



Advocacy Update

April 24, 2015

2015 Ontario Budget Blanks on the Arts—Again

(Toronto)...The Ontario Budget 2015, *Building Ontario Up*, is a 372-page document that contains little to recognize the growth sectors of the arts, culture or heritage.

The Government of Ontario appears to have once again cut its investment in the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport by \$150 million, a decrease from \$1.424 billion (2012-2013) to \$1.274 billion (2015-2016), according to budget documents released yesterday.

“The PASO Coalition’s primary concern continues to be Ontario Arts Council cuts to operating grants that took effect April 1.” Demetra Christakos observed, co-chair of the voluntary arts coalition. “When transfer payments from Ontario to the Ontario Arts Council are straight-lined for a sixth consecutive year, attrition to their value is a ligature on emerging arts professionals.”

Ontario’s Economic Forecast

Ontario government revenues have increased by \$27 billion since 2008-2009, from \$97.5 billion to \$124.4 billion, according to the budget. Ontario has recovered all the jobs lost since the 2008 recession, the unemployment rate is improving (down to 7.3% from 7.6% last year), the net surplus of corporations rose by 8% in 2014, and a resurgent US economy and a rebound in US consumer demand supports stronger growth in Ontario exports, including motor vehicle sales.

Keystrokes for the arts in the 2015-2016 budget:

- \$5.9 million has been allocated to celebrate the significance of the 400th anniversary of the Francophone presence in Ontario in 2015. However, it is not clear whether these funds come out of \$905 million in additional funding already allocated for the Pan/Parapan American Games in 2015-2016.
- The government proposes to narrow eligibility for the Ontario Digital Media Tax Credit and use a portion of the savings to renew the Interactive Digital Media Fund.
- The \$5 million cut first made to the Ontario Trillium Foundation in Budget 2013 is reiterated the current financial year, 2015-2016, for a total loss to date of \$20 million over four years.
- \$15 million in arts funding reallocated by the government in 2013 to establish the Ontario Music Fund has been renewed.

Other potential impacts on the arts

Apprenticeship programs is one area where the government proposes some strategic investments: \$13 million more over two years for pre-apprenticeship readiness programs, \$19 million to increase the per diem for apprentices in classroom training, and \$23 million to help colleges and other delivery agents train and deliver high quality apprenticeship programs.

However, the government is also tightening the Apprenticeship Training Tax Credit by \$30 million this year—deepening to a loss of \$95 million in 2017-2018.

There is an anticipated increase in investment in the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities of \$472 million (from 7.337 billion to 7.809 billion).

At the same, the government announced a massive reform of the postsecondary education system, embarking on a review of university funding this spring with a view both to greater differentiation between schools and the further alignment of public funding with “desired outcomes”.

“We’ll be tracking those outcomes.” Christakos said. “When the Harris government moved on core funding to universities in the mid-90s, university arts programs, art galleries, and other arts activities were deeply impacted.”

Perhaps due to lack of detail about the federal government’s funding intentions in the 150th anniversary of the confederation of Canada available when the Ontario budget document was printed, Ontario’s commitment to 2017 is equally vague: “The government will engage Ontarians to share ideas for commemoration and will work collaboratively to make Canada’s birthday an occasion for pride and celebration across the province.”

About the PASO Coalition

PASO is a Coalition of Provincial Arts Service Organizations that strives to strengthen the environment for the individuals and institutions that create and disseminate the arts in this province and for public access to the arts. Its collective memberships are made up of individual artists as well as the performance and exhibition organizations that create and support artistic expression. PASO operates on the principle of voluntary contributions of time and travel from Coalition member organizations.

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