



2022 – 2026 Strategic Plan

Guelph Arts Council

June 2022

CONTENTS

- 1. STRATEGIC CONTEXT 3
 - 1.1. How We’ve Grown 3
 - 1.2. Advocating for Arts & Culture 4
- 2. STRATEGIC FOUNDATIONS 5
 - 2.1. Mission 5
 - 2.2. Vision 5
 - 2.3. Values 5
- 3. STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS 6
 - 3.1. Strategic Direction: Focused, Impactful Advocacy 7
 - 3.2. Strategic Direction: Communicating Who We Are and What We Do 8
 - 3.3. Strategic Direction: Ensuring Operational Resiliency 9
 - 3.4. Strategic Direction: Committing to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion 11
- 4. APPENDIX: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT 13
 - 4.1. Why Engage? 14
 - 4.2. Engagement Process 15
 - 4.3. Common Themes 16

1. Strategic Context

1.1. How We've Grown

Guelph Arts Council (“GAC”) was one of Ontario’s first community arts councils. Well positioned in Guelph’s strong creative community, GAC has served as a community resource and cultural hubs for artists and arts groups for the past 47 years. Day to day, GAC supports the endeavours of Guelph’s artists and advocates for the role and benefit of the arts for both individuals and the broader community.

“Thank you for offering opportunities for people to connect and for continuing to grow the organization itself as we move forward in an ever-changing environment.”

After almost five decades operating in the cultural heart of Guelph, GAC is proud to have supported countless artists, arts groups, and arts and cultural initiatives across the Guelph-Wellington region. More recently, GAC became one of the arts councils to form a new association of municipal and regional arts councils, artists networks, and community-based cultural councils.

“The Alliance of Art Councils of Ontario (AACO) provides professional support, knowledge sharing, information and other resources to its members, advocates on behalf of its members and the artists and arts organizations that they serve, and provides recommendations on government policy and

programs at both the federal and provincial level. AACO is dedicated to building a strong, sustainable, inclusive and responsive arts environment in the province of Ontario.”

Through its membership in the AACO, GAC remains actively engaged in the operations and evolutions of arts councils in Ontario. In this capacity, GAC is able to integrate AACO advocacy efforts and knowledge sharing into its future planning.

1.2. **Advocating for Arts & Culture**

Ontario has a diverse, innovative, and thriving arts and culture landscape. Artists and arts organizations, however, are struggling to receive sustainable support. Arts councils in Ontario are facing a range of compounding factors that encumber their ability to support the creative community.

Funding Art & Culture

Support for the arts in Ontario has long since operated on a mixed model of public and private funding. As such, non-profit arts organizations, such as arts councils, must balance the burden of identifying and vying for a limited pool of available funds.

According to a 2013 Canada Council for the Arts, Canadian Arts Data Report, the ratio of revenues for 75 artist-run centres in the visual and media arts was **73% public, 16% private, and 11% earned.**

This balancing act means arts councils must find ways to attract and/or qualify for divergent streams of funding. In short, taking steps to ensure they are eligible for grant funding, while also appealing to the public for their philanthropy. This poses a significant draw on the capacity and resources of smaller organizations.

2. Strategic Foundations

2.1. Mission

Championing and growing opportunities for Guelph's creative community through communications, resources for learning, and cultural programs and partnerships.

2.2. Vision

To cultivate a vibrant city that integrates the arts into all community building.

2.3. Values

Our values are rooted in our belief in the intrinsic value of artists and the arts, and their ability to inspire positive transformation for individuals and communities.

We value:

Advocacy: *We champion artists' rights and freedom of expression.*

Creativity: *We believe creativity enriches the human experience.*

Community: *We believe the arts are an essential part of vibrant, sustainable communities.*

Inclusiveness: *We support and respect all artistic endeavours and embrace diversity, accessibility, integrity, and a role for the arts in affecting social change.*

Collaboration: *We believe collaboration builds stronger communities.*

3. Strategic Directions

An effective strategic plan sets the foundation for a clear and focused future, uniting the organization under a common purpose and strategy.

Our strategic plan is given shape by our strategic directions, which provide clear focus and direction while still allowing us to respond and adapt as circumstances evolve over the coming years.

Each of our strategic directions include a corresponding set of tangible commitments.

Taken together, our strategic directions and commitments will provide a strong framework for developing annual operational plans with measurable goals and achievable objectives.

3.1. Strategic Direction: Focused, Impactful Advocacy

The Guelph arts community needs a strong and passionate advocate. For years, GAC has been providing support and resources for artists and creatives in the Guelph region. Now, leveraging its position in the community, GAC is seeking to increase its capacity to advocate for improved funding and opportunities for artists and creatives in Guelph.

The Guelph community needs artists, and Guelph artists need support. The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically impacted the livelihoods and careers of artists, and the art sector risks losing talented creatives. We recognize that artists need both financial support and allyship. Support for the arts community must incorporate sustained efforts to advance the role and importance of arts in the community, while providing sustainable and accessible funding opportunities.

Like many others, as a small non-profit, GAC operates with finite financial resources. We will take a creative, multi-faceted approach to our advocacy. Where our financial capacity is limited, we will find creative and innovative ways to fulfill the needs of Guelph's artists. We commit to continued advocacy for artists across the region, including representation of their needs to the City of Guelph and other key funding sources.

Related Commitments

Over the next four years, we are focused on being impactful advocates for artists in the Guelph community by ...

- **Advocating for Flow Through Funding:** Leveraging our existing relationship with the City of Guelph to advocate for an agreement that enables us to administer sustainable and accessible flow through funding to artists and arts organizations.
- **Maintaining a Strong Community Presence:** Showing our support for artistic endeavours by attending events, raising awareness for new and

exciting projects, and advocating for the importance of the arts in our community.

- **Amplifying Artists’ Voices:** Acting as a united voice for the arts through strategic, consistent advocacy. Where decisions are being made about the role of arts in the community, GAC will represent the needs, concerns, and interests of local artists.
- **Building a Strong and Resilient Arts Community:** Positioning GAC as the “go-to” place for artists, supported through impactful programming and strategic advocacy efforts.

3.2. **Strategic Direction:** Communicating Who We Are and What We Do

To be an effective resource for the Guelph artist community, we must clearly communicate who we support and how we support them. From our promotion of the works of Guelph artists, we know we can be strong communicators. Now is the time to apply these skills to how we talk about ourselves, to share all that GAC has to offer with new and existing audiences.

We have worked hard to build an established communications infrastructure and a team of strong communicators. Capitalizing on this foundation, GAC will reexamine, re-evaluate, and reinvigorate the way that we speak about ourselves. We will be clear and consistent in our communications as to who we aim to be, who we serve, and why we exist. Strong branding will enable us to set clear expectations and be an effective and reliable resource for the Guelph artistic community.

Related Commitments

*Over the next four years, we are **communicating who we are and what we do by**...*

- **Defining “Who We Are”:** Ensuring a clear understanding of who we are, what we seek to offer to the community, and the role we want to play in supporting the Guelph arts community.
- **Defining “Who We Serve”:** Acknowledging that the arts community is diverse – and with that, so are its needs – we will be clear about the types of art and artists we have the capacity and resources to best serve, as well as our geographic and demographic boundaries.
- **Sharing & Promoting:** Consistently promoting our work to new and existing audiences, including clear and concise updates on how GAC can support artists and arts organizations.
- **Continuing to Raise Awareness and Visibility for the Arts:** Acting as an amplifier for news, events, and updates from and within the arts community.

3.3. **Strategic Direction: Ensuring Operational Resiliency**

Sustainability and longevity are paramount in our ability to continue as a strong and effective resource for the arts community. We recognize it is crucial to establish the operational infrastructure that can support responsive growth—growth that enables us to support artists with essential funding and granting opportunities.

We also know that our strength doesn't only come from inside our organization. As part of the Guelph community, building our capacity also requires leveraging the strengths of our partners.

As a small non-profit in a habitually underfunded sector, we understand that taking a measured and sustainable way forward is our best approach. We know that to address the evolving needs of the Guelph arts community, as we transition out of the COVID-19 pandemic, we will need resiliency and

attentiveness. This means taking care of our staff and volunteers, ensuring our short- and long-term financial stability, and integrating a sustainable model for growth.

Related Commitments

*Over the next four years, we are committing to **ensuring organizational resiliency** by ...*

- **Evaluating & Prioritizing Sustainable Funding:** Evaluating our existing funding sources to ensure staff time and energy is used most effectively, to support increased diversification, and to recognize gaps that could be supported by mutually beneficial relationships with private, public, and corporate sources.
- **Prioritizing Right Size Planning:** Ensuring that we are not operating beyond our means by taking the time to turn great ideas into great resources and evaluating their impact on GAC's capacity along the way.
- **Engaging in Responsive Programming:** Ensuring an intentional, purposeful approach to programming, in a way that is responsive to the needs of the community. We recognize that we can best serve Guelph artists by offering high-quality, consistent programming, and that in some instances, this may mean saying goodbye to existing programs to make way for new ones.
- **Leveraging Partnerships & Collaboration:** Capitalizing on Guelph's active arts community to expand our partnerships and collaboration efforts—allowing us to offer resources and programs without increasing the burden on our organizational capacity, while supporting local organizations and bolstering the connectivity of the arts sector.
- **Exploring Membership Models:** Reviewing and critically assessing our existing membership model, while seeking to understand its impact and value add for GAC and for GAC members.

3.4. Strategic Direction: Committing to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

We commit to ensuring that at GAC, the arts are for everyone. We will work to make GAC an increasingly inclusive, welcoming, and safe space, where those we serve feel represented in our work. This includes working with and creating opportunities for marginalized voices throughout our organization. We will be taking measures to engage communities that are disproportionately under-represented in our audiences and stakeholders.

We deeply value and appreciate the power of the arts and see the opportunity we have as an arts council to initiate positive change in the Guelph community and beyond. We recognize that artists and creatives in our community are doing meaningful work to build a culture of inclusivity, and we acknowledge our role as an arts council in promoting and furthering these efforts.

We also acknowledge that DEI work is both a journey and a continuous practice. We are committed to moving forward along this path with intention, authenticity and receptivity, understanding that we won't get it right every time. We will, however, consistently keep focused and learn from our mistakes. We seek to increase our knowledge and capacity through meaningful relationship-building, pursue effective engagement with traditionally marginalized groups, and address areas of underrepresentation in GAC's audiences, membership and communications.

Related Commitments

*Over the next four years, we are **committing to diversity, equity and inclusion** by ...*

- **Consciously Communicating:** Ensuring our communications not only represent and include equity deserving groups, but that they actively reach and engage the diverse population of the Guelph-Wellington community.

- **Establishing Connections:** Committing to meaningful collaborative and supportive relationship building, with a focus on collaboration with those in the community who represent and/or serve diverse populations and traditionally marginalized groups.
- **Reflecting DEI in Decision Making:** Taking steps to consider DEI in all our organizational decisions, including regular reflection and reevaluation as we move towards making GAC an increasingly inclusive and barrier-free resource for the community.
- **Amplifying with Intention:** Moving forward, we will Ensuring our efforts to promote and amplify the arts are representative of and as diverse as the art and artists within the community.

4. Appendix: Stakeholder Engagement

4.1. Why Engage?

Leadership Through Genuine Engagement

Strategic plans that provide meaningful direction over the course of their stated duration rely on an authentic engagement process, one that genuinely seeks input and allows for those invested in the success of an organization to provide ideas, input, and feedback.

Properly conducted, stakeholder engagement is in no way an abdication or devolution of leadership.

It's the opposite.

Leaders who reach out to and seek the input of the people delivering or receiving services every day are far more likely to craft future strategic directions that will resonate with those they affect, and those who must implement them.

The Multiple Purposes of Engagement



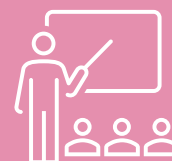
Listen

To listen to stakeholders by gathering input, ideas, and suggestions.



Include

To include stakeholders in the planning process, helping to generate buy-in.



Educate

To educate stakeholders about the great work you do.

4.2. Engagement Process

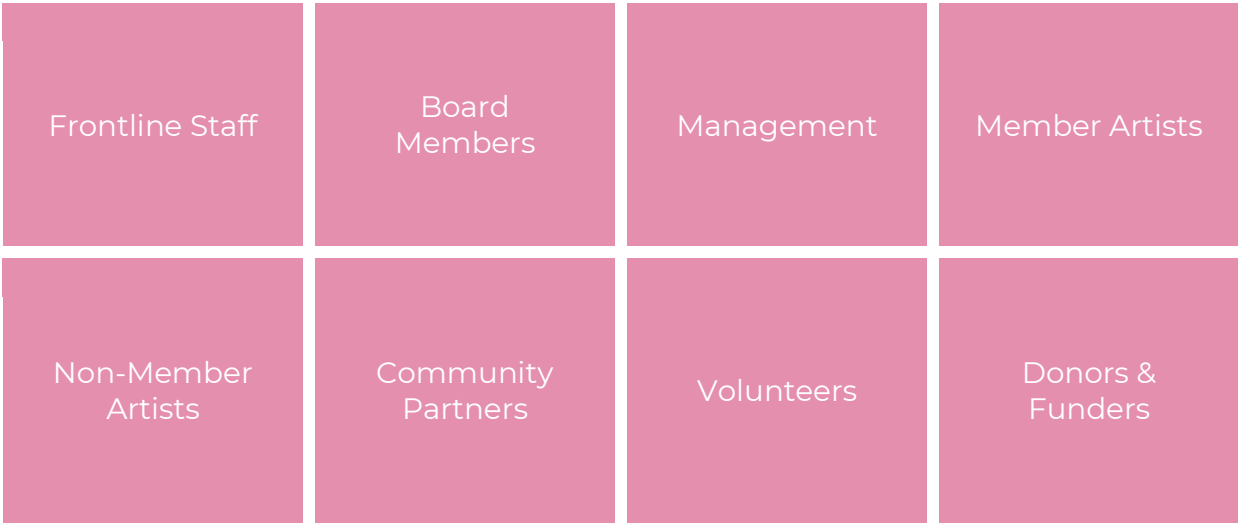
Engagement served as the foundation for the process, informing subsequent discussion, deliberation, and decision-making.

The engagement process—developed and facilitated by Laridae in March 2022—was designed to engage with and listen to the individuals who interact with Guelph Arts Council on a regular basis.

As a result of this engagement, our strategic plan is informed by experience, evidence, and the most broadly held perceptions of all those we serve.

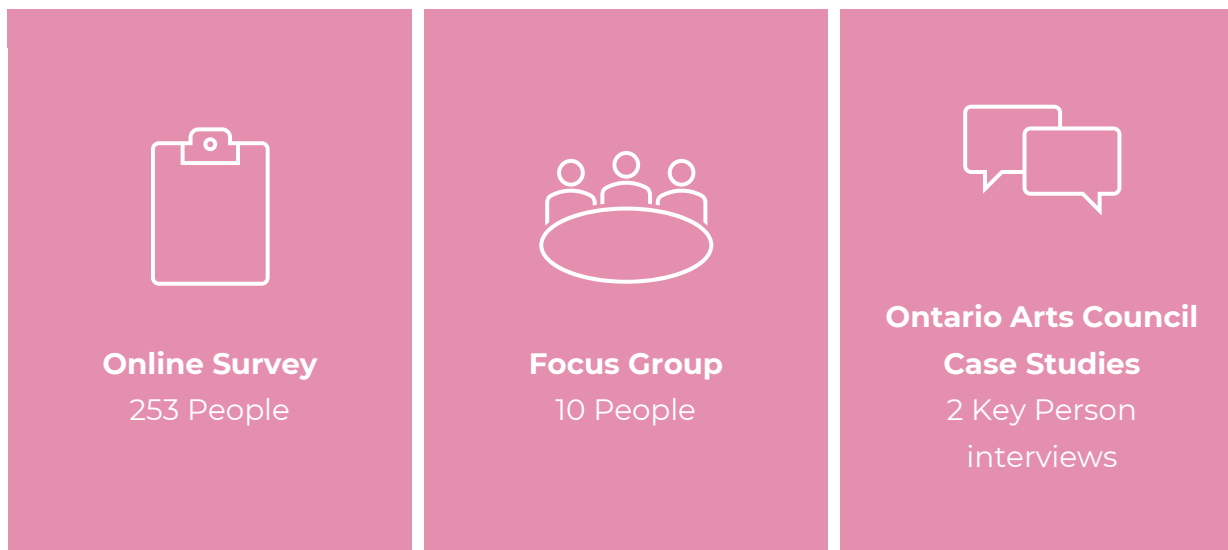
Audiences

During the engagement process, we engaged Guelph Arts Councils primary stakeholders.



Stakeholder Participation

Participation during the engagement process was enthusiastic and honest.



4.3. Common Themes

The following themes capture some of the common sentiments we heard during the stakeholder engagement process.

Perceived Areas of Strength

Communications: Stakeholders acknowledged GAC's ongoing commitment to connect the Guelph arts and creative community. They appreciated that you strive to create a network of support by sharing and amplifying voices, thus, strengthening the capacity of artists and arts organizations in the region.

Community and Engagement: Your stakeholders truly recognized GAC's important role in the Guelph arts and creative community. They shared their appreciation for GAC's ability to anticipate and respond to the needs of the

arts and creative community. They acknowledged that GAC strives to provide opportunities to artists of all levels and disciplines.

Advocacy: For the Guelph arts and creative community, advocacy is key. Stakeholders shared that GAC has understood and acknowledged their needs as artists, and represents them well. They recognized that GAC prioritises standing for artists and amplifying their voices and experiences. Overall, stakeholders felt that GAC’s work supports the endeavours of the Guelph arts and creative community.

Legacy: Your stakeholders appreciate that GAC has been a dedicated and active part of the Guelph arts and creative community for many years. They recognize that GAC strives to offer support that reflects the changing needs of artists and creatives. Stakeholders shared their intent to support GAC through new developments, opportunities and strategic shifts, in recognition of its important role as a resource for the arts and creative community.

Identified Challenges

Audience Clarity: Stakeholders identified challenges with who GAC serves. They posed questions such as, *who does GAC strive to represent in particular?* As well, *what are the boundaries of who GAC serves?* Stakeholders felt there are opportunities to clarify and clearly communicate who GAC can best support, and how it will do so.

Programming: GAC stakeholders have an appreciation for the limitations – such as funding and COVID-19 restrictions – that have been placed on GAC’s programming, however, some in the arts and creative community feel underrepresented and are would like to see increased support from their local arts council. Stakeholders expressed the importance of addressing programming gaps, i.e. accounting for the changing career trajectories of artists and those “emerging professional artists” often left behind.

Funding: Stakeholders expressed concerns that without a more structured approach to funding, GAC’s capacity to support its staff, and the community, will be limited. Member Artists, Non-Member Artists and Organizational Members expressed that access to funding and grant opportunities are critical for the growth of the arts and creative community in Guelph.

Advocacy: Stakeholders expressed that they would benefit from an increase in GAC’s strategic advocacy and lobbying. They recommended exploring ways to expand GAC’s relationship with the City to increase the council’s ability to negotiate on behalf of the arts in Guelph.

Suggested Responses

Crafting a More Robust Funding Model: Your stakeholders felt there is an opportunity to expand, diversify and systematize how GAC identifies and pursues funding opportunities. They felt this would better balance staff time and resources while improving the sustainability of GAC’s programming. Stakeholders suggested looking outward to the example of other Ontario Arts Councils that have successfully diversified revenue and funding streams.

Continue to Anticipate and Respond to the Needs of the Arts community: Your stakeholders appreciate efforts to provide programs and resources that support artists of all disciplines and career stages. Stakeholders recognized that providing effective and sustainable programming might require GAC to consolidate and/or taper current programs to be more specific to types of arts/artists.

Champion a United Voice: Your stakeholders believe there is an opportunity to leverage the existing support of the Guelph arts and creative community to create a strong network that can together advocate for increased funding, support, and opportunities for the arts community. They expressed support for GAC to act as a spokesperson for the network’s needs and interests.