



Understanding Capacity Needs of Hamilton Arts Organizations

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Introduction

The Hamilton Arts Council was invited by the City of Hamilton's Tourism & Culture Division to conduct a study of the organizational capacity needs of the arts in Hamilton. As a local community arts council with a mandate to serve and support this city's arts community, the Hamilton Arts Council bears witness to these challenges on a regular basis, and is uniquely positioned to lend visibility and perspective to the operational practices of arts organizations: not only their difficulties, but also the drive and ingenuity that keeps the arts alive in our city from one year to the next.

Historically, the scarcity of resources flowing through Hamilton's arts community has engendered an atmosphere of competition that has inhibited the conversations and collaborations that often lead to growth in the creative sector. That is an attitude that has shifted by visible degrees over the past ten years, beginning most significantly with a verbal agreement among a handful of art galleries to organize their opening receptions for the same night of the month and share in whatever audience may show up. In the years since that decision expanded the James North Art Crawl into the cultural force that it is today, the arts in Hamilton have seen a renewed belief in the strength of partnerships and open communication. That willingness to share in challenges and successes made it possible for artists and administrators to respond openly to the questions raised by this study, and it is in the same spirit of collective goodwill that we share their voices with the Tourism & Culture Division through this report, in hopes of finding a collective solution to the challenges faced by arts organizations in our city today.

Methodology

The information contained in this report was collected through a variety of approaches that range from quantifiable data gathered through surveys to verbal feedback in both group and individual meetings. The Hamilton Arts Council recognizes all of these approaches as equally valuable means of assessing the challenges facing our arts community; while survey questions capture overarching trends in the field, one-on-one discussions with artists and administrators are essential to uncovering the bigger picture behind identified needs.

Online Surveys

The Hamilton Arts Council conducted two online surveys promoted widely via e-newsletter notices and social media throughout the year-long scope of this study. The first, conducted at the start of this study in December 2012, focused on skill-based capacities within arts organizations. A second survey, conducted in November 2013, broadened the scope of questioning to identify common barriers faced by organizations in meeting their artistic goals.

Discipline-Specific Committees

Our network of discipline specific arts committees function as focus groups to gather artists and organizational representatives in the Literary Arts, Arts Education, Theatrical Arts and Visual Arts. Each of these committees provides a valuable forum for reporting on the issues facing their particular discipline and is mandated to identify collective solutions to shared challenges.

Community Roundtables

Both the Executive Director and Operations Officer of the Hamilton Arts Council have participated in numerous roundtable discussions of Hamilton arts professionals throughout the past year. When participating in such groups, it is our practice to maintain records of conversations and concerns raised at these forums as valuable direction for our work in the community. For the purpose of this report, we have drawn on observations recorded from the following community roundtables as part of our larger body of information:

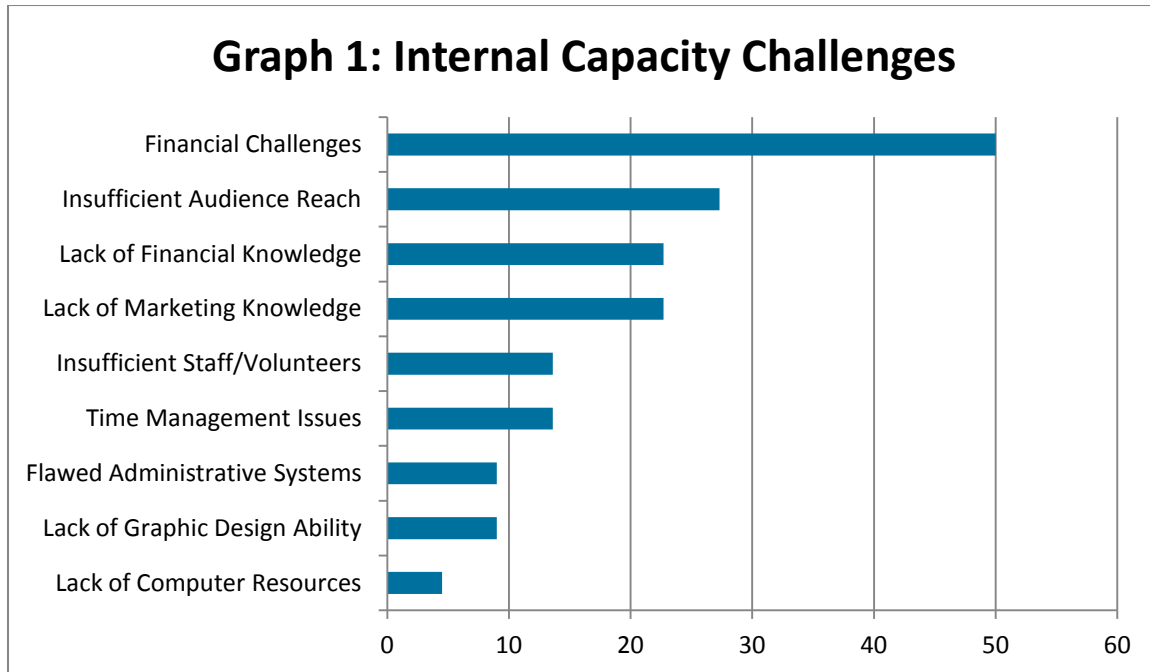
Forum	Organizer	Date
Arts Funding Task Force Consultation	City of Hamilton Tourism and Culture Division	January 28, 2013
ArtsBuild Ontario Community Conversation: Sustainable Creative Spaces	ArtsBuild Ontario	April 23, 2013
Creative Industries Task Force	Hamilton Chamber of Commerce	October 17, 2013
Inclusivity in the Arts Roundtable	Matapa Music & Arts /Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion	November 28, 2013

Individual Consultations: The Executive Director identified a shortlist of artistic leaders in Hamilton representing a cross-section of arts organizations of various sizes and creative concentrations. Each of these individuals was asked to participate in a confidential in-person interview to discuss the challenges facing their particular organizations. Where time constraints did not allow for an in-person meeting, individuals were invited to provide their perspectives via telephone conversations or email responses to a short set of questions.

In the findings that follow, survey results provide a benchmark for prioritizing the urgency of capacity challenges facing Hamilton’s arts sector. The experiential feedback gathered through committees, roundtables and individual consultations form the basis of interpreting this data to identify causes of challenges and propose solutions.

Survey Findings

Both surveys conducted throughout the course of this study asked respondents to identify barriers that limited their ability to fulfill their artistic goals. In the first, respondents were given the option to select from a list of internal capacities and offer their own challenges while selecting as many challenges as were applicable to their organization.



The challenges most frequently identified by respondents reflect interconnected concerns that are common to arts organizations in Hamilton, wherein financial challenges can create or exacerbate other barriers to success. The six identified challenges that weigh most heavily upon arts organizations can therefore be grouped into three primary areas:

Financial Challenges

Unsurprisingly, financial challenges emerged as the single most pressing issue for arts organizations in Hamilton; this finding supports a consistent pattern of austerity found in the local arts sector where organizations often operate on a shoestring budget. The ranking of “Lack of Financial Knowledge” as the third most pressing challenge (tied with “Lack of Marketing Knowledge”) also reflects the financial constraints of arts organizations as administrative leaders – most of whom have received education and training in the arts

rather than business or finance – struggle to generate revenue and meet both operational and program expenses.

Human Resources

The fourth-place ranking of “Insufficient Staff/Volunteers” and “Time Management Issues” should also be read as a symptom of this overarching funding dilemma. These concerns reflect environments, most prevalent in the grassroots and not-for-profit arts sector, where human resources are scarce due to a lack of funds to hire and retain employees. The organizational membership structure of the Hamilton Arts Council provides a telling snapshot of the human resources capacity of Hamilton’s arts organizations. Since 2011, we have used employment figures rather than budget as a simpler, less invasive measure of the financial means of organizations for the purposes of determining their place in our membership fee structure of Small, Medium and Large Organizations. In 2013, the proportion of arts organizations among our membership is distributed as follows:

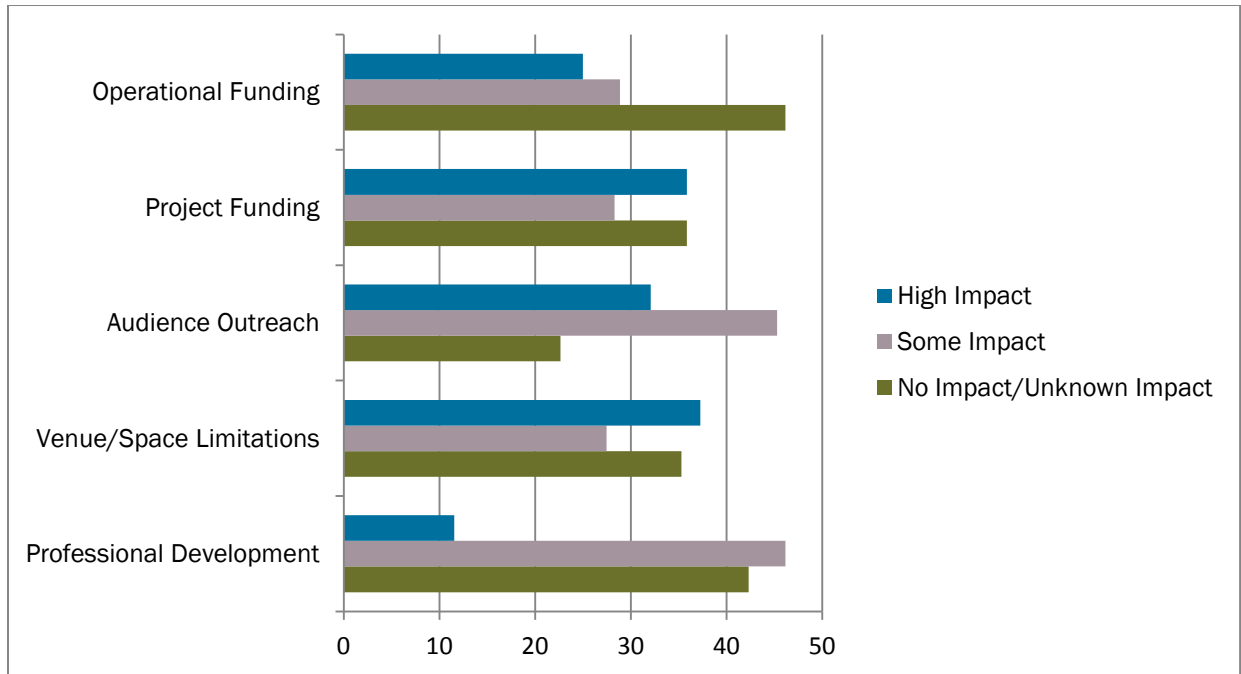
Membership Fee Level	Number of HAC Members
Small Organization (0-5 Employees)	66
Medium Organization (6-10 Employees)	2
Large Organization (11+ Employees)	2

The overwhelming majority of arts organizations among our membership operate with a minimal staff complement, and very often with as few as one or two paid employees. The diversity of organizations included in this group is also worthy of mention; found among those 66 organizations are everyone from emerging creative entrepreneurs to various of the organizations receiving Boards & Agencies funding from the City of Hamilton to cornerstones of the James North Art Crawl. While the accomplishments of these organizations are immediately apparent in the heightened profile of the arts in Hamilton over recent years, this work is quite frequently carried out by staff who juggle multiple job descriptions in addition to recruiting, training and supervising volunteers to take on auxiliary parts of their operations. These demanding roles, which often include regular overtime that may or may not be compensated, yield the high rate of burnout that is so commonly reported by its administrative leaders.

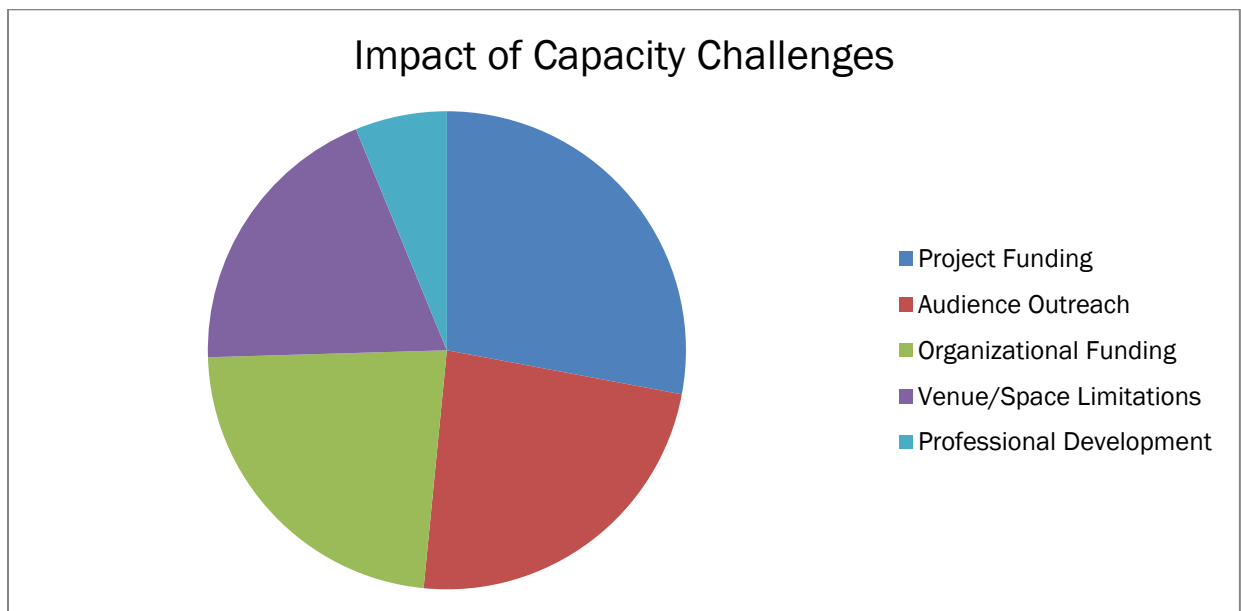
Audience Outreach and Engagement

Audience reach, as the second most prevalent challenge in this survey, is both a function of scarce funding and a separate problem whose solution could relieve the financial pressures facing Hamilton’s arts organizations. The concern for “Lack of Marketing Knowledge” ranking immediately thereafter would indicate that arts organizations not only lack the resources to connect with audiences, but also the knowledge of best practices for doing so using the means at their disposal.

While this first survey created a foundation for identifying the barriers organizations face in meeting their artistic goals, our second survey of the arts community in November 2013 focused on measuring the relative impact of these challenges. Respondents in this second survey, which included individual artists as well as organizational representatives, were asked to rate the extent to which each of a focused list of identified barriers has impacted their work.



Taking each set of percentages into balance, our survey results provided average ratings of the impact of each of the five barriers weighted as follows:



This calculation identifies Project Funding – generally understood as funding directed towards the delivery of specified artistic programming – as the area of greatest impact on the success of the arts sector. This is closely followed in importance by Audience Outreach; together, these two challenges threaten the very foundational purpose of the arts – to create and share artistic experiences. While Organizational Funding was also identified as a significant impact, its score lags slightly behind these first two challenges and reflects a creative culture that relies upon austere operational standards to support its creative goals.

Understanding Financial Need

While survey results provide a valuable snapshot of the barriers facing arts organizations and the relative impact of these challenges, understanding of the causes and consequences of these barriers requires closer examination of the everyday experiences of Hamilton's arts organizations and the artists who rely upon them as forums for sharing their work with the public. The overwhelming need for improved funding found in these surveys is indisputable, yet focus on the question of money alone conceals the substance of needs that would be served by improved access to funding.

Human Resources

Both survey feedback and interviews with stakeholders indicate that human resources are in greatest demand among arts organizations seeking improved funding. Job creation and salary support to retain existing staff are frequently at the core of grants submitted by arts organizations to provincial and federal bodies, with further arts organizations reporting a need to develop more robust systems for retaining and managing volunteers. In short, there is a surplus of work to be done in the arts, but a lack of funds to translate this work into paid positions.

Creative Space

Funding is also needed, as strongly indicated by the impact results in the latter survey, to deliver the artistic programming that is at the core of these arts organizations. For many, this need pertains to the physical space required to deliver artistic programs, whether this applies to securing rentable venues or maintaining an owned property as a suitable home for their work. For organizations without a permanent home – those which comprise the vast majority of arts organizations in Hamilton – the scarcity of suitable facilities in Hamilton also presents a considerable challenge, particularly among performing arts groups requiring mid-sized venues to mount their productions.

Artistic Programming

While granting opportunities at the federal and provincial level are better suited to meeting the artistic programming needs of Hamilton arts organizations, the expanded scope of these granting bodies creates intensified competition for these limited resources. Even those arts organizations that successfully attract federal and provincial arts investment into Hamilton face challenges in matching those grants with funds from other sources.

Funding has a direct impact on the ambition and scope of any arts organization's artistic offerings; it dictates everything from the number of exhibitions a gallery can deliver to the quality of staging a theatrical company can afford to present to its audience. Any supplementary activities aimed at improving audience engagement are also dependent on

securing funding above and beyond that needed to deliver core programs, such as educational programs for schools and guided tours. The importance of expanded programming is best demonstrated by the James North Art Crawl, which is, in essence, a collective audience engagement effort offered free of charge to the general public but at great cost to arts organizations on this street in terms of staff hours beyond regular operating hours and additional program expenses, to say nothing of special occasion permits and catering if galleries elect to serve alcohol to this Friday-night audience (which many have refrained from doing in recent years due to the prohibitive cost of such hospitality and increased license enforcement).

In interviews with artistic leaders, concerns about funding were expressed in tandem with a need to develop staff and Board capacity to generate revenue, reflecting a strong sense of organizational responsibility for attracting investment in their work. Multiple arts organizations expressed interest in receiving advice on grant writing to strengthen their cases when applying for funding from governments and foundations. Many in this group also acknowledged a need to develop stronger philanthropic cultures in their organizations by developing more effective Board governance and succession models and developing strategies for donor engagement.

Understanding Audience Engagement

The challenge of building and retaining an audience for the arts in Hamilton is one felt by all creative disciplines. Public engagement validates the social importance of the arts and provides a means of financial gain through sales that have become increasingly important in today's era of stagnated public sector funding for the arts.

Encouraging participation in arts activity is a paramount concern for the vast majority of arts organizations surveyed and interviewed throughout this study, with discussion around this issue concentrated in two key areas of need: community-based educational outreach, and strategic marketing.

Community-Based Educational Outreach

The arts have often suffered from a perception of elitism that negatively impacts both the arts and the general public by creating an artificial barrier that intimidates potential new audiences from attending arts events. While efforts in Hamilton such as the James North Art Crawl have made significant strides in creating a more welcoming atmosphere for the visual arts as well as certain street-based performing arts that have thrived as the monthly event grows in scale, attracting audiences to plays, concerts, and even art galleries beyond the spectacle of an Art Crawl continues to present a challenge to arts organizations.

Artistic leaders of more traditionally driven arts organizations, such as those whose focus is classical music or traditional art and fine craft, expressed keen awareness of an educational rift between their Hamilton-based audience and the artistic product they present in their galleries and on their stages. Far from wishing to limit their audiences to those who are well-versed in Mozart or historical painting, Hamilton arts organizations would far prefer to present their artistic offerings in a manner that welcomes beginners and encourages learning both in the artistic experience being presented and through supplementary educational programs. Many of the arts organizations interviewed expressed a particular interest in reaching audiences whom, in their opinion, represent the foundation of their future prosperity: youth, and recent immigrants to Hamilton.

This latter group of new Hamiltonians contains much of this city's artistic potential, not only as a prospective audience but also as artistic producers representing a new diversity of cultural expression in need of understanding. Bridging audiences and appreciations between the traditional western art forms that have predominated in Hamilton and those of its new and future residents will be essential to ensuring that Hamiltonians see their stories and experiences reflected and validated in the arts.

Besides educational opportunities, creating a more inclusive environment for the arts requires affordable access to participation through programs that offer free or subsidized

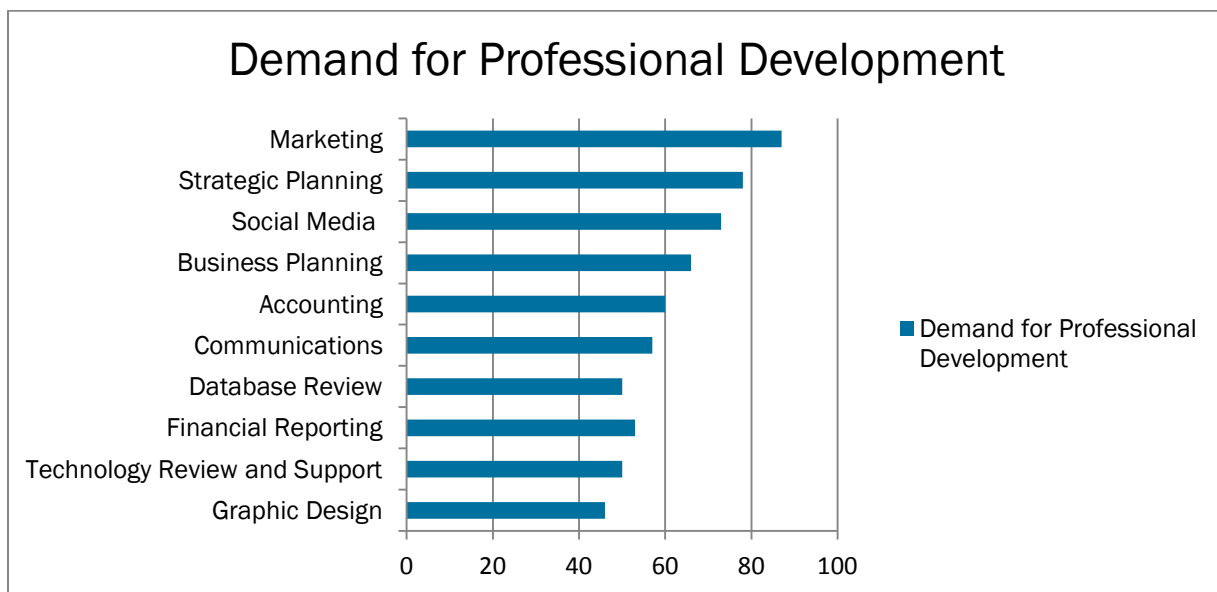
admission for low-income individuals. When arts organizations lack core financial stability, offering either educational outreach or affordability often proves impossible.

Strategic Marketing of Hamilton Arts

Despite national and international media attention on Hamilton’s arts scene, audience growth has not followed for the majority of arts presenters. This was identified as a particular point of concern for live music promoters who note the disparity between a critical mass of musical artists of all genres in Hamilton and an audience that has stagnated even as this city’s population of urban professionals – a valued demographic for live music – has grown in recent years.

While this observation would require further study to confirm, there is a strong perception in Hamilton’s music and theatre communities that its prospective audiences choose to travel to Toronto for live performance rather than stay in Hamilton. This trend is most often accredited to Hamilton’s inability to generate market awareness relative to the saturation of arts promotion seen across all media channels from Toronto. By comparison, Hamilton’s media landscape offers few platforms for promoting the arts with scarce televised coverage and few published arts writers in our newspapers. In the absence of a robust arts press in local media, arts organizations in Hamilton are often left to their own promotional devices, frequently using online tools to make their events known in oversaturated digital channels.

Beyond the particular challenges of live performance, arts organizations of all creative disciplines express frustration with the challenge of marketing their efforts to a wider audience, not only in Hamilton but beyond its borders. Returning to the first of our two surveys reveals a high demand for expertise in both marketing and social media among arts organizations surveyed when asked about capacities presently lacking in their organizations for which they would most like to receive assistance.



Understanding Partnerships

One does not need to delve deep into Hamilton's arts community to find proposed solutions to the capacity challenges facing our arts organizations. Participants in roundtables, committees and individual interviews were frequently outspoken in offering suggestions for supporting the arts in Hamilton:

- Increased financial support for the arts at the municipal level by delivering on the recommendations of the Arts Funding Task Force
- Access to business development resources for arts entrepreneurs
- Revision of zoning by-laws to expedite adaptive re-use of existing buildings for the arts
- Peer support networks that encourage the sharing of skills and knowledge in areas where arts organizations lack internal capacity
- A collective marketing campaign that promotes the arts as a city-wide attraction to local, regional and national audiences

Each of these recommendations represents a considerable investment in Hamilton's arts community and would require expertise and resources that, in some cases, readily define the body best positioned to deliver that support. The work of creating a new arts funding model for Hamilton, for example, has already been assigned to City staff in Tourism & Culture following the work of the citizen task force struck by the Arts Advisory Commission. Similarly, the Hamilton Arts Council has already taken measures to address further capacity challenges of the arts community as part of our 2013-2015 Strategic Plan.

The Role of the Hamilton Arts Council

The mandate of the Hamilton Arts Council, as confirmed by our Strategic Plan in March 2013, expresses our commitment to serving and supporting the arts sector at a local level by facilitating cooperative efforts and peer support, supporting skills development and fostering public interest in the arts for all citizens. To meet these goals, the Hamilton Arts Council has been developing initiatives that address some of the recommendations collected in this study.

Executive Directors Circle: This peer network of artistic leaders from Hamilton area not-for-profit arts organizations was initiated in January 2012 to provide a quarterly forum for sharing collective concerns and encouraging collaborative problem solving. Following a hiatus and review of the ED Circle format in 2013 (which contributed many valuable findings to this present study), meetings will resume in 2014 with an emphasis on professional development opportunities and knowledge sharing.

Business Volunteers for the Arts: Initiated as a pilot project in 2013, Business Volunteers for the Arts pairs Hamilton area business professionals with arts organizations seeking mentorship in areas such as business planning, finance, marketing and human resource management. As we continue to recruit our volunteer pool for this program, we look forward to facilitating more partnerships between arts organizations with identified capacity needs and business professionals who benefit from a more meaningful engagement with Hamilton's arts community.

Promoting Hamilton Arts Activities: With the launch of our new website in June 2013, the Hamilton Arts Council has greatly improved its capacity to promote arts events across the city through our online calendar and directory. In the coming year, we will be working to develop these resources and refine our e-newsletters to deliver more complete event listings to a wider audience in Hamilton and beyond. Our popular Theatre and Gallery Guides will also undergo a radical transformation in 2014 and be presented for the first time as a single annual magazine publication covering all arts disciplines in Hamilton.

The Role of the City of Hamilton

The widespread will of the arts community to see the City of Hamilton develop a municipal arts granting program is already understood through years of consultation and reporting that began with AAC's The Big Picture forum in 2009 and culminated in the recommendations of the Arts Funding Task Force earlier this year. While the work of reviewing and revising existing funding structures is ongoing, the Cultural Plan approved by the City of Hamilton in October 2013 provides a further template for position the municipality as a supporter of the arts in Hamilton.

The twelve recommendations of the Cultural Plan align with perceptions gathered in consultations both conducted and observed by the Hamilton Arts Council throughout 2013. Artists and their organizations perceive the City as a governmental body empowered to enact policies and mobilize resources that may either support or impair their ability to achieve their artistic goals. City policy around zoning, for example, can dictate the life, death or limbo of an arts organization in Hamilton that relies on the affordability of neglected building stock as viable creative space. Similarly, expanding upon resources already offered by the City through its Small Business Enterprise Centre could greatly improve the prosperity of burgeoning arts entrepreneurs who would otherwise lack this measure of support.

While recognizing and mobilizing those resources the City can contribute to a prosperous arts community, it is equally important to respect the limits of government involvement in the arts by engaging peer juries from the arts community as arbiters of artistic excellence in decision making processes. As a funder, commissioner and facilitator of the arts, the City should maintain an ethical distance from the creative freedoms of the artists it supports and aim at all times to be a champion, but not a creator, of the arts in Hamilton.

Recommendation

After reviewing the capacity needs of arts organizations and how their potential solutions align with the roles and capacities of both the City of Hamilton and the Hamilton Arts Council, the clearest opportunity that emerges for the Tourism & Culture Division is to apply its resources to the development of a marketing campaign to raise awareness of the arts across Hamilton and encourage public engagement in arts activities.

This marketing initiative, conducted with the vocal participation of Hamilton's arts organizations, would address an unresolved gap in the promotion of the arts at a local level and therefore avoid duplicating efforts already underway in the community to address other barriers to artistic success. Such a partnership between the City and the arts community that it aims to support would also answer the three major opportunities for municipal support identified by cultural leaders and cited in the Cultural Plan (p. 13):

Communication

Increasing arts coverage will raise the caliber of public dialogue around the arts. Cultural leaders seek increased two-way communication and consultation with the sector.

Collaboration

A streamlined, unified and cooperative approach among cultural leaders will lower costs through shared services and cooperation. Cultural Leaders seek to be included in the City's research and planning efforts.

Building Social Capital

Culture can build social bonds and promote a sense of shared identity – the city “needs to debrand and rebrand”.

As ever, stakeholders in the arts have been eager to offer suggestions for how to strategically market the arts in Hamilton and beyond its borders. Some areas in which municipal resources could be leveraged towards this goal include the following:

- Developing 'Buy Local' messaging specific to the consumption of Hamilton-based arts experiences through Economic Development
- Integrating an arts-specific message or brand as part of a tourism campaign similar to Eddie Friel's 'Glasgow: Scotland with Style' campaign
- Using public transit infrastructure to promote the arts (posters or video screens in bus shelters and transit terminals, posters on HSR buses)
- Place-making strategies using urban design to designate arts destinations; for example, markings on sidewalks to indicate an arts venue
- Accessible maps of arts sites in print, online and smartphone apps
- Municipal partnership on Culture Days, a nation-wide movement that offers free arts activities during the last weekend of September

What unites these various ideas is the indispensable and irreplaceable role that the City of Hamilton stands to play in their delivery. The successful implementation of even one of these ideas would demonstrate clear and celebratory City support of its artistic assets.

Conclusion

The capacity challenges facing arts organizations in Hamilton are considerable and lamentably common to the arts all across Canada. While the City of Hamilton has the means to ease barriers in areas such as funding and zoning, the arts community has also shown an increasing willingness to share resources and seek solutions among peer networks. Trading in knowledge capital when funding is scarce can alleviate some challenges, while others require partnerships of a different sort.

Both pressing community need and growing public awareness of Hamilton's shifting cultural identity make an arts-driven marketing initiative a timely priority worth exploring by the Tourism & Culture Division. While the newly adopted Cultural Plan presents a vast array of actions that could benefit Hamilton's arts sector, this strategic partnership would provide a visible and participatory opportunity to address a significant barrier to the success of arts organizations across the city and make significant strides in improving the financial well-being of the sector. Increased arts engagement among all Hamilton residents would not only benefit the arts community we have today, but also build the foundation for a creative city worthy of the next generation of Hamilton artists to come.