

28 May 2025

To: Jennifer Jones, Director of Cultural Services, City of Peterborough
From: Katherine Carleton, chair, Arts and Culture Advisory Committee
Re: ACAC collective thinking on the Community Wellbeing Fund, report CS025-003

The members of the City of Peterborough's Arts and Culture Advisory Committee appreciate the opportunity to be consulted on report CS025-003.

We are united in our feeling that we cannot endorse it in its current iteration. We are happy to review and comment on revisions to the report before it is taken to Council, should this be of interest. But we strongly suggest that any revision of city funding programs (from small project grants to Service Agreements) follow, not precede, the adoption of the Municipal Cultural Plan. We believe that the MCP represents a once-in-a-decade opportunity to reflect on our city's goals, accomplishments, dreams and strategies in the arts and culture realm, and that it can provide all stakeholders with a holistic perspective on our shared goals and ways to achieve them. In short, any revamping of granting programs should reflect the directions set out in the MCP.

Our questions and observations:

Consultation and Research

What other consultation has taken place or will take place before the report goes to Council?

Were the grant committees consulted?

Has there been any consultation with applicants in any of the relevant sectors as this report was drafted?

Are there funding models from other municipalities that have been identified as best practices and have inspired this re-design?

If consultation and best practice research has not been undertaken, we highly recommend that it take place before the report goes to City Council.

Timing, Transitions, Budgets

What's the rationale for bringing this report forward now?

Given the significant presence of arts groups in the existing programs, and the number of as yet unanswered questions about the way that arts groups' requests will be dealt with in 2026, can you help us understand what the transition plan is? Specifically, is there, or will there be, a plan to transition arts groups from the proposed 2026 "wellbeing" program to whatever's coming in 2027?

Given the value of Investment grants awarded to arts groups in recent years (2023, \$103,728; 2024, \$115,128; 2025, \$96550), some arts groups will clearly not make the leap to the Grants to Professional Arts Organizations program proposed for 2027, as that budget allocation remains at \$60,000. Has the city – or will the city - clearly outline the criteria for determining which arts groups will be considered for funding in which category?

Has the explanation for the allocation of \$60,000 for the professional arts organizations grants program ever been found? If so, what is it? If there isn't a clear rationale for it, why does it keep coming back?

We strongly feel that budget allocations should be based on identified need; if the \$60,000 allocation is the "right" number for the proposed Professional Arts Organizations program, great! If it is potentially inadequate, this must be re-visited.

Project vs. Operating Grants

Should this report in its current form receive support from Council, it looks very much as though we'll have the following forms of support to arts and community groups available by 2027:

- Project support (with a focus on time-limited and new activities) through the Community Project Grants + Community Development Grants
- Operating support through the Grants to Professional Arts Organizations + Service Agreements.

Is that right?

There's an intimation in the report that project grants for "new activity" are inspiring and valuable, and operating grants to help sustain activity create or imply dependence and are bad. We reject this categorically.

By re-styling Community Investment Grants as Community Development Grants, and emphasizing "new initiatives", the city has done nothing to address the genuine needs and both current and potential contributions of local not for profit groups. It will be walking away from a pattern of 3-year commitments to stable and well-managed groups that have been well-assessed by the committee, and it's replacing a source of stability and strength with a kind of grants Hunger Games.

Operating funding - in many parts of the not for profit ecosystem - is a goal that groups work hard to reach, deserve and sustain. It provides them with the ability to plan long-term, deliver excellent programs, sustain employment, and generate other revenue to sustain their programming. Yet this report recommends moving away from it. Did staff consult with experts in the not for profit sector - arts and otherwise - before crafting this?

What's more, operating funding is an efficient way for the city to invest in services and activities that it is not well placed to run on its own. Rather than asking community groups to torment themselves to create new or new-seeming proposals each year, operating funding enables good groups to continue to do good work, and continually, thoughtfully evolve their programs and services to best address community needs and interests.

We know that our perception of the value of operating funding is not unique to the arts.

The report makes no real reference to Community Service Agreements - i.e. the city funding programs that consume a proportionally significant amount of the money available - and, in the new program design, seem to be the only funding area currently offering operating support. we get some help to understand the criteria by which groups are identified as suitable for Community Service Agreement status? We think this transparency is vital in any review of the city's grant and support strategies.

There's no definition of "new initiatives". (p 6 and p 8)

Is there a definition of "political affiliations" (p 7)? Does advocacy count?

With the recent discussions about cultural tourism, it's surprising to see no reference to "cultural tourism considerations" (p 9). Is it intended that there will be an equivalent funding program to the Sports Tourism program, but for culture? And if yes, where will this be articulated? Might this be a topic for the Municipal Cultural Plan?

With the programs' new focus, it makes sense to re-assign the staff liaison role (p 10); but surely only after the transition plan for arts funding has taken place?

Public consultation sessions are listed as part of the "next steps" (p 11) - but are 4th of 4 next steps on a bullet point list and follow the adoption of a report that proposes major changes based on some untested assumptions. Placed where it is, this looks less like consultation and more like education sessions for potential applicants. Is there an intention to consult, or simply to inform potential applicants?

As a group, we believe that the City of Peterborough's grants programs and processes can and must evolve and we are committed to supporting positive change. We do not feel, however, that the directions outlined in report CS025-003 represent the kind of change that we would like to see.

Thank you for your consideration.