**Report on Equity Sounding**

**Canada Council for the Arts**

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**Equity Sounding – Executive Summary**

**Background and Structure of Sounding**

From **October 24-25**, **2013** the Equity Office hosted an **equity sounding** at the Canada Council designed to solicit community input on the current ecology, needs and aspirations of artists from culturally-diverse, Deaf, disability arts and official language minority communities. The sounding was intended to explore potential areas where the Canada Council might strategically intervene—through policies, funding programs, mechanisms or partnerships—to assist these equity-seeking groups in realizing their artistic vision. The sounding is part of a larger program redesignprocess that the Equity Office is currently undertaking in light of the wind-down of the *Capacity Building Initiative*, the implementation of the *Deaf and Disability Arts, Access and Equality Strategy*, and a potential partnership with the disciplinary sections on the *Roadmap for Canada’s Linguistic Duality* initiative.

The sounding brought together a **focus group** of 27 artists and other arts professionals from the designated arts communities. In forming this group, the Equity Office consulted with all sections/offices at Council and endeavored to represent a plurality of disciplines, practices, regions and perspectives. Through a series of panels, break-out sessions and whole group discussions, the participants were asked to share their expertise, ideas and preoccupations with each other and with Council staff. The participants were extremely engaged in the sounding and the resulting input is deep, varied and far-reaching. Key findings are summarized below. Note that the terms “diverse” and “equity-seeking” are used interchangeably to refer to members of **all** of the equity communities represented at the sounding.

**Summary of Input**

**Progress towards equity has been made:**

* Diverse artistic practices have proliferated in Canada and more culturally diverse, official language minority and Deaf and disability arts practitioners are appearing on Canadian stages, in galleries and in print
* Recognition among peers, critics, and the public of the vibrant and compelling artistic works created by diverse artists has grown
* Shifting Canadian demographics have increased audience demand for diverse works
* Alternative presentation networks and specialized festivals are providing new platforms for diverse works
* Equity-seeking artists are experiencing success on the international stage and linking Canada to emergent markets in South Asia, East Asia, Latin America and the Middle East
* A new “culture of leadership” is inspiring diverse artists to step into Artistic Director and curatorial roles
* Arts funders are increasingly recognizing equity as a strategic priority and more diverse artists are accessing public funds, especially individual, travel and touring grants
* The inclusion of official minority language arts in the equity framework has led to increased investment in these communities
* Collaboration and solidarity between equity-seeking communities has grown
* The Internet and social media have created “levelling” platforms and reduced physical barriers for artists with disabilities

**Major barriers still exist:**

* Diverse artists face ongoing racism and ableism in the Canadian arts sector in the form of exploitation, tokenism, stereotyping, appropriation, exclusion and isolation
* Mainstream arts organizations continue to make perfunctory gestures toward inclusion without a deep, underlying commitment to equity or engage in imbalanced partnerships with equity communities
* Diverse artistic practices are devalued by such labels as “community”, “non-professional” and “ethnic” and romanticization and exoticization continue to affect the selection and reception of diverse works
* The Anglo-Franco “Two Solitudes” schism that informs much of Quebec and federal politics continues to marginalize or render invisible culturally diverse and Aboriginal communities
* The Deaf arts community is extremely marginalized in the Canadian arts sector and fragmented by social and physical isolation; Deaf culture is also endangered by public misconceptions and “medicalized” perspectives on deafness; identifying and developing a national network of Deaf artists requires significant effort
* Diverse artists have limited access to mainstream presentation venues and lack their own cultural facilities, often self-presenting or performing in community settings with low artistic fees
* Physical access to stages, rehearsal spaces and studios continues to be a major challenge for disabled artists
* Diverse artists receive lower remuneration for their work than their non-equity counterparts and suffer increased burn-out
* Diverse arts practitioners are underrepresented in national arts policy and advocacy discussions
* The artistic staff of mid to large-sized arts organizations, the faculty of training institutions, universities and conservatories, and the pool of Canadian art critics remain predominately white and able-bodied
* Equity-seeking artists lack culturally-relevant professional, creative development and training opportunities
* Diverse artists do not have equal or proportionate access to arts funding in relation to their population share
* Artists with disabilities are frequently unable to receive individual grants without putting their income from provincial disability support programs into jeopardy
* Diverse arts organizations struggle to attain Canada Council operating funds, despite critical and public acclaim, large and dedicated audiences, operational support from provincial and municipal arts funders, and the same or higher scores in peer assessment committee processes as many existing operating clients

**Pressing needs include:**

* Networking opportunities for diverse artists to engage in peer-to-peer learning, collaborate, coordinate advocacy efforts and battle isolation
* Professional and creative development opportunities to enhance artistic and administrative skills
* Arts training and education that reflects the histories, aesthetics and values of equity-seeking communities
* Operational support for diverse arts organizations to recruit and retain qualified administrators
* Support for the research and development of alternative models of sustainable infrastructure
* Access to mainstream presentation opportunities
* Physically accessible art spaces and venues and sign language translation
* Dedicated cultural facilities for diverse artists to create and present their works

**To support the vision of equity-seeking artists it is suggested that the Canada Council:**

**(1) Increase its investment in equity-seeking arts communities:**

* Allocate additional funds to its equity priority, particularly given the wider range of equity groups now under its purview
* Ensure that well-performing equity-seeking arts organizations have access to operational support
* Continue to offer strategic funding through the Equity Office to fill gaps in the current arts ecology such as: professional development, mentorship, creative development and networking
* Implement other targeted funding mechanisms: for example, support to diverse arts administrators, an Equity “Flying Squad” or “Compass”- style initiative and incentives for mainstream presenters to partner with equity-seeking communities to present diverse work as part of their core programming
* Explore and, if viable, launch a Disability Arts Program (potentially modeled on the Inter-Arts Program) to support the research, creation and production of disability art works
* Empower the Equity Office with the necessary influence and resources to implement Council-wide equity policy and deliver strategic funding programs

**(2) Encourage and expect a comprehensive understanding of equity and diversity from Canada Council staff:**

* View equity as the shared responsibility of all Council personnel, including program officers, upper management and board members
* Make knowledge of equity and diversity a “requirement of the job” and expect staff to actively demonstrate this commitment
* Intensify staff training to ensure that all heads of section and program officers are well versed in the practices, aesthetics and values of equity-seeking arts communities
* Ensure that there are invitations and required participation at equity consultations (such as this Equity Sounding) for section heads and representatives of upper management
* Ensure that staff members are supported and equipped with the knowledge and tools to identify experts from diverse communities as peers assessors and advisors and to effectively “charge” peer assessment committees
* Increase the representation of officers and upper managers from equity-seeking communities

**(3) Embed equity values into all disciplinary sections, program guidelines and peer assessment processes:**

* Apply an “equity” lens to all policy and program discussions, including the current operating program review
* Build on best practices to implement a more cohesive approach to applying equity values across Council
* Ensure that the Equity Priority Policy is clearly articulated and applied by officers during peer assessment processes
* Increase representation from equity-seeking communities on Peer Assessment Committees to ensure that the burden of representation does not fall on one member, that there is sufficient expertise on diverse arts practices, and that assessors do not impose Eurocentric or ableist sensibilities on applicants’ work
* Ask each section and office to set equity goals and to track its progress with regards to funding a diversity of artists and practices
* Track each section and office’s success in integrating equity clients into its operating programs and implement more effective integration strategies, where appropriate
* Review all program guidelines to ensure that equity language is incorporated to eliminate systemic bias
* Expand its outreach efforts, including targeted grant writing workshops, to ensure that artists residing in all regions and communities are empowered to apply

**(4) Use its influence to cultivate equity and inclusion within the Canadian arts sector:**

* Act in a convening role to bring together diverse artists with arts presenters and facilitate meaningful exchanges between equity-seeking artists and large organizations in each discipline
* Create a pool of qualified peers to provide equity and access training for Council-funded organizations
* Develop on-line resources such as presenters’ manuals and guides
* Ask all operating clients to report on diversity in their programs, board, staff and audiences and make “commitment to equity” a standard part of the assessment process for arts organizations
* Consider requiring and supporting grant recipients to make their programs physically accessible to all artists/audiences
* Create a bridge between youth and community arts groups and the professional arts sector

**(5) Actively promote equity and diversity in the arts:**

* Leverage its research capacity to conduct an extensive “mapping” of equity-seeking arts communities across the country, potentially starting with a pilot project focusing on the Deaf arts community
* Further promote the work, experiences, successes and challenges of equity seeking artists through video, social media, showcases and conferences
* Work more closely with municipal and provincial arts funding agencies to promote equity in all regions
* Continue to advocate for diverse arts communities through collaboration with other federal and provincial agencies, e.g. UNESCO, Heritage Canada, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, educational ministries

**Conclusion and Next Steps**

Over the course of the sounding, the focus group participants generously shared their knowledge, passion and intelligence. Many individuals also sent feedback after the meeting indicating that they were inspired by the level and depth of the discussions and appreciated the opportunity to network and exchange ideas with peers from across the country. The participants were hopeful that the Canada Council continue its commitment to its institutional objective of ensuring equity in its programs and services, increase its investment in equity-seeking arts communities, and implement their recommendations.

The Equity Office intends to use the knowledge gathered through the Equity Sounding as it develops new strategies, policies and funding interventions with the goal of maximizing its impact and effectiveness in serving diverse communities across the country and furthering equity and access both within the institution and the broader Canadian arts sector.

**Equity Sounding – Full Report**

**Introduction**

From **October 24-25**, 2013 the Equity Office hosted a two-day **equity sounding** to solicit community input on the current ecology, needs and aspirations of artists from culturally diverse, Deaf, disability arts and official language minority communities. The sounding was intended to explore potential areas where the Council might strategically intervene—through policies, funding programs, mechanisms or partnerships—to assist these equity-seeking groups in realizing their artistic vision.

The sounding brought together a **focus group** of 27 artists and other arts professionals (e.g. presenters, curators, artistic directors) from the designated arts communities for the purposes of dialogue and information sharing. The majority of these individuals belonged to the equity groups currently funded by the equity office, i.e. culturally diverse artists of African, Asian, Latin American, Middle Eastern and mixed race descent and Deaf and disability arts practitioners. Representatives from the official language minority and Aboriginal communities were also invited to contribute to a broader dialogue on equity and the arts. In forming the focus group, the Equity Office consulted with all sections/offices at Council and endeavored to represent a plurality of disciplines, practices, regions and perspectives.

The sounding was part of a larger program redesignprocess that the Equity Office is currently undertaking in light of the sunset of the *Capacity Building Initiative*, the implementation of the *Deaf and Disability Arts, Access and Equality Strategy*, and a potential partnership with the disciplinary sections on the *Roadmap for Canada’s Linguistic Duality* initiative.

In addition to assisting the Equity Office in identifying the most pressing needs within the targeted equity-seeking communities and some priority areas for investment, the sounding provided participants a valuable opportunity for networking and exchange. The intention was to cultivate better understanding and build alliances amongst the various equity-seeking communities serviced by the Canada Council.

The sounding consisted of a combination of panel discussions, breakout sessions and whole-group discussions. In building the agenda, an “appreciate inquiry” approach was utilized. This methodology differs from a “problem-solving” approach in that it focuses on affirming and building on past and present strengths, successes, assets and capabilities to create “shared images of a preferred future”. The intention was not to completely avoid speaking about anything difficult or controversial but rather to start from the perspective of “what’s working” and build on these positive developments to move towards a collective, desired outcome.

Over the course of the two-day sounding the participants were asked to share their expertise, thoughts, aspirations and preoccupations with each other and with Canada Council staff, which included representatives from the Equity Office, the broader Council Secretariat and Strategic Initiatives unit and the Arts Disciplines Division. The following report provides a detailed summary of these discussions and is based both on audio recordings of the proceedings as well as some excellent notes taken by professional note-taker Trina Whitehurst. As will become quickly evident to the reader, the participants’ input was deep, varied and far-reaching.

The Equity Office intends to use the knowledge gathered in this report as it develops new strategies, policies and funding interventions with the goal of maximizing its impact and effectiveness in serving equity-seeking communities across the country and realizing the global objective of furthering equity and access within the Canada Council and the broader Canadian arts sector.

**A note on language:**

For the purposes of this report, the terms “equity-seeking” and “diverse” have been used interchangeably to refer to members of **all** of the equity communities represented at the sounding (i.e. culturally diverse, Deaf and disability arts, Aboriginal and official language minority communities), while “culturally diverse” refers specifically to individuals of African, Asian, Latin American, Middle Eastern and mixed race descent.

**Opening Session**

The Equity Sounding began with a traditional opening led by Aboriginal Officer Suzanne Keeptwo, welcoming remarks by William Lau, Acting Equity Coordinator, and a round table of introductions by the participants. Moderator Karen Tisch then delivered a presentation entitled “Equity at the Canada Council: Some Highlights”, which traced recent and historical developments in equity policy and practice at the Canada Council. The participants were invited to respond with comments.

The extent to which equity principles might inform the Canada Council’s concerted approach to operating funding process was discussed. There is clearly a perception that there is a bottleneck in the system that is hampering organizations from accessing operating funds. Shifting funds within operating funding envelopes is thus a critical concern for equity-seeking groups which have, for the most part, come to the funding table more recently that their non-equity counterparts. The sounding participants supported the Canada Council’s stated desire to reflect the evolving Canadian arts ecology in its funding programs and expressed interest in contributing to this timely discussion.

There was concern expressed about the sunset of the Equity Office’s *Capacity Building Initiative*, next steps for the clients of this program and the nature of the relationship that these organizations will have with the Equity Office and the Canada Council once this funding is fully phased-out. The program had initially been intended as a ramp into the operating programs in the disciplinary sections but, to date, the Council had experienced uneven results in transitioning organizations. The sounding participants requested that the Council implement a proactive integration strategy to expedite the entrance of long-time, well-performing Equity Office client organizations into the Council’s mainstream operating programs. The participants warned that a lack of sustained funding from the Canada Council could put a number of arts organizations that had been funded through the *Capacity Building Initiative* into jeopardy and undermine the Council’s prior investment in the development of these groups.

The participants noted that Deaf and disability arts organizations, which had only gained access to the *Capacity Building Initiative* three years ago, had not benefitted from as extensive of an investment as their culturally diverse counterparts and were thus at a different point in their evolution. An issue was also raised about which organizations should be eligible for equity funding as Deaf or disability arts groups. Participants were concerned that some organizations led by able-bodied individuals were accessing support for programming that did not reflect the vision of Deaf and disability arts practitioners.

There was some discussion on the Equity Office’s *Stand Firm* initiative, a parallel service that was provided to Capacity Building clients between 2002-2011 to promote peer-to-peer learning. In its early days, *Stand Firm* had successfully provided culturally diverse arts organizations with increased networking and professional development opportunities but the program was later underutilized. Participants remarked on the success of the *Stand Firm* initiative in Quebec, where culturally diverse arts groups have continued to meet and organize under the banner of the *Réseau des artistes pour l’équité (RésArtÉ)*. It was noted that *Stand Firm* had also been effective in battling isolation for culturally diverse arts organizations operating in Halifax and Winnipeg, and this service continues to be missed in these regions.

Participants felt that Deaf and disability arts communities might benefit from a similar networking and professional development opportunity as they start to develop more formal national networks.Participants reported on a new national service organization that is currently under development, which will link Deaf and disability arts practitioners across the country. The idea is to find common ground with other equity-seeking groups, while maintaining autonomy. As Deaf and disability arts practitioners continue to negotiate their relationship with the Canada Council, the Equity Office and the disciplinary sections, an ongoing challenge is to be “integrated” but not “assimilated”.

The *Vivacité Montreal* program was also discussed. The Equity Office is currently working with the *Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec (CALQ)* and its other Quebec partners to review this program’s impact, successes and challenges. While appreciating the benefit of this initiative in providing first-time project support to a number of culturally diverse artists, the Quebec participants stressed that there is still substantial work to be done to promote equity within the Quebec arts milieu and within the provincial arts funding system. They suggested that the Canada Council build on the momentum of the *Vivacité* partnership to take an active role in this conversation.

Considerable interest was also expressed in the Equity Office’s new funding partnership with Arts Nova Scotia on a program entitled the *Arts Equity Funding Program*. This initiative will serve culturally diverse, Deaf and disability arts communities. Participants were interested in seeing similar programs replicated in other regions of the country.

The participants understood that the Equity Office is striving to develop new program and policy interventions that would be responsive to the spectrum of equity groups it serves and maximize the impact of equity funds. They also appreciated that equity was re-affirmed in the Canada Council’s 2011-2016 strategic plan as one of the organization’s five key directions. However, they expressed concern about the extent to which Council is committing financial resources to its equity priority. As one participant noted: “a distinction needs to be made between the *nominal* and the *material* to avoid a situation where rhetoric is circulated to produce the appearance of something happening on the ground when actually what is happening is the opposite and material resources are being evacuated”.

The participants urged the Canada Council to both promote the integration of existing equity clients into Council’s regular disciplinary programs and maintain sufficient funds within the Equity Office to fund strategic programs and initiatives.

**Panel: Setting the Stage**

To open the sounding, four artists were invited to share how their experiences as equity-seeking arts practitioners in Canada have shifted over the years and the changes they have observed in the ecology surrounding their work.

The speakers were:

Larissa Lai, writer

Regine Cadet, multi-disciplinary arts presenter and dance artist

Michele Decottignies, multi-disciplinary artist, presenter and producer

Lata Pada, dance artist

Raised in a middle class, Chinese-Canadian new immigrant family, Vancouver writer **Larissa Lai** outlined the complicated set of “privileges” and “oppressions” that informed her upbringing. She cited working on the exhibition “Yellow Peril Reconsidered” as a formative experience that taught her how to make art within the framework of anti-racist cultural politics and gave her the critical education she never received at UBC. She talked about her early work as an arts administrator and her first Canada Council Explorations grant, which led to the publication of her debut novel, *Fox Is A Thousand*. She spoke about the difficulties of finding appropriate teachers as a writer of colour and acknowledged some of her early mentors, primarily Asian-Canadian visual artists.

Larissa talked about the reception of her first book and how works by culturally diverse artists are “taken up” (or ignored) by mainstream publishers, literary festivals and the press. She noted that critic Christine Kim had speculated that *Fox Is A Thousand* was “too queer, too local and too experimental” to be fully embraced by mainstream literary circles. She talked about a wave of feminist and anti-racist publications in the ‘80s and ‘90s that promoted the works of writers of colour, many of which suffered burnout and imploded in the face of neoliberalism and the internal contradictions of anti-racist movements. She spoke about being driven back into the academic world because of how difficult it was to survive as an artist in the 2000s, and the ongoing challenge of securing adequate writer’s fees and recognition in a society that undervalues the role of the artist.

**Regine Cadet** spoke about her initial struggle to establish herself in the Montreal arts scene as a new immigrant to Canada. She talked about how she was eventually embraced and asked to sit on many committees, juries and panels but how she sometimes felt like a “pawn” — offered a place at the table so that organizations could say they were considering diversity. She noted how in Quebec “culturally diversity*”* is discussed but there is a resistance to talking about “equity”. She spoke about an explosion of new culturally diverse arts organizations, artists, and projects in Montreal, as well as increased audience demand, particularly from African and Caribbean communities. Regine noted that there are currently more opportunities for culturally diverse artists within Quebec’s Anglophone arts community than the Francophone, where more significant barriers persist.

Regine spoke about the development of *Montreal arts interculturels (MAI),* a cross-cultural presenting organization that she managed for a number of years. She explained that MAI was one of the few culturally diverse organizations in Quebec that benefited from sustained provincial arts funding (albeit modest) and noted the importance of the Canada Council’s Equity Office and Inter-Arts Office grants in the organization’s development. She spoke about some positive actions taken by the *Conseil des arts de Montréal* to address cultural diversity and acknowledged the CALQ’s *Vivacité Montréal* program but echoed earlier comments that significant work still needs to be done to promote equity within the Quebec arts sector.

Regine talked about her personal practice as a dancer and how the traditional Haitian dance form she performs is devalued within the mainstream dance milieu, where contemporary European dance aesthetics dominate and stereotypes persist. She explained that she has had to self-present her work in order to continue to develop as an artist because of limited performance opportunities for culturally diverse artists and their works. With regards to cultural equity in Quebec, Regine acknowledged that some progress had been made but observed that: “it often feels that we are going around in circles”.

Alberta-based disability arts practitioner **Michele Decottignies** spoke about how her career has been marked by contrasts and binaries: in political terms, between assimilation and separation, and artistically, between traditional arts and alternative arts. Raised in a working class community in Calgary, Michelle’s upbringing was a lesson in applied political theory: “if you see something that needs to be done, you do something about it”.

Michelle spoke about her early attraction to drama, where she was able to connect with “a larger community of geeks and misfits”, and her formative training experiences with the Calgary theatre company *One Yellow Rabbit*. She spoke about how, after a decade of working as a stage manager for mainstage theatre companies in Alberta, she felt she had been subsumed by mainstream culture and ethos and had lost her integrity. Wilfully isolating herself from the sources of her oppression, she entered a cycle of “self-separation”.

For a time, Michelle focused exclusively on activism but missed working as an artist and eventually started pursuing arts-based service work, which led to the founding of *Stage Left Productions*, a platform through which she could explore radical politics and disability arts. Michelle spoke about the importance of the Canada Council’s *Artists and Community Collaboration Program*, though which she received her first Canada Council grant to work with adults with developmental disabilities. She also acknowledged the support of the Council’s Inter-Arts Office.

Michelle spoke about a dynamic, growing network of artists from across the country that are organizing nationally to create a value proposition about what disability arts are all about. She cited some ongoing challenges, including a chasm in accessible training, the stereotypical attitudes of many presenters that view artists with disabilities as either “tragic” or “inspiring”, and the dangers of “infiltration” from mainstream arts groups who start to access and benefit from the supports that equity groups have attained to combat barriers. Finally, Michelle spoke about the desire to develop the next generation of disability arts practitioners and the difficulties of coordinating and representing commonalities within the disability arts milieu without collapsing complexity.

Classical Indian dance artist **Lata Pada** spoke about semantics and the various labels that have been applied to her dance form in Canada over the years, including “folk”, “ethnic” and “visible minority”. She noted that semantics frequently inform how art forms are perceived and supported in Canada. She indicated that when she first immigrated to Canada, her dance genre was erroneously labeled as “folk”, though in fact it is a classical form that involves a high degree of training, discipline and rigour.

Lata also spoke about having to contend with the binary of “traditional” versus “contemporary.” She noted that the preservation of culture has not generally been seen as a priority for arts councils; the emphasis has been on experimentation and advancing the form. Artistic practices based on traditional aesthetics have therefore been undervalued, although these forms have always been dynamic and innovative in nature, incorporating new ideas and global influences. Lata noted a disjuncture at the peer assessment committee level in terms of assessors’ understanding of the “ethos, aesthetics and rationale” of work created by culturally diverse artists.

Lata also discussed the issue of “professional” practice. The perception that some culturally diverse dance artists are less “professional” because they do not make their full-time livelihood through the arts (or pursue parallel careers) has been a stumbling block that persists to this day, although the arts councils have redefined the term “professional” to be more inclusive of different ways of working. Lata also spoke about Canada’s rapidly shifting demographics and the growth of culturally diverse audiences. Finally, she talked about the community development and advocacy work she has been pursuing through her NASO, the South Asian Dance Alliance of Canada, and her current focus on nurturing, training and mentoring the next generation of Canadian Classical Indian dance practitioners.

**Group Discussion: Identifying Assets**

In keeping with the “appreciative inquiry” approach, participants were asked to discuss what is working well in the culturally diverse, Deaf arts, disability arts and official language minority arts milieu in Canada and to identify strengths, assets and successes that can be built on. Below are some of the factors that emerged from the discussion.

**I. Assets, Strengths, Successes**

**Increased critical mass**

Participants discussed the rapid growth and increased visibility of diverse arts practices in Canada. Hip Hop and Chinese music, for example, were cited as two musical genres that have grown exponentially in recent years both in terms of the number of artists practicing these forms in Canada and the level of audience interest. In theatre, participants noted that there are more artists of colour graduating from Canadian theatre programs, more works by diverse playwrights reaching the stage, and more parts for performers of colour than a decade ago. In writing, there are likewise significantly more writers of colour and Aboriginal writers in print in Canada today than in earlier decades and there is now a critical mass of published books and anthologies in Canadian libraries.

In visual and media arts, participants reported that there are markedly more artists of colour, queer artists and artists with disabilities being presented in Canadian galleries and festivals than in the past, though curators and programmers are still predominantly white and able-bodied. There is also a greater awareness of diversity within Canadian public galleries and artist-run centres, in part, due to the pressure exerted by the Canada Council. Participants suggested that the Council build on this momentum to put ability more firmly on the agenda of its grant recipients.

**Increased visibility and recognition**

Along with critical mass, participants noted a growing recognition among creative peers, critics, and the public of the vibrant and compelling artistic works being created by diverse artists in Canada. This is reflected in the media, through award nominations, through scholarship and pedagogy, through festival programming and in policy discussions. Language and discourse around equity and difference has also evolved, which is a positive occurrence.

**Increased public engagement and market development**

Participants noted that shifts in Canadian demographics have resulted in an ever-increasing demand for artistic work that reflects the diversity of Canadian audiences. Several participants spoke about the leadership role that equity-seeking arts groups are taking in developing alternative presentation and touring networks, nurturing community presenters and cultivating new audiences.

Participants also reported on the success of culturally diverse, Aboriginal and disability artists on the international stage and highlighted the active role that equity-seeking artists are taking in connecting Canada to growing world markets in such regions as East Asia, South Asia, South America and the Middle East.

**Festivals and new platforms**

Participants noted that the proliferation of specialized arts festivals over the past decade (e.g. disability arts, film, folk and jazz, official language minority literary festivals, etc.) has provided new platforms for diverse artists to showcase their work, as well as increased opportunities for commissions. Emerging artists from equity-seeking communities have also benefited immensely from the support, training and mentorship offered through these festivals.

**New technology and increased access**

Participants observed that society’s shift to a digital age has had a positive impact on equity-seeking arts communities. The Internet has provided an accessible, “levelling” platform for alternative modes of creative expression, and social media networks have allowed artists to connect nationally and globally with greater ease. This has been particularly significant in combatting the isolation and physical barriers experienced by many artists with disabilities. Through live streaming and other digital means, these artists can now access a wealth of disability art works, interact with colleagues around the world and build a sense of community.

**Rising artistic leadership**

Participants spoke about a new “boldness” or “fearlessness” among equity-seeking artists who are unapologetically and visibly taking their place in the broader arts ecology (the GG-nominated *Shakespeare’s Nigga* is but one example). Participants noted that this attitude is inspiring a new “culture of leadership” among diverse artistswho areinfiltrating existing arts institutions and taking the seats of Artistic Directors, programmers and curators. From these positions of influence, individuals from equity-seeking communities are beginning to create new homes for diverse works and to shift what is seen on Canadian stages and in Canadian galleries. At the same time, they are questioning static relations of power, building alternative visions of community and social cooperation, and challenging assumptions. Participants felt that more diverse artists need to occupy these seats.

**Alternative organizational models**

Participants stressed that the adaptability, flexibility and nimbleness of equity-seeking arts organizations and the alternative models and styles of leadership they employare strengths that have contributed to the growth and survival of diverse artistic communities in Canada. These models also serve as positive examples for the broader arts sector.

**Collaboration and synergy**

Participants noted that creative collaboration, partnerships and synergy are guiding principles of many equity-seeking arts organizations and there is a growing recognition among arts funders of the value of collaborative models of working. Participants also remarked on a marked increase in cross-cultural dialogue between different equity-seeking communities, as well as opportunities for individuals to self-identify as belonging to specific equity groups while recognizing intersections and commonalities.

Participants viewed the fact that members of different equity-seeking communities are increasingly working in solidarity and finding common ground as an asset. Collectively, equity-seeking groups represent a significant percentage of the Canadian population and there is strength in numbers. Participants noted that the inclusion of official language minority communities in the equity framework is a positive step and adds another layer of richness to the dialogue around diversity. Participants also suggested that the Canada Council’s Equity Office and Aboriginal Office could work collaboratively to further galvanize the informal networks that exist between culturally diverse, Aboriginal, official language minority and Deaf and disability arts practitioners and provide increased opportunities for networking and creative exchange between these communities.

**Advances in funding**

Participants cited the fact that the Canada Council and some of the provincial and municipal funding bodies have identified equity as a strategic priority as an asset. Several participants also remarked on the positive reception and support that the Canada Council’s Inter-Arts Office has shown to disability arts groups and to culturally diverse multi-disciplinary arts festivals. Increased funding to culturally diverse artists through the Canada Council’s touring and travel programs was also noted. Equity music showcases mounted in the past were viewed as helpful in connecting culturally diverse artists with presenters.

Participants appreciated the efforts of the Equity Office in improving communications and access to information for Deaf artists and artists with disabilities and providing internal equity training on disability arts for Canada Council staff. The *Capacity Building Initiative* was credited as having assisted a number of organizations to build their infrastructure and solidify their administrative and governance models, without which these groups might not have been able to continue their artistic work. (The discontinuation of this program is thus a concern.)

Participants observed that placing linguistic minorities within an equity framework has led to more investment in official language minority arts. The fact that Canada has a public arts funding system that values individual expression and that there is national legislation governing the payment of artist fees are assets that participants also felt should not be taken for granted.

**Transfer of knowledge to new generations**

Although formal training opportunities that are culturally sensitive and accessible are limited in the Canadian arts sector, participants noted that equity-seeking arts organizations are increasingly engaged in a wide spectrum of knowledge transfer activities that are nurturing the next generation of diverse arts practitioners. These include mentorships, apprenticeships, workshops, labs and specialized classes or courses. Participants also noted a marked increase in artist residency opportunities for diverse artists in Canada, which is contributing to artistic development within the various equity-seeking communities.

**II. Challenges and Barriers**

While highlighting assets, the conversation also captured some of the challenges and barriers that equity-seeking communities continue to face in the Canadian arts ecology, which are summarized below.

**Economic situation of artists**

Participants stressed that securing adequate remuneration for their work continues to be a barrier for equity-seeking arts communities. Disability arts practitioners, in particular, reported receiving lower artistic fees than their able-bodied counterparts. In addition, artists with disabilities are frequently unable to receive individual grants without putting their income from provincial disability support programs into jeopardy (a policy issue that needs to be addressed). Participants noted that due to a lack of mainstream presentation opportunities many diverse artists are forced to self-present their work or perform in alternative, community-based settings, which limits their ability to generate sufficient artist fees.

**Marginalization of Deaf artists**

Participants stressed that Deaf artists continue to be extremely marginalized in the Canadian arts landscape and Deaf arts suffer from a general lack of visibility and acknowledgement. Deaf culture is also endangered by public misconceptions and “medicalized” perspectives on deafness. Due to physical and social isolation, the complexity of coordinating communications, and the high cost of sign language translation and video conferencing, Deaf artists are often isolated from their peers. Identifying and developing a national network of Deaf artists is therefore critical but will require significant research and effort. Deaf artists are also generally underrepresented in arts policy discussions.

**Racism and ableism**

Participants spoke about having to contend with various forms of racism and ableism within the Canadian arts sector, including stereotyping, exploitation, tokenism and exclusion. Several participants reported on circumstances where they were invited to work with prominent arts organizations that had received public funding for “collaborative projects” yet were not treated as equal partners. (Grant agreements need to be better structured to ensure that such power imbalances do not occur.) Others noted how many mainstream arts organizations continue to make perfunctory gestures toward inclusion without a deep, underlying commitment to equity or diversity. For instance, including a token artist or production in their programming or inviting one diverse artist onto their board. Appropriation is also an ongoing concern, with various artists and arts organizations “borrowing” the cultural forms or aesthetics of culturally diverse or disability arts practitioners but removing them from their social, political and cultural roots or the lived experiences of their creators. A recent example is the appropriation of Integrated Dance vocabulary and the use of crutches and walkers as “props” for able-bodied dancers in a dance production performed by a prominent Canadian dance company.

**Normative artistic practices, romanticization and exoticization**

Participants viewed the increase in volume of diverse artists in print, on Canadian stages and in galleries as a positive development. However, they warned of the danger of being appeased solely by “the numbers game” and folding-in to a normative kind of artistic practice at the exclusion of more experimental or radical perspectives, voices, or artistic practices. In the quest to “put brown bodies in the spotlight”, participants underscored the importance of ensuring that there is still a diversity of ideas, form and content, particularly given that the politics of romanticization and exoticization are still very much at play and often affect the selection and reception of works by equity-seeking artists.

**Physical access**

Participants reported that physical access continues to be a major barrier for artists with disabilities. Although increasingly theatres and galleries are accessible to audience members with disabilities, access for artists with disabilities to stages, rehearsals spaces, production centres and artist studios is an ongoing challenge.

**Cultural spaces**

Participants noted that cultural facilities also continue to be a challenge for diverse artists. In order to empower equity-seeking communities to maximize their creative potential and build community hubs, participants stressed that more support is required for capital projects and physical spaces for artists to develop and present their work. It was suggested that the Canada Council advocate to Canadian Heritage on equity-seeking arts communities’ behalf for new or improved facilities. There are still very few art spaces or venues in Canada dedicated to diverse artistic practices.

**Access to Canada Council operating funds**

Participants reported that manyequity-seeking arts organizations continue to struggle to attain operating funds from the disciplinary sections at the Canada Council. This is despite garnering critical and public acclaim for their work, engaging large and dedicated audiences, securing operating and multi-year support from provincial and municipal arts funders (that use similar adjudication models), and receiving the same or higher scores in Canada Council’s peer assessment processes as many of the existing operating clients. Similarly, due to historic inequities, participants noted that many diverse organizations that have secured operating support from the Canada Council, receive lower levels of funding than their non-equity counterparts that entered the funding stream earlier. The sounding participants underscored the imperative of rebalancing funds within the Council’s operating programs to ensure that diverse applicants have access to appropriate levels of funding.

**Challenges in the overall environment**

Participants noted that arts funding in the current Canadian political landscape is under constant pressure and scrutiny, with artists needing to continually communicate the value of the arts to the public, politicians and decision-makers. A challenge for diverse artists is to find a place within this broader arts advocacy movement and not “fall off the agenda”. Participants reported, for example, that it was the larger NASOs that set the agenda for the “Day On the Hill” initiative, and equity-seeking artists did not have the opportunity to communicate their challenges, needs and aspirations.

While a number of positive steps have been taken towards increasing equity in the arts, many participants felt that they were still operating in an unjust and exclusionary environment, and that the principle of equity as a vital link between art and society and as a fundamental value in Canadian citizens’ lives still needs to be constantly defended.

**Group Discussion: The Evolving Landscape and Crafting the Future**

After reviewing some of the trends affecting the future of equity-seeking groups that were discussed in the last session, participants were asked to imagine a time in the future when diverse artistic practices in Canada are thriving and equitable access to artistic opportunities has been achieved and to identify what would have changed from the current landscape for these goals to have been realized. Below are the key factors that were cited.

**Redistribution of funds**

Participants emphasized that for equity to be achieved in the Canadian arts sector, all arts organizations must have equal access to arts funding and there must be a genuine desire within the broader arts milieu to share resources and power. This would require developing and implementing mechanisms to ensure that the monies distributed by the Canada Council and other arts funding agencies become more “fluid” and that funding institutions are better equipped to respond to the evolving needs and changing demographics of the sector.

Because the majority of public arts funding is currently invested in operating programs, participants noted that redirecting funds will inevitably involve removing entitlement from long-term operating clients who have become accustomed to more-or-less fixed grant allocations, regardless of their level of activity, stage of development or performance record. Some participants suggested that the Canada Council adopt a “long-term project” model for its multi-year grants to avoid locking in the majority of its resources indefinitely.

Participants stressed that arts funders should not rely on the promise of new funds to address funding inequities. Since there is no guarantee that public arts funding will be augmented in the immediate future, participants felt that creating a strategy for the redistribution of existing funds is imperative, and should be viewed as a separate conversation from whatever advocacy efforts are being pursued to increase overall investment in the arts.

With regard to the Canada Council’s equity mandate, participants emphasized that it is not enough for Council to lay claim to the values of equity and to state its support of cultural diversity, Deaf and disability arts and official language minorities without attaching money to these values. While the participants were pleased to see Council expand its equity purview to include more equity groups, they stressed that ­additional monies must be committed in order to address this wider constituency. Since many Council programs are currently under review and the redistribution of funds is being examined, participants felt that this would be a perfect time for Council to demonstrate its commitment to its equity values by increasing its financial investment.

**Peer assessment**

Participants noted that equity-seeking artists applying to arts funding agencies expect the same level of rigour to be applied to their funding proposals as to other grant applications. Funding weak art is viewed as tokenizing and does not further the interests of equity-seeking communities. Participants did, however, stress that it is essential that peer assessment committees analyzing equity files be knowledgeable about culturally diverse and disability arts practices and be equipped to assess artistic excellence based on the standards of these forms, as opposed to imposing Eurocentric or ableist sensibilities on applicants’ work.

Many participants felt that the peer assessment committee process currently employed by the Canada Council and other arts funders needs to be improved in order for equity to be achieved. (Individual participants also suggested some alternative adjudication methods such as regional offices or a more officer-driven process.)

While participants acknowledged that there is more diverse representation on Canada Council Peer Assessment Committees than in the past, they noted that the composition of committees continues to be a challenge. There is frequently only a single juror from one of Council’s equity-seeking groups represented on a PAC. The peers therefore continue to be predominantly white, able-bodied and members of the language majority. This places a lot of decision-making power on individuals that may have limited knowledge of the artistic practices or creative milieu of equity-seeking groups.

In addition, participants stressed that not all peer assessors come to the table with an understanding of equity issues or social justice models and some are opposed to arts councils employing any equity measures to address funding inequities. The single “diverse” member of the peer assessment committee is, therefore, frequently burdened with the responsibility of promoting equity values to the larger group and expected to be an expert on all equity-seeking communities and their artistic practices. Participants felt that increased representation on peer assessment committees is required to alleviate these problems.

Participants remarked on the fact that the Canada Council has a stated equity priority policy, which dictates that when there are two applications of equal merit and insufficient funds the applicant belonging to an equity group is prioritized. However, they reported that this policy is not always clearly articulated or rigorously applied in peer assessment committee processes.

Participants further stated that there is a disparity between the way different disciplinary sections and individual Canada Council officers present equity issues to the PAC. It was noted that some officers actively promote the Council’s equity values, introducing the equity priority during the “charge” and then carefully guiding PAC members on how to apply this policy during the allocation of funds, while others reference equity in the charge but remain passive while monies are being dispersed. Participants recommended that Council build on best practices to implement a more cohesive approach to applying equity values across Council and to ensure that the equity priority has a more material effect on the jury process.

**Presentation and curatorial power**

Participants underscored that what currently gets disseminated by mainstream Canadian presenting organizations and circulated at arts festivals is not fully reflective of the diversity of arts practice in Canada. This can create a false impression of Canadian identity. In order for equity to be achieved, participants stressed that what appears on Canadian stages and in Canadian galleries must represent the entire population. At the moment, there is a lack of diverse programmers, presenters, producers and curators in the Canadian arts sector.

Participants emphasized that, in an ideal future, there would be more diverse decision-makers leading large and mid-sized companies and arts institutions and more support of diverse arts presenters. There would also be a stronger dissemination web across the land so that work by equity-seeking artists could circulate to urban, rural, fly-in communities and reserves. In this way, culturally diverse, Aboriginal, Deaf, disabled and official language minority audiences would experience the transformative effects of seeing themselves reflected in Canadian arts programming and the next generation of Canadian artists would be inspired by diverse role models.

**National representation**

Participants brought attention to the fact that there are currently many high-level arts policy discussions where equity-seeking arts communities are underrepresented. For example, participants who attended the recent meeting of national arts service organizations in Ottawa noted that there are a number of diverse arts service organizations that the Canada Council does not formally recognize as NASOs. For equity to be realized in the Canadian arts sector, participants emphasized that it is essential for these groups to be “at the table” or their perspectives will be excluded from the larger discourse. Building capacity for diverse NASOs to speak to their particular constituents’ needs and nurturing networks or coalitions between the various equity-seeking communities served by Council were identified as essential steps in defending collective interests and combatting isolation.

Participants noted that, at the moment, there is no NASO or network serving Deaf artists and the Deaf arts community suffers from a lack of visibility and political leadership at the national level. There is also a lack of basic understanding or literacy within the broader arts community about Deaf culture. In any policy discussions profiling the needs of the Deaf community, Deaf artists must become educators to explain the nature of the culture and a 200+ year history. Participants stressed that for equity to be achieved, increased resources are required to identify Deaf arts practitioners across the country, establish a national guiding group and provide community representatives with some coaching in cultural leadership and arts advocacy. Participants suggested that a research project leading to the publication of a fully accessible, on-line guide to Deaf arts in Canada would be a good first step toward achieving equity.

**Physical access**

Participants noted that, in a fully equitable future, all arts spaces and venues would be physically accessible to artists and audiences of all abilities. Festivals and performances would incorporate sign language translation and film screenings would include audio description. Deaf artists would have ready access to sign language translators and video conferencing technology so that they could connect with peers scattered across the country, collaborate with non-Deaf artists and arts organizations, and more fully participate in the Canadian arts milieu. Participants noted that this would require financial investment in equipment and physical infrastructure.

**Capacity building and alternative organizational models**

In order for equity to be realized, participants noted that more support is required to train and retain arts administrators from equity-seeking communities. Participants also noted that further capacity building support is required by Deaf and disability arts organizations to develop infrastructure, human resources and governance but that this money should be directed to organizations led by artists with disabilities and not to groups with a “charitable mentality” that do not identify with the community.

Participants observed that many equity-seeking artists work outside the structure of formal, not-for-profit, incorporated arts organizations. For equity to be achieved, participants emphasized that arts funding agencies need to more fully acknowledge alternative models of working. For instance, an ad-hoc collective model where artists get together to do a particular project (sometimes over several years) and then disband or a producer model where individual movers and shakers develop and drive creative projects.

**Professional development, training, discourse and criticism**

A number of participants spoke to the need for increased professional development, mentoring and training opportunities for equity-seeking artists. Although there is a critical mass of diverse artists working in Canada, there is a lack of critical arts education that focuses on culturally diverse or disability arts practices or aesthetics. The “Indigenous Visual Culture” program at OCAD University, which offers students studio and theory courses taught from an Indigenous perspective, is a model that could be replicated.

Participants also expressed a desire to see the work of diverse artists recognized in the “cannon” of Canadian art and taught as part of the core curriculum of university arts programs, training institutions and conservatories. It was noted that in theatre, the faculty at Canadian training institutions continues to be predominantly white, and acting students are routinely stripped to become “neutral”, though, in fact, they are being moulded to a Western theatrical sensibility.

Although there is an emerging body of critical writing on the work of diverse artists, in order for equity to be fully realized participants suggested that Canada’s system of criticism must change. The pool of arts writers and reviewers needs to be diversified so as to ensure that the work of equity-seeking artists is not being viewed and critiqued through a Eurocentric or ableist lens. It was also noted that disability arts in Canada has a rich history that has been under-documented.

Participants spoke about a growing population of urban youth who are receiving arts training not through formal arts training institutions but through community-based youth organizations that are using arts as an anti-poverty tool or as a deterrent to delinquency or dropping out of school. These young people may be talented artists but have little knowledge of the professional arts community and be unaware that pursuing arts past adolescence is an option. Participants suggested that the Council play a role in nurturing these young culturally diverse artists by outreaching to youth organizations engaged in arts programming and creating a bridge to the professional arts community.

**Re-negotiating terms**

Several participants suggested that moving to a more equitable future requires a shift away from an “us-and-them” mentality and a re-examination of the terms “mainstream” and “normal”. As one participant queried: “Why are we working so hard to integrate into the mainstream, to be presented by mainstream presenters or to legitimize our art to the mainstream? The equity groups served by the Council represent 44% of the Canadian population. We are the mainstream!” Another participant noted: “A concept that the queer and disability communities have to offer is that there is no normal. The sooner we get rid of the idea of normal, the quicker we can get to working on things rather than supplementing the mainstream”.

Participants felt that the race/disability binary must also be problematized, since these communities and constructs are by no means mutually exclusive. Disability arts organizations must put anti-racist politics at the centre of their work and likewise groups organized around ethno-cultural formations must incorporate an understanding of the politics of ability/disability. As one participant noted: “It is important to recognize that all forms of oppression are disabling: people’s health is impacted by colonialism, labour practices and immigration, for example.”

**Shifting attitudes and perceptions**

Participants pointed out that in Canada artistic work is often viewed as a luxury and there is a lack of recognition for the role of the artist in society. In many countries, the general public is more invested in the arts and the average citizen has a wider lexicon of artists in their vocabulary. Many artists in Canada live below or at the poverty line and struggle to maintain their arts practice and survive. These difficulties are compounded for equity-seeking artists who must battle racism and ableism and, in the case of many artists with disabilities, physical and health challenges in addition to economic pressures. The level of burnout among equity-seeking artists is extremely high. Participants felt that arts funders and the broader arts community need to develop a greater appreciation of the ongoing barriers experienced by equity-seeking artists for equity to be achieved.

Several participants noted that equity-seeking artists and the arts community as a whole need do a better job at communicating the value of the arts to the general public in order to ensure that the work of artists is not viewed as expendable. As one participant stated: “An idealfuture is first and foremost a government who cares about the arts. This idea of scarcity is a myth. We, as artists, need to start fighting for the core values of the country. We need an arts lobby that says that this is what we deserve—we need to start pushing our agendas.”

Other participants noted that relying on corporate fundraising is not a realistic option for most equity-seeking arts groups. At the moment, the individuals who sit on the boards and the management teams of most Canadian corporations do not reflect the diversity of the Canadian population and taxpayers have no control over corporate decision-making. Increasing public investment in the arts is thus critical.

Participants noted that in Quebec the “two solitudes” are still a huge part of the public psyche and that this binary excludes Aboriginal and culturally diverse artists who are rendered invisible or relegated to the margins. Isolation is thus an ongoing concern. Individuals from minoritized communities in Quebec don’t feel that publicly funded spaces, such as art galleries or theatres, belong to them. Participants underscored that this Anglo-Franco schism, which also informs much of federal politics, needs to be deconstructed and the paradigm shifted in order for equity to be achieved.

**Equity as a shared responsibility**

Participants stressed that, in an ideal future, the benefits of equity and diversity would be widely recognized by all arts organizations and arts funders. Arts managers and artistic personnel would understand that it is not just “nice” to make arts programming accessible or anti-racist or queer positive but that diversity and inclusion add immeasurably to the strength and success of their activities. All arts organizations, including large institutions, would be accountable to reflecting the diversity of the Canadian population in their work, and this would be a condition of public funding.

Participants suggested that ideally all companies and organizations would have a 50/50 policy. That is, at least 50% of programming by diverse artists and 50% board and staff representation. This would eliminate tokenism. (Incentives could be offered for organizations to move in this direction.) Culturally specific, disability arts and official language minority arts organizations would be sought out for partnerships and there would be greater appreciation for the work these groups do in developing diverse audiences. The Equity Office would no longer be necessary because equal access to funds and opportunities would be achieved.

Several participants noted that in the immediate future consultation sessions with equity-seeking groups (such as this Equity Sounding) should be mandatory for Canada Council heads of section and upper management, and individuals should not just drop in and out but should block out time in their schedules to fully participate. As one participant noted: “it is disheartening to know a lot of the seats around us are empty. The people who need to hear our stories are not here to help troubleshoot.”

**Breakout Groups #1: Setting Priorities**

Participants were divided into four working groups and asked to identify the areas that require the most attention for the ideal future that was discussed in the last session to materialize (for instance, professional development, mentorship, networking, creation/production, presentation, accessible venues/facilities, etc.). There was an astonishing level of synchronicity in the needs and priorities that were identified by the four working groups and then shared with the larger group.

**Networking and collaboration**

Participants stressed the need for equity-seeking artists across Canada to have opportunities to talk with one another, collaborate, engage in peer-to-peer learning, coordinate advocacy and lobbying efforts, articulate shared visions, build trust and battle isolation. A number of models of collaboration were discussed, including a formal national service organization, a looser, more “ad-hoc” coalition, as well as a listserv or similar on-line formation. Participants highlighted the need for dedicated platforms for diverse artists to gather and exchange information on their common interests. At the same time, they underscored the importance of being at the table and fully engaged in “mainstream” arts forums, networks and service organizations so as to ensure that the perspectives of diverse artists are consistently represented in broader arts discussions. Participants also expressed a huge appetite for formal opportunities for equity-seeking artists across the country to collaborate on artistic projects, research projects or strategic initiatives that could build collective capacity through resource and knowledge sharing.

**Administrative capacity, operational support and access to funds**

Participants highlighted the ongoing need for equity-based arts organizations to build administrative capacity and secure ongoing, sustained support for their operations. At the moment, the majority of diverse arts organizations in Canada lack the financial resources to hire and retain qualified arts managers/administrators. This puts enormous strain on artistic personnel and leads to ineffective management and burn out. Participants also expressed a desire to research international “best practices” and develop alternative models of “sustainable infrastructure”, rather than simply replicating existing administrative models.

In general, participants emphasized the need for greater investment from arts funders in equity-seeking arts organizations and more equitable and proportionate access to public funds (including operating support). They also noted that if the artist is to be recognized as an important cog in the wheel of democracy, it is critical to ensure that artists and arts managers receive living wages and benefits.

**Presentation venues and presenter education**

Participants stressed the need for more presentation opportunities and venues for equity-seeking artists. The establishment of dedicated facilities and spaces is a long-term goal for equity-seeking communities. However, in the immediate future, participants felt that it was critical that existing presenters, arts venues and institutions engage in meaningful (non-tokenistic) partnerships with equity communities to present the works of diverse artists as part of their core programming.

In order for this shift in programming to occur, participants emphasized the need to educate mainstream arts presenters on the artistic practices of equity-seeking artistic communities. This training would cover aesthetics, audience development strategies, and the core tenets of accessibility so as to ensure that art spaces and venues are physically accessible and welcoming to diverse artists. Ethical issues such as appropriation, credit and remuneration would also be reviewed. Participants suggested various training mechanisms, including presenter handbooks or guides, mandatory equity workshops (conducted by qualified peers) and on-line resources.

Participants also recommended that more incentives be given and expectations placed on publicly funded arts organizations to ensure that they are fully accountable to reflecting the diversity of the Canadian population in their programs and to facilitatephysical access and inclusion for diverse artists and audiences. Because presenters are currently accountable for numbers (i.e. box office and audience figures), participants noted that a greater focus on qualitative performance measures is required in order to empower presenters to take creative risks, diversify their programming and consider the social impact of their work. Finally, as one participant noted: “We must find a way to reverse the pyramid. We need to empower ourselves so we are no longer begging to get into the mainstream, but it’s the reverse—other people come to us for our leadership and creativity.”

**Professional development, training and mentorship**

Participants stressed the need for increased professional development and training opportunities for equity-seeking artists at various points in their career. Professional development is required in all disciplines to build, artistic, administrative, and leadership skills among equity-seeking communities and to cultivate the next generation of diverse arts practitioners. To encourage diverse youth to see the arts as a viable career option, participants emphasized the need to develop “alternative pedagogical arts institutions” that foreground the artistic practices and perspectives of equity-seeking communities. Cultivating stronger bridges between training institutions, community arts organizations and the professional arts world was also viewed as a priority. Finally, participants underscored the need to develop rigorous artistic practice and “cultivate aesthetics that have traditionally been excluded” by providing individual equity-seeking artists increased creative development opportunities, including creation residencies, mentorships/apprenticeships and travel. One group also noted that more allowance needs to be made for process-driven artistic practices, as opposed to highly planned work that is more clearly “fundable”, as well as practices that meld the “professional” and “community” arts.

**Advocacy and promotion**

Participants spoke about the need to “radicalize” public understanding of art coming from all equity-seeking groups. Various mechanisms were suggested including: conducting research and mapping, producing publications, ensuring that the works of diverse artists are included in elementary, high school and post-secondary curricula, distributing information to new immigrants and new Canadian citizens on artistic opportunities, developing on-line resources and using a “TED Talk” model to post on-line videos featuring prominent artists from equity-seeking communities. Participants also remarked on the need to further educate politicians and arts funders so that Canada can establish itself as a “world leader” in equity. Participants noted that different provinces have different challenges when it comes to promoting diversity in the arts. The Quebec participants, for instance, spoke about the challenge posed by the proposed provincial legislation to ban public employees from wearing religious headgear (such as hijabs, turbans and kippas), which points to a need for more public education on respecting difference.

**Breakout Groups #2: Supporting the Vision**

Participants were once again divided into four working groups and asked to discuss how the Canada Council can best support the aspirations of artists from equity-seeking communities. They were asked to consider potential interventions—including policies, programs, partnerships or services—that might effectively meet the needs of equity seeking communities and share their recommendations with the larger group. In order to maximize the exchange of ideas, the working groups were reconfigured from the first session so that each individual would have the opportunity to interact with as many other sounding participants as possible. Once again there was a great deal of synergy in the responses of the different teams. Key recommendations are summarized below.

**Promoting equity within the Canada Council**

Participants unanimously felt that equity could be more firmly implanted into “the mental and functional DNA of Canada Council staff” and embedded into all disciplinary sections, program guidelines, and peer assessment processes. They stressed that if equity and diversity are stated institutional priorities, than an “equity lens” should be applied to all policy and program discussions, including the current review of Council’s operating programs. They felt that achieving equity should be viewed as a shared responsibility of all Canada Council personnel, including program officers, upper management and board members. They emphasized that this commitment should be a “requirement of the job” and clearly and consistently demonstrated by staff members. Participants also stressed the need to ensure employment equity at Council and, in particular, increase the representation of officers and upper managers from equity-seeking communities.

Participants underscored the need for the Canada Council to fully empower the Equity Office with the necessary authority and resources to implement Council-wide equity policy and deliver strategic equity programs. Participants noted that the Equity Framework document and Equity Priority Policy were valuable tools but not universally understood or implemented by Council staff. They suggested that further staff training is required to ensure that all heads of section and program officers are well versed in the practices, aesthetics and values of equity-seeking arts communities. Such training would also ensure that staff members are equipped with the knowledge and tools to identify experts from diverse communities as peers assessors and advisors and to effectively “charge” peer assessment committees. They reiterated that attendance at equity forums, such as this Equity Sounding, should be mandatory for section heads and representatives of upper management.

Participants suggested that the Canada Council ask each section or office to set equity goals and to track their progress with regards to adequately funding a diversity of artists and artistic practices. They further recommended that Council audit its success in integrating equity-seeking organizations into its operating programs, and implement more aggressive integration strategies, where appropriate.

Participants echoed earlier comments about the need to strengthen Council’s peer assessment process by ensuring that equity values and policies are more clearly and consistently communicated to peer assessors and by increasing the representation of equity-seeking artists on PACs. Ensuring that the burden of representation does not fall on a single individual on a PAC was viewed as a priority. Finally, they suggested reviewing all program guidelines to ensure that equity language is incorporated and to eliminate systemic bias.

**Operational and strategic funds**

The clearest message delivered by sounding participants in this session (and over the course of the two-day sounding) was that Council should “put its money where its mouth is” and invest more resources into equity-seeking arts communities, particularly now that it has expanded its equity mandate to include a broader range of equity groups. According to Council’s own analysis of Canadian demographic trends, equity-seeking communities have grown exponentially in recent years both in terms of overall population and “arts labour force” share. Proportionately, however, equity-seeking groups continue to be underfunded particularly on an organizational level. Ensuing that well-performing equity-seeking arts organizations have access to operational support (or long-term project support if Council moves in that direction) is paramount. Participants felt that Council’s disciplinary sections need to take ownership for ensuring equitable access to operating funds or that the Equity Office budget needs to be massively increased in order to provide parallel operating support to its constituent groups.

In terms of strategic funding priorities, participants reiterated some of the pressing needs discussed in the earlier sessions. Funding for individual artists to pursue professional and creative development, including travel, mentorships/apprenticeships and creation residencies, was considered vital. Support for networking initiatives and for collaborative artistic or capacity building projects was also highlighted. Given the aforementioned struggle for diverse arts organizations to attract and retain qualified general managers, it was suggested that some targeted funding (beyond operational support) be dedicated to supporting diverse arts administrators. Participants also noted that equity communities could benefit from a dedicated “Flying Squad” or “Compass”-style program. Support for arts service organizations serving equity communities was also recommended. An incentive program or scheme to encourage mainstream arts presenters and mid to large-scale arts organizations to work in partnership with diverse communities to present the works of equity-seeking artists was suggested. Finally, it was recommended that the Canada Council consider developing a dedicated “Disability Arts” program (potentially modeled on its current Inter-Arts program) to support the research, creation and production of disability art works.

**Application process**

Participants positively acknowledged the Canada Council’s recent efforts to update its communications systems and to make its program guidelines and application forms fully accessible to Deaf and disability arts practitioners. To minimize language barriers for individuals who speak English or French as a second language, come from an oral tradition or use sign language, participants suggested that Council consider accepting grant applications in applicants’ first languages and in videotaped formats. Participants also recommended that Council extend its outreach efforts to ensure that equity-seeking artists residing in all regions and communities have access to grant information and are empowered to apply. Since grant writing continues to be a challenge for many equity-seeking artists, participants suggested increasing the number of targeted grant writing workshops across the country and possibly subsidizing art service organizations or individual mentors to work with equity clients on their grant applications. Participants also recommended that Council provide more feedback to applicants on their final reports.

**Promoting equity in the broader arts sector**

Participants felt that the Canada Council could take a more proactive role in creating meaningful opportunities for equity-seeking artists to meet with and showcase their work to presenters, including major companies, galleries, etc. It was noted that the Council has the power and resources to act in a convening role, initiating and mediating meetings where equity-seeking artists and the representatives of the larger organizations in each discipline could sit at the same table. Participants also echoed previous comments about the need to educate presenters and decision-makers on diverse artistic practices and on making their programs accessible. It was suggested that Council develop a pool of qualified peers from equity-seeking communities who could be hired to do equity training for Council-funded arts organizations. Participants felt that Council could also develop and post more on-line resources, such as presenter guides or handbooks geared to mainstream presenters partnering with diverse arts organizations.

Extending the Canada Council’s use of video and social media to promote the experiences, successes and challenges of equity-seeking artists was also recommended. One group suggested that Council host a biennial “Living Conference” to promote and showcase the work of equity-seeking artists, which presenters and art institutions would be invited to attend. Finally, participants suggested leveraging the Council’s research capacity to conduct an extensive “mapping” of equity-seeking arts communities across the country. A pilot project focusing on the Deaf arts community was suggested as a potential starting point.

**Advocacy efforts**

Participants recommended that the Canada Council take a leadership role in advocating to the federal government on equity communities’ behalf. They suggested that Council work more closely with municipal and provincial funding agencies, as well as entities such as UNESCO to increase awareness of equity-related issues in the arts. They reiterated the role that the Council could take in placing equity more firmly on the agenda in Quebec and suggested working in concert with Heritage Canada, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and provincial educational ministries to raise public awareness of diversity in the arts.

**Mandating equity for Canada Council grant recipients**

Participants discussed placing higher demands on Canada Council-funded arts organizations to be accountable for equity, accessibility and inclusion. Some funding agencies, such as the Ontario Arts Council, ask all client groups accessing organizational support to articulate their commitment to equity by documenting the level of diversity in their programming, board, staff, audiences and constituencies. Participants suggested that the Canada Council adopt a similar practice and make commitment to equity a standard part of its assessment process for arts organizations.

Participants also spoke about the extent to which Canada Council-funded organizations could be mandated to make their programming physically accessible to artists and audiences with disabilities. Would it be viable, for instance, in the immediate future to implement a policy whereby all publicly funded arts organizations would be mandated to strictly use wheelchair-accessible venues and rehearsal spaces (or provide sign language translation) as a condition of their grant? Or is this a goal that could be achieved over time through equity training, offering financial incentives to arts organizations to cover access costs, etc. The participants suggested that the Canada Council further explore this question with the ultimate goal of making all arts activities in Canada fully accessible to artists and audiences with disabilities.

**Next Steps: Open Microphone**

In this “open mic” session, participants were asked to share any final thoughts, ideas and observations building on the themes of the sounding and the conversations over the past two days. The following subjects were discussed.

**National networking and advocacy**

There was further discussion on the concept of developing a national advocacy group to represent all of the equity-seeking communities around the table. Some members felt that such an entity would be useful in linking equity-seeking artists from different regions of the country and coordinating advocacy efforts. They suggested building a new umbrella NASO, which would convene biennial conferences with panels, working groups and discussions. Others felt that there were already sufficient national and regional arts service organizations serving the needs of particular segments of the community, for instance, the *South Asian Dance Alliance of Canada* (SADAC) or the *Ad Hoc Assembly* of Aboriginal and culturally diverse theatre groups. As previously mentioned, the development of a NASO specifically focusing on Deaf and disability arts culture is also currently underway. It was noted that artists and arts organizations lack the time and financial resources to participate in and pay the dues associated with multiple art service organizations. Deaf and disability arts practitioners also reiterated the need for an autonomous body that would focus on their particular interests and concerns at this point in the community’s development.

After further discussion, the general consensus seemed to be that a list-serve or other online formation that would allow the various equity-based service organizations to share information and organize around issues of common concern on an ad-hoc basis might be more useful and practical that creating a new umbrella organization serving all equity-seeking artists.

**Official language minority arts**

The varying working conditions of official language minority artists in different regions of the country were discussed. Artists from New Brunswick, for instance, spoke about the work of previous generations in raising awareness of Francophone culture in the region, which has led to significant dialogue, collaboration and partnerships between linguistic communities. Anglophone artists in Quebec, on the other hand, spoke to an ongoing sense of isolation. The arts in Quebec continue to be divided among language lines and, in general, Francophone artists regard municipal, provincial and federal funding bodies as avenues of support, while Anglophone artists look only to federal sources. Participants noted that provincial support of Anglophone artists and of culturally diverse Francophone artists in Quebec is limited.

On a national level, French language minority artists have developed various arts service organizations for networking and advocacy purposes, including the *Fédération culturelle canadienne-française* (FCCF) and discipline-specific groups such as *L’Association des groupes en arts visuels francophones* (AGAVF). However, participants suggested that further opportunities for dialogue and exchange, as well as support for creative partnerships between language minority artists working in different regions of the country are required to strengthen these communities.

It was noted that the current model of enhancing support to official language minority artists at the Canada Council through a common fund accessible to all disciplinary sections and offices, might be a strategy that could be employed to fund other equity-seeking groups, such as Deaf artists and artists with disabilities.

**International residencies in the visual arts**

Participants noted that the Canada Council currently offers formal international residency opportunities for visual artists in Paris, Berlin, London, Sydney, Santa Fe and New York City. It was suggested that the Council develop similar arrangements in other regions of the world, such as the Middle East, Africa, Asia or Latin America, to diversify these opportunities and better address the needs and interests of equity-seeking artists.

**Philanthropy and equity-seeking communities**

Participants spoke to the particular challenges experienced by culturally diverse arts organizations in accessing private donations and making philanthropic inroads into specific ethno-cultural communities. Culturally diverse arts organizations naturally look to their own cultural communities for potential donors. These diasporic communities are, however, sometimes made up of relatively recent immigrants or refugees who may not have the means to support the arts or may not come from a tradition of philanthropic giving.

Educating young people on the importance of the arts and how citizens can contribute funds or volunteer their time to arts organizations may breed a new generation of diverse arts patrons but the results of this work will only be felt in the distant future. In the meantime, equity-seeking arts organizations must frequently contend with unrealistic expectations from arts funding agencies regarding levels of private sector support. Participants noted that in most forums around fundraising and the arts, ethics are discussed but not equity.

**Panel: Aspirations and Inspirations**

In this closing panel, four artists were invited to share personal perspectives on the opportunities that face them, their hopes and aspirations and what inspires and fuels their work.

The speakers were:

Jes Sasche, visual artist, writer and curator

Tam-Ca Vo-Van, media and visual arts curator and programmer

Shahin Sayadi, theatre artist and multidisciplinary arts presenter

Karla Étienne, dance artist and arts manager

**Jes Sachse** spoke about her entrée into the arts world. She noted that she had never set out to be an artist and was initially drawn in not by the disability arts milieu but by the queer arts scene. Through research she developed an understanding of disability as political. Her first creative project in 2007 evolved from her anxiety around seeing photos of herself on Facebook. She decided to address this discomfort head on by creating 50 nude self-portraits. Reviewing these photos, she become compelled by the architecture of her anatomy and decided to continue her investigation into the relationship of her body and the photographic image. Jes spoke about her initial feelings of self-doubt that stemmed from a legacy of oppression as a person with disabilities.

Jes presented a number of slides of her photographic and installation work. She described the critical reception around her first series of photographs, including comments from one reviewer about the “passivity” of her photographs because she was not looking directly at the camera. She described the influence of queer and transgendered art on her work. She spoke about two recent artist residencies: one at the Artscape Gibraltar Point, which involved experimentation with straws as a sculptural medium and culminated in a photographic series entitled “Freedom Tube”, and another at the Durham Art Gallery through which she developed a large-scale installation entitled “wish you were here” consisting of an oversized ramp structure that was unattached to any building or entrance.

**Tam-Ca Vo**-**Van** spoke about her artistic passions and her curatorial work at Galerie Saw Gallery. She described the organization’s guiding philosophy that “the gallery exists to serve the community”. Though seemingly self-evident, this is not always the focus of visual art galleries. She spoke about the gallery’s approach to equity both in terms of the inclusion of diverse art practices and perspectives in the programming and the cultivation of diverse artists, curators and audiences. Tam-Ca described how SAW strives to be an accessible, welcoming space that nurtures informal exchanges and connects artists with communities. She spoke about the gallery’s efforts to engage diverse ethno-cultural communities, as well as Franco-Ontarians and Gatineau residents through targeted outreach efforts and multi-lingual publications.

Tam-Ca concluded by discussing the Galerie Saw Gallery exhibition “Before I Die”, which featured an interactive art project by New Orleans artist Candy Chang in which audience members were invited to complete the phrase “Before I die I want to…” Tam-Ca spoke about the positive public reception of this exhibition, which seemed to touch peoples’ lives and provoke various unexpected encounters. She noted that this type of audience engagement is what inspires her to continue her work.

**Shahin Sayadi** spoke about the evolution of his company OnelightTheatre. He described how he and his partner, Maggie Stewart, developed the company’s first productions after-hours in a 40-seat black-box theatre tucked behind a storefront, which they dubbed The Crib. At the same time, Maggie pursued a law degree and the couple juggled the running of a speciality food store and raising their first child. Shahin spoke about his Persian heritage and the diverse stories that inform his theatrical works. He described Onelight Theatre’s focus on building relationships with various ethno-cultural communities in the Atlantic region, including the indigenous Mi’kmaq community, and how the company’s productions have been shaped by these relationships.

Shahin described how, over the years, Onelight Theatre grew in size and scope from a project-based to an operating company and more recently became the resident company at the Alderney Landing Cultural Centre. He also discussed the development of Prismatic, a national multi-arts festival that showcases and celebrates the work of Aboriginal and culturally diverse artists. Prismatic, which has been running since 2008, is one of the sole venues for artists of colour in the Atlantic region. It offers local audiences exposure to culturally diverse artists from across Canada and local playwrights and performers opportunities to present their work in a professional setting. From its humble beginnings, Onelight Theatre has now grown to present a full season of work, operate a full-time venue and theatre school, host a national arts festival and conduct regular outreach to schools. Shahin spoke about how the company has leveraged these various programs and opportunities to become one of the most active and vital artistic hubs in the Atlantic region.

**Karla Étienne** explained that she had almost refused the opportunity to speak on this closing panel since, as a dancer, she is rarely called upon to take the microphone, generally serving the needs of the artistic work but remaining silent. Having said this, she felt that as an “interpreter” she had an obligation to share her experiences. She spoke about her development as a dancer and particularly the inspiration and mentorship of dance philosopher, dance artist and artistic director Zab Maboungou with whom she works at the dance company Nyata Nyata. She spoke about the vital influence of Zab’s work on an entire generation of diverse dance artists in Quebec. She explained how Zab teaches her students and company members to harness the necessary force and energy to surpass the limitations of their bodies and invest their movements with greater meaning and significance. She said that, in all humility, her aspiration was simple: to continue to be a woman who dances, which she sees as an honour and privilege.

**Closing Remarks and Post-Sounding Feedback**

William Lau thanked the group for their participation in the Equity Sounding. He acknowledged the participants’ passion, intelligence and thoughtful comments as well as their frustrations. He thanked Council staff for their participation in organizing and attending the sounding, and acknowledged the input of the disciplinary sections and offices in selecting participants. He encouraged the sounding participants to stay active and engaged with the Canada Council and stressed that their continued input was highly valued.

In the days following the sounding, many participants sent messages indicating that they had been inspired by the level and depth of the discussions and had appreciated the opportunity to network and exchange ideas with peers from across the country. However, they also reiterated their frustration with regards to the uncertainty of future equity funding (once the Capacity Building Initiative fully winds down), the difficulties that equity-seeking artists are experiencing in accessing operating support from the disciplinary sections, the lack of active participation of section heads and upper management in the Equity Sounding and the fact that the Canada Council had expanded its equity mandate without committing additional funds. Participants were, however, hopeful that the Canada Council would live up to its institutional objective of ensuring equity in its programs and services, expand its investment in equity-seeking communities and implement the various recommendations made during the Equity Sounding.

As noted in the introduction to this report, the Equity Office plans to use the input from the Equity Sounding to inform its future policy and program directions, maximize its impact and efficacy in serving equity-seeking communities, and advance the principle of equity within the Canada Council and the Canadian arts sector.

**Appendix A: Participant List**

**Focus Group**

Nina Lee Aquino (Ontario)

David Bobier (Ontario)

Regine Cadet (Quebec/Ontario)

Michele Decottignies (Alberta)

Karla Étienne (Québec)

Sally Frater (Ontario)

Tiphaine Girault (Québec)

Rachel Gorman (Ontario)

Hiromi Goto (British Columbia/Colombie-Brittanique)

Mei Han (British Columbia/Colombie-Brittanique)

Ajay Heble (Ontario)

Adonis Huggins (Ontario)

Frank Hull (Ontario)

Nantali Indongo (Québec)

Emma Kivisild (British Columbia/Colombie-Brittanique)

Larissa Lai (British Columbia/Colombie-Brittanique)

Sandra Laronde (Alberta/Ontario)

Danielle Leblanc (New Brunswick/Nouveau-Brunswick)

Vicky Moufawad-Paul (Ontario)

Marilo Nunez (Ontario)

Lata Pada (Ontario)

Jes Sachse (Ontario)

Rodney Saint-Éloi (Québec)

Shahin Sayadi (Nova Scotia/Nouvelle-Écosse)

Alvin Tolentino (British Columbia/Colombie-Brittanique)

Tam-Ca Vo-Van (Ontario)

Winston Xin (British Columbia/Colombie-Brittanique)

**Canada Council Staff**

Michelle Chawla, Corporate Secretary and Director, Strategic Initiatives and Multicultural Champion

William Lau, Interim Coordinator, Equity Office

Melisa Kamibayashi-Staples, Program Officer, Equity Office

Alan Shain, Disability Arts Officer, Equity Office

Noel Habel, Program Officer, Aboriginal Secretariat

Roger Gaudet, Director of Arts Discipline Division

Sylvie Gilbert, Head, Visual Arts Section

Caroline Lussier, Head, Dance Section

Claude Schryer, Coordinator, Inter-Arts Office

Hélène Pollex, Head, Arts Services Unit

Suzanne Keeptwo, Program Officer, Writing and Publishing Section

**Moderator**

Karen Tisch, Program Officer, Equity Office

**Appendix B: Participant Biographies**

The biographies submitted by participants are reproduced here:

**Nina Lee Aquino** is a director, dramaturge and playwright. She was the former Artistic Director of fu-GEN Asian Canadian Theatre Company and Cahoots Theatre Company and the current Co-Artistic Director of the Factory Theatre. She is the editor of Canada’s first Asian-Canadian 2-volume drama anthology *love + relasianships* (Playwrights Canada Press) and the co-editor of the award winning *New Essays on Canadian Theatre Volume One: Asian Canadian Theatre* (Playwrights Canada Press). Nina co-wrote *Miss Orient(ed)* and has written her second play, *Every Letter Counts* (World Premiere, Factory Theatre 2013). Other credits include awards for directing: the Ken McDougall Award 2004, the Canada Council John Hirsch Prize 2008, a Dora Mavor Moore Award for Outstanding Direction 2011 (*paper SERIES*, Cahoots Theatre Company) and 4 consecutive Dora Mavor Moore Award nominations (*Singkil,* 2007; *People Power*, 2008; *lady in the red dress*, 2009; *The Making of St. Jerome*, 2010).

## David Bobier has an MFA from the University of Windsor and a BFA from Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. His work has been exhibited across Canada with important touring exhibitions in Ontario and the Atlantic provinces. As a multi-media artist he has received grants from Canada Council for the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, Grand NCE, Ontario Arts Council and New Brunswick Arts Council. He is currently partnering with the Inclusive Media and Design Centre at Ryerson University in researching and employing vibrotactile technology to create vibratory ‘compositions’ and to investigate broader applications of the sensory interpretation and emotionality of sound and vibration in art making. Bobier is Founder/Director of VibraFusionLab, London, ON that uses a holistic approach to considering vibration as a language of creation and exploration. He is currently Director of Development for Toronto International Deaf Film and Arts Festival.

**Régine Cadet** a dirigé, pendant 7 ans, le MAI (Montréal, arts interculturels), un organisme qui se spécialise dans la promotion et la diffusion des pratiques artistiques interculturelles. Cette fonction lui a permis de s’impliquer dans divers projets et comités œuvrant pour l’intégration et la reconnaissance des artistes issus de l’immigration, notamment le Chantier diversité de Culture Montréal et ResArtE (Réseau des artistes pour l’équité). Très active dans le milieu artistique montréalais, Régine a siégé sur divers comités et jurys organisés par les différents conseils des arts (Conseil des arts du Canada, Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec, Conseil des arts de Montréal) et a fait l’objet d’articles dans Référence Magazine et l’édition spéciale sur la culture du Magazine Commerce. Également passionnée de danse, Régine a été introduite à cette discipline en suivant des cours à la Haitian American Academy of Ballet and Arts. Elle poursuivit sa formation en intégrant le Ballet Folklorique d'Haïti (BFH) qui lui permettra de découvrir l'immense richesse des danses traditionnelles haïtiennes et de présenter des spectacles à travers le monde : Mexique, Chili, Madagascar, etc. Arrivée à Montréal, elle a fondé la troupe de danse EKSPRESYON, qui marie de façon originale tradition, éléments de danse moderne et jazz, et où elle est tour à tour directrice artistique, chorégraphe et danseuse.

**Michele Decottignies** is a multiple award winning Canmore-based playwright, producer, presenter, director, designer, facilitator and administrator. She founded Stage Left Productions to house her innovative blend of professional arts production, community-based change processes, and grassroots social justice. As an under-educated, working class, radical lesbian feminist activist with several disabilities, Michele’s practice is necessarily concerned with social justice and with the development of new artistic and cultural practices that nurture rather than negate diversity. Her artwork is therefore multidisciplinary, collaborative, and truly radical – using the arts to challenge dominant social paradigms that render difference invisible and/or undesirable in society. Within the professional arts community, Michele has worked in a variety of artistic, technical, administrative, and/or advisory roles for many different professional and community arts companies throughout Alberta. She has made significant contributions to the fields of Political Theatre, Performance Creation, Artist-Community Collaboration, and Theatre of the Oppressed and to the disciplines of Feminist Art, Lesbian Art, and Disability Arts. Before Stage Left, Michele had the good fortune to work with activist groups, social justice organizations, and human service providers; working with many diverse community groups to affect both individual and structural change. Michele is a graduate with distinction of Mount Royal College’s Theatre Arts Diploma Program and managed to get a largely self-directed BFA in Secondary Drama Education from the University of Calgary. She also took professional film and video production training at the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology.

**Karla Étienne** earned a master’s degree in Environmental Science at UQAM and worked in environmental organizations. At the same time, she took her first steps in West African dance (*Takadja*,Juno Award 1996 and *Oumar N’Diaye*) in the dance technique developed by Zab Maboungou/Compagnie Danse Nyata Nyata, where, after a few years, she would become one of the Company’s dancers. In 2003, she decided to devote herself to dance and became the Company’s Assistant Artistic Director. She also coordinates the Programme of Training and Artistic and Professional Development in African Dance (PEFAPDA). Karla, the first graduate in the programme, has taught dance at the Nyata Nyata studio for several years, in addition to her own work as a dancer. Karla Étienne is regularly invited to sit on juries and consultation committees of the Canada and Quebec arts councils. She is vice-president of the Regroupement québécois de la danse and a member of the Conseil des Arts de Montréal’s Board of Directors.

**Sally Frater** is an independent curator and writer. She holds an Honors BA in Studio Art from the University of Guelph and an MA (with Distinction) in Contemporary Art from The University of Manchester and Sotheby's Institute of Art. In her curatorial practice she is interested in exploring issues of identity, history, memory, spatial theory, African and Caribbean diasporas, photography, as well as issues of representation and equity in gallery and museum practices. She has curated exhibitions for the Glassell School of Art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (2012) Justina M. Barnicke Gallery at the University of Toronto (2012), Georgia Scherman Projects in Toronto, Ontario (2012), The Print Studio in Hamilton, Ontario (2010) Art Gallery of Peterborough (2010), A Space Gallery in Toronto, Ontario (2006, 2008), and the McMaster Museum of Art in Hamilton, Ontario (2005, 2006). Her writing has appeared in catalogues for the Studio Museum in Harlem, The Art Gallery of Greater Victoria and for journals such as *Artforum Online*, *NKA*, *Prefix Photo*, *Border Crossings* magazine, *C Magazine*, *Fuse*, *Blackflash Magazine*, *Women and Environments International* and *Canadian Art*. She has presented at conferences at Ryerson University in Toronto, Ontario, Carleton University in Ottawa, Ontario and McGill University in Montreal, Quebec. She has received grants from the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council and has served on juries for the Ontario Arts Council, the Toronto Arts Council and the Houston Arts Alliance. A member of IKT and ICI (Independent Curators International) and co-founder of Third Space Art Projects, she was recently completed residencies in the Core Program at the Glassell School at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and Project Row Houses, Houston.

**Tiphaine Girault** est une artiste multidisciplinaire qui vit à Gatineau. À travers ses œuvres, l'artiste Sourde permet de faire rayonner sa culture et sa langue (Langue des signes québécoise) qui sont souvent méconnues des non sourds. Elle joue avec l’imaginaire, le poétique ou l’humour dans ses œuvres. Elle est présentement directrice générale de SPILL PROpagation appuyés par le Conseil des arts du Canada et le Conseil des arts de l’Ontario, un organisme à but non lucratif, qui a été formé afin de permettre l’émergence de la culture Sourde dans l’art et la culture canadienne, et qui explore les performances effectuées par les Sourds, aussi bien dans le théâtre, le multimédia, que dans les arts du cirque afin de créer une nouvelle et audacieuse forme d’art associatif.

**Rachel Gorman** is an artist and curator working in dance theatre, performance, and video, and is Assistant Professor in the Graduate Program in Critical Disability Studies at York University. She writes about disability movements and art production from the perspective of anti-racist, anti-colonial, and transnational feminist theory, and employs both cultural studies and critical political economy in her research. She served on the editorial committee of *Fuse Magazine* from 2007-2009, and the programming committee at A Space Gallery since 2009. She has two decades of activist experience with anti-occupation, anti-violence, and disability rights campaigns.

**Hiromi Goto**, author of seven books, received the regional Commonwealth Writer’s Prize and the Canada-Japan Book Award for her first novel *Chorus of Mushrooms* (1994). *The Kappa Child* (2001) won the James Tiptree Jr. Award and *Half World* (2009) was the recipient of the Sunburst Award. Goto has held numerous writer-in-residencies in British Columbia and Alberta; her work has been translated into French, Italian, Polish, Hebrew, Turkish and Japanese. She is currently a mentor at Simon Fraser University for The Writer’s Studio Program. Her many interests includes race, representation, women’s lives, the body, sexuality, feminism, and human relationship with the natural environment. She is an editor, teacher, mother, and what she calls “a soft activist”. Her latest novel for young people is *Darkest Light* (2012), the companion book to *Half World*.

**Mei Han**(Ph.D.) is a leading concert artist on the Chinese zheng (21-string long zither). Since having moved to Canada in 1996, she has been actively promoting traditional Chinese musical culture as well as creating cross-cultural and inter-cultural performance on her instruments. She has toured across Canada and North America, and performed concerts in some of the world’s most prominent concert halls and festivals. Mei is the artistic director and the leader of Mei Han Art Ensemble and Red Chamber, a Juno nominee, and the subject of three documentaries. Mei is also an ethnomusicologist, currently a visiting assistant professor at Kenyon College in the US.

**Ajay Heble** is the Director of the recently launched International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation (IICSI), and Professor of English in the School of English and Theatre Studies at the University of Guelph. He is the author or editor of several books including, among others, *The Fierce Urgency of Now: Improvisation, Rights, and the Ethics of Cocreation,* co-authored with Daniel Fischlin and George Lipsitz (Duke University Press), *People Get Ready: The Future of Jazz is Now!*, co-edited with Rob Wallace (Duke University Press), *Landing on the Wrong Note: Jazz, Dissonance, and Critical Practice* (Routledge), *The Other Side of Nowhere: Jazz, Improvisation, and Communities in Dialogue* (Wesleyan University Press), *Rebel Musics: Human Rights, Resistant Sounds, and the Politics of Music Making* (Black Rose Books), both co-edited with Daniel Fischlin. As the Founder and Artistic Director of the Guelph Jazz Festival, Heble has jolted the citizens of Guelph into an appreciation of improvised and avant-garde music and delighted aficionados from around the world with his innovative and daring programming. Under his visionary leadership, the Festival—winner of the prestigious Premier’s Award for Excellence in the Arts (2010), and a three-time recipient of the Lieutenant Governor’s Award of the Arts (1997, 2000, 2001) —has achieved a rock-solid international reputation as one of the world’s most inspired and provocative musical events. He is also a founding co-editor of the journal *Critical Studies in Improvisation/Études critiques en improvisation* (www.criticalimprov.com), and Project Director for Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice, a large-scale Major Collaborative Research Initiative, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. As a pianist, he has released three CDs: *Different Windows*, a live recording of improvised music with percussionist Jesse Stewart, and two recordings with his quartet, The Vertical Squirrels.

**Adonis Huggins** is the Executive Director of Regent Park Focus Youth Media Arts Centre, a community arts organization that specializes in using interactive multi media arts to engage youth and promote health. Widely recognized for his work, in 1999 Adonis and Regent Park Focus was invited by the Canadian Society for International Health to lead a Ukraine-Canada Youth for Health Project modeled on his experiences in Regent Park. Adonis and Regent Park Focus have received a number of awards: Mayor's Task Force on Drugs Award (1995), Innovative Prevention Program Award from the Addiction Research Council (1996), A Profile in Preventing Substance Use Problems Among Young People – A Compendium of Best Practices published by Health Canada (2000), Mayor's Community Safety Award for Outstanding Achievement in Youth Violence Prevention and Promoting Community Safety (2003/2007), and Toronto Culture's Face the Arts Award (2006) that recognizes his significant role in developing multi-media prevention programs for youth.

**Frank Hull**, dancer and performing artist: “What would the world be like without disability or illness? It would be tragic because I would not exist exactly the way I do now. My name is Frank G. Hull. I’m gay, disabled and mentally ill. I was diagnosed with bi-polar disorder in 2006. Back in 1998 I was invited by Debbie Wilson Studios and the On My Own Dance Company of Toronto to create a dance piece that would work with my body. But wait, it all started when I decided to crawl into gay dance clubs to dance on my knees with a cushion for support. A gay man’s dream, come true. Traditional dance has always left out the disabled, those over a certain age and even those who are considered over weight. When I dance on stage or in the club, in my chair, out of my chair, what I am really telling the world is I am not ashamed of my body, come get to know me and my body. Inclusive dance open to all bodies and abilities is pure magic where one can explore infinite shape. Finding that place where there is no need to doubt one’s beauty. In a society that says beauty is for the able bodied and young. I think that inclusive arts help us to break down barriers showing that bodies of all types, abilities and ages can be sexy and beautiful.”

When **Nantali Indongo** a.ka. Tali a.k.a IamBlackgirl a.k.a Taliwah revealed to herself that her passion for Hip Hop and performance could no longer remain a vivid memory of her childhood and teenage years, she joined Montreal Hip Hop band Nomadic Massive in 2005 ([www.nomadicmassive.com](https://webmail.canadacouncil.ca/borderpost/imp/wm-proxy.php/owa/redir.aspx?C=_4wJpIWZyESi4iV0iDo3MnTkvhovotBI9_DhKw-CCb1BT7m1KAfuhfeu33YazfEhwaVTRqyIACY.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.nomadicmassive.com)). Now an emcee-vocalist, Tali has rocked the mic across North America, and the globe, dropping rapid-fire rhymes in English or Caribbean patois; lacing tracks on the 3 of the band’s 5 studio recorded albums and mixtapes, and now preparing the next Nomadic album for 2014 as well as a solo project called “Fiyah in Yuh Belly”. On her unavoidable musical journey, Taliwah loads her backpack with a rhyme-book, a Nano, anecdotes from life as a frontline community worker and journalist, the history of Caribbean immigrant parents and the complex identity of a Canadian-Caribbean-Montrealer who knows about the hype of the first ParticipAction initiative and the havoc of Quebec in 1995. So while carrying the torch of a storytelling tradition onto stages and into studios, with master's tools and microphones; into classrooms and communities; Taliwah wants to expose to educate and rhyme to rouse, so that the top tips over and humbles itself while the bottom sees the booby traps and makes an educated move.

Kickstart Artistic Director **Emma Kivisild** has written, exhibited, and performed extensively, from promotional copy about local musicians, to narratives of disease, disability, and trauma, to multi-media shows about Armageddon. As a member of Kiss & Tell, under the pseudonym Lizard Jones, she is the co-author of the Lambda award winning *Her Tongue on My Theory* and the author of the novel *Two Ends of Sleep*. She is in the UBC Department of Language and Literacy Education and was the winner of a doctoral fellowship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

**Larissa Lai** is the author of two novels, *When Fox Is a Thousand* and *Salt Fish Girl*; and two books of poetry, *sybil unrest* (with Rita Wong) and *Automaton Biographies*. A recipient of the Astraea Foundation Emerging Writers' Award, she has been shortlisted for the Books in Canada First Novel Award, the Tiptree Award and the Dorothy Livesay Prize. She is an Assistant Professor in English at the University of British Columbia.

**Sandra Laronde** is an innovator in the artistic and cultural sector for over 19 years, working as a director, producer, performer and creative leader. In 2000, Sandra founded Red Sky, Canada's leading company in contemporary Indigenous performance in dance, theatre and music. Currently, she is also the Director of Indigenous Arts at The Banff Centre, the world's largest arts and creativity incubator. She divides her time between Toronto, Ontario and Banff, Alberta. Sandra's world stage line-up with Red Sky includes the Vancouver 2010 Cultural Olympiad; 2010 World Expo Shanghai in China; 2008 Beijing Cultural Olympiad; John F. Kennedy Center; State Theatre of Opera & Ballet in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia; Beijing's National Centre for the Performing Arts; and Roy Thompson Hall, among others. In May 2013, Sandra received the Victor Martyn Staunch-Lynch Award for Outstanding Mid-Career Artist in the Discipline of Dance, presented by the Canada Council for the Arts. In 2011, she was bestowed with an Honorary Doctorate Degree from Trent University and the Expressive Arts Award from The Smithsonian Institute. She was a City of Toronto and Toronto Life’s "face the arts" recipient celebrating cultural mavericks and was also awarded the Ontario Good Citizenship Medal; the Paul D. Fleck Fellowship in the Arts from The Banff Centre; and Toronto City Council's Aboriginal Affairs Award. In addition, she was one of 225 Canadians chosen to participate in the Governor-General's Canadian Leadership program that celebrates promising leaders who are making a significant impact on Canada. She is a member of the National Executive Committee for the Governor-General’s Canadian Leadership Conference; an Advisor to The Association of American Cultures based in Nebraska, and the Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD) in Toronto, Canada.

An avid reader from an early age, **Danielle Leblanc** completed her B.A. with a major in English and a minor in History at the Université de Moncton, followed by her M.A. in English Literature at McGill University. After graduating, she worked as a Communications Coordinator and Copywriter for belairdirect, an insurance company in Québec and Ontario, before moving back to Moncton to work as an Account Executive for an advertising, PR and communication agency. In 2010, she returned to the cultural sector as the Executive Director of the Frye Festival, Atlantic Canada’s largest literary happening.

**Vicky Moufawad-Paul** is an arts administrator, curator, and video artist. She is the Artistic Director at A Space Gallery and holds an MFA from York University. Her curatorial projects include “Blown Up: Gaming and War” which traveled to Gallery 101 in Ottawa, MAI in Montreal, and Interaccess Electronic Media Arts Centre in Toronto, “Enacting Emancipation” and “A Refusal of Images” at A Space Gallery in Toronto, “With Love From Le(z)banon and Pale(z)tine” at the Inside Out Film Festival in Toronto, “Strategic Fragments” and “Inconsumable” at E-Fagia in Toronto, and “Excessively Palestine” at 16 Beaver in New York City. She was previously the founding Executive Director of the Toronto Arab Film Festival, and has worked at the Toronto International Film Festival. She was a member of the Visual and Media Arts Committee at the Toronto Arts Council, an Advisory Board member of the Palestine Film Festival and at the AluCine Film and Media Arts Festival, as well as a member of the Board of Directors at Trinity Square Video. Her writing has been published by *Fuse Magazine*, *180º*, *E-Fagia*, the Arab American National Museum; and she was a contributor to the anthology *Decentre: Concerning Artist-Run Culture/A Propos de Centres D’Artistes* (YYZ Books, 2008). Moufawad-Paul’s video art has been exhibited nationally and internationally, most recently as part of Yale University’s Women and Gender Studies Speaker Series, University of Toronto’s Jackman Humanities Institute, and New York University's Kevorkian Center.

**Marilo Nuñez** is founder and Artistic Director of Alameda Theatre Company, a company producing and developing Canadian theatre with a distinct Latin American perspective. She has developed programs such as the De Colores Festival of New Works, Nueva Voz: A Latino Youth Initiative and El Barrio, an online database of Latino Canadian artists. She has been working in Canadian theatre for over 20 years as an actor, playwright, producer and now director. Directing: *Chile Con Carne* (Alameda), *The Intruder* (Alameda), *Hallaj* (Assistant Director/Modern Times/Soheil Parsa). Currently she is writing *El Retorno/I Return* (Tarragon Playwright’s Unit 2013) and *Sangre:Redux* an adaptation loosely based on Lorca’s *Blood Wedding* (part of the 2011 De Colores Festival of New Works and Cahoot’s 2010-11 Hot House Playwright’s Unit). Marilo’s first play, *Three Fingered Jack & the Legend of Joaquin Murieta*, has been published in the first anthology of Canadian Latin American playwrights, *Fronteras Vivientes* by Playwrights Canada Press.

**Lata Pada** is the Founder and Artistic Director of SAMPRADAYA Dance Creations, a company at the forefront of South Asian dance in Canada. She has lived in India, Canada and Indonesia and has made Canada her home since 1964. Lata has trained with India’s distinguished gurus, Kalaimamani K. Kalyanasundaram and Padma Bhushan Kalanidhi Narayanan. Lata’s solo performances have revealed a distinctive style, described as *“Pada continues to rivet the eye with her soulful lyricism” – Globe and Mail.*Lata Pada is a recipient of the Order of Canada in 2010 and has the distinction of being the first South Asian artist to receive the Order of Canada. In January 2011, Lata was conferred the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman by the President of India, the highest civilian honour for non-resident Indians. In June 2012, Lata was awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal. In September 2013, Lata was inducted into the inaugural Legend’s Row of the City of Mississauga. Lata holds a Masters in Dance from York University and is an Adjunct Professor in the Graduate Program of Dance at York University. Lata’s writing on the transformational power of dance in her life has been featured in the 2011 research book - *Creative Arts in Interdisciplinary Practice* - *Inquiries for Hope and Change* and in the 2011 Spring Edition of the *Canadian Theatre Review*. She is currently working on a research grant examining inter-cultural approaches to teaching Indian dance in the public school systems in Toronto. Lata has recently been awarded the 2012 Chalmers Foundation Senior Fellowship to research the performance traditions of the Ramayana in Indonesia, Thailand and Cambodia. She has received several awards and honours for her contribution to the arts in Canada, including the 1995 Mississauga Arts Award, the 2000 New Pioneers Award and the 2003 Professional Woman of the Year Award from the Indo-Canada Chamber of Commerce. She was recognized as an Outstanding Indo-Canadian by the Canada India Foundation in May 2010, and was featured in *India Abroad*’s Canadian Power List in October 2009 and *Zoomer* and *Astitva* magazines.

**jes sachse** is a genderqueer visual artist, writer and curator obsessed with disability culture, public art, the post-industrial malaise of twenty-somethings living and breathing in Toronto, and puns. Foremost a storyteller, sachse uses sarcasm and contradiction to juxtapose disability archetypes with self-representations, to pervade public and private spaces and present audiences with the invitation to look. Through the use of an interdisciplinary array of media, sachse has presented work on the international stage, including the recent curating of a unique disability arts program Kriptonite for Peterborough’s Artsweek in 2012 and 2011. sachse have also been working closely with other Toronto-based disabled artists, facilitating a CHIR funded digital story-telling initiative, *Project ReVision*, since 2011. sachse’s work has been featured in publications such as *WORN Fashion Journal*, *The Toronto Tempest*, *Ryerson Free Press*, *The Toronto Star*, *Abilities Magazine*, *NOW Magazine*, *Xtra*, *Eye Weekly*, and the 40th Anniversary edition of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*.

Né à Cavaillon au sud d’Haïti, **Rodney Saint-Éloi** vit depuis 2001 à Montréal. Il a étudié la littérature francophone à l’université Laval. Écrivain, essayiste, il est l’auteur d’une vingtaine d’ouvrages *J’avais une ville d’eau, de terre et d’arc-en-ciel heureux* (1999), *J’ai un arbre dans ma pirogue* (2003), *Récitatif au pays des ombres* (2011), *Jacques Roche, je t’écris cette lettre* (2012), (finaliste au Prix du Gouverneur général 2013). Il a publié le récit *Haïti Kenbe la!* en 2010 chez Michel Lafon. Son œuvre, à l’écoute du monde, est une longue traversée des villes et des visages. Rodney Saint-Éloi a réalisé pour le théâtre à Montréal des cabarets littéraires sur des auteurs de la diversité, notamment Senghor, Césaire, Franketienne, Roumain… En 2012, il a reçu le Prix Charles-Biddle pour l’ensemble de son œuvre.

**Shahin Sayadi** was born and raised in Abadan, Iran; he arrived in Montreal, Canada wearing shorts and a t-shirt on February 1, 1986 and, notwithstanding the bitter cold, decided to stay. Shahin studied technical scenography at Dalhousie University and, after completing his studies, founded Onelight Theatre, a professional theatre company based in Halifax. As the Artistic Director of Onelight, Shahin has been responsible for the development and staging of ten original productions since 2002 and has several new works in development. Onelight Theatre’s productions have toured nationally and internationally. Onelight Theatre has recently become the resident company at Alderney Landing Theatre. Shahin is also the founder and Artistic Producer of Prismatic, a national organization that showcases and celebrates the work of Canada’s leading Aboriginal and culturally diverse artists. Prismatic consists of a number of inter-related activities, including a 10-day arts festival featuring new works in dance, theatre, music, spoken word, film, and visual arts, and a national conference that brings artists and other stakeholders together to explore ways to develop the profile of Aboriginal and culturally diverse artists in Canada. Shahin is actively involved in local and national arts organizations, including volunteering on the Board of Directors of PACT (Professional Association of Canadian Theatres), co-founding the Ad Hoc Assembly – an organization of Canada's Aboriginal and culturally diverse theatre companies, and contributing to the development of the Legacy Centre for the Arts in Halifax. He is a lifelong fan of Bruce Lee.

Born in Manila, Philippines, **Alvin Erasga Tolentino** is one of the most active Asian-Canadian dance artists and the force behind CO.ERASGA Dance based in Vancouver now in its 13th season. Tolentino’s body of work, exploring issues of gender, identity, ethnicity and cross-cultural dialogue, reaches national and international audiences.

A curator and film programmer based in Ottawa, **Tam-Ca Vo-Van** is the director of Galerie SAW Gallery, where she has curated many exhibitions, including “International Geographic”, “The Winter Life” and “Culture Crash”. She worked for many years as a programmer at the Festival international du cinéma francophone en Acadie and organized the On the Bend Gay and Lesbian Film Festival in Moncton. She currently serves as the chair of the Association des groupes en arts visuels francophones (AGAVF).

**Winston Xin** is a Malaysian born, Chinese-Canadian media artist and curator. Xin’s past programming includes work with Vancouver's Out on Screen, and Video In (now Vivo) Media Arts Centre and he is one of the founders of Asian Heritage Month Vancouver. His video shorts and curated video/film programs have played extensively nationality and internationally. Xin’s curatorial and artistic practice is centered on the ways in which media art and differing cultures meet, oppose, interface, and dialogue.

**Appendix C: Agenda**

Canada Council for the Arts - Conseil des Arts du Canada

Equity Sounding

Day 1 - Thursday, October 24

**9:30–9:40**

Traditional Opening facilitated by Suzanne Keeptwo, Aboriginal Program Officer, Writing & Publishing Section

**9:40–10:30**

* Welcome from William Lau, Interim Coordinator, Equity Office
* Meeting protocols by facilitator Karen Tisch
* Introductions by round-table participants

Question: “What was your most rewarding moment in the arts?”

**10:30–11:00**

Equity Office presentation: “Equity at the Canada Council: Some Highlights”

**11:00-11:15**

Break

**11:15–12:15**

Setting the stage: In this opening panel, artists share how their experience as an arts practitioner in Canada has shifted over the years and the changes they have observed in the ecology surrounding their work.

**Speakers:**

Larissa Lai, writer

Regine Cadet, multi-disciplinary arts presenter and dance artist

Michele Decottignies, multi-disciplinary artist/presenter/producer Lata Pada, dance artist

**12:15–1:15**

Lunch

**1:15–2:30**

Group Discussion: Identifying assets

What is working well in the culturally diverse, Deaf arts, disability arts and official language minority arts milieu in Canada? What has been achieved and what successes can be built on?

**2:30–3:45**

Group Discussion: The evolving landscape

What are the most significant trends or developments shaping the future of equity-seeking artistic communities? Consider developments within the broader arts ecology and within the specific equity communities and how artists are leading, adapting or responding to change.

**3:45–4:00**

Break

**4:00–5:15**

Group Exercise: Crafting the future

Imagine a time in the future when diverse artistic practices are thriving in Canada and equitable access to artistic opportunities for artists has been attained. What does this look like? What has changed?

**5:15-5:30**

Wrap up

Equity Sounding

Day 2 - Friday October 25

**9:30–9:45**

Recap of future vision

**9:45–10:45**

Breakout Groups #1: Setting priorities

What area(s) should receive the most attention in order to realize the future vision? For example, professional development, mentoring, networking, creation/production, presentation, accessible venues/facilities, etc. Consider whether needs and priorities differ between the various equity-seeking groups and/or disciplines.

**10:45–11:00**

Break

**11:00–12:00**

Presentation of priorities, as identified by the breakout groups

**12:00–1:00**

Lunch

**1:00–2:15**

Breakout groups #2: Supporting the Vision

How can the Canada Council best support the aspirations of artists from equity-seeking communities? Consider potential interventions, including programs, policies, partnerships or services that might effectively meet the needs of equity-seeking communities.

**2:15–3:15**

Presentation of ideas generated by breakout groups on potential interventions

**3:15–3:30**

Break

**3:30-4:30**

Next steps: Open Mic

Building on the themes of the sounding, participants are invited to share additional thoughts, ideas and observations.

**4:30-5:15**

Aspirations and inspirations: In this closing panel, artists share personal perspectives on the opportunities that face them, their hopes and aspirations, and what inspires and fuels their work.

**Speakers:**

Jes Sasche, visual artist, writer and curator

Tam-Ca Vo-Van, media and visual arts curator and programmer

Shahin Sayadi, theatre artist and multidisciplinary arts presenter

Karla Étienne, dance artist and arts manager

**5:15-5:30**

Closing remarks.