

New Brunswick Arts Board
Press Conference – “State of the Arts” – November 23rd, 2000

The New Brunswick Arts Board announces an action plan for the arts:

In the year 2000 the New Brunswick Arts Board embarked on its course as an arm's length granting agency. This milestone in the province's cultural development culminated ten years of community and government consultations, and it marks an important first step towards the goal of a successful arts policy. Yet the autonomous and publicly nominated Arts Board now faces crucial questions: how to use its autonomy to maximize the positive impact of the arts in New Brunswick? What are its priorities for a provincial arts policy? These questions have figured prominently in the Board's discussions and consultations in developing an action plan for the arts.

The Board's action plan identifies four key arts policy priorities: *funding, infrastructure, education, and innovation*. The NBAB plan calls for government and private sector partnerships to address these priorities, setting a course towards a vital and healthy arts sector for the benefit all New Brunswickers.

Priority 1: Funding

The NBAB is committed to achieving an optimal mix of public and private funding to the arts within four years.

Provincial funding: New Brunswick under-invests in the arts. Indeed, less than two dollars per capita each year is invested in artists and arts organizations as compared with the all-provinces average of more than three dollars. This has measurable negative consequences in lost economic development, unused federal contributions and untapped cultural tourism.

Harder to measure is the detriment caused to the well being of our society as a whole. The Board wishes to emphasize that the arts are for *everyone*, not just the few. Artistic creation substantiates our communities and the Board believes that ensuring fair access to the arts for all New Brunswickers should be a priority in every municipality and on every reserve. Success stories such as Caraquet, with its vibrant community support for the arts, show how the arts can substantiate a community. Despite such successes, and there are other examples, the Board maintains that the arts have not yet achieved their rightful place in the mix of government and private sector priorities. For this reason, the Board is launching a three-point strategy to raise the threshold of arts activity across the province:

- A series of one-time strategic funding initiatives amounting to one million dollars over three years designed to build new audiences and markets, stimulate innovation, self-reliance and to promote major new creative works.
- The development of a multi-year plan in partnership with the Province's Culture and Sport Secretariat to infuse new resources into the arts sector where they will have the most effect, including stabilization of arts organizations.
- Building private sector partnerships through the New Brunswick Arts Foundation to create an endowment fund for the arts.

Federal funding: the NBAB monitors the regional impact of federal cultural departments and agencies. The Board is concerned that provincial under-funding impinges on the arts sector's success in attracting federal grant dollars. For example, the number of New Brunswick artists and arts organizations applying for Canada Council grants fell significantly in 1999-2000. Only 1.5% of total Canada Council funding or \$1.5 million went to New Brunswick artists and organizations, well below the province's 2.6% share of the Canadian population. By contrast, Nova Scotia achieved above-average grant success, receiving a total of \$3.6 million in Canada Council funds. The Canada Council's juries award grants on the basis of artistic merit not on regional considerations; nurturing talent at the provincial level thus is crucial to building the confidence and skills that ensure grant success at the federal level.

Priority 2: Education

The NBAB is committed to raising the appreciation of and participation in the arts across the province.

Arts education is a matter of urgent concern to the Arts Board. As a provincial responsibility it is incumbent on the Department of Education to demonstrate leadership in this area. The New Brunswick Arts Board will assist with advice and also through its arts scholarships and emerging artists programs.

New Brunswick has produced outstanding role models to whom arts educators can point: David Adams Richards has won the prestigious Giller Prize for literature. Moncton violinist Jasper Wood has earned the use of the Canada Council's Stradivarius violin. Herménégilde Chiasson was awarded the 1999 Governor General's award for poetry. Mi'kmaq artist Shirley Bear is currently with Vancouver's prestigious Emily Carr School of Art. Holly Cole, Marie-Jo Therio and Antonine Maillet captivate audiences everywhere.

Yet, the Province's current level of investment in arts education in fact may limit the chances of young New Brunswickers at the national level. For example, a current Arts Board survey of the National Theatre School, the National Ballet School, and the National Circus School finds just one student from New Brunswick.

The Board is also concerned that without strong arts education programs that reach all age groups future arts audiences will decline. It is essential that New Brunswick develop an unbroken continuum of arts education from primary through to university and adult education. The Arts Board will encourage the Department of Education to enhance arts education through increased professional development, teacher training and preparation, curriculum development, and artists in the schools. The Board will also help through its own programs:

- The Arts Board has requested special funds from the Ministry of Education to boost its arts scholarship program by 20% in 2001-2002.
- The Board's new Emerging Artists Program (\$60,000 per year) assists our most talented young artists after they emerge from post-secondary training.

Priority 3: Infrastructure

The NBAB believes it is essential to develop and implement an arts infrastructure strategy that addresses both facilities and programs as part of a provincial cultural policy framework

The Arts Board legislated mandate requires it to advise the government on arts policy. Yet the Board is hampered by the lack of up-to-date empirical data on audiences, arts education, and arts infrastructure. In response to this need, the Board is launching a research program to provide benchmark performance indicators as its action plan unfolds over the next several years. There are well understood needs that cannot wait upon more study. Acting on previously tabled reports, the Arts Board will begin immediately addressing certain arts infrastructure needs in New Brunswick:

- Stabilization of arts organizations: The Board is dismayed by the precarious state of many arts organizations and regrets the recent demise of *Éditions Acadie* and impending closure of The Space Gallery for lack of financial support. The Board is encouraging the Culture and Sport Secretariat to introduce stabilization measures in aid of the Province's arts organizations.
- A comprehensive survey/needs analysis of cultural facilities and programs region by region within the province: Based on this research the Board will work with provincial and municipal authorities to develop an infrastructure strategy designed to maximize the impact of scarce funding dollars.
- Art in public places: the NBAB believes the provincial cultural policy must include a program for art in public places. In the meantime, the Board has taken the lead by introducing its Presentation Program (\$68,000). For the first time (deadline February 1, 2001) municipalities and private corporations can apply for matching funds for public arts projects presenting the work of New Brunswick artists.

Priority 4: Innovation

The NBAB believes it is not enough to simply hold the line in existing programs and initiatives. New ideas and initiatives will be essential to implementing a successful arts policy.

To date, actual grant program dollars have been protected from the province's 1999-2000 budget cuts. Both the arm's length Arts Board and the Culture and Sports Secretariat in the Department of Education have absorbed these cuts through administrative reductions. For its part, the Arts Board has reduced the number and length of its Board meetings, deferred staffing initiatives, and trimmed administration costs.

On the plus side, the total amount of Arts Board grants has in fact increased with the introduction of new programs. Another significant plus is a reserve fund created by the previous Board to launch its successor with a strong impetus. This million dollar reserve fund positions the Board to introduce innovative initiatives over the next several years:

- A two-year stimulus to cultural tourism designed to better position the arts within existing Provincial tourism and investment development initiatives.

- An Aboriginal Arts Program designed to nurture and promote the artistic creation of aboriginal artists.
- An Electronic Arts initiative designed both to assist N.B. artists in showcasing their work in new media and to promote artistic creation in digital media.
- A series of five arts policy forums to be held in the five regions leading to a major regional conference in May 2002.

These program initiatives will be the subject of further consultations in the coming year as the Board evolves its advisory and monitoring role vis-à-vis the government's development of an arts policy.

Conclusion

In its next state of the arts press conference in November 2001 the New Brunswick Arts Board expects to report real progress towards a successful provincial arts policy. The Board believes that funding, education, infrastructure and innovation will be central pillars of that policy, and that they will find real expression in new funding dollars and innovative strategies for raising the threshold of artistic achievement in the province.