

# The Prototype - Merger between Ottawa Arts Council and Arts Network Ottawa

June 2024

## INTRODUCTION

The merger of the Ottawa Arts Council and Arts Network Ottawa marks a pivotal moment in the evolution of the arts sector today. It presents a strategic opportunity to re-evaluate and refine the structures that we work in, both in how an arts service organization functions and what role it plays in the arts it serves and in the lives of the residents where it is located. This merger is the next natural step in the evolution of the legacies of these 40 year organizations. Evolving to meet the needs of the sector has been a consistent piece of both legacies, from festivals, to facility developments, to now.

In response to extensive collaboration with, and feedback from, over 550 arts and community members, a new arts service model is being proposed to address the needs of the local arts community.

## Why change, why now?

Before the pandemic, the arts sector struggled with outdated structures and inadequate financial support, both of which were exacerbated by the crisis. The opportunity to reimagine and construct a more resilient and equitable future for the arts, transcending previous limitations, is here.

What did we learn from the pandemic and how can this help us build a healthier arts community now?

- Understand the nature of the challenge now
- Collaborate to achieve shared purpose
- Recreate shared purpose
- Create collaborative governance
- Work with community strengths



### Nurture Future by Melanie Yugo

*"What resonated with me during the Community Conversations in particular is the need to build bridges across regions, disciplines and backgrounds. There is also a desire to take a holistic approach to the arts, recognizing our role as actors in society and in the environment. As artists, each of us are planting seeds with the hopes of creating a sustainable, vibrant, diverse arts sector in Ottawa-Gatineau, one that is grounded in care, community and creativity."*

Centered in our work is artists. Melanie Yugo was commissioned to create an artwork that captured her perspectives of this process, from the community conversations and co-creation sessions. The work is a reflection of the grassroots approach to the merger process. One of the most touching outcomes of this commission, is that Melanie has very graciously decided to donate her fees – in support of the Council's Micro-Grant Program.

# A shift in how we work

**Core Purpose: to drive collective action in responding to community needs and priorities, fostering a thriving arts sector.**

A core value of both organizations is collaboration and partnerships and we regularly work within shared leadership structures and issue-based ad hoc groups. We have been active in pulling resources and research around key issues in the local sector, and pride ourselves on being responsive and resilient.

However, despite the advances the sector and our organizations have made, there remains constant and persistent 'needs' and 'gaps' in core areas identified by the local arts sector (including innovative funding models, accessible and affordable spaces, marketing and audience development and movement on Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility and Reconciliation for equity-deserving communities).

We believe now is the right time to try a new structured approach forward that codifies this into the roots of not only ourselves, but into the sector. **This prototype model is that framework.**

Mobilizing collective action needs a fundamental change in how we think and feel about our work and our role in it, and how the sector feels and thinks about the work and their role in it.

This shift will represent a commitment to innovation and responsiveness. By shifting how we work, we can leverage the merger for change in fostering sustainable growth, change and resilience within Ottawa's arts community.

This is how we are evolving to meet the changing needs and priorities of our sector.

FROM	TO
Organizations	Outcomes
Management	Mobilization
Me	We
Expert	Explorer
Delivery	Co-creation
Expectations	Agency
Head	Heart

[cocollaborationcic.com](http://cocollaborationcic.com)

## Moving From ... To...

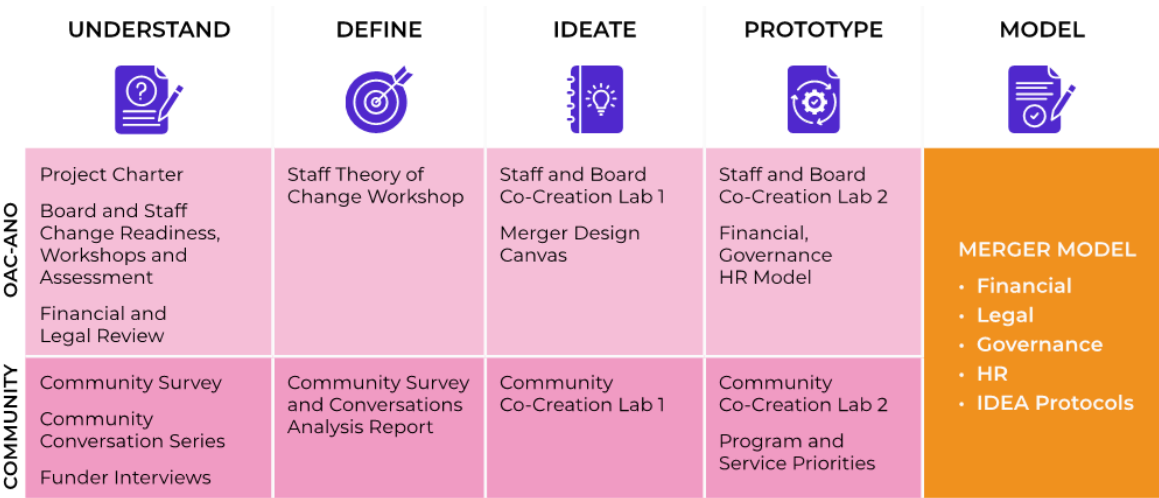
### FROM

- Centralized decision-making
- Silos and limited collaboration
- Inconsistent and lacking diverse engagement with the community
- Fragmented approach to sector support and learning

### TO

- Integrated governance structure
- Collective Action
- Inclusive and participatory decision-making processes
- Centralized hub for organizational support and learning

# OAC-ANO Merger Design Process



The methodology is based on Human-centered framework Design Thinking principles.

This report is between the prototype and model phases. There will be additional testing and ideating as the model continues to be responsive to community need and is refined. Reports from process milestones are available on the ANO/OAC website.

### SURVEY

In Fall 2023, a short survey asked questions about what the community currently sees as value within both organizations, what should we keep, consider or leave behind.

### COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

From November through to early 2024, we hosted seven in-person and virtual events with thought leaders from across the country. The sessions dove into innovative ways of operating, and explore themes related to: getting comfortable Adapting to Change; exploring Innovative Non Profit Models; Self-Determination of Indigenous voices in the work; Scaling Deep, as a complementary approach to achieving impact; Building an Inclusive Arts Ecosystem and the importance of moving at the speed of trust; Navigating the future of human resources in the arts sector workplace; and the importance of centering artist's voices.

### CO-CREATION LABS

The community joined us in an interactive co-creation lab exercise in sharing a vision for what they saw in this organization's future. The co-creation labs resulted in 8 prototype models for the merged organization. Each was unique, and dug deep into different areas of focus. Common themes were shared decision making, transparency, community care and keeping artists at the center.

This prototype is rooted in you, our peers, our community. It is a consolidated version of all of the prototypes that were created in labs.

# The Prototype: the organizational framework

A collaborative and inclusive model is crucial for fostering deeper community relationships, promoting innovation and enhancing our organizational effectiveness.

At the heart of this model lies our purpose – arts sector collective action.

We believe that collective action is the right pathway to work on solutions and innovations that address the complex challenges facing the arts sector today. It will take all of us moving together to ideate and model change.

To drive and nurture collective action, the model is divided into five parts. Each with pathways for shared leadership with the sector, and branches of mobilization and participation. Each interconnect, and have a role in collective action.

Here are some key impacts:

- Shift from Centralized to Distributed Decision-making
- Inclusivity and Participation
- Flexibility and Adaptability



## Community Advisory Circle

The Community Advisory Circle represents our community at large and is a key link between the model and the broad arts sector. In an advisory capacity, it could offer recommendations on relevant issues, helping to inform decision-making and ensure alignment with the evolving needs of the arts sector.

The Advisory Circle ensures that the arts sector voices are heard and have clear pathways to participation and mobilization within the other four 'nodes'. The Advisory Circle could be the place for more specialized expertise and guidance on specific areas of focus.

**Key role / pathway to participate:** Through membership, attendance/participation at events like community forums, specific calls for expertise/advice/feedback, etc.

**The People:** Arts Practitioners, Arts Organizations, Community Leaders and Advocates and/or Business and Philanthropic Leaders.

## Core Leadership Circle

The Core Leadership Circle acts as a high-level activator in the community. It is a group of individuals and organizations that can help advocate for the outcomes identified from the Action Labs and is a connection between the 'organization hub' and the 'arts sector' - and it is where action is mobilized and organized.

They are individuals who collectively guide the strategic direction and overall vision of collective action.

**Key Roles / pathway to participate:** through a time-set term, with regular meetings and reporting.

- Sets the strategic direction, priorities, and guiding initiatives for collective action
- Focus on high-level planning, that the activities align with community needs and sector goals
- Facilitates collaboration and coordination across model
- Represents the interests of the Advisory Circle
- Champion 'collective action' with community, donors, and partners, and spread the word about what this collective action is achieving

**The People:** Representatives from across the model : Action Labs, Community Advisory Circle, Board Members, Staff and External Advisors/Champions.

Through open dialogue, consensus-building, and collective decision-making, the Core Leadership Circle ensures that the organization remains responsive, innovative, and deeply connected to its community.

## Board of Directors

The Board of Directors maintains its fiduciary role for the corporation and ensures the outcomes from the collective action aligns with the strategic direction of the organization.

### Key Roles

- Provides oversight, accountability and monitors organizational performance.
- Sets policies, approves budgets, and monitors organizational performance to ensure alignment with the mission and values.
- Ensures the organization's mission, vision, and values are upheld
- Represents the new organization with the Core Leadership Circle and with external stakeholders,
- Advocates for the organization's mission and impact.

**People:** Volunteers from Ottawa community.

## Merged Organization - Operational Hub

The Operation Hub (the Organization) fuels the work driving the change, facilitates coordination and helps to make sure that everything runs smoothly. It will host a learning and development hub - where the sector can connect, providing skill-building, learning and mentorship.

The new organization acts as a catalyst for innovation, fosters partnerships, and ensures coherence in the implementation of initiatives without centralizing power or decision-making.

### Key Roles

- Provides operational and strategic support to the Core Leadership Circle and Action Labs
- Offers administrative, communications and resource coordination
- Facilitates shared decision-making implementation

- Ensures smooth implementation of initiatives and priorities identified by Core Leadership Circle and Action Labs
- Develops and implements programming that moves the action lab priority forward
- Develops and manages learning programs and projects
- Serves as a central point of contact for communication and collaboration between different stakeholders.

**People:** Full and part time staff, contractors.

## Action Labs

Driving the change are issue-focused Action Labs.

Issues brought forward from the Community Advisory Circle (the Community) are prioritized into Action Labs based on most urgent needs to move the sector forward. Depending on the issue, they can function like think tanks, research, policy/advocacy hubs, committees, collectives, etc.

Outcomes from the Action Labs are directed to two nodes: the Organization, to coordinate the activation and the Core Leadership Circle to amplify the issue and influence change.

**People:** Action Labs memberships are fluid based on issues.

## ACTION LABS: FORM AND FOCUS AREAS

Action Labs form and disband based on the organization's shifting priorities and the community's needs.

Time and Investment:

- **Project-Based Labs** : For addressing specific goals, like organizing a campaign, launching an initiative. They have clear starts and ends, disbanding after goals are met or when the project is completed
- **Issue-Based Labs** : For tackling ongoing issues or policy changes. The timelines might be longer, but are reviewed and evaluated regularly to determine if they are still needed and effective.

**Review and Assessment:** Evaluations are done to assess the progress towards goals, if the issues still matter, and if the team's strategies are working. Regular check-ins and assessments help decide whether to continue, change, or disband the action lab.

**Rotating Membership:** Memberships on Action Labs may rotate to keep fostering fresh perspectives, and help prevent burnout. Length of someones participating on the lab, and the groups term of references will be set out and depend largely on the lab's focus. This can help to bring new energy and ideas to the group.

Rotation also helps spread out the leadership and responsibilities, avoiding centralizing decision-making and enabling the distribution of expertise, keeping things fair and inclusive.

**Succession Planning:** Before membership rotation, knowledge and skills are transferred between members. This helps with continuity, and fosters mentorship in the sector.

**Disbandment:** When an action lab would end.

1. **Achieving Objectives:** Once goals or targets are met, successes are celebrated, learnings are documented and shared, the lab would come to an end.
2. **Change in Direction:** If focus or priorities shift, or the problem they were tackling are not relevant to the sector. Resources can then be put to more urgent issues.

3. **Lack of Impact or Feasibility:** If it turns out, through evaluation or feedback, the lab's efforts are not really making progress, or are no longer feasible. This could be from forces outside their control changed or they hit some roadblocks.

**Transition & Morphing into New Initiatives:** Sometimes, an Action Lab lays the foundation for a new initiative. The original lab might disband and some members transition to a new lab with a revised focus. Dynamic Action Labs keeps the organization and the sector nimble, and ready to tackle both urgent projects and Codepeer issues. This can be a good approach in the arts, where issues and opportunities are always shifting.

## Issue Process Example: Human Resource and Labour Market Needs within the Arts Sector

The following is a draft approach to tackle the human resource and labour market needs in the arts sector, focusing on key issues like retention, new and more inclusive leadership, adjusting roles, and fair/living.

### Step 1: Defining Objectives and Scope

#### Core Leadership Group

- Clearly lay out what we want to achieve.
- Decide what we're focusing on—will it focus on a particular type of arts organization, a specific geographical area, or the sector as a whole?

### Step 2: Getting Everyone Involved / Stakeholder Engagement

#### Operation Hub engages Community Advisory Circle and beings to pull together Action Lab

- List some key stakeholders including artists, arts workers, organization leaders, funding bodies, and policy makers.
- Develop and implement strategies to gather diverse perspectives and insights.

### Step 3: Collecting and Sorting Data

#### Operation Hub and Action Lab leverages resources for Data

- Quantitative Data: Get numbers on wages, how the workforce is changing, employment trends and changes.
- Qualitative Data: Gather insights on personal experiences, hear people's stories, what they expect from their jobs, and what's hard about being in charge or changing roles.
- Analysis: Analyze this data to identify patterns, challenges, and opportunities that could inform strategic directions.

### Step 4: Coming Up with Ideas

#### Action Lab

- Workshops and Brainstorming Sessions: Organize sessions to generate creative solutions to identified challenges. Involve diverse participants to ensure a range of ideas.
- Prototype Solutions: Develop prototypes for potential solutions, such as new HR policies, leadership development programs, or innovative funding models that support living wages. Try out some ideas and new collaborations.

### Step 5: Testing and Pilot Ideas

#### Action Lab and Operation Hub

- Select Pilot Projects: Pick a few ideas to try out on a small scale and see how they work.
- Gather feedback from all affected stakeholders to assess the impact and reception of the initiatives.

### Step 6: Evaluation and Adjustment

#### Action Lab and Core Leadership Group. Report shared with Community Advisory Circle

- Assess the success of the pilot projects against the objectives set in
- If not, change things up based on what we learned.

### Step 7: Scaling and Integration

Operation Hub works to mobilize resources or scale. Action Lab is expanded, disbanded or shifted.

- Plan and implement the successful strategies across the broader sector or targeted areas.
- Work with partners and sector to integrate the successful practices into standard operating procedures and policies.

### Step 8: Ongoing Monitoring and Adaptation

Operation Hub regularly monitoring and reporting out.

- Keep watching to see how our changes are working.
- Be ready to change things again if new issues pop up.

## Implementation

The proposed model framework is a mindset shift, and will take time to transition ourselves and the sector into cultivating a mindset of shared ownership and collective responsibility for achieving shared objectives.

The proposed model shifts the structure to align with the principles of collaboration, autonomy, and shared purpose. It requires moving the relationship between the arts service organization and the arts community from transactional to relational.

Still to be co-developed with the community are the protocols, decision-making and Measurement, Evaluation and Learning frameworks for the model.

In 2025, the shift to the new operation hub will begin and Arts Network Ottawa and Ottawa Arts Council will amalgamate into the new entity.

### BENEFITS

- Increased collaboration and synergy
- Enhanced responsiveness to community needs
- Greater diversity and inclusivity in decision-making
- Opportunities for innovation and continuous improvement
- Strengthened organizational capacity and resilience

## Further Reading

[Creating a New Arts Service Organization in Ottawa, Analysis Report of the Community-wide Survey](#)

[Community Conversations: Designing a New Arts Organization through Collective Vision](#)

[Community Conversations Report](#), March 2024

[Co-Creation Lab Report](#), April 2024

[Arts Leader's Breakfast Presentation Slide Deck](#), June 5, 2024

### PROJECT FUNDERS:



COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATIONS  
OF CANADA



OTTAWA  
COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION



CANADIAN ARTS PRESENTING ASSOCIATION  
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DES ORGANISMES ARTISTIQUES

Funded by the  
Government of Canada's  
Community Services Recovery Fund

Canada



Canada Council  
for the Arts

Conseil des arts  
du Canada