



Alberta
Foundation
for the Arts

A collage of artistic images arranged in colorful triangles. The images include: a person playing a guitar, a hand writing on a notepad, a person's hands clasped together, a person's legs in a dance pose, and a person's face in profile. The triangles are colored in shades of purple, yellow, blue, red, and green.

Strategic Plan

2024-27



The Alberta Foundation for the Arts acknowledges, with respect and honour, we are located on Indigenous lands throughout Alberta.

We also acknowledge that our offices are located in Treaty 6 territory in Edmonton, known in the Nēhiyaw (Cree) language as amiskwaciwâskahikan (Beaver Hills House) and in the Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) language as omukoyis (Big House). Our work is connected to many surrounding Indigenous communities whose presence continues to enrich Alberta, including Inuit and Métis people who share a deep connection with this land.

We acknowledge and greatly value that the artistic activity we support primarily takes place on the territories of the Blackfoot, Cree, Dene, Nakota-Sioux, Tsuut'ina and the Saulteaux First Nations, and connected to the Indigenous communities that are part of Treaty 6, Treaty 7, Treaty 8, and the Métis Settlements.

We recognize and deeply respect that the land Alberta is situated on has been a meeting place for many Indigenous peoples with diverse histories, languages, and cultures, for thousands of years. We recognize the role of Elders and the knowledge-keepers in helping our communities better understand and foster our rich cultural heritage. We acknowledge both the historical and present contributions of Indigenous artists, Indigenous arts workers, Indigenous organizations, and Elders to our arts community.

We reaffirm our commitment to strengthening our relationships with Indigenous communities and growing our shared knowledge and understanding. Our evolving process of our relationships with Indigenous communities is greatly valued as we continue to learn from, and apply knowledge from, Indigenous ways of knowing.

 **We have respect for each other.**

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AFA board members pictured from left to right:
Pi'kssipitaakii, Andrea True Joy Fox; Melody McKnight; Sylvester Ndumbi;
Xuejia Shana Yang; Cynthia P. Moore, Chair; Yasmin Jivraj; Robert Fernandez;
Le Bo, Vice Chair. (Missing: Nabil Malik.)



Message from the Chair

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA) is an essential supporter of Alberta's arts community. It is the main instrument our province employs to develop and champion local artists and art of all disciplines.

As a public agency with a legislative mandate to support the arts, the Board of the AFA is entrusted by the Government of Alberta to make strategic decisions. These decisions help shape the ongoing evolution and growth of Alberta's arts community. We take this responsibility very seriously. We strive to understand the perspective of artists and arts organizations. We employ the latest research and analysis to assist us in developing a path forward for the sector. We make great efforts to listen and learn to ensure that we are a partner on the journey of reconciliation, equity and inclusion.

This perspective has assisted in forming the basis of our 2024-2027 Strategic Plan, summarizing our approach to arts funding over the next three years. Our Strategic Plan contains an overview of how the Alberta Foundation for the Arts sees its role in the sector, the values and underlying beliefs that will guide our decision-making and, most importantly, a strategic direction articulated through four main goals for our community.

These goals include:

- Strengthening Relationships with Indigenous Arts Communities;
- Encouraging and Equipping the Arts Sector to Thrive in a Changing World;
- Embracing Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility; and
- Ongoing Public Engagement, Research and Advocacy.

The Foundation is committed to strengthening and growing our relationships with Indigenous arts communities. Understanding and appreciating the vital artistic and cultural practices of First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples residing in this land is key to ensuring a wholistic approach to supporting and growing the arts. In this time of recovery and healing, as well as of new and growing risks and opportunities ahead, it is our responsibility to help ensure that Alberta's arts sector is prepared for an ever-changing world and can respond accordingly. Our foundation will continue to adopt and implement strategies to advance a more equitable, inclusive, accessible sector to serve our diverse population. We are committed to continue to engage with artists and arts organizations and obtain the best data to inform our decisions.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the Alberta Foundation for the Arts 2024 - 2027 Strategic Plan.



Cynthia P. Moore

Cynthia P. Moore, Chair
Alberta Foundation for the Arts



A foundation for Alberta's arts community

In the more than 30 years that the AFA has operated in Alberta, it has fixed itself as a keystone in the provincial arts community. Alberta arts continues to evolve and grow with ever-increasing complexity, vibrancy and energy. The nature of artistic development may seem almost autonomous at first glance, or perhaps more connected to external trends and advances in the wider arts landscape. That is, in part, the disposition of creativity.

But Alberta's arts sector gains much of its stability from the AFA and our programs and services, which are dedicated to the development and promotion of the province's arts community. As a provincial arts funder—that expends more than 85 per cent of its annual budget on granting and other funding programs—we are committed to supporting the artists and arts organizations that challenge, entertain and inspire us through their work.

But the AFA is so much more than a funding entity...

It is a curator and a caretaker of invaluable artistic materials and, through the AFA Art Collection, it is also a documentarian of the modern evolution of Alberta's visual arts.

It is a champion and promoter of Alberta arts, but also a conduit for local artists and arts organizations to promote themselves, and their events and opportunities on offer.

It is a researcher and educator that seeks better understandings of the ecologies of arts communities across the province, in different disciplines and diverse cultural contexts.

In short, the Foundation is a foundation for Alberta's arts community. Its work is a bedrock upon which the garden of Alberta arts can grow.





The AFA was established in 1991 as a public agency and Provincial Corporation of the Government of Alberta. The AFA reports to Alberta’s Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women and is guided by the objectives found in the *Alberta Foundation for the Arts Act*, which are to:

- Support and contribute to the development of, and to promote, the arts in Alberta;
- Provide persons and organizations with the opportunity to participate in the arts in Alberta;
- Foster and promote the enjoyment of works of art by Alberta artists;
- Collect, preserve and display works of art by Alberta artists; and
- Encourage artists resident in Alberta in their work.

The AFA aligns its strategic priorities for the arts sector with those of the Government of Alberta, which includes ensuring the AFA prioritizes Alberta artists, art and cultural materials.

Context for Strategic Development

The AFA has developed a three-year Strategic Plan to help guide its annual operations and planning. The plan affirms the foundation's commitment to Alberta's arts community and identifies key priorities for the next three years. These priorities are ongoing and reflect both the changing landscape of Alberta's arts sector and how the AFA intends to serve the sector and the public. The timeline for the AFA's 2024-2027 Strategic Plan aligns with the Government of Alberta's commitment to incrementally increase funding assistance to the AFA to \$39.1 million annually by 2026-27. This increase allows the AFA to align its priorities and strategies in a corresponding way.

The context for developing the AFA's Strategic Plan started with our legislated mandate and consideration of our role in Alberta's arts ecology. From there, the board affirmed its aspirations for the AFA, including a vision, mission and values from which we wish to operate:

Vision

A vibrant Alberta arts community that sparks innovation, bursts with creativity, fosters understanding, and promotes belonging.

Mission

Be a champion for the arts as an essential contributor to the quality of life of Albertans.

Values

We are accountable to the arts sector, the government, and public to act with professionalism, integrity, and transparency.

Our decisions are grounded in lived experience, up-to-date and relevant research, and are responsive to evolving needs.

We embrace equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility in the arts and through the arts.





From there, we reflected on the challenges and issues that have impacted the sector over the past years. The AFA assessed the financial and social environment in Alberta as it applied to artistic activity and development, and looked ahead towards the future and desired outcomes it hopes to achieve through the plan.

Since 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant and lasting impact on Alberta's arts community. Pandemic recovery is ongoing, and the sector continues to face challenges, including the loss of artists and arts workers to other industries and the reluctance of audiences to return to in-person performances and exhibitions. Rising inflation has also put significant stress on artists and arts organizations, as well as the public.

The COVID-19 pandemic also brought to the forefront significant inequities within the arts sector and more broadly within society. Significant societal movements related to equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility have gained prominence in recent years. Canada continues to awaken to the painful legacy of its residential school system and treatment of Indigenous peoples, and must continually work towards truth, accountability, and reconciliation. Artists and arts organizations are responding to these calls to action and are increasingly seeking ways to address these issues, both within the arts community and to affect broader social change.

In addition to responding to societal change, the arts community continues to be challenged by and to take advantage of rapid technological evolution, especially in the digital realm. From the turbulent advent of cryptocurrencies and NFTs to the more recent emergence of Artificial Intelligence, artists and arts workers are grappling with both ethical and existential questions about artistic practice. There are no firm answers to these questions yet except to say that the arts sector may need to continue to define and redefine, and redefine again, who we are and what it is that we do with such powerful new tools at our disposal.



Engagement and feedback

To help identify the AFA's strategic priorities and ensure that the plan is responsive to the needs of the community, the AFA sought further feedback from the arts community through one-on-one interviews and targeted engagement sessions. Indigenous artists and members of Indigenous arts communities, arts leaders, arts organizations, and individual artists from various disciplines all provided their input on:

- the opportunities and challenges facing Alberta's arts sector,
- how to address arts issues related to equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility, and
- the AFA's priorities over the next three years.

Envisioning success

Armed with a better understanding of community needs, of the social and cultural environment, and the AFA's current role in the province's arts ecology, the board envisioned snapshots for what successful implementation of its Strategic Plan could look like over the next three years.

- Greater recognition in our province that Indigenous arts communities and artistic practices are integral to Alberta's cultural identity.
- Local arts communities that have the capacity and tools to innovate, adapt, and create while continuing to forge deep connections and engagement with their audiences and the public.
- A more equitable arts sector where all arts organizations and artists have access to AFA programs with systemic barriers removed.
- Increased understanding and respect for Alberta art and artists, both within the province and across the country, for the essential contributions they make to the economy, to education, and to individual and community well-being.

With these general outcomes in mind, the AFA crafted its Strategic Direction to describe how our organization will support Alberta's arts sector to get there.



The AFA is grateful for increased support from Alberta's government over the next three years enabling us to make strategic investments to help ensure the ongoing sustainability and growth of the Alberta arts sector.



Strategic Direction



Goal 1

Strengthen Relationships with Indigenous Arts Communities

Alberta is privileged to have one of the largest, youngest and fastest-growing Indigenous populations in Canada. About 250,000 people of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit heritage play an important role in the social, cultural, and economic fabric of the province. Indigenous artists in Alberta work in every discipline and encompass a multitude of practices spanning from traditional cultural practices to contemporary practices.

The AFA recognizes the importance of Indigenous Peoples and their perspectives, in both the arts sector and in society. For more than 20 years, the AFA has taken actions to build relationships with Indigenous artists and arts organizations in Alberta. This has led to the development and furtherance of dedicated programs for Indigenous Peoples and arts.

The AFA also recognizes the importance of reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. The *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action* includes a recommendation to promote the arts as a fundamental aspect of reconciliation, signaling the valuable role the arts play in the reconciliation process.



The AFA is committed to continuing to take meaningful steps to strengthen its relationship with Indigenous arts communities and further understand their needs.

This means listening. It means learning from Indigenous voices and applying these ways of knowing and being throughout our programs and services. The AFA seeks to support a thriving Indigenous arts sector in Alberta and promote the significant contributions of Indigenous artists and artistic practices to this cultural landscape. Through increased outreach and engagement, the AFA will gather Indigenous perspectives to help shape our supports for Indigenous artistic and cultural practices.

► Strategies:

- Increase outreach and engagement with Indigenous artists and communities to ensure that Indigenous perspectives are included and integrated in AFA's programs and services.
- Invest in artistic creation and development by Indigenous Peoples.
- Increase awareness of Indigenous arts communities and artistic practices.

Goal **2**

Encourage and Equip Alberta's Arts Sector to Respond and Thrive in a Changing World

Alberta's arts community has faced many challenges over the past few years, including the COVID-19 pandemic. To support the sector as it navigated this uncertain and unpredictable environment and recognizing that the arts are integral to the province's social and economic landscape, the AFA responded to these challenges by maintaining stable funding to arts organizations and continuing to provide opportunities for individual artists.

While Alberta is now in recovery, the impacts of the pandemic and further challenges, like rising inflation, remain. At the same time, the AFA seeks to encourage artists and arts organizations to respond to the challenges and opportunities presented by emerging technologies and new perceptions and discussions about the nature of art and artistic creation.



The 2024-27 Strategic Plan reaffirms the AFA's commitment to provide predictable and stable support for arts organizations and artists. The AFA will continue to provide operational and other supports to organizations so that they are able to provide Albertans with unique art experiences and job opportunities for artists and cultural workers, with an eye towards also meeting the challenges of access and participation experienced by some rural and smaller communities. Individual project funding and our ongoing support for the AFA Art Collection will continue to help artists advance their careers, innovate and grow their artistic practices, gain recognition, and support the preservation of Alberta's unique cultural heritage.

Recognizing that many of the challenges of recent years are ongoing, the AFA seeks to help increase the capacity, resiliency, and sustainability of the arts community through its programs and services.

This includes increasing the visibility of Alberta's artists by sharing the AFA Art Collection. As it has over the past years, the AFA will adapt when needed to ensure that support is targeted and responsive to the current environment and needs of the sector.

► Strategies:


- Support the growth, development, and adaptability of the sector through funding and programs.
- Foster partnerships and collaborations within Alberta's arts community.
- Increase public circulation of the AFA Art Collection to ensure it is accessible to more Albertans.

Goal **3**

Embrace Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility

In recent years, there have been and continue to be numerous calls for social change to address racism, ableism, and to overall achieve a more equitable society. The AFA believes that the arts hold tremendous power to create positive change. Alberta's arts community has a transformative ability to influence societal change, increase social cohesion, and meaningfully affect Albertans' lives.





Recognizing this potential, the AFA is committed to supporting Alberta's artists and arts organizations in engendering a more equitable and inclusive arts community and society.

The AFA aims to be a leader in this area and has already developed a Pluralism Policy to serve as a cornerstone for all our decision-making processes and address issues of equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility (EDIA). Implementation of this policy across the Foundation's programs and services is a priority over the short and long term.

To properly address issues on inequity, the AFA itself must model a diverse and inclusive organization and work internally to integrate the values of EDIA throughout its operations. The AFA is incorporating EDIA principals into all areas including its governance and the delivery of its programs and services. It will ensure that diverse voices and perspectives are at its tables and that support remains relevant and responsive, addressing systemic barriers that may exist within the Foundation.

Strategies:

- Support the arts community to build a more equitable arts sector through targeted programs and services, including opportunities for training.
- Integrate EDIA at all levels of AFA decision-making and develop a framework to measure EDIA progress and impacts.
- Continued review of programs and services to enhance EDIA practices to help reduce barriers and increase access.

Goal **4**

Ongoing Public Engagement, Research and Advocacy

The AFA recognizes that the arts are essential to Alberta's economic, social, and cultural fabric. The sector supports economic development, sustains a skilled workforce, and plays a significant role in enhancing the quality of life within the province. Alberta's artists and arts organizations enrich the lives of Albertans, foster positive health and well-being, and preserve and share the province's unique culture and history.





Despite this, the value of Alberta arts is not always appreciated and understood by the broader public, especially beyond our province's borders. As a public agency and provincial corporation, the AFA is well-positioned to build awareness of the sector and its importance. We can work with and build stronger partnerships with our federal, provincial and municipal partners, and advocate on behalf of our community.

The AFA is committed to continuing to share and amplify the significant contributions that Alberta's artists and arts organizations make to the province and beyond.

In advocating for the sector, the AFA must have a thorough understanding of Alberta's arts ecosystem as it evolves and adapts to trends and challenges. This includes better understanding of the opportunities, challenges, and implications of emerging technologies and tools. Acknowledging this, the AFA reaffirms its commitment to ongoing and continuous engagement with Alberta's artists and arts organizations. The AFA will also continue its research activities to strengthen advocacy for the arts. Developing and sharing relevant research will also provide the sector with useful information that they can use in programming and decision-making.

Strategies:

- Engage regularly with the sector on challenges and trends.
- Promote the economic, social, and cultural value of Alberta's arts and artists.
- Further the development of and access to relevant research and information including emerging trends and technologies.

Reporting

The AFA will monitor its progress in implementing its Strategic Plan by developing measurable indicators that correspond to each goal. Assessment of progress on each strategy will be conducted using both quantitative and qualitative data.

- **Quantitative** – This will include numerical outcomes, development of benchmarks and comparisons with data from previous years, and secondary source material from other researchers and funding jurisdictions.
- **Qualitative** – This will include gathering feedback through ongoing engagement with the sector, AFA website news feed submissions, and other tools to solicit information related to the needs of the sector, and comments about AFA initiatives. We will note trends as we develop a more comprehensive understanding of the sector. Targeted program evaluation is planned where relevant by using existing tools, such as the Expert Panel Comments from project grant applications and assessments by our partners.

Continuous improvement in our data collection methods will be balanced against the AFA's responsibilities as outlined in the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* as described in AFA grant agreements.

The AFA will use its existing reporting tools and explore new ways of communicating with its clients and stakeholders to share information about the outcomes and impacts of its activities. These include, but are not limited to, the AFA's Annual Report, its Impact of Funding webpage, Open Data information, and Expert Panel Member Archive. The AFA will also develop a reporting structure for implementing and measuring its EDIA initiatives.

These tools are intended to increase transparency and share a general overview of the economic impact and level of artistic activity occurring in the province.

Finally, the AFA is always available to discuss our progress on implementing this new Strategic Plan as we drive to transform our approaches and support the arts sector to, in turn, experiment, grow and contribute to the well-being of Albertans.



Conclusion

The AFA acknowledges that, as resilient and perseverant as the arts community may be, the sector continues to be in a period of recovery. Much of our plan is aspirational in nature: we look forward to growth and evolution of the sector, and the AFA looks for the best ways in which we can cultivate that growth. At the same time, we recognize how much work there is left to do, and that the path to recovery is not linear nor painless. Many challenges still lie ahead.

The AFA is confident in our approach for the next three years, in large part because of the steadily increasing and record-level funding support that will be provided to the AFA by Alberta's government over this same period. The foundation will be better positioned to adapt and respond to future challenges than ever before based on the values and vision for the community embedded herein.

No matter what may lay ahead, we are committed to attentiveness. We are committed to responsiveness.

At the same time, we feel strongly that better days are ahead for Alberta's arts sector. We are continually inspired by the creativity and passion of Alberta's artists and arts workers. We look forward to the new and unique art that will be exhibited, performed, written, screened, and yes, even coded, in the coming years.

Whatever lies in the road before us, we look forward to travelling towards it alongside Alberta's arts community.





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