.¹¹⁴

FOSTERING A GREATER SENSE OF BELONGING

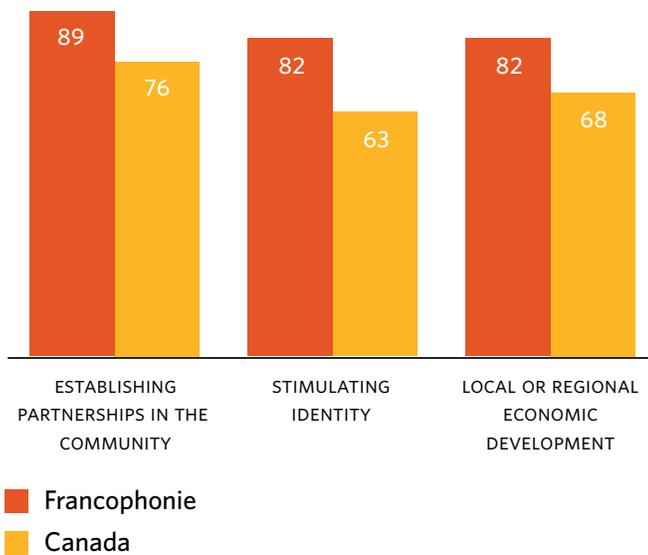


43% of minority francophone and Acadian people believe increased pride in the community and a greater sense of belonging are the main benefits of arts in their community. Second only to “bringing energy and vitality” (51%).¹¹⁵



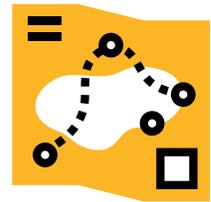
In Ontario, theatre experience in French-language schools developed feelings of autonomy, competence and belonging and played an important role in developing identity in a minority context.¹¹⁶

Presenters in minority french language communities embrace the role of...



Source: CAPACO (2012) *La diffusion des arts vivants dans la francophonie canadienne*

SCHOOLS AND CULTURAL SPACES ARE IMPORTANT



93% of francophone presenters partner with schools (vs 78% in Canada in general)¹¹⁷ which are a cultural anchor,¹¹⁸ especially in smaller communities.

Specific cultural spaces are important gathering places, symbols of an enduring community and a home for culture and traditions where people can dream and participate in living culture. However, building and operating cultural spaces present a major financial challenge, especially in smaller communities.¹¹⁹

LANGUAGE ON STAGE

Shows like *L’Echo d’un Peuple* in Casselman, Ontario and *L’Acadie des terres et forêts en fête* in Edmunston, New Brunswick, and festivals like Festival du Voyageur in Winnipeg, Manitoba increase awareness and understanding of the French language, history, accomplishments and aspirations in the region. They stimulate pride in the minority language community, develop young artists in their own language, create employment and economic returns and often have school outreach through visits and touring shows.



RECOMMENDATIONS

To continue to build belonging through the arts, we should:

Support high quality arts experiences

This research establishes a clear relationship between excellent arts and culture in the community and greater belonging. It suggests the need to focus not only on attendance or number of performances but also on the quality of the experience. We must value and harness art's ability to attract, retain, involve and connect Canadians.

Promote early, affordable and frequent exposure to the arts

In addition to better grades, greater high school completion and more civic participation,¹²⁰ early arts participation has belonging benefits. Whether embedded in school curriculum, provided as a free or affordable after-school program or offered in the community, the best youth programs create a sense of safety and inclusion, deliver challenging and interesting activities, develop supportive relationships with adults, solicit youth input and offer leadership opportunities.

Reflect diversity

Diversity—from ethnicity, to age, to disabilities—should be reflected across all aspects of the arts including volunteers, artists, audiences and performances.

Explore art as a vehicle for reconciliation

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada demonstrates how art can help heal the rifts and strengthen the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. It states: "Funding for community-based healing projects is an urgent priority for Aboriginal communities."¹²¹ In all communities, art can be a powerful starting point for dialogue, understanding, collaboration and healing.

Offer participatory arts programs

Community engaged arts foster interpersonal connections between participants, with lead artists and with the community. When community engaged arts programs beautify the community through murals, mosaics or installations, pride of place can also flourish. For resources, ideas or to share your project, visit artsengagecanada.ca.

Strengthen public policy, planning and funding

Municipal planners and policy makers must understand and value the many benefits that artists, arts organizations and events bring to the community. Recognizing that a vibrant arts community is key to attracting and retaining people in the community—and in building belonging—arts and culture needs to be a fundamental component of city planning. Arts vision, strategies, priorities and programs must be developed with community experts and practitioners. Long-term funding is needed to sustain high quality arts programs and facilities. Finally, municipalities should collect data on arts activities and outcomes at a local level.¹²²

"...culture [should] be elevated from its undervalued, peripheral role in urban planning to a central force in shaping the growth of cities... the existence of culture clusters or niche concentrations of culture industries are generally considered to be important indicators for creative cities... [and] viewed as magnets for talent."¹²³

Improve research linking the arts and belonging

The evidence linking the arts and belonging is strong but we need better and more consistent definitions of "sense of belonging", "community" and "arts" to make comparisons easier. More empirical research to determine cause and effect, the impacts of different quantities or types of exposure; impact on different audiences; relative benefits of different programs; benefits over time and belonging in a digital space are also needed to help policy makers, funders and the arts community.

Value and fund arts in official language minority communities (OLMC)

Arts and culture play a key role in the vitality of OLMCs, in promoting intercultural dialogue and in sustaining Canada's linguistic duality. Minority francophone artists and arts organizations must be valued, visible and included in municipal cultural policy and funding opportunities.¹²⁴

Explore intergenerational arts opportunities

Research shows the significant positive impact of Elders on art participation for youth in Indigenous families.¹²⁵ Beyond family influence, intergenerational Community Engaged Arts reduce isolation, improve relationships and improve attitudes towards aging – among all participants.¹²⁶ Age does not define who is an artist, a teacher or a co-creator. Intergenerational collaboration can break down barriers and build belonging.

Increase social and learning opportunities

Increasingly, audiences expect opportunities to meet performers, experts and other audience-members.¹²⁷ Not only do these opportunities enrich the experience, but connecting with others on an emotional and intellectual level helps develop social ties.¹²⁸

Support arts volunteers

In all communities, arts organizations and festivals rely heavily on volunteers. It is imperative to understand what drew them to volunteer (ex: to meet people or to develop skills) and to ensure they have an enriching experience. Solicit and value volunteer feedback. Thank and celebrate volunteers in meaningful ways.

Welcome newcomers

Arts organizations can collaborate with newcomer and settlement service providers to identify opportunities and programs to help newcomers feel welcome and comfortable in community art spaces.

Improve connectivity... literally

Access to live performances on Internet or radio is important to people living in smaller communities,¹²⁹ those with lower incomes or without post-secondary education and people with disabilities.¹³⁰ It is also important for minority francophone populations to access arts in their language.¹³¹ Artists in rural,¹³² Indigenous and minority francophone communities have expressed the need for broadband to co-create, access new markets, broadcast, promote, discuss and find sources of inspiration.¹³³

Increase awareness of Canadian arts and culture

Despite the prevalence of the arts in our lives, Canadians aren't as familiar with Canada's accomplishments in the field as we are in sports or science.¹³⁴ Pride in the arts translates into pride and belonging in Canada.

Improve accessibility

In Canada, people with a disability are among the most disadvantaged. Facilities, programs and performances must ensure easy access for the audience and inclusion of all artists.

Use the city as a stage

Program arts activities outside of traditional facilities. Site-specific performances, art walks and neighbourhood arts impact how people relate to familiar spaces, create a sense of place, and foster a sense of attachment and belonging to the community.

Open arts facilities to the community

The foyers of performing arts venues are often underused during the day and could be used for non-arts programming provided by community and neighbourhood associations or offered as co-working space. Libraries have made this shift and are becoming even more important community hubs.

GO CREATE AND CONNECT!

As we have learned through other *Vital Signs* publications focused on sports and civic engagement, the arts and belonging are intricately connected. Participation in the arts builds community belonging, and social inclusion can't happen without a thriving local arts scene.

By helping the arts to flourish in all its forms we can continue to create communities that are both reflective of Canada's rich diversity and where everyone feels like they belong.

Dance! Drum! Sing! Paint! Create something special or use the arts to engage the people around you. Your community, and indeed our country, will be more creative, caring and connected because of your involvement.



*The arts are about bringing people together and socializing – being human.*¹³⁵

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, TORONTO ARTS FOUNDATION



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