Popular Theatre Policy Recommendations

The following policy recommendations emerged from popular theatre workshops in Regina, Saskatchewan, and Edmonton, Alberta. It was clear from the conversations that many of the issues required structural transformation beyond the organizational scope. As a result, these recommendations have been organized into three categories: for individual organizations, for funding bodies, and for all levels of government.

For Organizations

1. Propose an approach that is grounded in **collective, generative conversations** to create space for people to share their perspectives, and **center lived experiences.**

2. Organizations need to **intentionally build budgets**, especially grant proposal budgets to **remove barriers to participate**. Budgeting for things like transport, childcare, food, etc.

3. Intentionally build opportunities to **create moments of connection and empathy** in the workplace; moving beyond “team-building” and towards relationship and empathy building.

4. Collectively be intentional about disrupting norms in the non-profit sector (reporting, budgeting, administration protocols). As a sector, we can take more risks and **co-create ways of reporting that best fit our needs**.

5. Find solutions to **create channels of communication** between community members and board members, and allow for bidirectional feedback on the experience of community members.

6. **Build relationships** and work with other organizations that have developed their **knowledge around policies, rights, and treaties** and are creating policy recommendations.

7. Arts organizations need to **allocate room in their budget for policy audits** by rights holders (ie: Anti-Racism Initiative, JHC, PCRJ) and work with them to ensure their organization **intentionally meets human rights compliance.**

8. **Policies about Anti-Oppression (AO) and Anti-Racism (AR) need to be co-developed** by staff with buy-in from leadership. This would maintain cohesion and shared understanding about why such policies exist, and how they can be applied in practice.

9. Anti-Oppression (AO) and Anti-Racism (AR)policies are treated as finalized, static documents: set in stone, reviewed once a year, never truly integrated into organizational culture. We propose **reframing AR/AO policies, not as a rulebook but as an ongoing, relationship-building process within organizations**, using creative means like art and Popular Theatre as tools.

10. Arts institutions evaluate Popular Theatre programs quantitatively, parallel to how conventional arts productions are evaluated: through ticket sales, audience numbers, and final product quality.

    - Popular Theatre must be evaluated differently. It can be **evaluated through more qualitative methods** such as: how participants engage and feel, how many return, depth of change for participants, and the quality of in-process communication.
    - Evaluations should be aimed at the overall strategy of the organization in relation to their mission, theory of change, and expected milestones.



For Funders

Organizations often submit proposals to fund their programs every fiscal year. This creates a barrier for most organizations given their workload and capacity. The cycle of applying for grants and funding and consequently reporting, can lead to high levels of stress and exhaustion for organizations.

1. Arts organizations require **reliable and stable core funding**, allowing them to pursue their mission through **co-developing programming with the community**. Short-term, project-based funding structures force organizations to divert their focus to maximizing tight budgets, working within rigid reporting frameworks, and prioritizing the latest buzzword. We heard clearly from participants that they flourish when organizations can prioritize delivering programs rather than applying and reporting for funding. Arts organizations want to focus on relationships with each other, with their communities, with the land, with the past, with the future, and with everything that is connected.

2. **Work collectively with organizations receiving funds to identify evaluation, reporting, and accountability mechanisms that are in line with the values of the work**, the needs of communities, and the scope of the organization rather than a standardized reporting mechanism.

3. Include **opportunities for organizations to include internal capacity-building** within project funds, particularly in areas that will allow organizations to review policies and implement changes.







For Government Bodies

Non-profit Arts Organizations are in a constant position of applying for government funding that occupy valuable time and resources. Non-profit Arts Organizations remain underfunded, micromanaged, surveilled, and scrutinized in a way that does not apply to the corporate/private sector. The conventions that shape our communities are most influenced by corporations/private sector, who have the most resources yet the least held accountable.

The following recommendations are intended for all levels of government to incorporate into their policies and practices when engaging with Non-profit Arts Organizations.

1. We propose the establishment of a **collective body for Non-profit Arts Organizations and leverage their collective power**:
    - Create a body of recipients to offer **independent oversight of government-based funding bodies**.
    - Create an office of the mediator or an arts-funding interlocutor office that would work directly with Non-profit Arts Organizations to **distribute funds that are responsive to the needs, challenges, barriers, and realities of communities**.
    - Support non-profit arts organizations to **subsidize some of the operational costs of programming**, such as accounting, human resources, and reporting. Essentially creating a broker between government funding agencies and nonprofit organizations to reduce the undue physical, emotional, and mental burden shouldered by underresourced nonprofits.
2. We propose all levels of government to **center the calls for economic reconciliation**. Economic reconciliation cannot be achieved through tokenization or box-checking measures squeezed into pre-existing colonial funding structures. Government bodies must **recognize Treaty rights and reframe funding systems in collaboration with Indigenous communities** to align with Indigenous cultural frameworks.

3. We propose all levels of government to **recognize and enforce corporate responsibility to the communities in which they operate.** Corporate responsibility is an essential part of ensuring where and how communities thrive: we can no longer allow corporations to harm our communities and leave municipal governments and nonprofits to fill in the gaps. It is the responsibility of the government to hold the private sector accountable when, where, and how they give back to communities. Governments must honour their responsibility to dismantle an extractive, exploitative dynamic and work with the arts and culture sector to ensure that corporate profits are reinvested back into initiatives that allow communities to thrive.

