

## Quebec Stand Firm

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Executive Summary

Who we are: The signatories constitute an informal association of non-profit organizations devoted to the production and/or presentation of ethnically and culturally diverse artworks.

Preamble: We wish to acknowledge the Honourable Sheila Copps for the leadership and extraordinary vision she has shown, and continues to show, in recognizing historical inequities in Canadian arts funding, Government, and other institutions.

The Canadian ideal: The Canadian ideal of a 'cultural mosaic' is far from being realized, as the Minister is clearly already aware,

Historical inequities: In the 1970's, a nationalist, post-colonial agenda to promote, encourage, and subsidize Canadian artistic content and home-grown arts producers neglected to recognize the diversity of Canadian peoples. The now-dominant arts producers and presenters enjoyed almost 20 years of substantial funding to develop infrastructure, and hence develop more diversified revenue sources.

Professional associations: Currently existing professional arts associations and service organizations seem to be unable or unwilling to institute substantive change regarding questions of Equity and diversity.

Parity: It is time for arts producers and presenters of culturally diverse contemporary art forms to achieve parity with status quo arts institutions.

Signs of positive change: New programs and priorities at the Department of Canadian Heritage indicate a shifting of funding criteria, towards inclusion, for instance, of non-Western art forms and practices in the National Arts Training Contribution Program, and a clearly stated emphasis on support to culturally diverse arts organizations in the Capacity Building initiative.

A need for institutional change: Bureaucratic policies and procedures at the Department of Canadian Heritage, while well intentioned when it comes to a shift in funding patterns, remain an obstacle to accessing these programs in a timely fashion, and to providing for meaningful, significant change.

Capacity building and the Stand Firm initiative: The Capacity Building project for culturally diverse arts groups, an initiative of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Department of Canadian Heritage, provides a strong working model for further restructuring of arts funding mechanisms, especially with the complementary support of the Stand Firm initiative.

Artists and Communities Collaboration Pilot Fund: Collaborative community arts practices, which involve contemporary professional artists working with non-professionals, are markedly different from a Euro-centric, modernist view of 'high art', and more closely resemble societies where the arts are, or were once, central to community life.

A national service organization for culturally diverse arts groups: Individual representatives in Montreal have been meeting regularly towards formation of a regional service and advocacy organization for culturally diverse arts groups. We hope that this initiative will spread to become a national organization.

#### Executive Summary of Concrete Recommendations

(a complete rationale is provided for each recommendation at the end of the document)

1. Increase the commitment to the Capacity Building initiative at the Canada Council.
2. Sustain and increase funding specifically for collaborative community arts practices at the Canada Council (currently a pilot program only).

3. We strongly urge that the Minister's office provide funds to hire regional resource people -- at the very least on a part-time basis -- in order to assist culturally diverse arts groups in organizing efforts.
4. We strongly urge that the Minister's office provide funds to hire regional resource people -- at the very least on a part-time basis -- in order to assist culturally diverse arts groups in organizing efforts.
5. We recommend that the Minister form a national advisory committee and/or a peer assessment council made up of culturally diverse arts practitioners, in order to monitor change within the Department and at other institutions, and to advise the Minister's office about the accessibility and efficacy of arts funding programs.
6. Maintain the arms length principle at the Canada Council, in order to protect culturally diverse groups, as well as other artists who speak out against injustice, from the less-enlightened whims of a possible future government.
7. We recommend that front-line workers at the Department of Canadian Heritage be better oriented to the needs of culturally diverse organizations.
8. We recommend that PCH integrate into their structure an approach that allows for evaluation of the Department's own 'institutional awareness' regarding the current realities of culturally diverse and other arts organizations.
9. We strongly recommend restructuring so that bureaucratic procedures at the Department of Canadian Heritage can be streamlined and fast-tracked to culturally diverse and other arts organizations within a reasonable time period.
10. We therefore recommend that the model of the Stand Firm initiative be reviewed, adapted and adopted at the Department of Canadian Heritage, in order to better administer and service culturally diverse and other arts communities.

Submission prepared for the Minister's Forum on Cultural Diversity

Submitted by:

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Who we are

We are a brand-new, informal association of Montreal arts organizations, drawn together by the common thread that each of the non-profit companies represented here has a mandate to produce and/or present artworks that are ethnically and culturally diverse.

Preamble

We wish to acknowledge the Honourable Sheila Copps for the leadership and extraordinary vision she has shown, and continues to show, in recognizing historical inequities in Canadian arts funding, Government, and other institutions. As the Minister so rightly points out, these institutions have not traditionally reflected the diversity that is Canada. The Minister has courageously and publicly stated, in no uncertain terms, that for too long the status quo in arts and cultural milieux has represented a dominant Euro-centric perspective, to the exclusion of so-called minority populations.

### The Canadian ideal

The Canadian ideal of a cultural mosaic leaves room for diverse ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups to co-exist, intertwine, and intermingle, evolving together while remaining distinct. However this idea of a mosaic remains just that, an ideal, and is indeed far from being realised, as the Minister is well aware.

### Historical inequities are still with us

In the 1970's, with the rise of a post-colonial nationalism, arts organizations who are now established and entrenched, and who benefit from a larger piece of the public pie, were just starting out. These now-dominant arts producers and presenters enjoyed almost 20 years of substantial funding to develop infrastructures, and to establish a level of status quo operational funding. Unfortunately the Canadian nationalism of the 1970's did not reflect the diversity of Canadian people in its vision; the result is that the anti-colonial forces have become the dominant colonial institutions.

### Professional associations and service organizations are also problematic

Many currently existing professional arts associations and service organizations have a questionable track record in addressing questions of equity and diversity. Their ability to correct imbalances is in any case limited, since the majority of their voting memberships are those long-standing, status quo institutions with considerable interests to preserve.

### Time to achieve parity

It is time for arts producers and presenters of culturally diverse contemporary art forms to achieve parity with status quo arts institutions. It is not enough for larger arts organizations to include an occasional nod to 'ethnic' populations. Indeed it is reprehensible that larger, more established organizations, institutions with sufficient staffing to readily apply for and administer grant monies from multiple sources, can therefore more easily access new programs promoting 'cultural diversity'. These subsidies are of far greater value when provided to struggling organizations who have actually have a history of producing culturally diverse work.

### Signs of positive change in funding patterns

We do see signs of change. New programs and priorities at the Department of Canadian Heritage indicate a shifting of funding criteria, towards inclusion, for instance, of non-Western art forms and practices in the National Arts Training Contribution Program, and a clearly stated emphasis on support to culturally diverse arts organizations in the Capacity Building initiative. Once again, we wish to acknowledge the Minister for the visionary leadership which has led to these changes.

### A need for institutional change

Nonetheless, like many such institutions, the administrative structure of P.C.H. remains mono-, not multi-cultural. The bureaucratic policies and procedures, while well intentioned when it comes to a shift in funding patterns, remain an obstacle to accessing these programs in a timely fashion, and to providing for meaningful, significant change. In a sense the Department remains an anachronism, an institution calling for change outside of itself, without looking inward at where substantial institutional change is also required. As performance artist Guillermo Gomez Pena has written:

Artists and writers of colour are losing patience. They have repeatedly stated that it is time to begin talking about economic and labour realities. ... Today, multiculturalism must also be understood as a question of workplace. All cultural institutions that claim to profess it must hire people of colour in important

administrative, artistic and technical positions. They must be willing to share the paycheque, the desk, and the decision-making process with the Other, not just the excitement of the artwork.

We believe that the Minister is aware of this need for institutional change. The Minister's Forum on Cultural Diversity is an example of her willingness to listen to grassroots peoples calling for meaningful participation. We urge the Government of Canada as a whole to act on pressing issues such as those we raise here.

#### Capacity building project and the Stand Firm initiative

Institutional change can be a long and difficult proposition, yet we see and applaud encouraging movement towards restructuring. Although the rate of change has, at times, been frustratingly slow, the institution of the Equity Office at the Canada Council has ultimately resulted in new, dynamic and responsive programs. In particular, the Capacity Building project for culturally diverse arts groups, an initiative of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Department of Canadian Heritage, provides a strong working model for further restructuring of arts funding mechanisms. Funds were set aside and fast-tracked to culturally diverse arts organizations, in order to immediately begin to redress historical inequities. The application process was greatly streamlined without sacrificing accountability, and these funds have already made a difference to the public visibility and overall effectiveness of culturally diverse groups. The concurrent Stand Firm initiative, a complement to the Capacity Building project, has greatly assisted these groups in further organizational development.

#### Artists and Communities Collaboration Fund

Similarly, the Council recently introduced a pilot programme in collaborative community art forms, which have until recently been considered (mistakenly) as 'non-professional', and hence ineligible for much Council funding. Collaborative community arts practices are not only a means to provide access to, and increase participation in the arts, but also more closely resemble many non-Western societies which value the arts as inseparable to community life. This conception of artistic practice is notably different from a Euro-centric view of 'high art', with so-called folk arts and community arts relegated to the low end of the spectrum. Unfortunately the Artists and Communities Collaboration project at the Council is a short-term investment only.

#### Towards a national service organization for culturally diverse arts groups

As the Minister herself knows and acknowledges, so-called minority cultures are hardly a minority when considered as a whole. For this reason individual representatives from the Montreal community have been meeting regularly towards formation of a regional service and advocacy organization for culturally diverse arts groups. We hope that this initiative will spread to become a national organization. With the Minister's help, we can accomplish this.

#### Concrete Recommendations

We are well aware that the Minister is a strong advocate. We urge the Minister to act fast to make change, because change has already been very long in coming. We therefore make the following concrete recommendations:

##### 1. Increase the commitment to the Capacity Building initiative

Rationale: We understand from the Canada Council's Equity Office that funds devoted to the new Capacity Building initiative are a long-term commitment to organizational support for culturally diverse companies. We hope this fund will grow so that it can be equitably distributed in the future. A three-year period is insufficient for some small arts organizations to significantly diversify their revenues towards longer term stability. Some of these currently funded groups may require additional assistance,

yet we do not wish to compromise the possibility that other deserving groups will have access to the program.

2. Sustain and increase funding specifically for collaborative community arts practices at the Canada Council (currently a pilot program only).

Rationale: This fund allows professional artists from diverse cultural backgrounds to choose to work within their communities, without sacrificing a professional career.

3. We strongly urge that the Minister's office provide funds to hire regional resource people -- at the very least on a part-time basis -- in order to assist culturally diverse arts groups in organizing efforts.

Rationale: Given that currently existing professional arts associations and service organizations seem to be unable or unwilling to work for substantial change around questions of Equity and diversity, culturally diverse arts groups must organize themselves. Please note that these under-resourced, generally under-staffed, over-extended companies must continue to fulfill their function amidst current regional and national forums and organizing meetings, that function being, of course, the production and presentation of artworks.

4. We recommend that the Minister form a national advisory committee and/or a peer assessment council made up of culturally diverse arts practitioners, in order to monitor change within the Department and at other institutions, and to advise the Minister's office about the accessibility and efficacy of arts funding programs.

5. Rationale: Until such time as there is a strong national organization, there needs to be another mechanism to represent culturally diverse arts organizations and artistic practices.

6. Maintain the arms length principle at the Canada Council, in order to protect culturally diverse groups, as well as other artists who speak out against injustice, from the less-enlightened whims of a possible future government.

7. We recommend that front-line workers at the Department of Canadian Heritage be better oriented to the needs of culturally diverse organizations.

8. Rationale: Good intentions are often obscured and greatly limited by the dominant structures of the Department. Culturally competent staff, with training, experience and understanding around issues of cultural diversity, must be empowered to act on behalf of the client groups.

9. We recommend that PCH integrate into their structure an approach that allows for evaluation of the Department's own 'institutional awareness' regarding the current realities of culturally diverse and other arts organizations. Rationale: The absence of peer assessment and/or other forms of transparent process leaves a strong impression that the Department is 'out of touch' with its constituents, and is more subject to the whims of the 'powers-that-be' than to the people it is supposed to serve.

10. We strongly recommend restructuring so that bureaucratic procedures at the Department of Canadian Heritage can be streamlined and fast-tracked to culturally diverse and other arts organizations within a reasonable time period. Rationale: We commend the Department and the Canada Council for the innovative administrative structure of the Capacity Building and concurrent Stand Firm project, which we believe can be adapted as a positive model for the following reasons:

11. Approachable and seemingly non-bureaucratic style and infrastructure

12. A time period of only seven weeks for assessing, selecting, and informing organizations of the application results

13. Outreach and support mechanisms

14. Facilitated networking possibilities

15. Ability to respond to community needs

16. Cultural sensibilities and sensitivities (cultural competency)
17. Peer assessment selection committees

We therefore recommend that this model of the Stand Firm initiative be reviewed and adapted for the Department of Canadian Heritage, in order to better administer and service culturally diverse and other arts communities.