

Canada's federal election: Opera.ca's call to action

The federal election is upon us and the question of the national government's role and contribution to arts and culture is prominent, like never before. Now is the time to seize the opportunity to ask that candidates of all parties outline and make clear their party's position on the federal investment in the arts.

It's also an opportunity to let all candidates know that the health and vibrancy of the arts and culture sector is important to Canadians from all walks of life.

This document contains:

- ✓ Background
- ✓ Our key messages
- ✓ Our call to action: what you, your board and volunteers need to do to sustain a national message and presence
- ✓ Resources:
 - Letter template
 - Useful web sites
 - Opera.ca and Canadian Arts Coalition submissions to the Standing Committee on Finance
 - Other resources

Background

Over the past couple of years, the arts sector, working together, has had a number of successes. The permanent infusion of \$30 million to the Canada Council for the Arts, as well as various provincial increases in funding to the cultural sector all speak to the need for a continued, cohesive and productive dialogue with governments.

The arts sector acknowledges the importance of this permanent \$30 million infusion to the Canada Council for the Arts and thanks the Government of Canada for this investment.

It follows though that the recent funding cuts to various arts and culture programs in federal departments are deeply disappointing. They have, however, propelled our issues and concerns into the national media.

We urge all members and friends of Opera.ca, and the Canadian opera sector, to ensure that the critical issue of public investment in the Canadian arts sector stays on the political and policy agenda. This is a non-partisan call to all parties and candidates engaged and running in this election.

Our key messages

The arts are part of Canada's economic fundamentals: Canada's creative economy contributes \$46 billion or 3.8% of Canada's GDP.

- ✓ The arts are central to the research and innovation that we all agree our country needs. Both public and private investment are required in research and innovation¹, one of the necessary fundamentals to a strong economy. The recently released Conference Board of Canada report *Valuing Culture* notes however, that government investment in the sector, as measured as a percentage of GDP, is now 0.3% lower than in 1999.
- ✓ Opera.ca analysis of federal investment in Canada's opera companies is even more striking than the overall trend. Over the past decade, the federal investment in the core operations of opera companies, as represented by support from the Canada Council for the Arts, declined from 10% to 7%, a 3% erosion.

We believe that the high quality of life, for which Canada is known, depends on a rich, vibrant and diverse arts sector.

A thriving arts and culture sector, supported by adequate investment by the federal government, will place Canada at the forefront of a global society that **values innovation, excellence, social cohesion and economic prosperity**. (Support document: Canadian Arts Coalition submission to Standing Committee on Finance; Opera.ca submission to Standing Committee on Finance).

- ✓ 93% of Canadians believe that the arts define Canada's national identity. (Source: Ipsos-Reid, Focus on the Arts 2000, Department of Canadian Heritage.)

Canadians view the arts as a centre of excellence, innovation and creative leadership in Canada and recognize that these attributes are the building blocks of an internationally competitive society.

- ✓ 91% of Canadians believe that cultural activities contribute to the competitiveness of our communities. (Source: Ipsos-Reid, Focus on the Arts 2000, Department of Canadian Heritage.)

What to do

Opera.ca remains committed to, and in an active leadership role with, the Canadian Arts Coalition. We urge you to go to www.canadianartscoalition.ca and sign up as a supporter. Visit regularly as initiatives are planned across the country that we urge you to participate in.

Recognizing that it is important for the Canadian arts sector to speak in unison, delivering a unified, cohesive and coherent message, the Canadian Arts Coalition has established a system of

¹ Advantage Canada, p. 18.

regional captains in provinces and centres across Canada. Several members of Opera.ca are contributing in this way. Please contact the regional captain in your centre to ensure your opera company contributes to this national initiative.

There are also a number of actions you, your company and the artists and volunteers you work with can take to keep arts on the agenda:

At a minimum, we ask you to undertake one initiative, ideally with members of your board.

- ✓ Ask **each board member** to write a letter to the candidates in their riding, Ask the candidates of all parties to outline their position on federal investment in the arts:
 - What is your position on the arts in Canada? What is the federal government's role?
 - What is your party's position on the arts in Canada?
 - If elected what would you do to advance the arts and culture sector in Canada.

You could hold a letter writing session at your next board meeting, or email a template to your board members. There is a template at www.opera.ca.

- ✓ Encourage artists and your staff to write to the all the candidates running for election in your community. Ask them the same questions outlined above.
- ✓ Stay connected to, and sign up as a supporter of, the Canadian Arts Coalition.
- ✓ Actively engage in events and initiatives in your community designed to keep arts and culture on the national agenda. This could be a news conference, a meeting with candidates or an open letter.

In your correspondence and communication with candidates, please identify yourself as a member of Opera.ca and the Canadian Arts Coalition.

Please ensure there is no perception of favouritism or partisanship in your correspondence or initiatives. Our objective is to put and keep arts and culture on the agenda in a constructive fashion, ensuring that we can work with the Government that is duly elected on 14 October.

Resources

[Opera.ca Brief to the Standing Committee on Finance](#)

[Canadian Conference for the Arts](#)

[The Conference Board of Canada: Compendium of Research Papers: The International Forum on the Creative Economy](#)

[Canadian Arts Coalition](#)

[Imagine Canada tipsheet](#)

Opera.ca letter template to all candidates

Please make this “*your*” letter. Note your involvement in the opera sector and the arts generally. Please don’t send a cookie-cutter version of this template.

Write to the candidates of all the major parties in your riding. If you’re not sure how to reach them, www.cbc.ca/canadavotes has excellent information on each riding and the candidates running in them (including contact data).

Please keep your letter respectful and non-partisan. Our objective is to ensure that all candidates are aware that cultural issues, and the federal government’s role in it, are important to voters in their riding.

Ask friends and neighbours to contact the candidates in your riding as well on this issue. Please copy Opera.ca (c.c. or b.c.c. on your letters)

Key points for the letter

Dear Mr./Ms/Dr.

- ✓ Arts and culture are important to me as a Canadian citizen and voter. **Note your involvement with the sector, as a board member/volunteer/artists/audience member etc.**
- ✓ I share the views of Opera.ca and the Canadian Arts Coalition that greater public investment in the arts is essential to Canada’s future. The high quality of life, for which Canada is known, depends on a rich, vibrant and diverse arts and heritage community. A thriving arts and culture sector, supported by adequate investment by the federal government, will place Canada at the forefront of a global society that values innovation, excellence, social cohesion and economic prosperity.
- ✓ This letter is to request your views and party’s policies on arts and culture in Canada. In particular, I would appreciate understanding your position on the role of federal investment in the arts sector and the measures you would champion to ensure a thriving arts sector for the benefit of all Canadians.
- ✓ If elected as the Member of Parliament for our riding, what would you do to advance the arts and culture sector in Canada?
- ✓ I appreciate your time in addressing my request. I would also welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter with you in more depth, including introducing you to our company and role we play in our community and the Canadian arts sector and economy generally.

Sincerely,