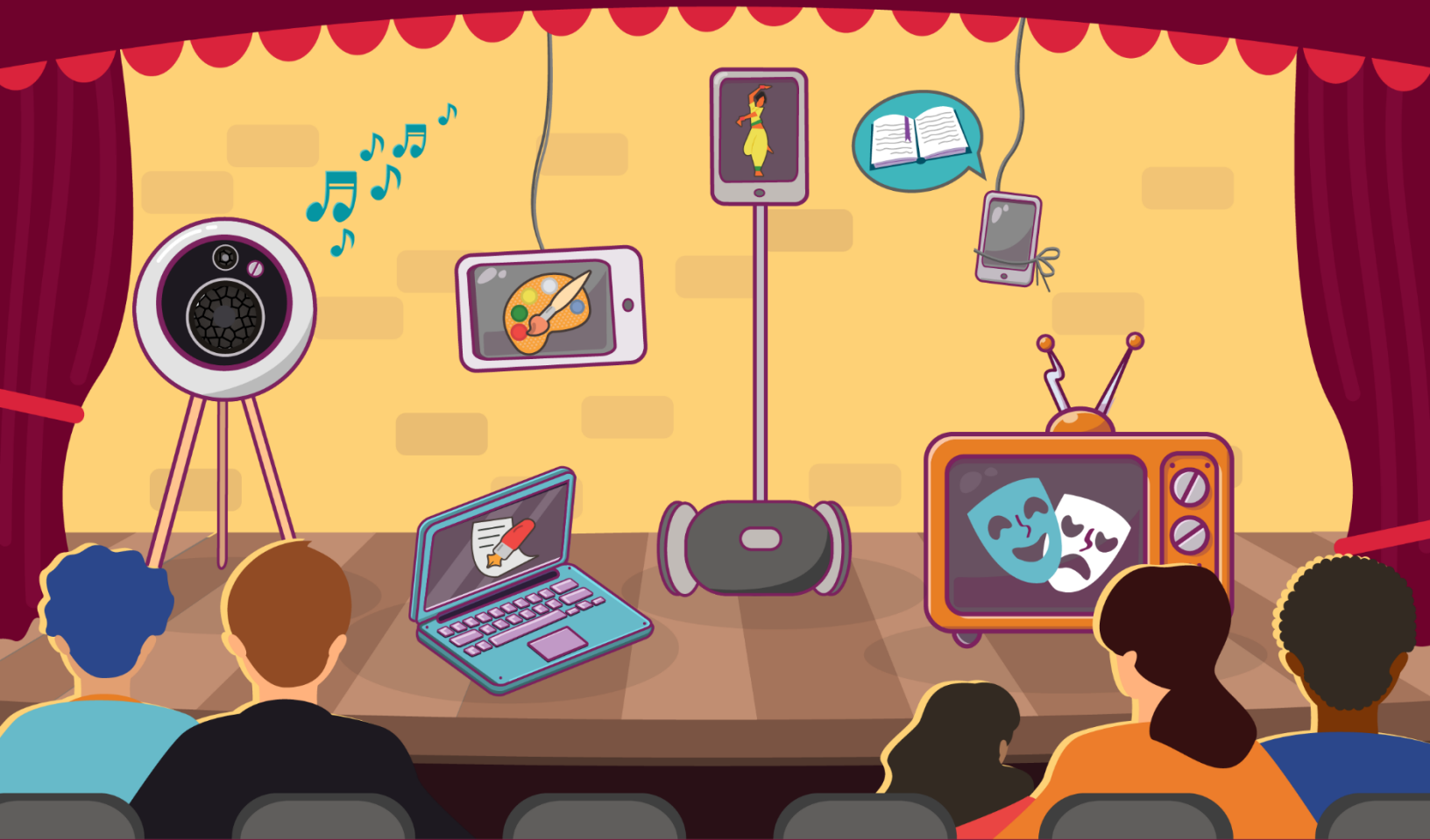


Innovation and resilience in the arts, culture, and heritage in Canada



Insights from 29 stories of artists and organizations using innovation to find resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic

PROJECT PARTNERS



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RESEARCH



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Introduction

Many artists and organizations in the arts, culture, and heritage have responded and adapted to pandemic-induced challenges by doing new things or doing things in new ways. *Innovation and resilience in the arts, culture, and heritage in Canada* offers 29 stories of artists and organizations using innovation to find resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic, while an [accompanying webpage](#) contains a much longer (but still limited) list of innovations and pivots.

A recent report shows that the 594,000 employment and self-employment positions in the culture sector in 2020 represented the lowest jobs total since culture specific records began in 2010. The total value of all goods and services sold in the culture sector decreased by 10% between 2019 and 2020, reaching its lowest level since 2015. The performing arts and festivals have been the hardest hit area of the culture sector, losing 36% of jobs and 52% of sales between 2019 and 2020.

Alongside these pandemic-induced changes, many other significant events have taken place. The discovery of unmarked graves on former residential school sites, the intensification of the fight for racial justice, increased anti-Asian racism, and the premeditated murder of a Muslim family: all have shaped our country and the arts and heritage sector.

The artists and organizations profiled in this report actively sought out changes and innovations that provided a measure of stability in turbulent times, whether that stability involved interesting new directions, significant personal opportunities, promoting diverse voices, combatting racism, limiting staff layoffs, or increasing revenues.

Some of the artists and organizations responded to our survey of the cultural community between May and July 2021. Others were nominated by members of our research team and the Creative City Network of Canada's Steering Committee for this project. All 29 stories were discussed and selected by [the fantastic team of "Story Seekers" assembled to work on this project](#). In selecting which stories to pursue, our team attempted to balance a number of considerations:

- Geography: There are stories from all 10 provinces and two territories, from urban, suburban, rural, regional, and Indigenous communities.
- Diversity: There are stories about Indigenous organizations; Black-led organizations; 2SLGBTQIA+ organizations; official language minority organizations; groups led by women; organizations working with people who are D/deaf, disabled, or live with difference; and racialized artists.
- Disciplines: There are stories about artists and organizations working in many different arts and heritage disciplines.
- Size and type: The stories profile the work of individual artists, groups of various sizes and structures, as well as younger and more established organizations.

Our thanks go out to the artists and organizational representatives who agreed to be interviewed for this study and have their stories of innovation and resilience presented in this report:

Afros In Tha City

(Calgary, Alberta)

ALAVIVA

(Quebec City, Quebec)

Alianait Festival

(Iqaluit, Nunavut)

Enza Apa and artsPlace Canmore

(Canmore, Alberta)

BEING Studio

(Ottawa, Ontario)

Carving on the Edge Festival

(Tofino, British Columbia)

Dancemakers and Luke Garwood

(Toronto, Ontario)

Eastern Front Theatre

(Dartmouth, Nova Scotia)

Festival of Literary Diversity

(Brampton, Ontario)

Fredericton Playhouse

(Fredericton, New Brunswick)

Indigenous Performing Arts Alliance

(Toronto base but national in scope)

Kiran Ambwani

(Montreal, Quebec)

Laïla Mestari

(Chicoutimi & Montreal, Quebec)

Musée d'art de Rouyn-Noranda

(Rouyn-Noranda, Quebec)

Newfoundland Symphony Orchestra

(St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador)

Okanagan Children's Choir

(Okanagan, British Columbia)

Orchestre symphonique de Montréal

(Montreal, Quebec)

Prince Edward Island Department of Education

(Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island)

Queer Songbook Orchestra

(Toronto, Ontario)

re:Naissance Opera

(Vancouver, British Columbia)

rice & beans theatre

(Vancouver, British Columbia)

STEPS Public Art

(Toronto, Ontario)

Strata Festival of New Music

(Saskatoon, Saskatchewan)

Tangled Arts & Disability

(Toronto, Ontario)

Théâtre Cercle Molière

(Winnipeg, Manitoba)

Tupiq A.C.T. (Arctic Circus Troupe)

(Kuuujuaq & Montreal, Quebec)

Video Pool Media Arts Centre

(Winnipeg, Manitoba)

Woodland Cultural Centre

(Six Nations, Ontario)

Yukon Transportation Museum

(Whitehorse, Yukon)

12 key themes

We discovered 12 interrelated themes in the stories. Details are provided [in the themes section](#).

1. **Innovation works best when customized:** Though innovation often involves technology, many of the stories involved changes in organizational processes. Some innovations were both technology and process based.
2. **Needed: flexibility and adaptability:** Flexibility and adaptability of mindset, objectives, and resource allocation were key ingredients for innovation and resilience.
3. **Support is varied but crucial:** Whether through financial or in-kind support, every innovation relied on staff, collaborators, and a range of funders to pitch in.
4. **Digital, organizational, and financial challenges:** All innovations faced incredible challenges during the pandemic. Artists, arts managers, and heritage workers overcame key digital, organizational, and financial barriers in implementing changes.
5. **Small can be mighty:** Many innovative ideas got off the ground with very few resources, and some of the smallest organizations were able to be very nimble.
6. **Partnerships can extend capacity and reach:** For many innovators, partnerships were essential to their resilience.
7. **Equity bolsters resilience, and resilience enhances equity:** The hard work of creating equity can contribute to resilience, which, in turn, influences equity.
8. **Sometimes, just jump:** The organizations and artists who responded particularly well identified opportunities and, in many cases, took a big leap of faith.
9. **Prioritizing and connecting with artists:** A common theme among organizations and artists who had success during the pandemic was that they prioritized the community's artists and developed new projects according to artists' ideas and needs.
10. **Short-term innovations can lead to longer-term changes:** Most pandemic-related innovations were focused on short-term goals such as creating works and employing artists, but a number of artists and organizations also turned their attention to long-term applications of their innovations.
11. **Important places of exchange:** Artists and cultural organizations are often at the forefront of engaging in dialogues about the compelling histories, stories, issues, and ideas that exist in every community.
12. **Redefining the arts and heritage:** Some pandemic innovations have pushed the boundaries of artforms or of the presentation of gallery and museum collections.

About the project

Innovation and resilience in the arts, culture, and heritage is a multi-year project of The Creative City Network of Canada in partnership with the Cultural Human Resources Council, Les Arts et la Ville, and the Canadian Commission for UNESCO. Representatives from each of the partner organizations came together to form a Steering Committee to guide the research.

Hill Strategies led the research for the first phase of this project, while its second phase involves professional development to transmit key learnings to other cultural organizations and artists, with the goal of building resilience within the arts and heritage sector.

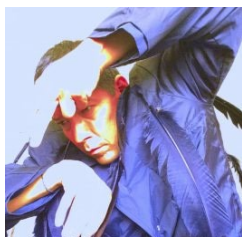
For the research phase, Kelly Hill (Hamilton, ON) worked with a talented and diverse team of Story Seekers who identified and wrote stories of innovation during the pandemic: Anju Singh (Vancouver, BC), Blanche Israël (Halifax, NS, who also contributed to project coordination and story analysis), JP Longboat (Ottawa, ON), Margaret Lam (Kitchener, ON), Melanie Fernandez (Toronto, ON), and Myriam Benzakour-Durand (Montreal, QC).



Anju Singh is a multidisciplinary artist and consultant based in Vancouver, BC with over 15 years of experience in leadership, technical, and administrative roles in the not-for-profit and arts sectors. Anju specializes in the areas of technology, media arts, systems change work, project management, and digital transformation.



Blanche Israël is a multilingual Canadian consultant, cellist, and the founder of proScenium Services, which specializes in strategy, development, and virtualizing in the performing arts. During the pandemic, Blanche launched a livestream technician service for Canadian artists and arts organizations. Consulting clients have included Dadan Sivunivut, the Canadian Opera Company, The Arts Firm, and Orchestras Canada. Blanche completed a degree in Arts Management at the University of Toronto in 2014. She has performed and toured as a cellist with JUNO Award-winning Indigenous operatic tenor and composer Jeremy Dutcher since 2018.



JP Longboat is a storyteller and multidisciplinary artist. He is Kanyen'kehà:ka (Mohawk), Turtle Clan and grew up along the River Ouse, Haldimand Deed territory, Ontario. JP has a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree through combined education at the University of Michigan and the Ontario College of Art and Design. He has extensive professional training and practice in traditional and contemporary forms of visual art and live performance. JP has trained, collaborated, and performed with many professional theatre and dance companies across Canada. His work emanates from the cultural ways of his people and his creative process is grounded in the legacy of First Nations artistic practice. He is the founder and Associate Director of Circadia Indigena-

Indigenous Arts Collective based in Algonquin territory, along the Kichi Sibi at Akikodjiwan Falls. The collective creates full-length performance works and land-based multidisciplinary festivals.



Kelly Hill is the President of Hill Strategies Research, which specializes in research related to Canada's arts and heritage sector. Kelly has a unique perspective on the arts and heritage thanks to the 400+ research projects that he has undertaken since founding Hill Strategies in 2002, including qualitative and quantitative research into various arts and heritage disciplines. He has a strong interest in projects that illuminate the well-being of artists and arts organizations across Canada.

Margaret Lam is the Design Research Lead at Octagram, a software consultancy in Canada. She consults and advises on numerous strategic digital initiatives, where she brings a nuanced understanding of how human-centered design practices can inform social innovation and digital transformation within the arts and culture sector. Select projects include CAPACOA's Linked Digital Future Initiative, Creative Users' Accessing the Arts, ArtsPond's Hatch Open and ThePitch.ca. She is also the founder of BeMused Network and the co-founder of DigitalASO.



Melanie Fernandez has over 25 years of leadership experience in the arts and cultural sectors with a focus on exploring innovative frameworks for producing and learning through community-engaged intersectional practices. Melanie's work is rooted in inclusionary platforms that ensure postcolonial representation of racialized and Indigenous stories. Currently, Melanie is the Coordinator of the Arts Education & Community Engagement at Centennial College, is the Project Manager for the final phase of restoration of the Mohawk Institute Residential School site, and consults. Consulting clients have included Mural Routes, Indigenous Performing Arts Alliance, Ukrainian Culture Festival, Living Arts Centre in Mississauga, Lifeline Syria, the British Museum, the Woodland Cultural Centre, North York Board of Education and others.



Myriam Benzakour-Durand has professional experience with various arts organizations, as well as in community engagement and community arts in Montreal. Having completed a master's degree in management, she has specialized in understanding conflictual relationships within social services, the arts, and non-traditional management structures. Her academic and professional background has allowed her to put to good use her ease in human relations, her ability to understand the needs and strengths of each person, and her capacity to find creative and innovative solutions.

Themes

1. Innovation works best when customized

Each artist and organization defined and delivered innovation differently, based on their own knowledge and experience. Success can also look different for different innovations.

Many used technology to create and present works in a virtual setting, others changed their creative and organizational processes to meet changing needs, and some did a mix of the two. In all innovations, a key finding was that it is critical to start with a deep understanding of your specific audiences' values, habits, and level of digital literacy, and to then incorporate them in the design of audience experiences.

Technological innovations

In some cases, responding to pandemic restrictions required organizations and artists to digitize their programming in order to continue to connect with their communities virtually. Most technological innovations were relatively simple, relying on existing and established tools such as videography, photography, and social media, as well as commonly used platforms such as Zoom and YouTube. Digital innovations are far from one-size-fits-all, and a key lesson is that innovators should be mindful of the urban-centric and Western-centric nature of digital “best practices”.

Debi Wong
re:Naissance Opera



[In] creating an interactive 360° experience, we have to really be in tune with what we think [audiences] are going to do, or how we think they're going to engage with the piece, so that they don't get lost in an endless VR world, or they don't get confused and bored and just quit, or they can still understand the story. Because they have agency in the story.

- The **Festival of Literary Diversity** moved all its events to Zoom in May 2020, and by 2021 had developed a sophisticated literary festival experience hosted on a highly customizable conference software platform called vFairs.
- The **Strata Festival of New Music** created an online composing symposium in a month, without prior experience in creating digital experiences.
- The choral arts were strongly affected by health regulations, which closed down all in-person singing events. In this context, the **Okanagan Children's Choir** created a digital composition project to allow choir members to get together, create music, and sing.
- Unable to travel from Montreal to Nunavik to perform, the **Tupiq Arctic Circus Troupe** learned to create and perform for film under tight restrictions in order to deliver on its obligations and maintain a presence in its Northern community.
- Yellow Objects, by **rice & beans theatre**, adapted from live theatre to an installation format to create “a version of this project that can be done without live actors, while still

keeping a semi-interactive storytelling experience,” according to Artistic Director Derek Chan. The artists worked with digital tools that allowed them to sketch out the performance space, test lighting and projections, place actor-figures in the space, and run projections.

- **ALAVIVA**, an organization that aims to promote the social inclusion of seniors and people with reduced mobility through technology, used a robot to help connect seniors to art during the pandemic. The robot offered a remote virtual tour to seniors who were stuck in their homes. Early iterations demonstrated the great potential of the project, which propelled ALAVIVA to make the “art robot” a pillar of the organization.

Process innovations

We found that some of the most innovative approaches did not require groundbreaking technology, but instead focused on a reimagining of artists’ and organizations’ creative and logistical approaches and processes. Changes involved programming, staff, structure, and resource allocation.



What we did was not rocket science. We used YouTube; we used our website. Really I feel like the biggest innovation was the process - the way we delivered it. We worked hard to make it feel like you were ‘doing symphony’: making the digital concert experience mimic the feel of a live concert through elements like pre-show chats, audience interaction, and a signature cocktail.

Hugh Donnan
Newfoundland
Symphony Orchestra

- The stability afforded through emergency funding from the Canada Council for the Arts, the Winnipeg Foundation, and federal emergency programs allowed **Video Pool Media Arts Centre** to shift its resources toward its process innovations. The act of slowing down to make intentional, thoughtful, and consulted decisions meant that the organization could build for the future with everyone in mind.
- Artist **Leila Mestari** worked with the LOBE Centre in Chicoutimi to bring a gallery experience outdoors through soundless video installations designed for viewing through a window, works displayed on advertisement billboards, and a printed zine for on-site and international distribution.
- The **Indigenous Performing Arts Alliance** developed Tech Bundles — shippable equipment and software for use by remote and Northern Indigenous communities — as a pandemic-adapted alternative to a Northern touring network project. When the organization realized that its remote partners needed support, not just equipment, other partners were brought on to create workshops and tutorials to accompany the Tech Bundles.
- The **Newfoundland Symphony** focused its outreach efforts on remote parts of the province it had never reached in its nearly 50-year history. The organization now has plans to change its name to the Newfoundland and Labrador Symphony as a result of the

geographical reach it was able to develop through the digital innovations brought on by the pandemic.

- The **Queer Songbook Orchestra**'s major pandemic innovation was to work with schools for the first time. QSO Kids, a digital show for elementary school students, required the organization to learn how to livestream while navigating school requests and requirements.

2. Needed: flexibility and adaptability

Flexibility is a key precondition for innovation and resilience. In other words, openness to change is fundamental. During the pandemic, increased flexibility around organizations' usual obligations created an excellent breeding ground for innovation. A culture of openness to small experiments and a commitment to learning from those experiences helped artists and organizations become more resilient. Our research found that many different sources of flexibility played a role in resilience, including staff, volunteers, organizational structures, artistic output, and funding.

Staff and volunteers

Resources, particularly staff time, are needed to help organizations respond nimbly. Having a staff member or outside contractor dedicated to digital efforts was instrumental to many organizations' responsiveness. For others, digital initiatives required a team and infrastructure distinct from bricks-and-mortar operations.

- Like many other Canadians, members of **Afros In Tha City's** media collective experienced the negative mental health effects of isolation during the pandemic. In response to this, the collective showed flexibility toward its members regarding schedules and deadlines, which helped the collective with its sustainability through the pandemic.
- In order to deliver a digital version of its theatre creation festival for youth, staff at **Théâtre Cercle Molière** learned many new technologies, including livestreaming its annual gala.
- Staff flexibility and organizational support run in both directions. For the **Orchestre symphonique de Montréal**, the team's comfort, health, and psychological well-being were at the heart of the decision-making process. Several initiatives were taken to support the teams, including group walks and a network of phone calls. Having received this support on a human level, employees were fully invested and able to pivot. The team quickly developed expertise in human resources, digital skills, programming and finances to allow the orchestra to continue to perform.
- In delivering a digital festival, the **Carving on the Edge Festival** required different skills from its volunteers, especially technological literacy and experience, which led to recruitment challenges that the festival was eventually able to overcome.

Barbara Beranek
Musée d'art de
Rouyn-Noranda



COVID forced us to think outside the box and think fast.

Organizational adaptation

Some organizations refined their organizational structure to respond to changing circumstances.

- The **Queer Songbook Orchestra**, which had operated as an unincorporated collective before the pandemic, had very little infrastructure to rely on. The organization had to go dark for many months. To envision a new, more resilient path forward, the collective incorporated as a not-for-profit, building infrastructure that would allow them to work with schools, secure larger grants, and work toward increased sustainability.
- The social enterprise model of **STEPS Public Art** enabled the organization to remain nimble and responsive and to identify innovative opportunities when the COVID-19 pandemic struck. The staff team structures enabled STEPS to facilitate projects through a tight project management process to maximize output while allowing staff to have ownership over projects.
- Careful reflection about digital practices can help organizations adapt to changing needs, as shown by the digital transition of the **Carving on the Edge Festival**. The festival took the time to think about the “why” behind its digital approaches, including how these approaches align with the community’s values.



An orchestra is like a football or hockey team. If they don't play together on a regular basis, the team won't be as good.

Marianne Perron
Orchestre Symphonique
de Montréal

Artistic output

- **Kiran Ambwani** demonstrated flexibility and the ability to adapt on several occasions. She developed a new work method—a collaborative approach—that she was able to add to her toolbox. She also adapted to a new kind of visual aesthetics in her photography.
- Similarly, **Laïla Mestari** maintained a flexible artistic practice, relying on multiple media to execute her *Hay Girl* project, which was extremely well adapted to the exceptional circumstances of COVID-19.
- When delivery of arts-based curriculum became incredibly difficult, alternatives that supported remote learning became a valuable source of mental health support for students. The **PEI Student Drama Festival** was revamped as a digital experience to give students the opportunity to write their own scripts and participate in artist-led workshops on topics such as blocking, lighting design, choreography, costume design, makeup, and scriptwriting.
- For **ALAVIVA**, it was important to quickly test new ideas related to its “art robot”. This process, which Founder Andrée Pelletier refers to as open innovation or design thinking, helped the organization identify needs, validate those ideas, test a prototype, and improve the product.

Funding

Flexible funding support, along with the elimination of some pre-pandemic expenditures (e.g., travel, accommodations, and front-of-house costs), allowed organizations to focus on paying creative people to brainstorm new ideas, models, and solutions.

- For Paul Suchan, Executive Director of the **Strata Festival of New Music**, funding flexibility “really opens up the world for innovation”. On the expenses side, the virtual edition of the Student Composer Symposium had lower costs for travel, distribution, and marketing.
- The speedy flexibility of the **Festival of Literary Diversity** allowed the organization to hold onto previously approved grants while achieving its goals through virtual events.

Shaun Brodie
Queer Songbook
Orchestra

“

[Resilience is about] being able to find the opportunity when things don't go as you planned, but then being able to look at it from a different perspective and see what can be made of where you are at.

3. Support is varied but crucial

No innovator worked alone. Support came from a range of sources in myriad ways, not all of which were financial. Every innovator relied on staff, collaborators, and funders to pitch in. Non-financial contributions included gifts of time and expertise.

Mixed funding sources, usually with governments in the mix

Organizations explored many avenues to improve their financial situation during the COVID-19 pandemic, including generating earned revenues, encouraging donations, and reducing expenses.

- When in-person educational and public visits to the **Woodland Cultural Centre** became non-existent, the impact on revenue streams was huge. The development and packaging of the Centre's virtual tour more than tripled the educational program's generated revenues.
- The **Orchestre symphonique de Montréal**, which had previously offered its digital concerts free of charge, moved to a paid model by enriching its programming with bonus content.
- For many groups, community support was a necessary ingredient for resilience. For example, the **Fredericton Playhouse** and the **Orchestre symphonique de Montréal** retained ticket revenues by asking ticket buyers to consider converting their tickets into donations. In other cases, targeted fundraising campaigns were successful thanks to this same type of public goodwill.

Marianne Perron
Orchestre Symphonique
de Montréal



We cancelled so many concerts, and people could choose to be reimbursed for the cost of the tickets, receive a credit to use when we resumed our activities, or make a donation. The percentage of people who made a donation was enormous.

Government funding played a role in almost all cases. During the pandemic, many municipal, provincial, and federal agencies prioritized stability and employment, affording organizations an unprecedented opportunity to experiment and innovate.

Here are examples of how innovators generated and worked with different types of funding.

- **STEPS Public Art** scaled up its innovation thanks to municipal support from the City of Toronto, RBC, 27 business improvement areas across Ontario, and other supporters.
- The Town of Canmore's Building Neighbourhoods Project supported the Curbside Museum project of artist **Enza Apa** and **artsPlace Canmore**. The Curbside Museum, which started as a small personal project outside Enza's home, grew into a larger community-engaged project supported by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts' Travelling Exhibition Program.

- The **Strata Festival of New Music** in Saskatchewan benefited from sustained operating funding from SK Arts, which was later extended by an additional year.
- The **Yukon Transportation Museum** received financial support for its pilot initiative from the City of Whitehorse, the Government of Yukon, and local businesses such as Air North, Pelly Construction, and Lotteries Yukon.
- The **Alienait Arts Festival** made some financial adjustments with the support of its funders including the Government of Nunavut, the Government of Canada, and Canadian North Airlines, and reexamined its existing grants, reprioritizing and contextualizing some of its funding to take on a new festival delivery format.
- **BEING Studio**'s Artist Connect project was a large undertaking, including direct costs such as speaker fees for special guests and artists, plus administrative overhead. The project's funders included the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ottawa Community Foundation, and individual donors also provided crucial support.
- **Video Pool** received emergency COVID-19 funding from the Canada Council for the Arts and the Winnipeg Foundation, as well as support from the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy. This meant that the organization had the financial resources and the staff capacity to pursue organizational process innovations.
- The **Carving on the Edge Festival** shifted to a digital edition in 2021, despite the challenges in doing so for wood carving — a very hands-on artform. The festival was supported by a variety of funders, such as BC Arts Council, Department of Canadian Heritage, Clayoquot Biosphere Trust, Destination BC Tourism Events Program, Alberni Clayoquot Regional District, and Tourism Tofino. The reduced costs of the online version allowed the festival to be delivered with a budget that was about 20% smaller than in previous years.

New revenue streams

Some groups created brand new revenue streams, but not all saw expanded budgets overall. In some cases, the new revenue streams simply replaced revenues lost due to the pandemic.

- The **Newfoundland Symphony** created Pay-It-Forward subscriptions, a targeted donation that subscribers could add to their digital subscription to give the less fortunate access to the symphony.
- **rice & beans theatre** created interactive stories and an online installation for its Yellow Objects project, which expanded the company's audience and led to some financial stability.
- The digital edition of the **Carving on the Edge Festival** generated roughly three times as much in fundraising as the festival had received in previous years. The fundraising success in 2021 was thanks to registrants being redirected to a donation page right after completing their online registration.
- Galleries and museums such as the **Woodland Cultural Centre** and the **Musée d'art de Rouyn-Noranda** created virtual tours and galleries that visitors could explore online, serving their communities while also reaching new demographic and geographical segments and creating a new revenue stream.

4. Digital, organizational, and financial challenges

Three types of management challenges were very common in implementing the innovations: digital skills, organizational capacity, and finances. A few examples:

Digital

- Many artists and cultural presenters who performed at the **Alianait Arts Festival** had no experience recording themselves. The festival offered them significant assistance in preparing for and delivering their online presentations.
- The switch from live performance to film was complex for **Tupiq Arctic Circus Troupe**, involving learning about film production from scratch. Despite the lack of experience, the company's artists and administrators chose to lean into the pivot to film as an opportunity to showcase their creativity.
- Organizers of the **Festival of Literary Diversity** learned how to manage Zoom events as they quickly adapted to a digital space in 2020, but that left them vulnerable to online trolling and socially disruptive behaviours. Minimizing safety concerns was a critical issue that the festival addressed by moving to a new, paid platform in 2021.

Organizational

- An artist residency at **Dancemakers** occurred at a unique time, because the organization had been without artistic leadership for about a year and had been scheduled to close. A new Board took over, but the timing of the organizational change caused uncertainty and delays in the residency.
- **Video Pool** was able to manage its intensive processes to improve accessibility and transform the organization during the pandemic, when staff members had a temporary reprieve from their usual workload. However, as COVID-19 restrictions start to lift and the centre's activities are returning to normal, there is concern that there will be limited capacity for its transformative organizational work as operational obligations return.

Financial

- While Yukon Spin has been a tremendous success in terms of validating the virtual tour's business viability and tech feasibility, the **Yukon Transportation Museum** faces a challenge in garnering the dedicated human and financial resources needed to sustain and grow the pilot initiative.
- **ALAVIVA**'s art robot project sits at the nexus of the arts, health care, and technology. However, this complexity hasn't led to significant funding opportunities in any of these areas.

5. Small can be mighty

Innovation and resilience can happen at any scale. Even without large amounts of money, individual artists and small organizations have had outsized impacts on communities during the pandemic.

- The **Queer Songbook Orchestra**, the **Okanagan Children's Choir**, and **Eastern Front Theatre** got their projects started using modest savings. The orchestra and theatre were able to use the inaugural versions of their projects as a proof of concept to secure grants and community contributions.
- The **Strata Festival of New Music** implemented digital learning opportunities on a shoestring budget thanks to lightning-quick professional development.
- The **Yukon Transportation Museum's** innovative implementation of virtual cycling tours highlights how innovation can happen in smaller and rural centres just as easily as in larger urban centres.
- As a grassroots collective, the **Queer Songbook Orchestra** was accustomed to working with limited resources. The organization was able to stretch a modest guarantee from a public school's parent pride committee to meet the project's needs.
- Artist **Kiran Ambwani** was able to envision and deliver her project with only the personal support provided by the Canada Emergency Response Benefit.
- During the pandemic, many people have struggled with health issues, including the effects of isolation, anxiety, and overall mental health. The small Curbside Museum project of artist **Enza Apa** and **artsPlace Canmore** enabled residents of Canmore, Alberta to see their own stories and histories reflected.
- Several small organizations took the opportunity of going virtual to expand their geographical reach far beyond its pre-pandemic capacity, securing new connections for the future. **Eastern Front Theatre** worked with artists from across Atlantic Canada. The **Newfoundland Symphony's** programming reached Labrador for the first time. The **Festival of Literary Diversity**, based in Brampton, Ontario, targeted and acquired paid visitors from as far as Vancouver and the United States.



Small things can have a larger impact in terms of being able to show off the talent and ingenuity of Atlantic Canadian artists.

Kat MacCormack
Eastern Front Theatre

6. Partnerships can extend capacity and reach

Many innovators have discovered novel directions and new ways of working by leaning on external organizations for their expertise and networks. Partners have included organizations and businesses outside the arts, culture, and heritage. Our research found many examples of significant partnerships, a few of which are highlighted below.

Emma Hendrix
Video Pool



Partnerships are so, so important. We don't do it alone, we do it with others. And that is really informative, and difficult because you have to be willing to be in a vulnerable space. You just spend the time and the effort to really think about how you take care of each other.

- For the digital edition of the **Alianait Arts Festival** in 2020, a distribution partnership with television broadcaster NorthwTel was vital to the festival's delivery to audiences across the North and internationally. With limited internet availability and bandwidth in the North, streaming can be unstable.
- The co-hosts of the Crip Times podcast series from **Tangled Arts + Disability** (Yousef Kadoura, Kayla Besse, and Kristina McMullin) brought together a group of talented partners (University of Guelph, Bodies in Translation, Wheels on the Ground, Ryerson University, and others) to bring the series to fruition and ensure maximum accessibility.
- **Video Pool**, in aiming to become more accessible, worked closely with the Arts AccessAbility Network of Manitoba, Manitoba Association of Playwrights, Creative Manitoba, and New Media Manitoba.
- Through its Tech Bundles project, the **Indigenous Performing Arts Alliance** hopes to serve the diversity of Indigenous artists and communities throughout Canada. To do this, the Alliance is working to partner with local Indigenous centres or organizations that can house, manage, and facilitate the sharing of the Tech Bundles' resources within their communities and regions. Furthermore, the project would not have been possible without the partnership of the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the Department of Canadian Heritage, Apple Canada, and Long & McQuade.
- **STEPS Public Art** has built long-term partnerships with business improvement areas (BIAs), foundations, and corporations. These well-nurtured partnerships, which have led to trusting relationships with the STEPS team, allowed the organization to quickly create its 2020 Main Street Art Challenge. Building on the success of its efforts in 2020, STEPS launched I HeART Main Street in 2021 to support BIAs of all sizes across Ontario, to strengthen business-community relationships, and to provide meaningful opportunities for local Canadian artists.

- **re:Naissance Opera** was able to achieve its vision of a virtual reality opera through a partnership with the Sawmill, a Vancouver-based motion capture studio. The studio's partial in-kind donation of expertise, consultation, and studio time gave the project a level of technical skill and capacity that would otherwise have added significant cost.
- For **BEING Studio**, the process of curating the Artist Connect symposium brought them in close collaboration with other disability-centred organizations and resulted in tremendous organizational learning. Each staff member had the opportunity to engage with knowledge experts, reflect, and grow as they learned from each event.

7. Equity bolsters resilience, and resilience enhances equity

The tough fight for equity, diversity, inclusion, and decolonization compounded the burden of the pandemic on artists and organizations from equity-seeking communities. However, we also found that an equity lens helped focus organizations' goals and guide the rapid decision-making needed at the beginning of the pandemic.

Jael Richardson
Festival of
Literary Diversity

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Because we focus on marginalized communities, we knew if there were vulnerable communities involved, we couldn't hold [the festival] for some and exclude others.

Reciprocally, resilience can contribute to greater equity in the arts and heritage: organizations and artists who are resilient - who have time, resources, flexibility, and a culture of innovation - are better positioned to make decisions with equity and a diversity of perspectives in mind.

While diverse artists and organizations led by Indigenous Peoples, Black people, disabled people, and racialized people are leaders in the fight for equity, the entire sector is called to contribute.

- **Being Studio** worked to deepen conversations about disability arts in a virtual space. A key refrain throughout its Artist Connect project was the idea that disability is not an absence, but rather a valuable presence. This powerful idea left a deep impression on participating artists as well as the staff and volunteers from the six participating organizations.
- The **Festival of Literary Diversity's** April 2020 festival pivoted to Zoom in a matter of weeks, in part because the marginalized communities that the festival serves were also the most vulnerable to COVID-19. The organization's digital shift required a steep learning curve that ultimately set a new bar for virtual literary festivals.
- The members of the **Afros In Tha City** media collective have helped raise important issues in the Black community. Black leadership and freedom of expression are critical in continuing this work.
- **Kiran Ambwani's** Can-Asian Artistic Resilience project responded to anti-Asian racism brought on by the pandemic by showing the positive contributions that the Asian community has made, thus helping to combat the racism that affects it.
- A podcast series from **Tangled Arts** was created during the pandemic to find new ways of engaging disabled artists and prioritizing access for disabled communities. The artists, scholars, and activists who participated in the podcast series shared expertise about the isolation that they experience as a daily part of their lives, in contrast to the larger mainstream community that was experiencing this for the first time.
- The **Carving on the Edge Festival** was founded in 2010 by a group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous carvers and artists in Tofino, BC as a way to deepen the knowledge and cultural exchange needed to sustain the practice of carving. A deeply shared love of

wood carving has fostered a spirit of reconciliation and a cultural pathway between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people across different generations. This same spirit is what made the digital edition of the festival so meaningful for everyone at a time when they needed to be in the company of each other the most, even when technology itself can be a barrier.

- **Video Pool**'s efforts during the pandemic have been strongly focused on enhancing the equity of its services. As part of this push, the organization created a series called *BIPOC Tech Talk* to respond to the arts community's need for a BIPOC centered space for conversations about technology. Rather than directing the group, Video Pool encouraged the group to be led and developed by the participants.

Equity-seeking groups can face distinct challenges. The **Indigenous Performing Arts Alliance**'s challenges in securing local partners outside of urban centres speak to the historic lack of arts infrastructure and limited investment in rural artists and communities.

Ado Nkemka, editor at **Afros In Tha City** noted that, "in Calgary, we have a hard time, at least for Black and POC [people of colour] communities, keeping our artists here. We are trying to build a community where people don't feel like they have to leave to make it or to feel legitimized as artists."

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If you want to understand Black lives, we need freedom in our expression. Some people in our collective have had experiences working with different organizations and felt that they were censored through the editorial process or felt like they had to wrap their story with a nice bow, which isn't always the case. Sometimes there isn't necessarily a happy ending. There's always something to learn, but I think it goes back to that freedom, flexibility piece. If you really want to hear our voices, you have to be committed to opening yourself up to accepting truths that are not necessarily fluffy and easy to digest.

Ado Nkemka
Afros In Tha City

8. Sometimes, just jump

Occasionally, opportunities appear. Other times, opportunities are made, or at least discovered. Many innovators decided to take a first step — often a big leap into the unknown — even if they didn't know their exact destination. A spirit of openness to small experiments and a commitment to learning from those experiences allowed artists and organizations to become more resilient in the face of disruptions and uncertainty.

Laïla Mestari



You have to take risks instead of saying that it's not possible to do things like we always have. You have to be bold and try things that have never been done before.

- A podcast series from **Tangled Arts + Disability** was produced and hosted by Yousef Kadoura, Kayla Besse, and Kristina McMullin. The artist trio had never produced a podcast before and learned a great deal through trial and error.
- In partnership with the LOBE artists' centre in Chicoutimi, artist **Laïla Mestari** showed that with a bit of audacity and a lot of work, it was possible to present an in-person visual art exhibit in the middle of the pandemic, at a time when virtually everything was closed.
- The artist residencies in **Fredericton Playhouse's** InterMISSION project started modestly and grew with the available resources. The residencies served as a pilot project that helped the Playhouse envision how residencies could fit into a regular season.
- Creating a virtual reality opera is a very new concept. **re:Naissance Opera** took on the daunting task of creating for this emerging technology. There have been many steep learning curves for the organization, often without any precedents to rely on. The re:Naissance Opera team explored every aspect of opera-making in this new medium with a learning mindset, embracing the process as an exciting part of the project, but it was also one that added unanticipated time and costs.
- Derek Chan of **rice & beans theatre** emphasized the importance of play and experimentation, especially when adapting to a digital environment. Trying new things, failing, succeeding, adapting, and iterating are all important parts of theatre's innovation process.



With enough funding, we could sort of jump in the deep end of the pool and say 'okay, let's just do this'.

Paul Suchan
Strata Festival

9. Prioritizing and connecting with artists

At the onset of the pandemic, many in the arts and heritage sector felt adrift. Deciding where to focus was difficult, and designing programming to engage Canadians while respecting health restrictions was complex and time-consuming. Innovators who focused on the needs of their closest stakeholders and communities — artists — were able to quickly centre their goals and define a path forward.

Hugh Donnan
Newfoundland
Symphony Orchestra



Everybody had choices. We could have put our heads in the sand and just caretake. But we didn't just want to disappear for a year. Right from the beginning, the goal was, because we weren't as hard-hit as other places, to get as many musicians on stage as possible so we could pay them.

- Committing to an online format allowed the **Alianait Arts Festival** to take presentation opportunities out to a much wider range of Northern artists. This new format reached communities from Greenland to Alaska, allowing the festival to begin building a more comprehensive network of artistic and cultural presenters across the North.
- Going dark during the lockdown made it possible for theatre organizations like the **Fredericton Playhouse** and **Eastern Front Theatre** to put time and resources toward developing non-public-facing strategic initiatives that generated work and creation opportunities for local artists.
- **Kiran Ambwani** connected with over 130 artists as part of her virtual photography project. Her goals included motivating other artists and communities to stay connected, to help each other out, and to stand together.
- The **Newfoundland Symphony**'s decisions were led by a desire "to get as many musicians on stage as possible so we could pay them," said Executive Director Hugh Donnan. This led to innovative ways of connecting with audiences, including a Pay-It-Forward subscription model and an outreach program targeting seniors' residences.
- **Video Pool** kept its artist communities at the forefront of its decision-making, which allowed the organization to move forward without leaving important communities behind.
- The **Indigenous Performing Arts Alliance** entered the pandemic with confirmed funding for a major initiative to create a Northern performing arts touring network. Pandemic restrictions led them to look closely at the needs of organizations in their Northern and remote partner network, and to devise a digital version of the project to respond to these needs. Instead of sending touring artists to remote locations, the Alliance equipped its remote partners with gear, software and expertise that allowed them to broadcast virtual performances.

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We were able to consider how we could boost the careers of so many more people, rather than just one playwright a year.

Kat MacCormack
Eastern Front Theatre

10. Short-term innovations can lead to longer-term changes

While most of the innovations we studied were designed to get artists and organizations through the pandemic, many will have a significant impact in the longer term.

Kat MacCormack
Eastern Front Theatre



It was ultimately uplifting and really inspirational, for me even. It has helped us now look forward in a new way.

- The Seniors Outreach project allowed the **Newfoundland Symphony Orchestra** to reach people across Newfoundland and Labrador. Said Hugh Donnan, Executive Director, “this is a permanent arm of our operations, for sure”. An upcoming change in name, to the Newfoundland and Labrador Symphony Orchestra, reflects this new reach.
- The **Musée d’art de Rouyn-Noranda**’s increased visibility through its MA Virtuel project will allow the museum to pursue new opportunities and develop new partnerships.
- The **Woodland Cultural Centre** continues to expand its suite of virtual tours to extend its audience across Canada and beyond.
- Rather than rushing to implement temporary COVID-19-specific measures, **Video Pool** has worked toward long-lasting strategies to increase access to the centre’s services.
- The connections made through **BEING Studio**’s Artist Connect symposium brought tremendous energy to the organization. Its experimentation with digital engagements and partnerships with organizations outside of the Ottawa region highlighted the role that the organization can play in a larger conversation about the disability justice movement and improving access to the arts.
- The online **PEI Student Drama Festival** and **ArtsSmarts** programs were pandemic-inspired teaching and learning formats that are expected to be expanded in the future.
- **Théâtre Cercle Molière** plans to incorporate a digital format into its future young artist festivals, because of the great accessibility allowed by virtual programming. Students at schools far outside of Winnipeg can benefit from the virtual format.

11. Important places of exchange

Some pandemic innovations show that artists and cultural organizations can be at the forefront of engaging in dialogues about the compelling histories, stories, issues, and ideas that exist in every community. In this context, cultural organizations are often important places of exchange.

- In creating popular virtual tours, the **Woodland Cultural Centre** greatly expanded its reach, thereby allowing many more visitors to hear the important stories told by the Centre's programming. The Centre has also worked to deepen audience members' participation by enhanced storytelling.
- The **Yukon Transportation Museum's** Yukon Spin project has the potential to engage many new visitors in the territory's past, present, and future.
- **rice & beans theatre's** digital innovations show that storytelling in new forms can build audiences. The company also recognizes that shared learning is key to future success of the sector.
- **Alianait Arts Festival's** digital pivot greatly increased its audience, thereby sharing the powerful voices of Northern artists and cultural presenters and broadening understanding of cultural communities in the North.
- For the **Okanagan Children's Choir**, providing composition training through a digital format increased access to learning opportunities. The organization successfully engaged children at a time when that was very difficult, especially in the choral arts.
- **Tangled Arts'** podcast series *Crip Times* generated discussions among artists, scholars, and activists about important issues in the disability community.
- The virtual concerts of the **Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal** allowed the orchestra to reach new audiences. For example, the first school to register for the Youth Matinees was from Nunavik, in Northern Quebec. The first concert conducted by Rafael Payare, the orchestra's new Music Director, garnered 125,000 views across 80 countries.

12. Redefining the arts and heritage

Many innovators have done nothing short of redefining their artform. Many worked to redefine the creative process itself.

- In **Dancemakers'** *Liveness* residency, Luke Garwood and collaborators explored ways to redefine dance performance in a virtual setting, using motion capture, digital manipulation, and animation.
- **re:Naissance Opera's** *Orpheus VR* project explored opera creation within a 360°, interactive environment, which required the music and text to be flexible and modular, rather than linear like a traditional opera. The company's innovation and experimentation with the artform was intended to allow new ideas to flourish and to grow opera, rather than taking away from or tearing down what has come before.
- **rice & beans theatre** designed a version of a play that could be experienced without live actors while still remaining somewhat interactive through an outdoor digital installation with sound design.

Many heritage organizations pushed the boundaries of how they present their collections during the pandemic.

- When no one could pay an in-person visit to the **Yukon Transportation Museum's** collection, the organization explored what it means to digitally bring to life the history and stories of transportation in the Yukon - through the lens of a bicycle. These virtual tours of the territory helped fulfil the museum's mandate.
- The **Woodland Cultural Centre** attempted to balance history while expanding how audiences interact with Indigenous arts and heritage. Through virtual tours, visitors can better understand the full scope of Haudenosaunee history, including both the residential school system and the vitality of the community's art, language, and culture.
- A collaboration between artist **Enza Apa** and **artsPlace Canmore**, the Curbside Museum challenged the museum construct and made everyday objects and stories "precious".

Other innovators embarked on slightly less ambitious projects that nonetheless reimaged how they work in their artform. For example, photographer **Kiran Ambwani** changed her usual process for her *Can-Asian Artistic Resilience* project, in which she "photographed" subjects via screen captures over Zoom.

Looking toward Phase 2

This research forms the basis for the project's second phase, which involves professional development to transmit key learnings to other cultural organizations and artists. By undertaking new directions, promoting diverse voices, combatting racism, limiting staff layoffs, or increasing revenues, the innovative practices outlined above provided some stability for the artists and organizations. More broadly, these findings should help build resilience within the arts and heritage sector.