

REPORT: artsnb Commission on Cultural Diversity

Authored by: The New Brunswick Arts Board

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The **artsnb Commission on Cultural Diversity** was devised to continue operational action to achieve the work set out in the Strategic Plan 2013-2018 set out by the directors of the New Brunswick Arts Board. The meetings involved artists of culturally diverse backgrounds, arts and culture organizations, multicultural society representatives, federal and provincial government cultural department representatives, and **artsnb** employees. The aim of the meetings was to provoke thoughtful discussion on a variety of issues arising in an increasingly culturally diverse province of New Brunswick, and to determine strategies to improve inclusivity of diverse cultures in the public sphere and encourage understanding and appreciation for the different cultures found throughout the province.

FORMAT

The format devised for the artsnb Commission on Cultural Diversity was a series of three meetings held in FY 2015-2016 in Dieppe, Saint John and Fredericton.

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| <p>Meeting 1 December 4, 2015 Dieppe Cultural Centre Dieppe, NB</p> | <p>MORNING After an opening smudging ceremony led by Natalie Sappier, meeting participants were led through the KAIROS Blanket Exercise, by Christina Dunfield from the Mennonite Central Committee Canada and co-facilitated by Natalie Sappier/Samaqani Cocahq. This exercise (http://www.kairoscanada.org/what-we-do/indigenous-rights/blanket-exercise) has been used by several Federal government departments for staff sensitivity training on Indigenous rights and issues. An interpreter (Marie-Claude Hébert) was present to translate the script so that the activity was accessible in both official colonial languages. Fifteen years ago, the Aboriginal Rights Coalition worked with Indigenous elders and teachers to develop an interactive way of learning the history most Canadians are never taught. The Blanket Exercise was the result.</p> <p>AFTERNOON The “talking circle” took up the entire afternoon. Several agenda items were deferred to the second meeting. For many, the morning exercise was emotionally harrowing; particularly for those from countries of origin with similar colonial pasts. Each</p> |
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| | <p>participant shared what they had learned or carried away from the event, and shared their unique perspectives on the diverse society that was on Turtle Island before colonial contact, and all that has happened since to bring us to today's culturally diverse context.</p> <p>We closed with a Circle Dance and song led by Natalie Sappier.</p> |
| <p>Meeting 2 January 25, 2016 Saint John Arts Centre Saint John, NB</p> | <p>MORNING</p> <p>After an opening prayer offered by Natalie Sappier/Samaqani Cocahq and roundtable introductions, Program presentations were made by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • artsnb (Joss Richer) • Tourism, Heritage and Culture (Bunthivy Nou) • Canada Council (Monique Léger / Christian Mondor) • Canadian Heritage (Jea-Claude Leblanc, Stéphanie Brunet-Langis) • Sheila Hugh Mackay Foundation (Kathryn McCaroll) <p>In each case, general program opportunities were outlined with emphasis, in some cases, on how equity initiatives/ programs/ changes to criteria had been undertaken and implemented.</p> <p>AFTERNOON</p> <p>Break-out groups explored the following topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What tools, supports and program structures are necessary for supporting increased diverse cultural expression? • How will the growth of diverse cultural expression increase a sense of belonging, acceptance and mutual understanding in New Brunswick? <p>Each group shared their findings, followed by a closing discussion.</p> |
| <p>Meeting 3 March 4, 2016 The Station Fredericton, NB</p> | <p>MORNING</p> <p>After an opening smudge ceremony led by elder George Paul of Metepenagiag and roundtable introductions, participants broke into groups to discuss the following goals that issued from the previous meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To identify short-term goals that are achievable in the existing framework(s). • To identify long-term goals that may require adjustment of the existing framework(s). • Strategies for inclusion (incentives, administration, increase visibility, critical diversity on juries, staffing, etc.) • Education (Sensitisation, educating educators/staff, resources for indigenous and cultural protocols, etc.) • Responsive programming (social movements, demographic change, etc.) |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion and celebration • Necessary resources for success <p>AFTERNOON In the afternoon, the group worked on setting out points that could shape the beginnings of an action plan.</p> |
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FINDINGS: STRATEGIES FOR INCLUSION

Incentives

- One of the big challenges we have is injecting diversity, but also bringing people from our own community to the table. Part of the solution is the responsibility of the organization that is funding, to have criteria of engagement and inclusion.
- It was suggested at a Université de Moncton conference to create a scholarship for Mi'kmaq students so hopefully they could attract some students to the university. They might say that they only speak English, but you need to incentivize.
- Making strategic placements of culturally diverse people into the environment of a university class could lead to more diverse enrollment in university programs

Administrative measures

- Potential barrier to arts funding is the complexity of the application process. More outreach may be needed to create awareness of the fact that arts funding resources are here, and also to help people through the potentially alienating application process.
- There is very little signage in New Brunswick that includes indigenous languages. First thing we can do in New Brunswick to signal an inclusive society and an invitation to newcomers is to show that we are inclusive of First languages and the First People.
- Dedicated funds to translate into Mi'kmaq and Maliseet need to be made available, just as there are for French and English. When people see their language written, validates and reinforces the value of the language and provides incentive to learn the language.

Strategic interventions

- The Federal government's inclusion strategy is interesting in that they didn't look at ways to attract more women into politics, just made it half and half, and found qualified, culturally diverse people to fill the positions. Same with diversity, just need to make a decision and do it.

- It is difficult to bring people together, but there is no way to build comfort without people feeling a little bit uncomfortable. We have to prepare people to feel a little discomfort, and then overcome it.
- A discomfort happens when people want to work with indigenous groups; there will continue to be discomfort unless we push to collaborate.
- Dynamic of diversity got lost in the Acadian policy for French language (marginalized non-Acadian French-speaking groups). In the development of strategy in NB, inclusion in the dialogue is necessary in order to find and integrate what the strategy is currently missing.

Art in Education and Sensitization initiatives

- A discomfort happens when people want to work with indigenous groups because of colonial guilt; to overcome it, there must be a push to collaborate. Need to provide service, distribute protocols on how to approach.
- New opportunities for collaboration are needed through gatherings, openings, and especially in learning environments.
- Follow the Canada Council for the Arts' lead in incentivizing the arts ecosystem to include more diverse voices in order to receive organizational grants is a model to follow. Maybe a similar move to incentivize programs and build diversity into the schools/programming/curriculum is needed. Children need to have the opportunities to be exposed to more than one world view.
- This year, New Brunswick has the largest number of immigrant children ever, but we are still not seeing enough teachers of diverse backgrounds – extremely important for children to see themselves reflected as they develop their identity.
- Immersion (EN/FR) programs for immigrant children should last longer.
- Art helps traverse the unfamiliar to make it familiar; it creates a home and a space for mutual understanding, acceptance, and belonging. It's the universals of the human experience expressed through art that resonates with people, gets at something deeper, even when a focus is specific.
- Black history (diverse histories) is hardly talked about in schools; art is a medium through which to convey this history. If it wasn't through art (literature, visual arts, music, dance, theatre, etc.), how else can we would share diverse histories and world views with our children?
- Art can be a medium for connecting people.
- Art is important not only to create beauty, but to create patience and discipline.
- There is a need for more workshops/education done for people for Aboriginal arts practice that connects traditional and contemporary in a respectful way.

ACTION PLAN for artsnb

Short Term Goals

OPERATIONS

- Actively include diverse stakeholders in meetings and jury process for arts and cultural programming.
- Ensure that the **artsnb Cultural Diversity Commission** continues to meet, even if it is only twice a year. We need to have continuity to ensure follow-through on actions and ensure success.
- **artsnb** can revisit program criteria to ensure inclusion wherever possible, even if just in the statement of who is eligible for the program.
- **artsnb** could host local artist gatherings to share work by diverse artists, open eyes/minds, learn, and build up art community. Co-education; reduce isolation.
- **artsnb** can look at criteria for the Documentation grant; printing and production costs are also the most expensive, and not funded under this grant. For visibility of diverse artists, printed product is needed.
- **artsnb** could run a sensitization program, so that people understand the value of art, to explain to people the importance of the art and its role in society.
- Educate the Educators: **artsnb** could produce a presentation for Teachers' Professional Development Days – developed in association with art teachers and diverse cultural communities.
- **artsnb** could play a role in providing a service to share/distribute protocols on how to approach indigenous groups when arts organizations or individual artists want to work with them.
- There is a need for improved information sharing for newcomers who arrive with a professional arts practice — they don't know where to find things like the Fredericton Arts Alliance arts newsletter or the ArtsLink newsletter. There is a need to encourage the organizations that create such newsletters to reach out to diverse communities, multicultural centres, and settlement services. It would be easy for **artsnb** to coordinate this and send out reminders periodically.
- Re-define artistic excellence (in order to broaden perspective and acceptance of what forms art can take).

Long Term Goals

- **artsnb** needs to enable more opportunities for culturally diverse exchange — people don't like to work in an environment they're not used to, and such exchanges serve to increase their exposure to different environments. Creating opportunities for people to go places they've never been is also important for broadening understanding of the global context.

- Work with communities to establish protocols for engaging in diverse cultural and arts activities. Cultural Sensitivity Training is needed. Breaking discomforts in communicating is important, especially when it comes to language.
- Teach culturally diverse stories early on. School curricula need to be overhauled, and the literary arts, music, dance, visual arts need to be incorporated in a way to enrich and deepen the curriculum.
- Work towards creating greater diversity among staff at educational institutions/government/arts organizations, etc. Community / cultural agents need to be diversified as well.
- Establish proactive measures and incentives for accelerating the diversification process. For instance, it is important that **artsnb** and the Department of Tourism, Heritage and Culture programming emulate Canada Council's diversity criteria / requirements for arts funding to organizations
- Increase diversity in programming delivered through official media, so that when diverse communities listen to music on Radio Canada/CBC, they see themselves reflected back.
- Redefine the word "equality," and have the mandate of cultural organizations need to shift with the definition.
- Integrate more events/activities that reflect the new reality of a diverse province into programming for arts funders and cultural societies. Change guidelines to assist organizations in making the shift.

Broader context – beyond artsnb:

- Actively encourage collaboration between galleries in NB and beyond for cultural exchange.
- Actively respond to social movements. This helps develop the ecosystem and increase critical discourse within the community.
- Follow up with initiatives to ensure that the momentum built by the **artsnb** Commission on Cultural Diversity continues.
- Resources are needed to support business and the arts, and production of videos on indigenous cultural protocols (video format suggested – similar to Ontario Arts Council videos)
- Sensitize people to different types of art to help validate different forms of cultural expression.
- Promotion: make quality and richness of diverse cultures known. This will help people stay in NB and develop their practice, especially when they see themselves reflected in it.

- Celebration: seek opportunities to anchor culturally diverse arts within existing public events.
- Increase visibility of diverse populations on boards of organizations and institutions.
- Leverage non-traditional venues and make established venues more accessible (i.e. cultural centres and schools).
- Offer incentives to organizations or artists to diversify and/or collaborate.
- Create inclusive policies for programs.
- Capture diversity within organizations' databases — consciously map it so that better strategies can be determined to encourage it.
- Create more opportunities for mentorship, training, and internships to professionalize emerging and new Canadians within the arts and heritage sector. This will diversify the voice of cultural institutions.
- Overhaul curriculum in schools.
- Create tools for emerging artists and new Canadians so that they can navigate Canadian systems more easily and access resources. On a programming level, this might involve looking to arts programs in larger municipalities, simplifying the existing language found in program descriptions and changing the medium by which people can apply (i.e., video project proposals for non-English/French speakers and Indigenous persons who have a preference for oral tradition). Programs can also broaden “artistic excellence” to include “cultural impact” as evaluation criteria.

MEETING PARTICIPANTS

A cross section of culturally diverse artists, arts organizations, community organizations, and government departments (Tourism, Heritage and Culture; Post-Secondary Education Training and Labour)

| NAME | ORGANIZATION |
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| ARTS/CULTURE ORGANIZATIONS | |
| Jean-Pierre Caissie | AAAPNB |
| Intesar Saeed | Cultural Expressions Festival |
| Adda Mihailescu | Beaverbrook Art Gallery |
| Christina Thomson | Beaverbrook Art Gallery |
| Catherine Gagné | Artist/ Musician/ Sistema Moncton |
| Swan Serna | Artist / Musician / Sistema Richibucto |
| Carlos Avila | Artist / Musician / Sistema Saint John |
| Anika Lirette | Artist / Theatre / Théâtre Alacenne |
| Marie-Thérèse Landry | Conseil provincial des sociétés culturelles |
| Julie Whitenect | ArtsLinkNB |
| PROFESSIONAL ARTISTS | |

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| Jalianne Li | Artist / Theatre/Dance |
| Dan Xu | Artist/ Visual Arts |
| Polina Plakhova | Artist |
| Geetha Thurairajah | Artist / Visual Arts / Sackville |
| Madeleine Whalen | Artist / Theatre |
| George Paul | Artist / Elder, Metepenagiag |
| COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS | |
| Christina Dunfield | Facilitator, Kairos Blanket Exercise, Mennonite Central Committee Canada |
| Flora Sharpe | Miramichi Regional Multicultural Association |
| Marisa Rojas | Multicultural Association of Fredericton |
| Monica Sharma | Asian Heritage Society of New Brunswick |
| Agathe Robichaud | Comité d'accueil, d'intégration et d'établissement des nouveaux arrivants de la Péninsule acadienne (CAIENA-PA). |
| Jeremias Tecu | Multicultural Association of Fredericton |
| Madhu Verma | Asian Heritage Society of NB (Chair), NB Multicultural Council (Board Member) |
| Kassim Doumbia | Economic and Social Development, Shippagan, NB |
| EDUCATION | |
| Dr. Ibrahim Ouattara | Prof. Philosophy/Law, Université de Moncton |
| Phylomène Zangio | Université de Moncton / Black Community Activist |
| FUNDERS | |
| Jean-Claude Leblanc | Canadian Heritage |
| Stéphanie Brunet-Langis | Canadian Heritage |
| Bunthivy Nou | Tourism, Heritage and Culture |
| Kathryn McCaroll | Sheila Hugh Mackay Foundation |
| Monique Léger | Canada Council for the Arts |
| Christian Mondor | Canada Council for the Arts |
| Nadia Khoury | New Brunswick Foundation for the Arts |
| ARTSNB STAFF | |
| Joss Richer | Program Officer |
| Kristen Atkins | Program Officer |
| Natalie Sappier | Aboriginal Outreach Officer |
| Greg Toole | Public Relations |
| Akoulina Connell | Executive Director |
| Tilly Jackson | Executive Assistant |