



Making a difference...together

Capital Regional District

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The Honorable Lana Popham
Minister of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Dear Minister Popham:

RE: BC ARTS COUNCIL'S REGIONAL AREAS POLICY

I am writing to you in my role as Chair of the Arts Commission at the Capital Regional District (CRD) to ask you to repeal or modify the BC Arts Council's "Regional Areas" policy. This policy is creating substantial barriers for the capital region's arts sector. The name of this policy implies a general goal to treat regions more equally, yet the policy excludes and deprioritizes the capital region and greater Vancouver from BC Arts Council funding. The BC Arts Council's website glossary states:

Regional Areas: For the purposes of BC Arts Council grants and funding priorities, regional areas are considered as those outside of the capital region and greater Vancouver.

In practice, this policy is not about regional distribution; it is about penalizing arts in urban areas.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, this policy had relatively little impact on arts in the capital region, as the BC Arts Council and Province of BC focused on relief funding to keep the arts sector solvent. This funding was immensely helpful to the arts sector and the Province did a fantastic job distributing it in a timely, effective, and equitable manner. In recent years, however, the "Regional Areas" policy has had a significant detrimental effect on the arts sector in the capital region:

- In 2022-23, Operating Grants to arts organizations in the capital region received a **combined reduction of \$113,410 or 7.7%** of all operating funding (see Appendix A).
 - Arts organizations across the province (which received more than \$75,000) were cut by 10%, but only those outside of the capital region and greater Vancouver (or part of other designated priority groups) had the opportunity to have that funding restored or even increased in the same intake — and most did.
 - The net effect of this policy action was to pull support from arts organizations in the capital region at a time when inflationary pressures were already squeezing margins on operating budgets and making it difficult to maintain service levels.
- Arts organizations from the capital region (and greater Vancouver) are **ineligible to apply to the Accelerate Pilot Program**, unlike every other area of BC. This excludes several exemplary, fast-growing arts organizations in the capital region from applying for this much-needed organizational development funding.

- The BC Arts Council also recently announced that no new applicants for Operating Grants would be considered in 2024-25 and 2025-26. This, together with the exclusion from the Accelerate Pilot Program, means there is no opportunity over the next three years for organizations in the capital region to advance from project to operating funding. This removes provincial support for the development of the arts sector in the capital region in a way that is not true for other regions of BC.
- **The “Regional Areas” policy is a cross-cutting lens that applies to every BC Arts Council granting program, including grants to organizations and individuals.** In every area of support, artists and arts organization from the capital region are being treated differently from those in other areas of BC.
 - By excluding or relegating the consideration of applicants from the capital region, the BC Arts Council is actively discouraging adjudicators from providing funding to this key region of BC. This policy is structured to force adjudicators to score and rank these applications lower, which puts them at a major disadvantage in competitive granting programs where grant awards are determined through comparative evaluation.

The capital region and greater Vancouver are treated in the same way by this policy, which is both unexplained and unwarranted. The capital region has a population one-sixth the size of greater Vancouver, a different demographic profile, and an arts sector that is in a different stage of development. The capital region, including the District of Saanich itself, includes large swaths of rural areas. It is important to recognize that the situation in the capital region is very different than that of greater Vancouver.

The BC Arts Council states that its vision is to “... strive to ensure that artists and cultural organizations in British Columbia are well-supported, thriving and able to reach their full potential under principles of equity, diversity, accessibility, and reconciliation”. That goal cannot be achieved by cutting back funding to vibrant clusters of artists and arts organizations. The professional arts sector is an industry concentrated in urban areas, just as other industries (forestry and mining, for instance) are often concentrated in rural areas. Urban areas can leverage arts funding to achieve impact most because that’s where most artists and creators work and reside, and ultimately, artists and creators are the engines driving arts and culture.

In addition, arts and culture are significant economic and visitor industry drivers, so investing in the arts in the capital region is a tremendous opportunity to grow tourism with year-round attractions and amplify the economic impact of these cross-pollinating sectors.

Let me provide a real-world example of the known effects of the “Regional Areas” policy. Wonderheads Theatre [tours its productions throughout BC](#) and beyond, benefitting audiences across the province with its innovative blend of full mask theatre. It was a recent addition to Operating Grants at the CRD Arts and Culture Support Service due to its tremendous growth and widespread impact. But because of the “Regional Areas” policy, Wonderheads Theatre will not be eligible for the BC Arts Council’s Accelerate Pilot Program because it is headquartered in the capital region. There are many other artists and organizations in a similar position to Wonderheads Theatre that are excluded or relegated to secondary or no consideration for funding due to the fact their contact address happens to be in the capital region, despite their depth and breadth of their impact.

The council of the BC Arts Council plays an important role as an advisory group; however, the responsibility for the effects of this policy ultimately resides with the political leadership. As the BC Arts Council is not an incorporated organization but rather a branch of the ministry, you have the legal authority to approve or modify BC Arts Council policies and grant funding awards.

The CRD Arts Commission urges you to consider changes to the “Regional Areas” policy. Here is a list of options we propose to address the issues created by this policy in order of preference:

- Recommended option: **Repeal this policy and allow all regions of BC to apply in a way where artists and arts organizations across BC all have equal access and equal priority for funding from the BC Arts Council.**
- Alternative Option #1: Enter a partnership with the Capital Regional District whereby the CRD distributes \$1.5 million per year of provincial funding to ameliorate the effects of the “Regional Areas” policy for as long as it is in effect and re-invest in vibrant cultural clusters.
- Alternative Option #2: Remove the capital region from the “Regional Areas” policy as the situation in this region of BC is not similar to that of greater Vancouver.
- Alternative Option #3: Do not exclude arts organizations from the capital region from applying to the Accelerate Pilot Program and conduct further research on how to better support cultural clusters.

For background, the CRD Arts Commission supports artists and arts organizations across the capital region through arts grants, convening, and arts advocacy. In 2023, the CRD Arts Commission distributed \$2.6 million in funding to 93 organizations activating a broad array of professional and community arts. We also convened an Arts Champions Summit, which contributed to our new strategic plan to grow the arts sector in this key area of BC.

Investments by the Province of BC are essential for artists and arts organizations in the capital region to develop as a sector and deliver arts events to the public. These relatively small investments have a major multiplier effect in generating social and economic benefits in the capital region through its vibrant local and tourism-driven economies.

I respectfully request that you to reconsider the “Regional Areas” policy and place artists and arts organizations from the capital region on a level playing field with artists and art organizations from other regions of BC.

Sincerely,



Marianne Alto
Chair, CRD Arts Commission

cc: The Honourable, David Eby, Premier and M.L.A. Vancouver – Point Grey
BC Arts Council
Local councils and cultural services staff