



**Supplementary Report on  
Presenting and Aboriginal Communities**

**The Value of Presenting:  
A Study of Arts Presentation in Canada**

[www.valueofpresenting.ca](http://www.valueofpresenting.ca)

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## Background

On behalf of Canada's performing arts presenting networks we have been conducting the largest national study to-date in the presenting field. The study is spearheaded by the Canadian Arts Presenting Association (CAPACOA), in partnership with the regional presenting networks, and an advisory committee of sector representatives. The study activities have been undertaken by Strategic Moves in collaboration with EKOS Research Associates beginning in May 2011 and are expected to be completed in March 2013.

## Goals of the Project

The overall goals of this national project are:

- To identify, understand and communicate the value and benefits of performing arts presentation for Canadians.
- To define the role of the presenter in the performing arts ecology, in communities and in the society with the next 20 years in mind.

To achieve this, we explore live performing arts presentation from the diverse perspectives of artists, creators, producers, and managers as well as municipalities, people working in non-art sectors like health, social services or education, the public and presenters themselves.

Through this project, we also seek to better understand performing arts in various contexts, for example in urban and rural communities, by performing art discipline or relating to different cultural groups.

## Activities Undertaken

In order to gain engaged participation throughout this two-year project, we have been employing an action research framework where information is shared in draft form and feedback and input is encouraged on an ongoing basis. We have enabled participation by members of the presenting field using various modes, from phone interviews, to face-to-face dialogues and workshops, to Facebook, Twitter and a dedicated project website ([www.ValueOfPresenting.ca](http://www.ValueOfPresenting.ca)).

This *Supplementary Report* summarizes the results of research and consultations we have completed in the first year of this two-year project with a focus on *Presenting and Aboriginal Communities*.

The information summarized in this supplement was gathered through:

- National *Survey of Performing Arts Presenters*, 288 respondents; published in February 2012.<sup>1</sup>
- Dialogue sessions that included presenters serving aboriginal Canadians at *Breakout West* (Whitehorse, YK)<sup>2</sup> and *Impact 11* (Kitchener, ON)<sup>3</sup>.

This amendment incorporates feedback received during the summer of 2012. The data points are unaffected by this feedback; the changes are editorial in nature to more clearly articulate these findings.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.diffusionartspresenting.ca/?p=585>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.diffusionartspresenting.ca/?p=438>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.diffusionartspresenting.ca/?p=557>

## Performing Arts and Aboriginal Cultures

The performing arts in Canada have much deeper roots than one might expect. Long before European explorers came to Canada, Aboriginal peoples had a rich, expressive artistic life including dance, theatre, storytelling, music – all inseparable from every other aspect of life. These deep artistic traditions have been part of this land for millennia; they have been influencing contemporary Canadian culture and identity as well as being influenced by it. Nonetheless, development of theatre and performing arts in Canada was shaped by European rather than by Aboriginal traditions.

“It is a common misconception that theatre on the North American continent began with the arrival of Spanish and French explorers and settlers,” according to the *Canadian Encyclopedia*. “Native and Inuit ceremonials and rituals evidenced a highly sophisticated sense of mimetic art, and occupied a central place in the social and religious activities of their peoples. Masks, costumes and properties were used to enhance dialogue, song and chants in performances designed to benefit the community by influencing such crucial matters as the weather, the hunt, or spiritual and physical well-being. Great ritual dramas (such as those of the British Columbia Kwakiutl people) sometimes took the form of a long cycle encompassing some 4 to 5 months of performance.”

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Canada adopted a policy of assimilation in which mandatory residential schools came to play a key role. The devastation this policy brought on aboriginal communities and individuals was profound. Beginning in about 1990 Aboriginal leaders began to address the abuses within the residential school system and asked for acknowledgement and change. Finally in 2008, the Canadian Prime Minister issued an official apology in the House of Commons to former students of Indian residential schools by saying “The government now recognizes that the consequences of the Indian residential schools policy were profoundly negative and that this policy has had a lasting and damaging impact on aboriginal culture, heritage and language.”

*Multicultural Canada*, an academic online collaboration led by Simon Fraser University, points out that “there has been a marked revival of Aboriginal pride and cultural renewal ... The cultural renaissance of the Aboriginal peoples reflects a long, diverse, and sustained history of cross-cultural contact and exchange. Although often based on explicit Aboriginal cultural traditions, the work of native artists is understandably eclectic, drawing on Euro-Canadian traditions and ethnic heritages while addressing a complex audience of multiple sensibilities.”

One poignant example of these recent changes in the relations between Canada and Aboriginal communities is the inclusion of the Four Host First Nations at the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics. More than using an Inukshuk as the Vancouver Games logo, Aboriginal leaders were acknowledged as heads of states and Aboriginal culture and achievement was showcased and celebrated in a first-of-its-kind collaboration, including the televised Opening and Closing Ceremonies.

## Aboriginal Performing Arts Organizations

Here are some of the performing arts organizations that have emerged during the last 40 years and continue to operate today:

- Association for Native Development in the Performing and Visual Arts (ANDPVA) is Canada's oldest Indigenous arts service organization founded in 1972
- Native Theatre School, founded in 1974, evolved into the Centre for Indigenous Theatre based in Toronto where it operates a full-time program; also operates summer programs in various locations, e.g. Peterborough, ON or Lethbridge, AB. It offers training in the performing arts to students of Indigenous ancestry
- Native Earth Performing Arts, Toronto, ON, founded in 1982, is the oldest professional Aboriginal performing arts company in Canada
  - Weesageechak Begins to Dance, a development festival for new work, founded 1989
- De-ba-jeh-muh-jig Theatre on Manitoulin Island was founded in 1984
  - Here *The Rez Sisters* by Tomson Highway was workshopped and developed in 1986
- Ondinnok is a Native theatre company in Quebec founded in 1985
- Indspire was founded in 1985 as the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation
  - National Aboriginal Achievement Awards created in 1993
- Full Circle First Nations Performance, Vancouver, BC, founded in 1992
  - Talking Stick Festival, founded 2001
- Indian Arts-I-Crafts, located in Brantford, ON and founded in 1991, is active in local, provincial and federal Aboriginal events
  - Canadian Aboriginal Festival, founded in 1993 and presented by Indian Arts-I-Crafts, includes performing arts alongside sporting events, educational events and workshops as well as food and shopping
- Red Sky Performance is an indigenous dance, theatre and music company founded in 2000
- Urban Ink productions was founded in 2001 as a First Nations Theatre company. It has evolved to produce Aboriginal and diverse cultural works that integrate any number of artistic forms
- Indigenous Performing Arts Alliance, created in 2004, is dedicated to developing a broader appreciation for indigenous performing arts in Canada and encouraging the development of Indigenous performing artists and arts organizations
- Trent University, the first North American university to establish a department dedicated to Aboriginal Peoples in 1969 (in 2006 renamed the Indigenous Studies department) is home to *NOZHEM: First Peoples Performance Space* which opened in 2005

Over the last 40 years stars like Graham Greene (actor), Tomson Highway (playwright and novelist), Buffy Sainte-Marie (singer, songwriter, composer, record producer, visual artist, actress), Elisapie Isaac (singer, composer, filmmaker) and Susan Aglukark (singer, songwriter) have become mainstream names.

Aboriginal artists continue to emerge from all parts of the country, for instance Tanja Tagaq, an Inuk throat singer from Cambridge Bay, NV; Cris Derksen, a Vancouver-based musician; A Tribe Called Red, an Ottawa-based crew of DJs who are creating a new kind of musical mash-up, Pow Wow Step, featured during a monthly Electric Pow Wow.

While there has been a marked increase in the number and voices of artists, performance creation companies and professional training opportunities, there is a sense of a persistent lack of professional performance spaces for Aboriginal works.

## Producing and Presenting Difference

In the course of the study to-date, we have encountered several examples of Aboriginal performing arts being integrated in presenters' programming. We anticipate hearing more such stories as the study unfolds over the next year. Following are a few specific examples from across Canada.

In recent years, a champion of the integration of Aboriginal performing arts in its programming has been the National Arts Centre. For instance, its English Theatre section has been making a strong contribution to the development and production of the work of Aboriginal theatre artists for a national stage. This work began in 1991 when the first play by an Aboriginal playwright (Tomson Highway's *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*) was co-produced by the NAC. Since 2006 Aboriginal main stage productions have become a programmatic staple of each season, often via co-productions. In 2012, the NAC English Theatre produced Shakespeare's *King Lear* featuring an all-Aboriginal cast with August Schellenberg in the title role.

Another example of bringing diverse artistic voices together is the Harrison Festival for the Arts in BC. It shared this experience in the *Survey of Performing Arts Presenters*:

"The most rewarding partnerships have been with the First Nations community. It involved the steepest learning curve, letting go of a specific outcome and hearing what was important to their community. The outcome has always been unexpected and generally more rewarding than anticipated. Thank you to the BC Arts Council Diverse Collaboration fund for encouraging this kind of community partnership."

The Harrison Festival for the Arts' long history of working with diverse community partners has spawned an important contribution with its best practices guide titled *Culturally Diverse Arts Programs - A Guide to Planning and Presentation (2005)*<sup>4</sup>. It includes several case studies of cross-cultural partnerships in the performing arts.

In the Yukon, presenters participating in a Dialogue session felt the 2011 debut of the *Coming into the Light* festival in Whitehorse presented a milestone. That festival was seen as a significant example of First Nations sharing arts and cultural experiences and becoming more engaged in the arts community by showcasing Yukon First Nations artists and performers alongside artists from British Columbia, Northwest Territories, Greenland, and Alaska.

To better understand the challenges and opportunities of Aboriginal artists, producers and presenters, we participated in partnership with MT Space, CCI, CPAMO, PCC and CAPACOA at *Impact 11 Festival and Conference*. This international intercultural theatre festival was organized by MT Space in Kitchener, ON under the theme of *Staging Displacement: Producing and Presenting Difference*. One premise of the conference was that "Theatre is the space in which we build communities, and the medium through which we fight for equity and social justice."

The dominant themes that emerged during this 4-day conference and festival were:

- Aboriginal and immigrant artists make art grounded in their respective communities, art that comes from a shared experience.
- Aboriginal artists are contemporary artists who make contemporary art.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.harrisonfestival.com/HarrisonFestival5/docs/bestpracticesguide.pdf>

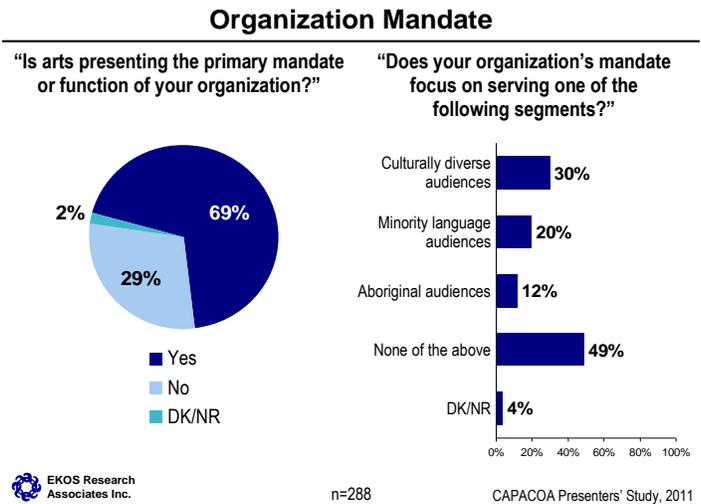
- Audience development within own community and in mainstream are a significant concern that requires increasing thought and action.
- Focus on building multi-faceted partnerships.
- Aboriginal creation needs to find its own production and presentation modes as the work continues to have difficulty finding its way to being presented in “established” venues.
- There are many layers of understanding needed in the endeavour to respect difference so communication and dialogue are very important.
- Media arts and online technologies were seen as great opportunities to create and disseminate work, not merely a marketing channel for live performances.

## Presenters Serving Aboriginal Audiences

These themes found a strong echo in the results of the *Value of Presenting Survey of Presenters*. 288 performing arts presenters participated in this national survey.

We found that half of presenters surveyed have a mandate to serve Aboriginal<sup>5</sup> (12%), official-language minority (20%) and/or culturally diverse audiences (30%). Especially those with Aboriginal mandates also serve minority language audiences (41%) and culturally diverse audiences (65%). For these presenters arts presentation is typically only one part of their mandate, indicating that they tend to be broad-reaching organizations.

The 34 presenters serving Aboriginal audiences who participated in the survey are located in various sizes of community, with 76% of them located in Western Canada (compared to 43% overall.)



## Strong Community and Cross-cultural Roles and Building Partnerships

The 34 presenters who have a mandate to serve Aboriginal audiences say that they play a larger role in:

- Connecting audiences and arts/artists from across Canada and around the world (79% vs 62% who do not share this mandate).
- Exposing audiences to different cultures (74% vs 54%).
- Spending high effort on community involvement/social development (88% vs 66%).

These presenters were much more concerned about audience development with ethnic / cultural groups in the next 10 years (85% vs 63%). Other issues they are much more concerned about are the development of administrative capacity, system and efficiencies to maintain central artistic focus (91% vs 62%).

These presenters identified more strongly that they consider among the top three benefits "better understanding between cultures." (53% vs 29%), while they rated all other benefits examined similarly.

## Creating for Community

During the *Impact11 Conference*, participants explored building alliances across different cultures, values and behaviours. A panelist described their motivations for working in and through the community.

<sup>5</sup> Interpretive note: some of these presenters may be Aboriginal-run, and some may not be. This survey does not identify a subgroup of "Aboriginal presenters", but rather framed the questions based on the mandate to serve various audiences or interest.

One concept described how the artist's motivation stemmed from their own culturally defined community, in this case a First Nations community, and the desire to give voice and reflect back to that community something about its own experiences, to reclaim its own culture and cultural expression. Creating art and performance was used to help communities reconnect with lost languages, lost knowledge and reengage and reactivate the peoples' own stories. In that way, performing arts provided a pathway and a catalyst for renewed cultural connection.

### Forging Successful Partnerships

88% of those serving Aboriginal audiences say they play a large role in building partnerships with other organizations in the community (vs 68%).

They work in partnership with all types of organizations, like most other presenters do as well; however, they are more likely to work in partnerships with government organizations (88% vs 67%) and private sector (79% vs 64%) and they have stronger ties with non-arts based organizations (88% vs 69%).

Several examples of working in partnerships have been collected as part of the *Value of Presenting* project already. For instance, the Alianait Arts Festival prides itself on presenting great art while helping to build a healthier Nunavut. This organization shared this experience through the *Survey of Performing Arts Presenters*:

"Alianait has partnered with local Iqaluit schools and the Iqaluit District Education Authority. We present events in school facilities on a regular basis and set up our Festival tent on school grounds. We offer free concerts and workshops to the schools - this is part of the contract for artists coming to Iqaluit. As a result, we have developed a very positive working relationship and no longer pay any fees for using the school facilities. We also provide opportunities for school groups to perform at Alianait events and many of the teachers and students have become Alianait volunteers. We are also building our future audience."

*Impact 11* participants distilled their experience in forging successful partnerships by affirming that assumptions are the antithesis to successful partnerships.

Conference participants framed cultural differences in the broadest sense: From working across socio- and ethno-cultural differences, to dealing with differences in organization size, budget and capacity, to differences in objectives, values and modes of working and decision-making, as well as organizational structures.

One panelist's philosophy of partnership was predicated on "how can I help the next person and honour who came before me." The partnerships they work in often include mentorship, sharing skills, knowledge and experience.

Another example cited an artistic partnership between a dancer, playwright and presenter where the partners had to learn to speak to a presenter, understand the values they themselves held and they encountered among their partners and, in so doing, negotiate differing values and different emphasis on values. While the process had challenges, the outcome worked.

Theatre's power to cut through the façade and show experiences and make them real is an important asset. This was obvious in the example of a law school inviting an Aboriginal theatre

company to perform at graduation – the performance helped the graduating class to see law from a new perspective and made a powerful impact as people were about to begin their law practice.

A group of presenters in the Yukon contributed more examples of the power of community and partnership as they see it in their work.

These Northern presenters see the arts in their community as expressions of who they are, bringing people together, having a dialogue and discovering things together, as beautiful ways to build community and individual expression. They see how performing arts presenting contributes to healthy communities, to community identity and pride, and how it provides a way to present their artists and stories both in and outside of the Northern territories.

Two specific examples related to a major venue, the Yukon Arts Centre (YAC) and to a cross-cultural engagement, the *Coming into the Light* festival. First, the YAC has transformed the possibilities of what can happen on stage by attracting people with a range of technical skills (design, lighting, etc.); this has unleashed new possibilities in terms of bringing in first-class artists and companies they couldn't have dreamt of hosting before. Second, the 2011 debut of the *Coming into the Light* festival in Whitehorse was a significant example of First Nations sharing arts and cultural experiences and becoming more engaged in the arts community.

## More Festivals, Multi-disciplinary Art Forms

Those serving Aboriginal audiences are significantly different from the average presenter:

- They are more than twice as likely to define themselves as a festival (47% vs 20%) and half as likely to define themselves as a series presenter (18% vs 36%).
- This is mirrored when asked about the formats in which they present: 12% present series (vs 34%), 38% present festivals (vs 19%) and 47% present both which is the same as the average.
- They are much more likely to present interdisciplinary arts (71% vs 39%), media arts (41% vs 19%) and spoken word/storytelling (65% vs 42%), while they present other arts at similar rates as the average.
- 53% report presenting works in Aboriginal languages compared to the overall average of 13%.
- They are less likely to “only present shows produced by others” with 15% (vs 38%) and more likely to say that they “mostly present shows produced by others and also produce their own” with 56% (vs 37%). 29% report “mostly producing their own shows” which is not significantly different from the average at 23%.

## Not-for-profit Structure and Funding Sources

Like most presenters (92%), presenters serving Aboriginal audiences are not-for-profits (96%). While they are as strongly concerned about financial stability / stable funding (97%) as others, they are less intensely worried about the reliability of government funding (62% vs 76%) even though it is the number one issue for these presenters as well.

Their total annual budgets are on par with the average except only 3% report a budget under \$50,000, compared to the overall average of 15%. As stated above, presenting is often just one part of their mandate, so their reported budgets may include items that are part of the overall budgets but not specifically related to presenting activities.

The funding mix is similar to other presenters with government, box office, donations and sponsorships as leading sources.

In terms of funding, the *Impact 11* conference spawned this discussion about financial structure:

A panelist suggested a rethinking of why arts organizations are structured as non-profit organizations. The suggestion was made that the primary reason for adopting a non-profit corporation structure is to become eligible for government funding, i.e. to satisfy someone else's rules. Yet, there is a cost to going after this funding: in administrative resources, proposals, responding to funder's priorities, and so on. Structurally, non-profit organizations must have quite elaborate administrative structures including a board of directors which must be recruited, nurtured and trained in order to be useful to the organization. The panelist suggested that while government funding can be important, other ways of working and organizing may get some projects/organizations to their goal faster or more effectively.

Importantly, this discussion did not suggest that public funding was unimportant. Rather, it aimed to open another avenue of contemplation in terms of how to meet specific artistic goals.

Organizational structures in general may well merit additional research and discussion within Aboriginal performing arts communities, the sector in general and funders.

## Staff and Volunteers

The presenters serving Aboriginal audiences tend to have staff running their day-to-day operations (91% vs 81%) but they also tend to have a smaller staff predominantly of between 1 and 4 (53% vs 40%). There were no significant differences to the average in terms of the use of volunteers, which is as important to those serving Aboriginal audiences as it is to any other presenter.

## Many Venues Used, Fewer Owned

Those serving Aboriginal audiences use more venues than any other sub-group examined. 44% use 6 or more venues while only 23% of presenters overall reported using 6 or more venues. They are also one of the least likely groups to own a venue (18% vs 30%).

In terms of primary venue capacity, 42% of those serving Aboriginal audiences report a capacity of 1,000+ (vs 22%), likely reflecting the strong representation of festival formats within this group.

About 1 in 3 of those serving Aboriginal audiences, anticipate some kind of venue-related capital expenditure over the next five years, which is somewhat less than the overall average of 4 in 10. However, of those who are planning a capital expenditure, those serving Aboriginal audiences appear somewhat more likely to expand or build new venues and anticipate a budget over \$500,000.