

POLICY IN ACTION

A REPORT ON NATIONAL ARTS SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The study's mandate is to produce a report for the Canada Council for the Arts on the state of National Arts Service Organizations (NASOs). The areas of focus are NASOs' ability to: deliver professional development to their members; conduct advocacy activities; and provide policy advice to the Council.

Methodology

The consultant conducted a literature and file review, interviewed Council section heads and officers, and interviewed officials of a representative cross-section of 18 NASOs funded by the Council in all disciplines.

Overview of Council Support to NASOs

The Council has an important, longstanding and interdependent relationship with NASOs. Variations exist in the organizational history and stability of NASOs in the various disciplines and categories, and in the Council's approach to funding them. A decision to eliminate NASO operating grants in 1996 was followed by a reinstatement of the grants in 1999, accompanied by the introduction of multi-year funding.

Director's Speech to the 2003 Chalmers Conference

In an address to the Canadian Conference of the Arts' Chalmers Conference in May 2003, Council Director John Hobday stressed the value of NASOs and the need for the Council and NASOs to work together to achieve common goals.

What NASOs Do

For purposes of the study, NASOs are defined as member-directed volunteer bodies representing professional artists or arts organizations, which serve their members as well as their discipline and the public. NASOs are funded mainly by membership revenues, fees for service and grants. The primary services they offer include: networking and peer support; communication and information; public awareness and audience development; research and program delivery; professional development and training; and policy development and advocacy.

Key Findings

The report presents a broad SWOT (Strengths / Weaknesses / Opportunities / Threats) analysis of NASOs in the areas of focus specified by the study mandate.

The study finds that NASOs place a very high priority on **professional development and training**. Acting on needs expressed by their membership, NASOs have developed numerous strengths in offering a broad range of P.D. services, enabling members to acquire new skills, knowledge and expertise. But NASOs could achieve much more in this area, advancing the state of the arts, if not hampered by a lack of financial and staff resources. Long-term threats exist for artists, arts organizations and NASOs themselves from being under-resourced and over-extended

In **policy development and advocacy**, NASOs can play a vital role, not only as advocates for their members, but as policy resources for the Canada Council and other funders and policymakers. Some NASOs intervene effectively in the policymaking process on issues vital to their members' legal, financial and professional interests. Others are less capable of influencing developments, due to limitations on their resources for research, consensus building, staffing, travel and lobbying. These limitations are barriers that make some NASOs less effective in fulfilling their policy and advocacy goals, and hence less effective partners for the Council.

In considering **NASOs' relationship with the Canada Council**, the study examines the relationship from both angles. For NASOs, the Council remains important not only as a funder but a body committed to fostering and promoting the arts with knowledge and expertise. But gaps in the Council's approach to NASOs, whether in terms of support, communication or consultation, undermine the relationship and make it less dynamic and successful than it could be. From the Council's perspective, NASOs are seen as valuable collective resources, but the collaborative quality of the relationship varies according to the NASO or the section.

A Note on Defining "National"

The study discusses the Council policy of funding two "national" NASOs in disciplines that are language-based (e.g. theatre and writing), and one in disciplines that are not. In practice, that policy can be difficult to achieve for a variety of reasons.

Recommendations for Action

The report makes three broad recommendations intended to:

- sustain the provision of high-quality professional services to NASO members in the artistic disciplines served by the Canada Council; and
 - enhance the quality of policy advice offered by NASOs to the Council and other funding bodies.
1. **A NASO Databank:** The Council should compile a databank of statistical information on NASOs to provide a solid foundation for policy development, as well as a policy matrix systematizing NASO support by all levels of government. If possible, groundrules for Council support should be coordinated with Department of Canadian Heritage support for NASOs.
 2. **A NASO/Canada Council Summit:** The Council should establish an annual summit meeting between itself and NASOs, in concert with the annual Chalmers Conference of the Canadian Conference of the Arts.
 3. **A Dedicated Program for NASO Operating Grants:** The Council should establish a new granting program, appropriately staffed and funded, dedicated to providing multi-year operating grants to NASOs. The program would have its own budget and would receive expert guidance from section heads and officers in each discipline. Its grants would be supplemented by project support from the disciplinary sections.

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Mandate of the Study

The Canada Council for the Arts commissioned this study in June 2003, for the purpose of undertaking “an exploration of the strengths, weaknesses and challenges of national arts service organizations and their relationship to the Canada Council.” The study was to focus on three key services provided by national arts service organizations (NASOs):

- delivering professional development to the membership;
- conducting advocacy activities;
- providing policy advice to the Council.

In addition to a literature review of documents related to NASOs, the study research included consultations with section heads and program officers of the Canada Council, and with a representative sampling of executive directors and, where possible, chairs of NASOs funded by the Council. The objective was to produce “a report on the state of national arts service organizations, key opportunities and challenges, and measures to strengthen [their] relationship with the Canada Council.”

1.2 Methodology of the Study

The consultant, Roy MacSkimming, examined a variety of reports, speeches and other documents dealing with the arts and their service associations, including NASO files provided by the Canada Council. At the Council, the consultant conferred with senior management and with section heads and/or program officers in all artistic disciplines as well as the Aboriginal and Equity offices. The consultant and research associate Michel Alarcon interviewed, mainly in person but also in some cases by telephone, senior staff or board members of 18 NASOs, representing a cross-section of the national associations funded by the Council. A list of interviewees appears in an appendix to this report.

The consultations and interviews provide the material for section 2 of the report, “What NASOs Do.” They also inform the SWOT (Strengths / Weaknesses / Opportunities / Threats) analysis of NASOs’ work in professional development and training, and in policy development and advocacy, summarized in section 3, “Findings.” The observations on NASOs’ relationship with the Council, also in section 3, and the recommendations contained in section 4, are the consultant’s own.

1.3 Overview of Council Support to NASOs

Since its inception in 1957, the Canada Council has had a considerable relationship with NASOs in the various disciplines that it supports. The relationship is reciprocal and occasionally complicated. At its simplest, the relationship involves the Council providing operating and/or project funding to NASOs; in turn, they provide the Council with information, opinion and policy advice about their discipline, while also acting as a conduit for disseminating Council information to their membership.

The relationship is conducted mainly, although not exclusively, between NASOs and the appropriate Council section. The complexities vary case by case. For NASOs, advising and lobbying the Council while receiving its financial support may pose the appearance, if not the reality, of compromising their independence. For the Council, assessing any NASO's effectiveness and its claim on public funding may inevitably be coloured by the conduct and content of its advocacy. Mutual respect and fair-mindedness are necessary on both sides of the relationship.

In funding NASOs, the Council has followed a natural progression: it has extended its support for creative artists and arts organizations to include their professional associations. Artists and arts organizations supported by the Council largely overlap with NASO membership, although not completely. NASOs and the Council also share similar aims of promoting the creative vigour and financial health of the arts and artistic professions. Although their mandates and methods differ, NASOs and the Council have frequently made common cause on both practical and policy matters.

The diverse aspects of NASOs' work of behalf of their members are examined in the next section of the report.

Variations exist in the kind and continuity of Council support to NASOs. The actual amount of support varies according to policies and budget allocations set by the individual sections. Funding periods (annual or multi-year) and funding categories (operating, project or travel grants) also vary. They are affected by each organization's financial circumstances, level of activity, and funding history, and the Council's assessment of these.

Over the years, each section has developed its own consultative relationship with, and funding approach toward, NASOs in its area of responsibility. In general, sections have recognized a need for a NASO to represent artists and/or arts organizations in each sector that it supports. That approach often results in funding more than one NASO per discipline, reflecting the multiple artistic genres and categories eligible for support. In music, for example, separate NASOs represent symphony orchestras, opera companies and choral conductors; in literature, separate NASOS represent writers, book publishers and magazines. Moreover, since a discipline such as theatre or literature is language-based, NASOs exist for both official languages in each category of activity.

NASOs spring from the arts community to represent the interests of, and provide services to, a specific membership. But since NASOs can be extremely helpful to the Council's work of supporting the arts, the absence or weakness of a NASO in a particular discipline can create problems for both the discipline and the Council. Hence on occasion a Council section has stepped in to encourage the birth, renewal or survival of a NASO.

The greatest disruption in the Council's relationship with NASOs occurred in 1996. Following a major cut in the Council's parliamentary appropriation resulting from the 1995 federal budget, the Council announced that it would sharply reduce its administrative expenses and tie its funding more closely to three priorities: creation, production and dissemination. NASOs were caught in the net of the Council's policy changes. In its 1995 strategic plan, the Council wrote that it would withdraw operating support "from those arts service organizations it currently funds that do not contribute to the creation, production and distribution of art."

Since most NASOs do not undertake those activities directly (to do so, after all, would be to compete with their own members), they saw their operating grants eliminated with a year's warning. Henceforward they would receive only project grants for specific and limited purposes.

For some NASOs with diversified revenues, it was possible to weather the loss of operating funding by accessing project grants; typically, these were associations with significant other income in the form of membership fees, service fees or provincial funding (usually from Quebec or Ontario). For more fragile NASOs, however, such a fundamental policy change represented a serious setback. This was particularly true for those heavily dependent on the Council for operating assistance. The visual artists' association, Canadian Artists' Representation / Front des artistes canadiens (CARFAC), could no longer afford a paid secretariat. An association of dance companies, the Canadian Association of Professional Dance Organizations (CAPDO), collapsed as an independent body and had to be housed within a sister NASO, the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres (PACT).

Greater stability was restored after the resumption of Council operating grants in 1999. At that time, to contribute further to the stabilization of NASOs' core operations, the Council also introduced multi-year funding, permitting organizations to conduct longer-term operational planning.

1.4 Director's Speech to the 2003 Chalmers Conference

Arts service organizations meet to network and to discuss issues of common concern at the Chalmers Conference, an annual forum organized by the Canadian Conference of the Arts. At the Chalmers Conference on May 22, 2003, the current Director of the Canada Council, John Hobday, delivered an address outlining the Council's new strategic objectives for meeting the challenges facing the arts. The first of three objectives discussed by the Director was:

“fostering sustainability and adaptability through a new relationship with arts organizations.”

Mr. Hobday made it clear that, without sacrificing its primary objective of fostering excellence in the arts, the Council would seek to “improve [arts organizations’] ability to achieve their artistic mission by fortifying their long-term sustainability and adaptability.” Making the arts infrastructure stronger and more viable would become a major Council priority. And Mr. Hobday underlined the important role played by arts service organizations within that infrastructure. He not only described the Council’s elimination of NASO operating grants in the mid-1990s as “a mistake,” but spoke of the potential for the Council and NASOs to work together in several ways. Among them:

- developing strategies to enhance NASOs’ capacity to serve their members;
- developing arts policy;
- conducting arts advocacy.

The Director envisioned NASOs and the Council combining “our very different strengths” by acting in concert as “relentless advocates for the arts.” The commissioning of this study may be seen as flowing from that vision.

2. WHAT NATIONAL ARTS SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS DO

2.1 Defining NASOs

Canada’s arts community undertook significant policy work in the mid- and late-1990s to analyze the characteristics of arts service organizations and their claim to public funding. Much of that work was accomplished by the Canadian Conference of the Arts (CCA), the national umbrella organization to which most NASOs belong. In its June 1995 “Report on the Funding of Arts Service Organizations,” the CCA provided a clear working definition of what a NASO is:

“...organizations founded and directed by their members, who are professional creators, interpreters, producers, distributors/disseminators and/or conservers in the arts and cultural sector, to serve the collective interests of the membership, the constituency, and the public. They may be discipline-specific or multi-disciplinary.”

NASOs, then, are:

- representative professional bodies;
- member-directed; and
- serve the interests not only of their members, but their discipline and the public.

NASOs may represent individual artists (creators or interpreters) in dance, media arts, music, theatre, visual arts or literature. Or they may represent organizations that produce, perform, exhibit or distribute artistic or cultural works: dance companies, film and video cooperatives, orchestras, opera companies, theatres, public galleries, publishers or arts presenters.

Occasionally, NASOs may group artists and/or arts organizations across disciplines, as the CCA does. Multi-disciplinary associations may operate within a city or region, as does the Vancouver Cultural Alliance. But for purposes of this study, only national associations are discussed, since by and large the Canada Council directs its support to those arts service organizations providing national representation. See section 3.4, “A Note on Defining ‘National’.”

2.2 Membership, Funding, Governance and Accountability

NASOs define eligibility for membership according to criteria of professionalism stated in their constitutions and by-laws. For purposes of this study, NASOs are organizations in which membership is voluntary, not obligatory: i.e. they are not trade unions or labour organizations. They are generally incorporated as not-for-profit organizations and funded through a combination of membership fees, fees for service, and grants.

Typically, NASOs are governed by their members, who delegate authority to a volunteer board of directors, chosen from the membership at an annual general meeting. NASOs of the type funded by the Canada Council usually maintain an office and employ a paid secretariat, which may range from one or two persons to half a dozen employees or more, administered by an executive director. The staff is accountable to the board, which may meet several times a year. The board is in turn accountable to the membership, which may meet once a year or more frequently if resources permit. The association as a whole is accountable to government funding bodies for the proper use of public funds in providing services to members and the public.

In serving their members, NASOs deliver a broad range of services, as follows:

2.3 Networking and Peer Support

NASOs serve their members and their discipline by providing regular opportunities for artists and arts organizations to meet, exchange information and ideas, and receive support and validation from their peers. These intangible benefits can be extremely important for creators who practise their art in solitude; and for organizations that produce, perform, exhibit or distribute artistic and cultural work in isolation from each other. In a country as physically huge and regionally and culturally diverse as Canada, NASOs perform the invaluable service of bridging distances, whether geographical, linguistic, cultural or psychological.

2.4 Communication and Information

A fundamental service of NASOs is to act as a focal point for collecting and disseminating information to members and the general public. This information may be of a professional, legal, marketing, or financial nature required by members for the development and practice of their art, or the successful conduct of their profession. Or it may be information about the discipline, needed by educators, the media, or government policymakers or administrators. It may also be information to help audiences gain greater access to and enjoyment of the arts, or to help citizens receive answers to specific questions. Virtually all NASOs routinely field inquiries from non-members and the general public regarding a wide range of matters related to their discipline.

NASOs communicate by a variety of means: Web site, email, telephone, letters, newsletters, membership directories, print articles, brochures, videos, policy briefs and reports, participation in meetings and legislative hearings, and interviews in the print and electronic media.

2.5 Public Awareness and Audience Development

NASOs continually promote their discipline and enlarge the audience for members' work by raising the public profile of the arts. They develop promotional campaigns directed to the media or the arts and culture marketplace. They participate in marketing events such as Contact showcases for the performing arts or Word on the Street festivals for literature. They produce promotional brochures or catalogues. And they assist in conducting awards programs or cultural tourism projects.

Some of the most important awareness initiatives undertaken by NASOs are directed toward the educational system: encouraging teachers at the elementary, high school, CEGEP or university level to integrate the arts and even visits from individual artists into the curriculum.

NASOs reinforce promotional efforts by individual artists and arts organizations. Through cooperative projects, they provide members with cost-effective promotional expertise and marketing initiatives that they could not afford individually. Cooperative ventures run the gamut from joint sales catalogues for galleries, museums and publishers, to ticket-selling operations for the performing arts, to membership Web services.

2.6 Research and Program Delivery

NASOs can be helpful to governments in ways directly related to their membership and deep involvement with their discipline. Some NASOs have developed expertise in conducting research on aspects of members' activities, or the audience or market for their work. In addition to serving membership needs, such research can provide precisely targeted information to assist government officials and funding agencies to better understand the arts community and address issues in arts policy or the cultural industries.

NASOs can also be a vehicle for delivering programs that serve their members and/or government departments and agencies. Members may be served through negotiation and delivery of group social-benefits plans, through bulk purchasing of supplies and equipment, or through group leasing of office or rehearsal space. Government is served when NASOs administer public programs on behalf of departments or agencies, in cases where an association is in a position to deliver a program more efficiently and effectively. Administrative fees for delivering such programs benefit NASOs by increasing and diversifying their income.

2.7 Professional Development and Training

Virtually all NASOs interviewed for this study provide members with professional development and training opportunities. This may be done directly, through organizing seminars, conferences or mentoring programs; or indirectly, by facilitating or funding participation in outside programs, such as those offered by educational or professional institutions.

Professional development and training programs may be designed for artists or arts administrators at the junior or senior level, for company employees, or for board members and other volunteers. Programs may be in such areas as artistic practice, use of new technologies, marketing or business skills, domestic or international touring, exporting, fundraising, volunteer development, or governance.

2.8 Policy Development and Advocacy

Members expect their NASO to contribute ideas to the development of public policy for their discipline, and to advocate their cause in a wide variety of settings. Policy development and advocacy are generally the responsibility of the board, taking guidance from the membership at annual general meetings or through soundings of membership opinion. Board members receive strategic and practical support from the executive director and other staff in delivering and reinforcing key messages to government, the media and the public.

The issues involved in policy and advocacy work vary according to a NASO's discipline and the nature of its membership: i.e. whether it comprises creators, not-for-profit arts organizations, or for-profit firms in the cultural industries. Effective advocacy on issues of funding, copyright, taxation, regulation, legislation, technology, international trade or education requires specialized knowledge and research.

Equally important for success is a sophisticated understanding of the policy development process and the machinery of government. NASOs must learn how and where to intervene in the complex policy process in order to influence decision-makers and achieve desired outcomes. At times, the professional well-being and even survival of their members may depend on it.

3. KEY FINDINGS

Based on the study mandate, this section summarizes key findings related to NASOs' strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in the areas of:

- professional development and training;
- policy development and advocacy;
- their relationship with the Canada Council for the Arts.

These findings are derived from study of Canada Council files and interviews with Council officials and NASO representatives. They are intended to apply in a general way to NASOs operating in both official languages. The findings occasionally include references to particular associations for illustrative purposes, without necessarily limiting the examples that could be cited.

3.1 Findings: Professional Development and Training

3.1.1 Strengths

- Providing members with regular and accessible opportunities for professional development and training is given a high priority as an essential element of NASOs' mandate.
- NASOs determine members' P.D. and training needs by canvassing the membership at annual general meetings, through Web or print surveys, and at workshops, setting future initiatives to meet those needs.
- Senior members' expertise is shared with less experienced colleagues through P.D. and training workshops and mentoring programs, such as those offered by PACT, Union des écrivaines et écrivains québécois (UNEQ), Association of Canadian Publishers (ACP) and Canadian Magazine Publishers Association (CMPA).
- If deemed necessary, expertise from outside NASO membership is imported through the use of consultants, either from other professions or other countries, e.g. "Relationship Products" seminar involving Danny Newman held by the Canadian Arts Presenting Association / Association canadienne des organismes artistiques (CAPACOA).
- Some NASOs have a "federal" structure, with a national membership linked through provincial or regional affiliates, facilitating cost-effective exchange of P.D. projects among regions: e.g. CARFAC and the Independent Media Arts Alliance (IMAA).

- NASOs from different disciplines join forces to strengthen arts management across sector (Creative Management project launched by CCA; Arts Leadership Network launched by Opera.Ca, Orchestras Canada and PACT).
- P.D. and training initiatives encourage understanding, use and adoption of new technologies, e.g. IMAA, ACP.
- P.D. encourages development of domestic touring networks (CAPACOA).
- Some NASOs benefit from sharing ideas or expertise through organizational links to their international counterparts (Opera.Ca, Orchestras Canada).
- P.D. initiatives develop members' international marketing and export capability, e.g. Association nationale des éditeurs de livres (ANEL).
- Training initiatives expand artists' creative skills and career potentials, e.g. Regroupement québécois de la danse (RQD), Association des théâtres francophones du Canada (ATFC), IMAA.
- Some profession-wide initiatives achieve results that benefit non-members in the same profession, e.g. The Writers' Union of Canada (TWUC), UNEQ, CARFAC.
- Some NASOs develop statistical studies with financial benchmarks permitting members' self-evaluation in relation to peers (Orchestras Canada, ACP).
- Some NASOs use P.D. to strengthen board governance (CARFAC).
- Some NASOs can access other federal and provincial programs to fund P.D. and training (e.g. HRDC, Cultural Human Resources Council, Book Publishing Industry Development Program, Ontario Media Development Corporation, Quebec's Société de développement des entreprises culturelles or SODEC)

3.1.2 Weaknesses

- For some NASOs, financially fragile members result in a fragile association. Insufficient membership revenue and excessive dependence on public funding result in a Catch-22: insufficient revenue reduces ability to offer quality P.D. and other services, leading to difficulty attracting

members, leading to difficulty attracting further public funding, e.g. Canadian Dance Assembly (CDA), CARFAC.

- Lack of resources forces trade-offs between P.D. and advocacy work (ATFC, PACT, Opera.Ca, CARFAC).
- Lack of resources increases staff overwork and burnout rate (RQD, CDA).
- Insufficient staffing makes NASOs excessively reliant on volunteer contributions by members for P.D. and even operations (ATFC, CDA, CARFAC).
- Lack of resources for travel and translation reduces members' ability to foster exchanges of P.D., information and ideas through networking with peers in other regions and linguistic communities (Artexte, ATFC, RQD, Orchestras Canada).

3.1.3 Opportunities

- By offering more extensive P.D. services, NASOs could attract larger membership, hence greater revenue base and public funding.
- With more adequate revenues, NASOs could foster cost-effective sharing of P.D. and training initiatives a) among regions, b) between linguistic communities, c) across disciplines.
- NASOs could pursue other federal and provincial funding sources for P.D. and training, e.g. HRDC, etc. as above.
- NASOs could use P.D. opportunities for staff and board members to gain greater expertise in administration, governance and fundraising, making associations more efficient, effective and diversified in revenue.
- NASOs could use P.D. to improve their members' and their own access to, and use of, new technologies.
- Increased resources could enable greater international presence and collaboration, e.g. Conseil québécois du théâtre (CQT)
- Senior members and administrators preparing to leave profession could prepare for succession by mentoring and grooming new generation of managers.

3.1.4 Threats

- Shortage of financial and human resources increases danger of burnout and rapid turnover by NASO staff and board members.
- Insecurity over continuity of NASO operating grants from Canada Council destabilizes NASO planning and morale.
- Lack of funding for AGM travel limits members' participation in P.D. events, planning meetings, networking opportunities.
- Insufficient financial and human resources threatens succession by new generation of administrators and board members as older generation retires.
- Interruption in transition to new generation threatens continuity of knowledge base and institutional memory.
- Lack of coordinated objectives, methodology and funding between Canada Council and Department of Canadian Heritage threatens NASOs' ability to execute long-range development and collaborative projects (e.g. delays experienced by Arts Leadership Network).

3.2 Findings: Policy Development and Advocacy

3.2.1 Strengths

- By developing membership positions on policy issues, NASOs equip artists and arts organizations with more knowledgeable advocacy tools and greater influence over the public policy process.
- NASOs provide a focal point for governments, cultural agencies, educational institutions and the media to communicate with, and receive input from, specific sectors within the arts community.
- Ottawa-based NASOs are well-positioned to monitor and influence federal government and its agencies (CCA, CAPACOA, CARFAC, Canadian Museums Association).
- Other NASOs employ Ottawa government-relations experts as consultants to guide their advocacy strategies (ACP, Canadian Magazine Publishers Association).

- NASOs collaborate across disciplines on broad issues (CCA Chalmers Conference; Book Industry Group) and on single issues (Bill C-20 on child pornography).
- Some NASOs' "federal" structures facilitate national consensus-building (IMAA, ACP, CARFAC).
- NASOs increasingly use strategic-planning processes to identify organizational missions, advocacy goals and means of achieving them (CCA, CDA, Orchestras Canada, PACT, TWUC).
- NASOs' advocacy has achieved establishment of government policies and programs in support of creation, production and dissemination of the arts (ACP, ANEL, CAPACOA, IMAA, TWUC, UNEQ).
- NASOs' advocacy has raised the national profile, legal status, and negotiating position of artists and cultural workers and producers by achieving legal recognition from the Canadian Artists and Producers Professional Relations Tribunal as collective-bargaining agents (Playwrights' Union of Canada, UNEQ, TWUC, Le Regroupement des artistes en arts visuels du Québec, CARFAC, Union des artistes, etc.).
- NASOs encourages greater presence for Canadian content in educational system and distribution networks (CQT, UNEQ, TWUC).
- NASOs are developing greater political sophistication and effectiveness advocating members' interests to federal government and the media (CCA, ACP, IMAA, CMA).
- NASOs have developed strong and effective use of Web technology for advocacy purposes (ANEL, IMAA, UNEQ).

3.2.2 Weaknesses

- Insufficient financial and human resources undermine timely policy development and adoption of effective advocacy tools.
- Lack of resources limits travel to and presence in Ottawa for advocacy purposes (PACT, TWUC).
- Lack of resources for travel and translation undermines opportunities for fostering exchange and consensus-building on policy issues and advocacy between linguistic communities (Artexte, CARFAC, CDA, RQD, IMAA, CQT, PACT).

- Lack of resources forces trade-offs between advocacy work and P.D. (ATFC, PACT, Opera.Ca, CARFAC).
- Outside of francophone Quebec, NASOS lack resources to advocate effectively at provincial as well as federal level (IMAA, CARFAC).
- NASOs representing arts organizations have difficulty fundraising in private sector because of unwillingness to compete with members' fundraising efforts (Orchestras Canada, PACT).

3.2.3 Opportunities

- By extending and becoming more effective in advocacy work, NASOs have potential to attract larger membership, hence greater revenue-base and public funding.
- Accessing resources for AGM costs and travel would involve more members in policy development and advocacy activities, strengthening outcomes.
- NASOs could attract and maintain stronger member participation in advocacy activities through enhanced board and volunteer development.
- NASOs could acquire greater advocacy expertise by retaining government-relations consultants.
- Advocacy experience and expertise could be shared more fully a) among NASOs, b) between linguistic communities, and c) across disciplines.
- Enhanced advocacy results are possible from greater collaboration between NASOs within broad sectors (performing arts; writing & publishing; visual arts and new media), and from greater collaboration between NASOs from different linguistic communities.
- Enhanced results are possible from deploying outstanding, high-profile artists and companies in support of advocacy initiatives.

3.2.4 Threats

- Lack of financial and human resources increases danger of burnout and rapid turnover by NASO staff and board members.
- Insecurity over continuation of NASO operating grants hastens staff turnover, destabilizes organizations.

- Lack of funding for members’ travel to AGMs limits participation in policy development and advocacy, weakening outcomes.
- Insufficient financial and human resources limit policy issues that can be addressed, deprives NASOs of ability to influence policy-making and political process.
- Lack of ability by NASOs to advocate provincially increases fragmentation of cultural policy, isolation of provincial associations.
- Some government programs may be politically motivated, rather than designed in NASO members’ best interests.
- Cultural agencies may choose to minimize importance of NASOs’ policy positions and advocacy efforts, weakening members’ influence over policies and programs that affect them.

3.3 Findings: NASOs’ Relationship with the Canada Council for the Arts

3.3.1 Relationship from the NASOs’ Viewpoint

While seeking to meet members’ needs and expectations for high-quality professional development and advocacy services, NASOs must operate within an increasingly complex professional and public-sector environment.

Like other organizations today, NASOs inhabit a world of instantaneous communications generated by electronic technology. They also interact with an increasing plethora of government policymakers, programs and regulations engaged with arts and culture. These realities result in accelerated demands on NASOs’ small secretariats and volunteer boards, with their limited resources. Staff and board members must be extremely well-informed, must be timely and pro-active in communicating with members, government and the media, and must be increasingly results-oriented in their work.

Even though NASOs employ dedicated professional staff, the resulting stresses are a major factor behind the staff and board burnout cited earlier. These issues have been documented with greater thoroughness by the Canadian Conference for the Arts project, “Creative Management in the Arts and Heritage: Sustaining and Renewing Professional Management for the 21st Century.” Although that project, carried out in consultation with the Cultural Human Resources Council, is concerned with the broader not-for-profit arts and heritage community, its findings are highly applicable to NASOs. The project report “A Proposed Action Plan for Creating Winning Conditions” can usefully be read in reference to NASOs, especially regarding the importance it places on more “healthy and humane” workplaces and human-resource policies. The report makes clear that

enhanced professional development, training and remuneration are necessary to attract the next generation of cultural managers.

Although money is not the only solution to the challenges facing NASOs, it is part of the solution. And indeed, new money is now available through the various arts programs established at the Department of Canadian Heritage in the past three years: the Capacity Building, Creative Spaces and Arts Presentation programs. Depending on their discipline, some NASOs are in a position to access one or more of these programs for certain aspects of their activities: e.g. the Capacity Building program, which provides short-term grants for raising revenues from other sources. Other NASOs, such as those in book and magazine publishing, may access project funding for professional development, research and other purposes from the Department of Canadian Heritage programs for those cultural industries.

But for purposes of core funding for operations – the undramatic but essential functions of keeping the doors open, the lights on and the staff paid – most NASOs continue to look to their original source of public support, the Canada Council. The Council also continues to be perceived as offering the most experienced, knowledgeable, committed and sustained arts programs at the federal level, free of political influence. For these reasons, NASOs still regard their relationship with the Council as critical to their survival and success.

That regard varies in nature and intensity according to a NASO's discipline, membership base, access to other revenue sources, and historical stability.

Associations representing individual artists can, practically speaking, levy far lower membership fees than those representing arts organizations. Visual artists, playwrights or writers may be more numerous than art galleries, theatres or publishers, but they cannot afford to pay nearly as much for the privilege of membership. NASOs representing creators keep fees low and are loath to raise them for fear of losing members. This fact makes a group like CARFAC particularly dependent on its Canada Council operating grant.

In other instances, a discipline may historically have experienced difficulties maintaining a NASO. Such difficulties may have financial, administrative, personnel or other causes. This has been true of dance in English-speaking Canada. The current Canadian Dance Assembly (CDA), representing classical ballet, modern and other dance companies, was preceded by two other national organizations that struggled greatly. Currently, the CDA too is struggling hard to build its membership to a viable level and to staff its basic operations. Other NASOs have a better-established membership and revenue base, and a longer history of viability.

Thus NASOs with which the Council deals are at very different stages of development and organizational and financial stability. As cited in section 1.3, dance and visual artists' associations suffered when the Council eliminated NASO operating grants in 1996. The impact of the Council's decision was debilitating for all NASOs, but

particularly damaging for those in a fragile state. Members of those associations suffered severe disruption in all services, including professional development and advocacy.

When Council operating grants were restored in 1999 and put on a multi-year basis, NASOs' financial stability and planning capacity improved considerably. In some disciplines, however, a sense of insecurity remains. Some NASO administrators expressed concern in interviews about the Council's continuing commitment to providing operating grants, particularly if a new government should require program cuts across the federal system to finance other priorities, as happened in 1995. This concern was expressed most strongly by Quebec-based NASOs.

Clearly, stable and predictable revenues to pay for core operating expenses are essential to a NASO's effectiveness. This includes its ability to offer quality professional development and training services, to conduct effective advocacy activities, and to provide the Council with sound advice based on a thorough canvassing of members' views. The following conundrum illustrates the interdependence of the Council and NASOs: if the Council (or some other dedicated source) does not ensure the health of NASOs' core operations, it can scarcely expect to receive well-researched, meaningful information and advice, or constructive, consensus-based collaboration on policy questions.

Many NASO representatives interviewed stressed the importance of two-way communication to a healthy relationship between themselves and the Council. Communication, they emphasized, should flow more constantly and effortlessly than it sometimes does, and in both directions. The Council should not only use NASOs as a conduit for disseminating program information to clients, but should consult them more fully on policy changes and keep them better informed generally: e.g., on the reasons for granting decisions, or on forthcoming changes to the Council's budget or funding practices for the discipline.

Some interviewees felt that the Council can create a stronger advocate for its own role in arts support – vis-à-vis Parliamentarians, the government and the media – if it forges closer links with the arts community through NASOs. The Council and NASOs should work together, in this view, as mutually supportive allies. The Council can reinforce that alliance by being continually present in the arts community across the country to witness artists' working conditions and achievements.

NASO representatives varied in the degree of satisfaction with their relationship to the Council at the section level: from well satisfied to only partially satisfied. Some speculated that section policies and practices threaten their relationship with the Council: e.g. reliance by some sections on disciplinary advisory committees that are not as knowledgeable about, or representative of, the whole community as NASOs themselves.

Several NASO representatives desired greater opportunities to develop more regular and sustained contact with senior Council management. This need was especially pronounced in francophone Quebec. While Quebec representatives generally described

their relationship with the Council as working well at the level of section heads and program officers, they would prefer greater access to senior managers to improve their understanding of the milieu and its needs.

Some NASOs that access support from Department of Canadian Heritage programs for cultural infrastructure stressed a practical need for greater coordination in program objectives, criteria and funding methodology between the Council and the Department. If both are funding an organization or a major cross-disciplinary project, such as the Arts Leadership Network, it is necessary – certainly from the clients’ point of view – that they collaborate more closely to help the organization or project achieve its objectives.

Occasionally, NASO representatives acknowledged that they too can and must take greater responsibility for improved communications and more successful relationships with the Council.

3.3.2 Relationship from the Council’s Viewpoint

It would be misleading to generalize overly about the Council’s view of its relationship with NASOs. Section heads and officers responsible for administering NASO operating and project grants deal with NASOs on a regular basis. Naturally their relationships with, and approaches toward, individual NASOs vary.

Such variations are usually based on perceptions of a) an association’s ability to represent, and speak credibly for, its discipline; b) its administrative and financial capabilities; c) its effectiveness in delivering services such as professional development and training; and d) its ability to advocate the membership’s cause in the outside world. Other variations in attitude result from the nature of a section’s funding relationship to its discipline, and its policies for serving the discipline. The fact that each individual section has evolved its own approaches over the years makes these variations inevitable.

At the same time, interviews with Council staff indicate that all sections, to a greater or lesser degree, consider NASOs a valuable component of the arts infrastructure, and a needed interface between the community and the Council. As one officer put it, “We need arts service organizations. It would be very difficult to serve the milieu without them.” Indeed, services and activities such as those examined in this report would likely not exist on a discipline-wide basis without those organizations. In their absence, it would be a case of every artist for him- or herself.

It is acknowledged that, ideally at least, NASOs represent a considerable collective resource for the Council, for purposes of communication and collaborative policy development. In practice, some sections are less inclined than others to consult a NASO in the belief that its positions will adequately reflect the spectrum of views in the discipline. On a case-by-case basis, the reality often lies somewhere in-between.

In a discipline such as dance in English-speaking Canada, which has been weakened by the absence of a viable NASO, the Council may be anxious to provide the resources to help a NASO get on its feet. Those resources may be financial or human (by the provision, for example, of consulting assistance). In other cases, section heads expressed a more laissez-faire view: i.e. if a NASO has not succeeded or even emerged in a particular discipline or genre, that outcome is a matter for the community to settle, without Council interference.

Other variations in approach exist from section to section. Some sections, such as Theatre, have established an advisory committee comprising practitioners chosen by the section to provide it with policy advice from multiple perspectives. Other sections have not done so, preferring to consult NASOs in the discipline.

Similarly, some sections, such as Writing and Publishing, fund NASO operations and projects out of a cooperative projects program with its own budget and jury. Other sections fund them instead out of the same program and budget that funds arts organizations in the NASO's own membership.

3.4 A Note on Defining “National”

Officially, it is Canada Council policy to support a single NASO within a discipline that is not language-based (e.g. in music, Orchestras Canada or Opera.Ca). In language-based disciplines, however, the Council considers NASOs to be necessary and eligible for funding in both English and French (e.g. the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres and the Conseil québécois du théâtre; or the Writers' Union of Canada and l'Union des écrivaines et écrivains québécois).

Nonetheless, given the realities of the arts community, the arts market and government funding, two linguistic groups often co-exist even in non-language-based disciplines (e.g. visual arts and dance). It is not possible, or probably desirable, to resolve this seeming contradiction by Council fiat.

Provincial government funding is usually available only to provincially based ASOs. (An exception arises in the case of Ontario, which sometimes supports NASOs that include members from across the country as well.) As a result of variations in provincial funding, some provincial ASOs are better funded and resourced per capita than their national counterparts (e.g. Theatre Ontario compared to PACT).

The Council recognizes as NASOs Quebec-based francophone associations in language-based disciplines. These organizations may be funded the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec as well as by other provincial and municipal bodies. But a Quebec-based NASO wishing to become more “national” by extending services equally to English-speaking members elsewhere in Canada may be discouraged from doing so by provincial policy. At least two Quebec NASOs in non-language-based disciplines, Arttexte and the

Regroupement québécois de la danse, have shown an interest in extending their mandates to the whole country, but lack the necessary resources.

Some Quebec-based NASO representatives expressed regret in interviews that they are isolated from their peers in the rest of Canada. They seek additional resources for translation (of Web sites, newsletters, publications, documents and meetings) in order to forge closer “national” relationships. It appears that the incremental costs of translation services and travel to the other solitude represent the greatest barrier to encouraging more truly national NASOs. It is unclear how any of these contradictions could be resolved, except by more money and more flexible and inclusive policies by both federal and provincial funders.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

The above findings point to a clear need to build a stronger, more viable network of national arts service organizations across Canada, in order to:

- sustain the provision of high-quality professional services to NASO members in the artistic disciplines served by the Canada Council; and
- enhance the quality of policy advice offered by NASOs to the Council and other funding bodies.

Such a network can only be as strong as its weakest link. The findings of this report lead to the conclusion that some NASOs are far better resourced than others to fulfil their mandate; and that the Canada Council, as their primary federal funder, should contribute to reducing these discrepancies to the extent feasible, by raising the weaker associations closer to the level of the strongest.

In order to enact the appropriate measures to strengthen NASOs, the Council needs to do three things:

- collect and analyze data on NASOs now dispersed in the files of its individual sections;
- facilitate the sharing of information and ideas among NASOs, and between them and the Council; and
- stabilize NASOs’ operations by providing them with core funding to ensure a common level of basic operational services.

The following three actions are therefore recommended:

Recommendation 4.1: A NASO Databank

Before embarking on recommendations 2 and 3, the Council should assemble, systematize and analyze its considerable existing store of information about NASOs.

Compilation of a NASO databank would provide a solid foundation of knowledge to inform further policy development and funding initiatives. This would involve three steps:

1. Compiling a statistical database on all NASOs and provincial ASOs, including their membership and budgetary data and levels of public funding;
2. Developing a policy matrix systematizing support to NASOs by all levels and programs of government;
3. Coordinating, if possible, the groundrules for Council support to NASOs with those of Department of Canadian Heritage support.

Recommendation 4.2: A NASO / Canada Council Summit

It is recommended that the Council establish an annual “summit meeting” between itself and national arts service organizations. Such a meeting would address issues cited earlier in this report regarding communication, consultation, collaboration and coordination between NASOs and the Council. The meeting would represent a regularly scheduled opportunity for NASOs to exchange views with the Council, to network with each other, build strategic alliances, and share and develop best practices in the areas of:

- governance
- financial administration
- member services
- professional development and training
- audience development
- domestic and international market development
- policy development, and
- advocacy.

Such an event would:

- be convened and funded by the Council in concert with the national and bilingual Canadian Conference of the Arts
- build on the existing Chalmers Conference held by the CCA
- involve participation by all NASOs funded by the Council

- include participation by Council senior management and all disciplinary sections, as well as representatives and program officials of the Department of Canadian Heritage and other appropriate cultural agencies, and
- be flexible in theme and agenda, responding to the needs of the arts community and the Council.

Recommendation 4.3: A Dedicated Program for NASO Operating Grants

It is recommended that the Council establish a new granting program, appropriately staffed and funded, dedicated to providing multi-year operating grants to NASOs.

Informed by knowledge gathered through the NASO Databank and the NASO / Canada Council Summit, the new program would address the current disparities in Council support to NASOs currently provided by individual disciplinary sections. The program objective would be to provide a level playing field for NASO support through a common or comparable level of funding for shared-cost maintenance of core services, including but not limited to:

- a full-time executive director
- essential staff support
- a national office
- a budget for executive and board travel
- a budget for AGM travel.

The program would be appropriately staffed and funded by the Council, with an officer who would receive expert guidance from section heads and officers in each discipline. The program's base multi-year operating grants to NASOs would be supplemented by project support from the disciplinary sections, given for purposes assessed by the sections and their advisors as being particularly valuable and necessary.

Thus the new program would absorb certain funding responsibilities currently held by the disciplinary sections and the Outreach office, which awards grants for AGM travel.

APPENDIX 1

NASO REPRESENTATIVES INTERVIEWED FOR THE STUDY

In alphabetical order:

Association of Canadian Publishers (ACP)
John Pelletier, Executive Director

Association nationale des éditeurs de livres (ANEL)
Jean-Louis Fortin, directeur
Sandra Gonthier

Association des théâtres francophones du Canada (ACTFC)
Alain Doom, directeur general

Canadian Artists Representation / Front des artistes canadiens (CARFAC)
Audrey Churgin, Executive Director

Canadian Arts Presenting Association / Association canadienne des organismes artistiques (CAPACOA)
Peter Feldman, Executive Director

Canadian Conference of the Arts (CCA)
Megan Williams, Executive Director

Canadian Crafts Federation (CCF)
Roslyn Morrison, board member

Canadian Dance Assembly (CDA)
Barbara Richman, board member
Ellen Busby, board member

Centre d'information Artexxe
François Dion, directeur

Conseil québécois du théâtre (CQT)
Raymonde Gazaille, directrice générale

Independent Media Arts Alliance (IMMA)
Peter Sandmark, Executive Director
Catherine Yurkevich, staff member

Opera.Ca

Claire Hopkinson, Chair

Orchestras Canada

Dan Donaldson, Executive Director

Playwrights Canada Press

Angela Rebeiro, Executive Director (former E.D., Playwrights Guild of Canada)

Professional Association of Canadian Theatres (PACT)

Lucy White, Executive Director

Regroupement de la danse québécoise (RDQ)

Pierre-Paul Savoie, président

Louise Laplante

Lorraine Hébert

Union des écrivaines et écrivains québécois (UNEQ)

Pierre Lavoie, directeur général

Writers' Union of Canada (TWUC)

Deborah Windsor, Executive Director

Number of organizations: 18

APPENDIX 2

BIBLIOGRAPHY: REPORTS AND SPEECHES

Expert Advisory Committee on the Funding of Arts Service Organizations. *Report on the Funding of Arts Service Organizations*. Ottawa: Canadian Conference of the Arts, 1995.

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