

July 1, 2024

Dear Councillor,

All great and desirable municipalities attract potential residents by the value attributed to quality activities such as arts and culture and creative industries. The sector's economic impact has been proven as an animating driver of tourism, investment and elevated profile as compared to municipalities that treat creative initiatives as tokenism.

As a prior eight year member of the Arts Advisory Commission (AAC), four of which as a representative of the Arts Funding Task Force that developed the City Enrichment Fund (CEF), I have watched with dismay as the overall objective to create an accessible, fair and equitable funding process was transformed into a burdensome set of criteria that required so much time and professional expertise to document that, contrary to the original intent, imposed multiple barriers to accessibility and equity.

Additionally, due to a misguided adjudication process with little thought applied to recruitment and orientation of adjudicators representative of all artistic disciplines, an ad hoc process that is no more than a surface nod to other funding body processes, community groups have been subjected to inconsistent and pejorative adjudication, depending on the particular year's adjudicator's personal preferences.

I have witnessed groups receiving grades across the spectrum from A to C from one year to the next for the same applications describing the same activities. The adjudication process has proven to be a 'moving target.' The result is that groups are unevenly graded and as a result funding is inconsistent and unreliable.

What we need is to understand is that the "grading" rationale, of A, B, C, etc. is fundamentally flawed. How can we imagine that 3 or 4 individuals privately recruited by city staff, with a varying level of knowledge, expertise, and interests, would have the ability to accurately grade the value of one group against another based on information provided by a writer who may also have a varying level and expertise to actually represent a group's activities. This rationale is a slippery slope built on a sandpit, and fundamentally flawed.

Groups should not be graded; they should be supported. All groups impact the community through their own focus; we should not pit organizations of different ilks in a competitive environment, comparing apples to oranges. It makes little sense unless we view and treat our community groups as peripheral and simply brush them off through a system of tokenism.

How do we achieve an accessible, fair and equitable process?

We apply a formula that results in a fair percentage of funding without the need for competition and flawed grading. We throw out the grading system. We allow groups to represent themselves as they choose. We look at organizational budgets, support from other government funders, foundations, partners. We look to funding larger or more impactful groups based on a percentage of their operating budgets. Smaller groups may require a greater percentage of funding however actual dollar amounts would be lower. In other words, we are exacting and detail oriented, but not through demanding an organization defend their value and existence, we need to understand that this is a given, and instead focus on how best to be fair, equitable, and accessible in our system of support.

Thank you for your time, attention, and considered thought,

J. Radman