



ARTS

BC  
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FOR PEOPLE POWERING THE ARTS

ADVOCACY TOOL KIT

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Over the years a number of cultural organizations, including Arts BC have prepared resources to advocate support for the arts and cultural sector from candidates for elected office. Arts BC encourages all members to advocate for public awareness and government support for arts and culture in their own communities and regions.

### **Some tips to help get started:**

- Get to know all the candidates in your riding. Check with their local office for biographical information including their background and interests. What is their “cultural profile”? Do they attend cultural events? Do they support arts and culture in the community?
- Work to inform the candidates about your organization.
- Do not assume candidates know about issues pertaining to arts and culture. Be prepared to provide background information to the candidates. The better informed they are, the more able they are to address the issues.
- Attend meetings. Call the candidates’ campaign office for a schedule of private and public appearances. Make sure someone from your organization attends as many meetings as possible. Ask questions – both broad based and of local concern.
- Look for partners in your community who share your concerns and issues. Join forces to organize an all candidates meeting around matters of common concern.
- Contact your local media. Bring to their attention local arts and cultural issues and ask them to cover candidates’ views.
- Let your community know the candidates’ views on arts and culture. Record candidates’ answers to questions on local issues and report them through newsletters, media releases, letters to the editor.
- Let Arts BC know what you are doing and what responses you are getting from your local candidates.

### **Sample questions for candidates**

- Do you support public funding for the arts in BC? Is increased funding for arts and culture a priority for your party?
- If your party forms the next government what steps would you take and what programs and policies would you implement to ensure a strong and flourishing arts and cultural sector in this province?
- What do you consider the contribution of arts and culture to British Columbia communities and to the health of the province as a whole?

### **With reference to our economy and our quality of life**

- What role do you consider the arts have in the education of our children and young people?
- What would you/your party do to enhance that role?

### **Other Sources of Information**

Alliance for Arts and Culture [www.allianceforarts.com](http://www.allianceforarts.com)

Canadian Arts Coalition [www.canadianartscoalition.com](http://www.canadianartscoalition.com)

## **Tips on Hosting an All Candidates Meeting**

Municipal, provincial and federal elections give arts organizations across the province a chance to ramp up their advocacy efforts to make sure arts and culture are on the agenda.

One way to ensure arts and culture are on your local candidates' agenda is to host an all candidates meeting. An all candidates meeting is a great opportunity to put arts and culture issues before the public, give increased exposure to the contributions of arts and culture in the community and provide important contact for the arts community with the candidates. Some tips to consider when planning an all candidates meeting:

- Consider joining forces with other community organizations to host the meeting: other arts organizations, the local college, school PACs, volunteer organizations, and business associations. Cooperating with other organization allows you to share costs and the work, gives access a broader public and increases the profile of your own organization.
- Choose a suitable venue. Take into account parking, public transit and access for people with disabilities. Choose a space that you are confident you can fill. A smaller room that's filled to capacity has a better chance of resulting in lively meeting with lots of discussion than one that's larger, but half full. If you plan to invite local media, make sure there's room for them to set up equipment. Check the acoustics. If they're poor, make arrangements to have a sound system in place.
- Be flexible about dates. Invite the candidates and offer them several options.
- Hold a reception either before or after the meeting. This can be as formal or informal as you like and can afford. It's a good way of acknowledging the organizers, and another opportunity to connect personally with the candidates.
- Decide on a format. A common format is to have each candidate deliver a short speech and follow the speeches with questions. Recruit someone familiar with rules of order and with some knowledge of arts and culture in your community to act as moderator.
- Publicize the meeting through the local media, community networks, your web site, broadcast emails. Send out information more than once, including a reminder to the media the day before and the day of the event. Look for free publicity wherever you can get it.
- At the meeting itself, it's a good idea to have materials about your organization and some advocacy information about arts and culture available (see online resources at the end of this article)
- Have a few people ready to ask questions to get the ball rolling. Record the meeting. After the meeting make sure thank you letters to the candidates, the moderator and anyone else who contribute to the meeting.
- Prepare a follow-up media release to send out.

There are lots of excellent resources online that provide arguments for the arts, important things to consider, how to approach candidates and what questions to ask.

## **Questions for Candidates**

The following questions for candidates—both municipal and school board contenders—and tips on advocacy are adapted from the Alliance for Arts and Culture’s 1999 monograph, *Arts and Culture Advocacy*. We present them here to assist and inform local efforts.

### **Questions for candidates:**

- What is your position regarding support for arts and culture initiatives? Would you endorse financial support for the arts and culture sector?
- Does this municipality include culture in its official community plan? If not, would you endorse the development of a cultural strategic plan? How would you support the implementation of such a plan?
- Does the municipality have a public art policy? Is there an advisory committee? How does it work?
- What is your position on maintaining and upgrading existing municipally owned arts and culture facilities (whether operated by the municipality or by a leaseholder)?
- What is your commitment to addressing current deficiencies in performance and exhibition facilities in the municipality?
- Do you consider the development of tourism a strategic economic goal for the region? If so, what do you consider role of arts and culture in attaining this goal?
- What are your ideas on developing partnerships between the municipality, the business community and arts and culture groups to better market our cultural assets?

### **Advocacy Tips**

- Attend all-candidates meetings. Ask questions about arts, culture and heritage issues.
- Assume candidates may not know the issues, so be prepared to provide background information.
- Invite other arts groups to attend to create a strong presence for arts and culture.
- Meet with and talk to candidates directly
- Profile arts and culture in the community, identify people who can discuss the issues and deliver this information to the candidates by fax, email or in person.
- Brief local media (media releases, letters to the editor, personal contact) on the issues and questions for candidates.

## **Answering challenges to arts and culture funding**

### **1. Why do the arts need public funding at all?**

*A. Funding for the arts supports a public good just as it does recreation, sport and other community programs. The arts deliver more “bang for the buck” than many other investments of public funds. Arts and culture are a labour intensive industry. The biggest subsidy for arts and culture comes from those employed by the sector. Cultural workers subsidize the arts by accepting low wages, taking on seasonal or project employment and working “volunteer” overtime.*

### **2. The arts are a frill.**

*A. The arts are not a frill; they employ more people in BC than the logging and fishing industries. Arts and culture make significant social and economic contributions to communities and regions throughout the province.*

### **3. The arts are elitist.**

*A. Arts and cultural events and facilities have patrons and participants from all walks of life. More people in Canada attend arts and cultural activities each year than attend sports events.*

### **4. Why should taxpayers pay for arts and culture if they don't attend?**

*A. Many things in our community are not user-only pay. Taxpayers support libraries, schools and recreation centres. Yet not everybody swims, curls or plays hockey, for example.*

### **A final tip on advocating for arts and culture: Get out and vote! And encourage everyone you know to vote too.**

#### **After Elections: Encouraging Your Newly Elected officials**

After each election, it is a good idea to remind the returning or newly elected representatives of the importance of arts and culture, and at the same time make your organization known to them. Send a letter congratulating your elected official and be sure to include information about your organization, its programs, services and value to the community.

Sending letters to elected representatives can only help. If you would like statistics more specific to your area, check the BC Arts and Culture Week website quotes pages at [www.bcartswweek.org](http://www.bcartswweek.org) or reports by Hill Strategies you can download free from [www.hillstrategies.com](http://www.hillstrategies.com)

Advocacy begins at the local level. Municipal elections provide an ideal opportunity to profile the contribution of arts and culture to healthy communities and to promote support for arts and culture in your area.

Electing councilors, mayors and school board trustees who support arts and culture is becoming increasingly important. With changes in the provincial climate and reduced funding to schools impacting arts programs, grass roots activism becomes essential to the continued vitality of the arts and cultural sector.

### **The Social Contribution: Vital Communities**

“We are increasingly recognizing that creative expression and participation are powerful means of building healthy and resilient communities, from neighborhoods to nations.”

### **Canadian Conference of the Arts, June 1999**

The arts have long been thought to have benefits to one’s health and quality of life. Research from around the globe confirms what many of us already know: that arts and culture are essential to the well being of people of all ages and from all backgrounds. Studies have shown arts and culture to have a positive impact on those in prison, at-risk youth, people living in poverty, and individuals with special needs, to name a few. Research conducted in Sweden has even found the death rate of those participating in the arts to be half of those who do not!

“Through cultural events and experiences, individuals connect with the community of humanity” Arts and Culture in the Community, Greater Vancouver Alliance for Arts and Culture. Arts and culture also contribute to building vibrant communities. Cultural events and activities are an ideal way for people to establish closer relationships, and to connect with people from diverse backgrounds. Through these connections a mutual sense of community ownership and responsibility is created, and communities are strengthened.

A “Made in BC” example is community participation in BC Arts and Culture week. In April of 2004, 49 of BC’s community and regional arts councils organized and participated in a wide range of events, from an exhibition of a community mapping project titled ‘Islands in the Salish Sea’, to a musical afternoon in a local bed and breakfast to the hosting of “Free Art Day” hands-on events. Over 25,000 people from across the province participated in community arts council sponsored events alone during Arts and Culture Week, events that brought together artists, the business community, local politicians and community members of all ages and backgrounds. The result was enormous media and community support, overwhelming positive feedback from participants and renewed appreciation of the contribution of arts and culture to BC communities.

### **The Economic Contribution: More than Money**

In addition to their social benefits, arts and culture have significant economic benefits for communities. Jason Azmier, Senior Policy Analyst from the Canada West Foundation and author of Culture and Economic Competitiveness: An Emerging Role for the Arts in Canada explains:

“It is a city’s urban culture and ‘livability’ aspects that determine where someone decides to hang up their shingle and lay down roots... Climate, quality of public services, tax rates, crime levels, perceived opportunities, ethnic diversity, the cultural amenities of a city – all these elements are factored in. . .”

Azmier also explains that although there are definite financial benefits to arts and culture they cannot always (nor should they) be measured using a set formula, that much of the contribution is not measurable in terms of dollars and cents.

Nonetheless, one area to look at when discussing the economic benefits of arts and culture is cultural tourism. The Okanagan Cultural Corridor Project has found that cultural tourists spend more, shop more, stay in more hotels and motels, and stay longer than other visitors to an area.

A notable example of a BC community embracing cultural tourism is Chemainus. Chemainus, with a population of 4000, was heavily dependent on the forestry industry for years for its economic viability. A downtown revitalization project initiated in 1982 led to the creation of 33 outdoor murals at various venues throughout the town. Since it became a cultural tourist destination, Chemainus has welcomed 100 new businesses and now draws over 400,000 tourists a year with its city murals.

It appears that the demand for cultural destinations is only going to increase, with the cultural tourist demographic increasing, and the value of tourism expected to double by the year 2010. This means a strengthened economic base for communities that promote cultural tourism, as well as increased ‘livability’ for those who choose permanent residence in an area where arts and culture are valued and supported.

### **The Education Contribution: Academic Success and Learning Life Skills**

“It becomes apparent... how desirable it is to cultivate the natural sensitivity and freedom of expression the child possesses- to cultivate them not as training for a special field but as an enriching of personality extending into all fields.” Art In The Daily Life Of A Child, Grant Wood

One does not have to look hard to see the far-reaching implications of arts education.

Some of the many documented benefits arts programming in schools offers children of all ages include:

- increased math achievement for those involved in instrumental music
- higher reading proficiency for those involved in theatre
- higher general academic scores
- lower drop out rates
- greater use of complex language
- greater self-confidence

These findings and more remain consistent with children from all socioeconomic backgrounds and parental income and education levels.

## **What Can You do?**

When municipal and school board elections are being held, find out who is running in your area and what their agenda is. Start by finding out where the mayor, councilor and school board trustee candidates in your riding stand on arts and culture issues. Do they attend cultural events? Do they know what the local issues are? Do they support art and culture in your community and schools?

Make sure you are informed and up to date on the current debate on these issues. Be prepared to provide background information to the candidates. The better informed they are, the more able they are to address the issues.

## **What Can You do?**

Call your local constituency office and request a meeting. Invite representatives from other arts and culture groups in your community, so much the better – as long as you are prepared to address only issues of mutual concern.

If possible, send a briefing prior to the meeting that describes your organization, what it does and who it represents. Include any successes, issues or concerns you would like to address. Plan to talk about the value of arts and culture to your community, both the economic benefits locally and to the tourism sector (if applicable). Talk about your organization in the context of the region and the province, that your concerns are echoed in communities all over the province.

In presenting your concerns focus on problems and suggestions for solutions.

Afterwards, send a thank you letter that touches on the points covered in the meeting and the MLA's responses.

If you are able to meet with your MLA, please let Arts BC know about it.

Each experience contributes to every organization and supports all our efforts.

## **How to contact your MLA**

You can find out how to get in touch with your MLA by logging onto [www.legis.gov.bc.ca](http://www.legis.gov.bc.ca) searchable by name, constituency, community or postal code

### **or call**

Enquiry BC at 604-660-2421 if you are calling from the Vancouver area

1-800-663-7867 if you are calling from anywhere else in the province