



## **Ontario Craft Council**

### **Growing Ontario Craft Community North**

**Final Report**

***Outcomes, Challenges and Next Steps***

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**Final Report: *Outcomes, and Challenges and Next Steps***

**Overview**

The Growing Ontario Crafts Community North project was very successful based on formal participant evaluations, comments and general feedback from artists and the community at large. The project provided artists with a variety of spaces and places to share business skills, further develop sustainable livelihoods in the culture sector and raise awareness of the sector's quality and vitality across the North. The project delivered a series of six professional development workshops and meet and greet events, a symposium, and a juried travelling craft exhibition. A Northern Steering Committee comprised of professional artists from across the region assisted in guiding the project. NORDIK Institute coordinated the project.

**Outcomes**

A number of project outcomes were identified including the items listed below.

**Northern Ontario Identity**

- Opportunities for Northern Ontario artists to gather for educational and dialogical purposes where there are few spaces to express and explore concepts and perceptions of what it means to be an artist in this region.
- Self-identification of being an artist including how operating a business impacts identity; the complexity of Northern Ontario with three dominant cultures and a long history of strained relations; identification of areas for capacity building and sector development to increase employment; and, roles and action steps for artists and developers.
- Symposium focused on understanding Northern artists' identity, perceptions and development needs in creating resilient, sustainable communities; presentations offering a diversity of cultural artistic perspectives; an overview of the work being created in the region; and, participant-driven workshops generated much discussion around key development topics and identified planning and action steps.

## Cross Cultural Participation

- First time OCC had actively sought Francophone and Indigenous communities' participation. Their participation in all events strengthened the project, contributing to its success by bringing diverse perspectives to the table in understanding the Northern Ontario context, and building networks between diverse populations.

## Networks and Social Capital

- Local and regional networks, spanning the three dominant cultural groups, were developed through the CraftSmarts workshops, the Meet and Greet events, the symposium and the Steering Committee.
- CraftSmarts workshops and Meet and Greet participants met new local and regional artists. They had opportunities to show work, exchange ideas, share and gain new business development skills. Resource people for each workshop provided insight and/or skills training to meet target goals. Key Northern resource people were identified for future development needs. For example, Kenora's local photographer is connected to arts community and able to document art work; Manitoulin Island is now linked to Kenora and Thunder Bay; Wawa connected with Northern Saskatchewan; Fort Frances with Kenora; and Hearst artists along Hwy 11 corridor.
- The Steering Committee brought together nine professional artists from across the region. It was comprised of a matrix of artists from the three dominant cultural ancestries, a variety of disciplines, length of time practicing and location. Networks that have been established can be utilized for future projects and/or each members' networking needs.
- The symposium facilitated the development of local and area networks by bringing together artists from across the region and, through the internet, others who were not able to attend in person. Many artists in the Sault Ste. Marie area met for the first time. The First Nation community was well represented enabling many non-Indigenous and Indigenous artists to meet each other. As well the new Director of the Art Gallery of Algoma (in Sault Ste. Marie) attended and met key people in the culture sector with whom she would need to network. A direct result of the networking is the addition of a Sault Ste. Marie area (Batchewana Bay) artist's work being carried in another artist's business in located in North Bay and on-line.
- The creation of the artist video was a wonderful way of fostering a technology-based network of artists. While each artists' clip was prepared separately through NORDIK, once the video was completed the artists were linked to each other through the video. A few artists commented that they were planning to connect with other artists in the video. The video was a first time the OCC had a promotional tool of this nature.

## Professional development

- CraftSmarts workshops provided access to professional development for artists where few opportunities exist. Topics were identified by each community based on need and the agenda was designed to connect artists to Northern resource people within their communities or from across the region who had specific skills and had addressed similar issues.

- The Meet and Greet events were informational and networking events that were run in conjunction with the CraftSmarts workshops to take advantage of the gathering artists and reduce programming costs. Important information about the OCC's programs, services and grants as well as the Canadian Artists' Representation/le Front des artistes canadiens (CARFAC ON) and the Ontario Arts Council's (OAC) programs were discussed and support materials were distributed. Information is often difficult to access in the North and the events provided a range of resources for further follow-up. OCC also gained input into their services through the facilitated discussions. The artists often brought work to share with others as a means of introducing themselves.

### Raising the profile of craft and the arts

- The juried travelling craft exhibition, *CraftCurrents*, provided artists, communities and tourists with the opportunity to see firsthand the quality and diversity of craft being created across the region. Each tour stop celebrated the opening with a well-attended reception of artists and dignitaries, providing an important informal meeting space for raising the profile of craft with decision-makers, the arts community and the community at large. Of the 34 pieces in the exhibition 13 pieces sold, with all but two of the purchases being made by buyers who purchased work produced outside their home community. This greatly contributes to the profile of the quality and diversity of work across the region when the work is viewed in homes outside their communities.
- The symposium raised the profile of the arts through event promotions across the region and engaged southern Ontario based culture sector organizations and funding agencies in dialogue regarding ways to increase sector sustainability. The symposium blog housing the presentations, summary discussions and other resources documents the dialogues and ideas and mobilizes learnings.
- The Northern artists video highlights current work and challenges enabling others to learn about and experience the quality art made in the region.

### Increased use of technology

- Due to the geographical expanse of Northern Ontario technology may be the most efficient and effective means of bridging distances and reaching a greater audience, but it doesn't replace the necessity for in-person gatherings.
- OCC's first venture into live streaming was at the symposium held in Sault Ste. Marie.
- The Northwestern Ontario Arts Council's representative inquired about using it to meet OAC's needs.
- On-site participants were aware of the live streaming and its advantages.
- Some of the southern Ontario arts service organizations and agencies mentioned they may consider it for other projects.
- It was the first time the OCC had invited OAC and CARFAC ON representatives to present their own information sessions via technology during the Meet and Greets and the first time

representatives had used it. Hearst's event utilized technology (Skype) to facilitate the session. Canadian Artists' Representation/le Front des artistes canadiens (Ontario)'s (CARFAC ON) Executive Director and the Ontario Arts Council's Northeastern representative are considering using technology in future deliveries.

- The symposium blog extends the life of the project by allowing people to access the resources for an extended period of time.

### Raising awareness of the OCC

- In the past number of years the OCC has not been actively programming in the North. This initiative introduced and connected many artists to the organization. A few artists who trained in southern Ontario and had been OCC members most of their professional lives participated in the project as well.
- The project raised awareness through project event promotions. For example, email blasts were sent to approximately 250 arts organizations across Northern Ontario; CraftSmarts flyers, press coverage; exhibition press coverage, catalogues and opening receptions and attendees; symposium promotions, invitations, press release, and blog. Participants and attendees were from various cultural groups.
- Of the 44 people who applied to the *CraftCurrents* exhibition, 9 applicants (20%) were current OCC members; 5 applicants (11%) were past OCC members and 30 applicants (68%) were 'new audience'. Of the 34 artists selected for the *CraftCurrents* exhibition, one was a life member, 2 past members, 6 current members and 25 (74%) were non-members.
- The OCC's offer of a reduced membership to *CraftCurrents* participants generated 5 inquiries which were given to the membership coordinator to follow up.

### Challenges

#### Project funding cycle:

- Due to the short timespan the project's human resources were challenged to organize, promote and deliver the various project components. Involving communities in advance of writing funding applications would make them aware of the potential opportunity. They could then also provide letters of support for the application.

#### Advertising and promotion:

- Getting the word out and organizing events is particularly difficult in the North due to the lack of organizational infrastructure that limit reaching local artists and networking between areas to pass information along.
- Although NORDIK sent notices out to over 250 cultural organizations one cannot be sure information was distributed throughout the local organizations' networks.

- Many smaller local media outlets were very supportive of the events, providing good coverage.
- Reaching the Francophone community was challenging. Unfortunately French-language services were not funded through the project, so many unilingual Francophones may have been excluded.

#### Steering Committee:

- Professional artists with knowledge and experience are very busy making a living and often not available for meetings due to other commitments. Many stated they do not have time to volunteer for another committee even though they see the value. There are few arts administrators in the North to draw on for committee work that have a broad understanding of visual arts. An OCC membership was a token of appreciation extended to Steering Committee members for their time commitment to the project.

#### CraftCurrents Exhibition:

- Barriers to participation that could be mitigated next time included:
  - Photos: need a support person to convert slides to meet publication requirements;
  - Delete CV as a requirement;
  - Have a 'neutral' name (*CraftCurrents* vs. *Masterworks*);
  - Increased time line; sufficient time to notify artists and apply;
  - Application available in French.

#### Human resources:

- Delivering projects in the North takes considerably longer than in southern Ontario due to lack of networks.
- Shortage and over extension of local host organization resulted in NORDIK leading the workshop design process and developing and sourcing resources.
- NORDIK contributed considerable HR resources to this project including a second full time person.

#### Programming costs:

- Workshops: The free workshops put a financial strain on the OCC but enabled anyone to attend and built awareness of OCC. Next time working in that community/area the OCC could charge a small amount for the workshops.
- Increase travel budget for resource people.

### Sponsorships and supplemental funding:

- Limited number of sponsorships available due to poor economic conditions. Many organizations commit to sponsorships early in their fiscal year and are not available when project requests are made.
- Community Development Corporation's Local Initiative Funds (LIF) are becoming increasingly difficult to obtain in some communities due the FedNor's focus on economic benefit. Arts organizations may have been funded previously so additional requests are not likely to be funded.

### Technology Outreach:

- Provides many people access to the events but many areas do not have broad band (high speed) internet and some areas do not have any internet access. As well, people have varying degrees of familiarity, skill and/or interest in using the technology.

### Next steps

The symposium summary discussion paper outlines the major themes identified by this project regarding development of the culture sector in Northern Ontario that the OCC, other arts service organizations and communities can use as a guideline.

The OCC has raised its profile and directly contributed to development of craft and the arts in communities where programming occurred. Revisiting these communities would assist in solidifying newly established relationships and support communities in their continued development. Strong relationships with a few communities would allow for networks to build outward from hubs and link to first tier (larger) communities where the OCC has already been working and there are many more resources for artists.

In targeted communities, host organizations could consider utilizing a Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation (NOHFC) Youth Intern grant to do development work with the inter position shared by two or more communities, thereby meeting other community development needs.

NORDIK found this project to be very engaging, inspiring and beneficial to the artists and communities at large and would be pleased to work with the OCC on future projects. In the meantime NORDIK will continue to be a resource for culture sector development across Northern Ontario.

## Project Funders

In addition to the **McLean Foundation**, the Ontario Craft Council would like to thank the following organizations for their support of the project:

Ontario  
Trillium  
Foundation



Fondation  
Trillium  
de l'Ontario



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL  
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO



CARFAC  
ONTARIO

Northern Ontario Research, Development, Ideas and Knowledge



Ontario  
Northern Ontario Heritage  
Fund Corporation  
Société de gestion du Fonds  
du patrimoine du Nord  
de l'Ontario