

Policy Internships and Fellowships Program
Final Report

**On the Other Side of the Fence:
Tale of the Public Sector from a Different Perspective**

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Once Upon a Time There was the Federal Government

Over the years, arts and culture within the federal government have been subject to various restructuring initiatives. In the 1980s, the discipline-based structure (e.g., visual arts and crafts, performing arts, writing and literature, etc.) was eliminated and policy officers were given a portfolio of issues. Federal responsibility for arts and culture has shifted across a number of departments over the past several decades. The most recent shift occurred when the Department of Communications, the Secretary of State and Multiculturalism and Citizenship were disbanded in the 1990s and some of their responsibilities were subsumed under the responsibilities of the new Department of Canadian Heritage, established by the *Department of Canadian Heritage Act*, which came into force on July 12, 1996.

Among other responsibilities, the Minister of Canadian Heritage was given jurisdiction over: the promotion of a greater understanding of human rights, fundamental freedoms and related values; multiculturalism; the arts, including cultural aspects of the status of the artist; cultural heritage and industries; and the formulation of cultural policy. More recently, the Arts Policy Branch was transferred from the Citizenship and Heritage Sector to the Cultural Affairs Sector.

Mission of the Department of Canadian Heritage

The Department of Canadian Heritage is responsible for national policies and programs that promote Canadian content, foster cultural participation, active citizenship and participation in Canada's civic life and strengthen connections among Canadians. Its offices in Gatineau, Québec house the Minister as well as the Arts Policy Branch, which comprises Art Development and Programs, Arts Financing and Legislation and Management Services.

The Arts Policy Branch fosters a creative and cohesive Canada through established national policies and programs designed to train, develop and sustain the professional not-for-profit arts sector and to promote Canadians' access to, and participation in, a diversity of cultural activities in their communities. Enhancing cultural diversity in the arts in Canada and increasing the extent to which the arts are anchored in community life are essential elements in the achievement of these objectives.

The Arts Policy Branch is responsible for the following programs¹ and policy initiatives:

- International Arts Day Celebrations
- Arts Presentation Canada
- National Arts Training Contribution Program
- Canadian Arts and Heritage Sustainability Program
- Cultural Spaces Canada
- Cultural Capitals of Canada
- National Technical Assistance Registry
- *Status of the Artist Act*²
- Designation of National Arts Service Organizations (NASO)

¹ Website reference: www.pch.gc.ca/progs/arts/index_e.cfm

² Website reference: <http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/S-19.6/103295.html>

Then There Was the Canadian Conference of the Arts

The Canadian Conference of the Arts (CCA)³ is one of the oldest and largest arts advocacy groups in Canada. An independent, non-profit umbrella organization and registered charity, it was founded in 1945 by 16 national cultural organizations. For more than 50 years, the Canadian Conference of the Arts has been working on behalf of its membership, which includes arts organizations, artists, activists and friends. The CCA has become a national forum for the arts and cultural community in Canada, dedicated to the growth and vitality of the arts and cultural industries. The CCA addresses the needs and priorities, and protects the professional interests, of the arts community through such activities as lobbying governments, monitoring developments on the political and legislative front, making submissions to standing committees, appearing at legislative and budget hearings, and in general promoting greater public awareness of the arts.

Located in downtown Ottawa, the Canadian Conference of the Arts is staffed by 10 employees and interns, constituting the heart of the organization, and overseen by 13 board members. The organization houses ArtsSmarts and the International Network for Cultural Diversity (INCD). Within its vision of a creative, dynamic, and civil Canadian society to which artists can contribute freely and fully, the CCA serves as a catalyst and a leader in the field.

Issues such as freedom of expression, copyright, taxation, funding, censorship, status of the artist, new technologies, telecommunications, arts education and global markets top the CCA's agenda.

The Policy Internship, on the Road to the Other Side

The focus of my internship at the Canadian Conference of the Arts was on developing a broader policy experience in the voluntary sector, enhancing my understanding and participation in public policy development and strengthening knowledge transfer specific to policy development files. Having in mind goals beyond that of inter-sectoral collaboration (between the not-for-profit sector and government), I was interested in finding ways to (better) assess policy making in light of program delivery, and therefore provide better service to under-served communities.

Prior to this policy internship, most of my formal experience with not-for-profit organizations was gained through my work in government, which I joined immediately after university. I had previously worked as a volunteer, a committee member and a chairperson with college, university and community advocacy groups. While this earlier exposure stimulated a passion for policy making, it did not enhance my understanding of the structure behind this multi-layered process.

Although I had graduated from university and moved on to other challenges, I managed to become, in 2002, the co-chair of the Committee for Equal Access and Participation of Canadian Heritage and Parks Canada. Among the roles of the Committee is that of examining and analysing human resource and/or departmental policies with a view to fostering equal access and participation on the part of visible minority groups.

Within three years, my position in the Department of Canadian Heritage changed from project officer to program officer. As a program officer, my duties involved the basic tasks of assessing and evaluating project proposals against established program criteria. During my third year with

³ Website reference: www.ccartarts.ca

the program, provisions related to access for minority groups were added. This change was seen as having a potential impact on a large percentage of diverse arts and culture organizations.

I was able to make a case, with my managers, for a PIAF assignment; as they became familiar with the program, my superiors increasingly looked upon the policy internship as a very good opportunity for career development.

The Match: Aiming to See the Public Sector through the Eyes of the Other Sector

The match between the department and host organization was a parallel effort initiated by the Canadian Conference of the Arts and myself. The CCA was looking to support an intern and I was looking for a learning opportunity that was in accordance with the terms of the PIAF program. After careful consideration of other possible arts (host) organizations and advice from senior colleagues, I chose to manifest my interest and contact the General Director of the Canadian Conference of the Arts.

The CCA has been a client of the Department of Canadian Heritage since its inception. It has received grants and contributions from the Official Languages, Multiculturalism, Human Rights and Arts Policy Branches of the department. I must admit that my experience as a program officer, rendering services to departmental clients, limited my perspective of national arts service organizations such as the CCA to only one facet of the organization: namely, that of federal government advisor eligible to receive privileged operational funding for advisory services rendered.

The Canadian Conference of the Arts is overseen by a Board of Governors acting on behalf of their constituents. The Board of Governors has the principal responsibility of fulfilling the organization's mission and oversees the legal accountability of its operations. Its fundamental role is to establish a clear organizational plan in order to accomplish the mission of the organization and evaluate its activities in terms of successes and failures.

The Board of Governors is composed of professionals from the arts and culture milieu who have acquired significant experience in the voluntary sector and/or are experts in their artistic discipline. The responsibilities of the General Director revolve mainly around the management of the organization's operations, administration and public relations.

My Placement

My internship started at the CCA on September 8th, 2003. Although the concept behind the program was clear, the learning process through which my policy-making ability was going to be shaped needed to be defined. The host organization was very welcoming, warm and open to doing business in a different way. In negotiating the scope of my internship, the home and host organizations exchanged e-mails with me and amongst themselves. Both organizations were great in facilitating the transition.

My role as a policy intern allowed me to participate in several aspects of the policy work of the CCA. Initially, my primary focus was to learn how to identify issues, do pertinent research, conduct analyses using conventional tools and develop networks of associates within the arts community. In accordance with my interest, my work was concentrated on cultural diversity. More specifically, my role consisted of writing briefing notes with recommendations to the General Director and to Board members, researching potential policy-making venues, and

addressing policy questions from a diverse perspective. Other duties included monitoring and assessing issues pertinent to the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency (now referred to as the Canada Revenue Agency) with financial implications for artists and arts organizations. Another objective was to follow the progress achieved by the International Network for Cultural Diversity. I was also concerned with helping to raise the CCA's profile in the diverse community in light of the recommendations emanating from the Minister's Conference on Cultural Diversity and with developing strategies to promote the implementation of the strategic plan formulated at the conference.

As these objectives were broad in scope and pertinent to the processes involved in policy making and to the way in which not-for-profit organizations operate in order to advance policy, it seemed more strategic for me not to limit myself to a specific research project.

Although my goals and objectives were thoroughly discussed prior to the internship, the resource-limited context in which the Canadian Conference of the Arts, like other not-for-profit organizations, operated made it difficult to address these objectives. For example, in the case of the International Network for Cultural Diversity, I experienced a natural shift in duties, from policy making to the administration of a regional cultural diversity meeting aimed at introducing the INCD to a potential Indian membership.

Held in December 2003⁴, the meeting in India as laid out by the organizers of the Asia-Oceania wide meeting had many objectives:

- To celebrate Asia's historical diversity and to develop inter-cultural history
- To explore India's historical role vis-à-vis its neighbours (particularly nations comprising the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) and to study how "sustainable development" can co-exist with diverse cultural traditions
- To focus attention and concern on the preservation and promotion of cultural diversity
- To find ways of protecting freedom in cultural life, the rights of minority cultures and points of view

Reducing the scope of the Asia-Oceania wide meeting and shifting energies toward a smaller (Indian) meeting called for readjusting the focus of the encounter to a fuller agenda highlighting above-noted issues of "sustainable development" and cultural diversity and freedom.

Lastly, I was asked to conduct a mini-research project targeting the needs of culturally diverse organizations seeking to obtain charitable status or the National Arts Service Organization (NASO) designation.

Environmental Context of the Sector at the Time of the Placement

In May 2001, the Government of Canada launched the Tomorrow Starts Today initiative.⁵ In the announcement, the Prime Minister, The Right Honourable Jean Chrétien (1993-2003), made a commitment to invest \$560 million in new money for arts and culture. This financial contribution was intended to stimulate the leveraging of strategic investments in arts and culture through partnerships with provinces, communities and the private sector. The objectives of this initiative were to nurture creativity, develop citizenship and contribute to the economic vitality of communities.

⁴ Website reference: www.incd.net/events/meetings.html

⁵ Website reference: www.canadianheritage.gc.ca/special/tomorrowstartstoday/nr-1.htm

The Canada Council for the Arts received \$75 million over three years and an investment of an additional \$13 million over three years to increase opportunities for young Canadians to train for careers in the arts. A sum of \$80 million over three years was invested to improve cultural infrastructure, with a focus on repairing and upgrading arts and heritage facilities across Canada. A total of \$63 million over three years was allocated to the development of a national strategy to support modern management and greater financial stability in arts and heritage organizations, and to help communities develop and sustain arts and heritage programs relevant to their aspirations and circumstances. An additional \$57 million over three years was invested to enhance access to the arts for all Canadians, including young Canadians and those living in rural and remote communities, through arts celebrations, festivals and support to arts presenters. The Tomorrow Starts Today initiative reached its sunset date in 2003-2004.

Front-page headlines speculating on the date of departure of Prime Minister Chrétien added to the financial uncertainties of the artistic and cultural community. In this climate of uncertainty, arts organization faced the challenge of securing new funding in light of a potential budgetary redistribution or a shift in policy direction that could determine or undermine the future of the sector.

Public servants awaited an expected Cabinet shuffle (which would result in a new Minister of Canadian Heritage) and likely a shift in the day-to-day operations of the public service. The Cabinet shuffle was anticipated to have effects such as a delay in response to funding requests, a shift in government priorities and a freeze on (part of) the department's operating budget.

In parallel with speculations about the federal government, the Province of Ontario was in the midst of an election. Interestingly enough, within the provincial Liberal Party, only the MPP for Sarnia-Lampton, Caroline DiCoco, advocated a budget reallocation in favour of a cultural platform.

At the municipal level, the City of Ottawa unveiled a draft budget in February 2004 calling for dramatic cuts to arts and culture despite the fact that Ottawa ranks last out of the six largest Canadian cities, with respect to municipal arts grants funding support.⁶ Artists, individuals, coalitions, advocacy groups and (other) government agencies, departments and deputies all rallied for the financial sustainability of the cultural sector. Other program areas (e.g., health, recreation and social services) faced a similar, if less dramatic, threat.

On a positive note, the persistent efforts of the community to promote arts and culture as intrinsic to Canadian society found expression in the Speech from the Throne on February 2, 2004.⁷ The Governor General stated: "Enhancing quality of life in our cities is about wanting to help each other. It is about a willingness to work together to build great places to live. Today this willingness is everywhere in Canada. We see it in the efforts of a million Canadians working in the voluntary sector. And they have our support."

In the same month, the new Minister of Canadian Heritage, The Honourable H el ene Chalifour-Scherrer, announced a one-year supplement to the Tomorrow Starts Today initiative in the amount of \$207 million. In March, the City of Ottawa affirmed its commitment to arts and culture for fiscal year 2004-05 by allocating to this sector the same level of funding as in 2003-2004.

⁶ Website reference: http://ottawa.ca/2020/arts/1_1_en.shtml

⁷ Website reference: <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/sft-ddt.asp>

My Assignment

Although my internship mostly involved being part of an overall process aimed at sustaining the arts and culture community, I was privileged to address some of the challenges faced by arts community organizations that serve diverse minority groups.

For my first assignment, I wrote a briefing note for the November 2003 meeting of the CCA Board of Governors, highlighting the Minister's Conference on Cultural Diversity and assessing the strategic plan arising from the conference. The purpose of the Minister's conference was to bring together culturally diverse communities and cultural decision makers, in order to find ways to better reflect diversity in Canada's cultural policies and programs. The objectives of the conference were to:

- Increase knowledge, among cultural decision makers, of the needs and capacity of culturally diverse communities
- Increase knowledge, among culturally diverse communities, of the availability of national cultural programs and activities
- Build on the experience and expertise of communities and cultural institutions
- Facilitate networking and strengthen relationships between participants
- Celebrate culturally diverse artistic expressions

My analysis highlighted the value of this federal government initiative in acknowledging diversity-related issues particular to the cultural sector. However, it identified gaps and concerns raised by the community that were not fully addressed in the aforementioned strategic plan. While the plan had highlighted the mandate and objectives of current programs and proposed more funding for limited life-span programs, it had failed to provide the sector with short-term and long-term policy alternatives for the achievement of stability on the part of diverse groups. My analysis made the point that diversity needs to be made an inextricable element of the cultural sector and that they have to be addressed in the context of a secure future for the sector at large.

Combined with observations based on my voluntary and government experience, this analysis prompted my reflection that the question of diversity needs to be addressed horizontally and in a broad societal context, rather than in an isolated fashion; for example, it should not be seen solely as a political asset and tool to help define Canadian identity. Adopting a more inclusive perspective is a challenge for both the government and the voluntary sector.

Although my brief on the Minister's Conference on Cultural Diversity did not lead to further research or policy development, it resulted in a brainstorming session that identified the need for a mini-research project initiative. As discussed with the Board of Governors of the CCA, arts organizations face two challenges: meeting the criteria applicable to registered charitable organizations and meeting the eligibility requirements for designation as a National Arts Service Organization.⁸ Diverse organizations are also confronted with the dilemma of non-inclusive terminology in the wording of the NASO designation.

⁸ Designation by the Minister of Canadian Heritage constitutes recognition, by the Government of Canada, that a non-profit organization is considered a national arts service organization. Eligibility criteria are related to both the purpose and the membership of the organization.

The NASO designation, established in 1991, serves as a special recognition by the Minister of Canadian Heritage. Its objective is to assist arts organizations having to deal with a strict and rigid regulatory environment. The designation seeks to ensure the promotion of the arts on a nation-wide basis through activities such as sponsoring arts exhibitions or performances, conducting workshops and development programs relating to the arts, or organizing and sponsoring conferences, competitions and special arts events.

In 2003, Statistics Canada reported that 80,000 organizations in the not-for-profit sector were successful in receiving not-for-profit status. Although there are no datasets on the specific demographic composition by discipline (age, gender, cultural origins of the members of the sector), it is fair to assume that arts and diverse culture-based organizations constitute an important component of the not-for-profit sector.

Although the NASO designation was anticipated to benefit 200 organizations, only 18 organizations have reached the desired status.

My research, which was conducted over a two-week period, consisted of a series of interviews with 54 of the 2003-2004 stand-firm grant recipients of the Canada Council for the Arts. The 10-item questionnaire was intended to identify/assess:

- The scope of the organization in terms of the number of full-time salaried employees
- The financial status of the art organizations in relation to criteria for charitable status
- The motives behind seeking or not seeking charitable status
- Awareness of the National Arts Service Organization designation
- Incentives for seeking the National Arts Service Organization designation

The two-week project did not allow enough time to interview all suggested parties; nor did it permit a thorough examination of the challenges and issues encountered by the organizations interviewed. Nevertheless, findings suggested that, for organizations with charitable status, the main reason for seeking such status was to obtain more funding privileges. For other organizations, a lack of resources, the challenge of preparing annual audited financial statements and limited access to legal expertise acted as deterrents to seeking charitable status.

I consider that the direction taken by the Canadian Conference of the Arts in addressing policy issues from the diverse community perspective was commendable. In my view, this effort could be enhanced by the allocation of more resources, in order to create a national (research)

Once the organization qualifies for designation as a NASO, the Minister of Canadian Heritage forwards the necessary documentation to the Canada Revenue Agency for consideration as to whether the organization meets the criteria for registered charitable organizations.

Registration by the Minister of National Revenue enhances the designation (as a NASO) by permitting organizations to issue official donation receipts with the same benefits as registered charitable organizations. Registration also exempts the organization from paying income-related taxes under Part 1 of the *Income Tax Act*.

Website reference: www.canadianheritage.gc.ca/progs/osna-naso/info_e.cfm

initiative aiming at supporting (providing tools and information to) organizations lacking the financial resources to undertake an elaborate incorporation process.

As my internship progressed, my objectives were revised, in order to address and develop my ability to:

- Define problems
- Describe goals in light of potential solutions
- Formulate solutions to challenges and/or issues
- Select a solution most pertinent to the challenges identified
- Implement the solution and consult with partners
- Evaluate the successes and failures of the proposed solution

In conclusion, my internship with the CCA proved beneficial despite my limited experience in the sector. My policy analysis work at the CCA (focusing on exploratory research and evaluation of short-term successes and failures in policy implementation) enhanced my critical and analytic abilities.

I returned to my home department on March 8, 2004. I was assigned to work on a new program aimed at assisting Canadian festivals, artistic series and programming seasons. I anticipate that the extensive and unique knowledge in policy analysis with special insight into diverse arts organizations, that I acquired through my PIAF internship, will inform my future work in the public service (and, to a lesser extent, my current program-oriented assignment in the department) as well as my endeavours in the voluntary sector.

A Reality Show: the Voluntary and Public Sectors as Partners in Public Policy

Being aware of the management, training and mentoring challenges faced by the sector in order to account for the Canadian demographic, I must admit that I was grateful as the youngest person to be part of the wonderful team of PIAF interns and fellows. The CCA made a special effort to include me in their day-to-day activities. I was invited to attend regular staff meetings and periodic board meetings and to participate in consultation teleconferences and meetings with stakeholders, as well as in policy-driven conferences.

Prior to my internship, my understanding of economics was limited to budgetary figures. This six-month internship has enhanced my knowledge and has given me the privilege of working with young and dynamic staff members who are no strangers to hard work and non-remunerated overtime. Moreover, I was happy to have worked with, and to have been mentored by, Megan Williams, who is brilliant in formulating questions relevant to policy making and in shaping policy-driven decisions.

I will end this report by stating that the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence. Although the voluntary sector and the government are part of the broader public sector, better described by Nelson Thomson Learning School as the community's common sense and common conscience, both should strive to fulfill their identity in light of the greater good and to sustain the livelihood of the public sector without allowing individual organizational preoccupations to get in the way. It is crucial that the competitive spirit (which underlies the private sector's ability to manipulate risk elements) not override the transparent and trusting nature of the public sector. It is also important that policy be introduced, sustained and embraced by younger generations in order to ensure a credible transfer of the values and ethics at the source of this ever-growing sector. Lastly, it is important that all national organizations

become more representative of the Canadian demographics in their governance structures and in their membership.