



# **NAVIGATING A CAREER IN THE ARTS FOR NEWCOMERS**

**Findings and Recommendations**

**March 2021**



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## Message from WorkInCulture's Executive Director

*Navigating A Career in the Arts for Newcomers* is only the beginning of the work that needs to be done to help create sustainable, meaningful career-building experiences and resources to help newcomer artists and arts professionals access careers in the sometimes bewildering Canadian creative community ecosystem.

This report sets out a number of recommendations but needs to be followed up with action from a cross-section of the broad community - including government, settlement agencies and the arts community. The solutions need to be multi-faceted and to involve the artists and arts professionals themselves. WorkInCulture is committed to finding resources to continue this work and hopes to be joined by others.

We all stand to gain if talented creators and creative minded individuals from around the world can practice and support their chosen disciplines and contribute their talent, perspective and insights to our Canadian communities.

Sincerely,



Diane Davy  
Executive Director, WorkInCulture



*Supporting the professional lives of artists, creatives, and cultural workers.*

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## Executive Summary

This report summarizes the findings of a series of expert interviews and community roundtables exploring the needs and expectations of new Canadian and immigrant artists and arts professionals. Based on these findings, WorkInCulture makes several recommendations for how we might continue to deepen conversations and take action that will lead towards sustainable, community-led, and cross-sector transformation for new Canadian and immigrant arts professionals.

Over the course of 2019 and 2020, first in person and then virtually, the study consulted with arts professionals and representatives from artist serving organizations concerned with the challenges faced by new Canadian sector professionals. These professionals and the organizations they represented were also often newcomers themselves. In addition, we spoke with professionals from, and representatives of, the settlement and human services sector: settlement agencies as well as employment service agencies; local immigration partnerships, economic development offices, and other arms of regional and municipal governance; and a variety of organizations, public and nonprofit, representing additional sector stakeholders, including libraries, heritage organizations, and Ontario postsecondary.

What we heard during these conversations was both illuminating and emotional: stories of hope and disappointment, modest successes and innumerable challenges yet to be resolved. We discovered that new Canadian artists and arts professionals experience barriers to the sector labour market in ways both similar and distinct from newcomers in other employment and economic sectors. The barriers encountered by new Canadian and immigrant workers in other sectors were felt to be exacerbated by the characteristics common to arts and culture work in Canada. Seasonality, a prevalence of limited-duration and part-time contracts, a reliance on voluntarism and low wages, and insular professional networks, among other of the sector's characteristics, contribute to the difficulties people have had locating meaningful and timely information, opportunities, and resources to initiate or continue their careers as professional creatives. Racialized new Canadian arts professionals reported experiences of exclusion and discrimination that intensified these difficulties. Ultimately, all felt that being a new Canadian or immigrant was a factor in delaying their entry or reentry to the sector. Some spoke of colleagues who were forced to move laterally out of the sector in order to find survival employment; some indicated they themselves were facing this same ultimatum.

These discussions and their resulting narratives led us to form the following recommendations, addressed to any and all stakeholders prepared to lead on these initiatives:

1. Enhance professional development resources and supports for new Canadian, immigrant, and refugee artists and arts professionals to enable independent learning and community development.
2. Initiate new and cultivate existing cross-sector collaboration and partnership opportunities, prioritizing commitment and active participation from all levels of government, the employment and settlement sector, ASOs, and postsecondary institutions, prioritizing a newcomer-led, newcomer-initiated mandate.
3. Develop new and enhance existing communications and outreach strategies to better inform and connect new Canadians, including pre-arrival immigrants and refugees, to timely and relevant arts and culture sector services and resources.
4. Design a physical and/or virtual hub for supplying consolidated, up-to-date, and accessible information about the arts and culture sector for a new Canadian audience.

WorkInCulture is committed to continuing conversations in support of new Canadian and immigrant artists and arts professionals, and is eager to cultivate partnerships with the individuals, organizations, and institutions dedicated to this community.

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## 1. About the Project, Navigating a Career in the Arts for Newcomers

The OTF Seed Project, *Navigating a Career in the Arts for Newcomers*, was initiated to explore the particular challenges faced by newcomers as they seek to enter the Canadian arts and culture labour force.

In the decade since the publication of the City of Toronto report, “From the Ground Up: Growing Toronto’s Cultural Sector” (Silver 2011), arts and culture in Toronto continued its development as a vital economic driver and magnet for local and international talent alike. As recent conversations about sector diversity have demonstrated, however, this growth has been neither even nor inclusive (Ministry for Tourism, Culture and Sport, Ministry for Citizenship and Immigration, and Ismaili Council for Ontario 2018).

Although welcoming of creative entrepreneurship, pathways to entry and access to positions of leadership within the arts and culture workforce remain elusive, particularly for individuals identifying with equity seeking communities.

New Canadian and immigrant artists and arts professionals, who arrive intending to launch into or continue a professional creative career in Canada, experience this exclusion in distinct ways. With information that may be both out of date and difficult to access and with few employment networks to meaningfully engage with, new Canadian and immigrant arts professionals may spend years before gaining a foothold in the sector. Unfortunately, many are forced to leave the sector much sooner than this. WorkInCulture’s commitment to supporting career growth in the arts and culture sector compelled us to explore this issue, in order to determine how our organization can leverage and enhance what is being done to support this community, and to explore ways to build with other organizations a cross-sector capacity for inclusive growth and transformation.

Between October 2019 and February 2021 (with a pause in 2020 as a result of the pandemic), WorkInCulture conducted a needs assessment study to learn more about the experiences of new Canadians trying to build careers in the arts in Toronto and what challenges and opportunities they, and those working to support them, came across in doing so. WorkInCulture also sought to learn about the experiences of representatives from arts organizations that had been trying to engage and work with these communities as well as settlement services and resource centres interested in becoming better versed in culture sector career resources. What we learned from this project allowed us to formulate a set of actionable recommendations to better serve new Canadian creative professionals in Toronto and beyond. The knowledge developed will be shared widely with other leaders and stakeholders, in both the culture and settlement sectors, to encourage a concerted, cross-sectoral effort to more effectively address the skills and knowledge required by new Canadians in their ability to find fulfilling careers in art and culture and become part of the next generation of artistic leaders.

## 1.1 Key questions explored

Preliminary conversations and discussions surfaced a number of questions about how best to go about consulting the various communities of new Canadian and immigrant artists and arts professionals active in the sector in order to understand their professional concerns and priorities.

- Where are newcomers and immigrants currently getting their information about the arts and culture sector in Toronto?
- What current programs, training, and funding opportunities exist to support this community?
- Do similar resources exist for arts organizations looking to engage with newcomers and immigrants?
- What do arts organizations know about the newcomer and immigrant experience?
- What do settlement services know about careers in the arts and culture sector?
- What information is being communicated to newcomers during application, intake, and settlement processes?
- What follow-up resources (if any) are provided to newcomers and immigrants throughout their career trajectory?

In consultation with an Advisory Committee convened from our project partners in support of this research, WorkInCulture developed the following research question to help consolidate the initial questions and provide a focus for our consultations:

***In what ways and to what extent do foreign-trained and/or internationally-experienced artists and arts professionals achieve career success in the Canadian context?***

- What kinds of opportunities and barriers exist to impact an individual's success?
- What support and/or services, if any, are currently offered through organizational programming (such as through settlement services, libraries, artist-serving organizations, community or multi-service organizations, employment services, faith-based organizations, and other public and nonprofit agencies) that address the unique individual and collective needs of this specific professional cohort?
- What support and/or services, if any, are offered through informal and/or autonomous activities (such as through networking or ad hoc social activity)?
- In what ways, and to what extent, is such formal and/or informal activity successful? What gaps remain?



## 1.2 Assessment methods and approach

With this framing, we developed a strategy to engage the community using a series of individual (expert) interviews and community roundtables. We worked with our project partners and advisory committee members to coordinate and publicize the following research activities:

- Four facilitated in-person group roundtable discussions [54 participants];
- A series of one-on-one interviews with newcomer artists, arts organizations, and settlement services organizations (including employment centres) [11 individuals];
- Surveys completed in-person and online [79 submissions]
- Four Advisory Committee Meetings (see below)
- A presentation of findings with previous interview and roundtable participants as well as other key stakeholders [38 attendees]

In order to analyze the results of what we heard, we conducted a thematic analysis of our many conversations, attempting to surface commonalities amongst the many narratives.

## 1.3 Advisory Committee Members

1. Airta
2. Immigrant Writers Association
3. Institute for Creative Exchange (ICE)
4. Paralia Newcomer Arts Network
5. Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC)

Further support on this project was provided through an advisory committee featuring representatives from the organizations listed above. These organizations provided us with key insights of and understanding into the challenges faced by the target community including providing connections to existing research, resources, and networks of settlement service providers WorkInCulture was unfamiliar with. Furthermore, they provided reach into the newcomer and immigrant communities WorkInCulture did not presently have. The representatives, with lived experience as newcomers, and in most cases as arts professionals themselves, offered honest feedback and guidance that added much value to the entire experience – and for that and more, we are so thankful for their contributions to this project.



## 2. The Toronto Arts and Culture Ecosystem for New Canadian Arts Professionals

The context considered by and addressed in this report is a complex one. Although the geographic context concerns the city of Toronto, the cultural context is far more expansive, as it can be seen to encompass the globe, as well as durations of time (past and present), scales of experience (personal and collective), and different sectors of the professional experience (nonprofit and for-profit; arts and culture and the social services).

In order to make this report manageable, and to make its recommendations feasible, we have had to make some decisions about how to represent the diverse experiences of immigrant and new Canadian artists and arts professionals most clearly and directly. Ultimately, however, there are some terms and contexts that elude any clear or direct description.

We have chosen to highlight the following terms because there is often some confusion or disagreement over how they are used by new Canadian arts professionals themselves, and the professionals and organizations working in support of them. We agree with Grant Kester's (2011) assertion, made in a different context, that there are no unequivocal signifiers: that is, that there are no terms, words, or concepts that are wholly free of disagreement or controversy. So, while we will adopt a certain working definition for each of the following, we will also try to point out how such definitions remain contested.

### 2.1 Terms Used by the Arts and Culture Sector

#### *The Culture Sector, the Arts and Culture Sector, The Creative Sector, or The Creative Industries*

In Toronto and Ontario, the *culture sector*, the *arts and culture sector*, the *creative sector*, the *creative industries*, and so on, refer to a range of subsectors and disciplinary specializations that may be seen as more dynamic and wide-ranging than in other industries. For the purposes of this project, WorkInCulture summarized the subsectors into four main categories: 1.) Arts; 2.) Cultural Industries; 3.) Museums and Heritage; and 4.) Libraries. In addition, the culture "sector" is understood to be broader than a traditional "industry." In other words, where some traditional industries have a discrete value chain in which a specific class of products is produced or where services are delivered, the products and services of the culture sector are far most diverse. Table 1 below summarizes one way of conceiving of this complexity by enumerating subsectors and their specializations.

**Table 1: The Culture Sector**

Subsectors	Arts	The Cultural Industries	Libraries	Museums & Heritage
Specializations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual Arts and Crafts</li> <li>• Dance, Music, Theatre (The Performing Arts)</li> <li>• Literary Arts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital and Interactive Media</li> <li>• Design and Advertising</li> <li>• Film and Television</li> <li>• Book and Magazine Publishing</li> <li>• Music Recording and Publishing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Libraries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Museums</li> <li>• Archives</li> </ul>

Adapted from *MakingItWork* (2019)

## Arts and Culture

*Arts and Culture* is an inclusive term that encompasses the diversity of work and professional opportunities in artistic and cultural enterprises across the sector. In the Toronto context, which echoes but is also distinct from the broader provincial and national one, arts and culture implies not only freelance and solo enterprises, but arts and media organizations as well, including those adopting for-profit and nonprofit models. These may include structures as diverse as charities, small-scale enterprises and large-scale corporations, as well as enterprises that have a few or many paid staff. Arts and culture also implies significant volunteer labour: organizations may utilize a few or be reliant upon many volunteers to support their enterprise, and these may be involved seasonally or year-round.

## Artist, Arts Professional

*Artists* are individuals who, independently or cooperatively and collaboratively, practice any of the various creative arts, such as a sculptor, painter, craftsperson, maker, designer, novelist, poet, performer, dancer, filmmaker, and potentially a combination of several of these practices.

*Arts professionals* implies a wide range of culture sector professions, including artists. More commonly this categorization implies those whose labour does not typically or directly result in artistic creation or outputs. This category of arts professionals commonly includes: arts administrators, cultural workers, arts managers, producers,

and so on. Arts professionals generally refers to those who work in support of the presentation and appreciation of the arts, and who may work for organizations or take on roles related to day-to-day operations, management, community engagement, program development, organizational capacity, and so on.

## *Arts Service Organizations (ASOs)*

*Arts service organizations (ASOs)* are a diverse body of typically nonprofit and even public organizations that support arts and culture (its subsectors, its communities, or as a whole) through activities such as advocacy, professional development, resources, financial support and/or networking.

- Many ASOs are member-based networks that allow like-minded individuals and organizations to come together and support each other, much like professional associations in other industries.
- Some ASOs are subsector- or discipline-specific, and tailor their services to support a specific form or medium.
- Other ASOs provide services, programming, and resource development to address specific professional needs within the sector (WorkInCulture, for example, provides career development activities to organizations and individuals working in the sector).
- Some ASOs are regionally-focused, curating their services to address a localized community, town, city, province, or region; Toronto, for instance, is home to an anchor community of six *local arts service organizations* (LASOs), that promote the arts at a local level across the Greater Toronto Area.

ASOs, in short, take a wide variety of forms to provide contextually-responsive and community-led supports to a range of culture sector professionals.

## 2.2 The Newcomer Spectrum

Canadian newcomers, or new Canadians, may be distinguished by a range of objective and subjective factors. Objective factors may include their age, their time in Canada, their immigration status, or even where they currently live (as with those who are pre-arrival).

Subjective factors are more varied, but may be particularly significant because they are rooted in personal experiences of migration. For example, some who have been in Canada for decades may continue to identify as a newcomer or immigrant while others may prefer to disassociate with this status as soon as citizenship has been conferred—or even sooner. While for some migration was a choice, for others it was not. For newcomers forcibly displaced from their home some may wish to openly identify with such destabilizing or traumatic experiences; others, however, may prefer to conceal this aspect of their identity, and resist the use of any associated labels such as refugee,

displaced person, or protected person, even when these are legal and technical definitions. Some may wish to identify solely as Canadian, while others may identify solely with their homeland or heritage; many others may identify fluidly and dynamically upon a spectrum between these poles. Public and regional perceptions of newcomers as well as personal and professional experiences of living and working as an immigrant – including lived experiences of racialization and discrimination, whether in the community, on the job, or both (see Block and Galabuzi 2011; 2018) – all contribute to interpretations and expressions of newcomer identities that are changing and fluid rather than fixed and static.

Accordingly, while the objective standards and definitions describing newcomers established by the Government of Canada or by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) are functionally useful, they do not necessarily reflect the subjective lived experiences of this heterogeneous group. This report adopts a dynamic and shifting understanding of newcomer experiences, one led by the narratives and preferences of those we spoke with. Further, the report attempts to make recommendations guided by this newcomer-led approach, suggesting that formal definitions of newcomer eligibility be adopted by organizations, and augmented to be inclusive of how such recommendations might be implemented.

**Table 2: Newcomer Eligibility**

<p>For the purposes of their programming, CompassstoConnect.ca defines newcomers as “IRCC clients”</p> <p>IRCC clients for settlement services may be classified as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Permanent Residents of Canada.</li><li>• Protected persons as defined in section 95 of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA).</li><li>• Individuals who have been selected, inside or outside Canada, to become permanent residents (pending verifications) and who have been informed, by a letter from the Department.</li><li>• Convention refugees and protected persons outside Canada who have been selected for resettlement in Canada by the Department.</li><li>• Live-in Caregivers</li></ul>
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(Compass to Connect, n.d.)

When it comes to newcomer status, time limits also vary adding a layer of complexity for new Canadians seeking and determining their eligibility for resources and support programs. According to Statistics Canada (Yssaad & Fields, 2018), recent immigrants (also known as newcomers) refers to landed immigrants who came to Canada five and 10 years prior to a given census year; very recent immigrants came within five years. Under the Toronto Newcomer Strategy (City of Toronto, 2017), a recent immigrant is defined as having been in Canada for less than 10 years and includes permanent residents as candidates eligible to receive support through the strategy including

through neighbourhood-based Local Immigration Partnerships. Within funding bodies there are variances as well. For the Toronto Arts Council, a granting agency with newcomer and refugee specific funding opportunities, newcomers are defined as an immigrant or refugee who has lived in Canada for less than 7 years in addition to being a permanent resident, having an application for Permanent Resident Status pending, or being a Protected Person (approved refugee claimant; Toronto Arts Council, 2021). Applicants to Toronto Arts Council's granting programs must also have been a resident of Toronto for at least one year prior to an application deadline. Eligibility for funding from Ontario Arts Council requires applicants to be residents of Ontario, permanent resident or application pending, and similar to Toronto Arts Council, applicants must have lived in Ontario for at least 12 consecutive months before submitting an application.

## 2.3 The Settlement Context

### *Settlement Services*

Settlement services are geared towards helping newcomers settle and adjust to their new lives in Canada. They function to provide a range of social services, resources, and support to get settled into a new community including finding housing, childcare, schooling, healthcare, and employment. Certain providers offer access programs such as language classes, skills training, and foreign credentials assessment. Settlement service providers can take the form of an independent agency or organization, or can be associated with other networks such as community centres and libraries. Some providers are tailored to support residents of specific neighbourhood or even members of a specific ethnocultural group in order to provide one-on-one settlement information, referrals, and community outreach. As a first point of contact, Settlement Services aim to remove barriers to successful integration by newcomers. However, with more than 70 agencies (Ontario, 2020) listed for the city of Toronto alone on the Government of Ontario website, ensuring relevant and consistent information across the full service system has been cited as a challenge, including when it comes to addressing the needs of new Canadian artist and arts professionals seeking skills-appropriate employment.

### *Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs)*

Launched by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs) aim to provide a collaborative framework to facilitate the development and implementation of sustaining solutions for the successful integration of newcomers. LIPs foster local engagement of service providers and other institutions in support of community-based knowledge sharing and local strategic planning in order to develop and implement strategic action plans that reflect local priorities. Within the city of Toronto, there are four quadrant-based LIPs set up to serve Toronto's north, south, east and west neighbourhoods.

## 3. What We Heard

In this section, we will explore the ideas, opinions, and experiences shared by the people we spoke with during the roundtables, as well as the individual artists and arts professionals, and organizational leaders we interviewed separately. As has been mentioned, these professionals represent a broad demographic of individuals who, through their work or lived experience (or both), have reflected on the experiences of immigrant, new Canadian, or refugee artists and arts professionals from a variety of perspectives. Despite not being wholly representative of the field, these perspectives nevertheless provide a broad range of insight into the personal and professional experiences of new Canadians, immigrants, and refugees seeking to establish or expand their careers in the Canadian arts and culture sector. WorkInCulture hopes to continue to support the development of a more detailed understanding of the sector and the experiences of those within it.

First, this section will explore the experiences and perspectives of artists and arts professionals themselves, whose narratives of the barriers, opportunities, and other professional needs help shape the scope and purpose of this study. Next, we will explore what was said by those representing the human services in the region, specifically professionals from settlement and employment services, including perspectives from Local Immigration Partnerships and the City of Toronto's Newcomer Office. Finally, we will discuss what we heard from the arts sector; as this includes a diverse range of professional practices, including fine arts, performing arts, community arts, creative industries, libraries, heritage, and more, this section will include perspectives not only from local artist serving organizations but from adjacent sector organizations such as the Toronto Public Library.

### 3.1 From New Canadian Arts Professionals Themselves

Despite distinct personal and professional trajectories, there were a number of commonalities between the experiences of the artists and arts professionals we spoke with. There are a few ways we have decided to group these experiences in order to best highlight the similarities between them. We apologize in advance for any oversimplification or generalization that might have resulted from this approach.

*"No one really tells you the level of perseverance you need to work in the arts and culture sector; it is full of contract and part-time opportunities that are sometimes required to make up a full-time career."*

First, the artists and arts professionals we spoke with shared similar concerns about the immigrant, refugee, and new Canadian experience, specifically in terms of:

- **Career stage.** We spoke with professionals who were at early, mid, and later points in their careers, and who were experiencing those careers as professional artists (makers and performers, struggling, emerging, established, and accomplished), as arts administrators, and in some cases both.
- **English fluency.** While most of the individuals we spoke with were fluent or near-fluent in conversational English, many expressed a concern about their ability to effectively communicate in writing, particularly in order to convey the nuance of their professional experience.
- **Training and credentials.** We spoke with professionals who acquired educational or training credentials, significant professional experiences, or both prior to arriving in Canada, as well as those who wholly acquired Canadian educational credentials subsequent to their arrival, including those who continue or plan to be enrolled in formal education. Many, of course, sustained a place between these two poles, and had training and professional experiences both within and outside of the country.
- **Career continuity.** We spoke with individuals whose professional careers in the arts were not, nor could not reasonably be, pursued immediately upon arriving in Canada. For various reasons, sometimes as a choice but more often without the luxury of meaningful alternatives, these individuals had to turn away from the arts in order to find other activities, including employment in altogether different sectors, or to engage in domestic care or parenting work. Many of this subgroup discussed both their episodic experiences in relation to the sector, while others discussed their attempts to return. Some spoke of challenges in trying to reinstate practices they had previously pursued, while others spoke of lateral shifts to adjacent sector activities (such as arts administration or arts education).

Secondly, artists and arts professionals spoke about how their personal and cultural values intersected with their personal and professional identities. For example, the experiences of “home” cultures, as distinct from Canadian cultures, were frequently noted. Participants made (and, in our roundtables, shared) comparisons between and amongst experiences of culture, such as between countries of origin and the local diaspora. This was mentioned in the context of how participants formed perceptions of art and cultural work as legitimate employment in Canada, and subsequently asserted this legitimacy to family and community. The artists and arts professionals we spoke with also discussed their experiences of the multiple cultures of settler Canadian life, particularly regarding so-called professional or “workplace cultures.” Our participants spoke of the challenges of navigating and enduring such workplace cultures, both in general but also in the complex cultures of arts and culture labour, which typically exists across multiple sites in non-standard employment arrangements, rather than in institutional and permanent work settings.



Thirdly, many of the new Canadian arts professionals with whom we spoke brought up discrimination—as experienced both personally and professionally. Systemic racism in Canadian culture was frequently brought up as a major issue for racialized arts professionals, both those identifying as recent arrivals but also those calling Canada their home for years or even decades. Some racialized artists and arts professionals further felt that their gender or sexual orientation intensified their personal and professional experiences, making achieving legitimacy within, or in contrast to, the Canadian arts professional mainstream increasingly challenging. Age and career level were also seen as factors that further impacted participants' experiences as newcomer, new Canadian, immigrant, and/or refugee artists and arts professionals in unanticipated ways.

In short, the picture of experiences we were able to gather through our conversations and discussions was both rich and incomplete. While we made a significant effort to engage as wide a cohort as possible, and while many of the participants shared, echoed, and amplified the experiences of others, we do not wish to claim that what follows achieves any degree of consensus. Our conversations addressed only a small sample of the complex and unique experiences of new Canadian arts professionals, past and present.

Nonetheless, the resounding tone of the consultations was that of impassioned and optimistic frustration: the new Canadian, immigrant, and refugee artists and arts professionals we spoke with were incisive in pointing to a clear and puzzling absence of widely available, easily and publicly accessible resources and meaningful, career-building experiences with well-defined professional pathways. They were critical as well of the lack of any obvious initiatives dedicated towards meaningful sector change or inclusive sector opportunities by program managers and policymakers at any level of government. And, like all artists, they lamented the lack of affordable, accessible, and dedicated spaces for supporting creative endeavours, including rehearsal, performance, production, and exhibition spaces. Despite this, many were optimistic that such resources and such change was possible, was desired by all stakeholders, and was within reach.

### 3.1.1 Labels and Being Labelled

#### *New Canadian, Newcomer, Immigrant, and Refugee*

As discussed in section 2, terms like newcomer, new Canadian, immigrant, and refugee are often viewed with ambivalence by most of the participants we spoke with. Participants indicated that, at one time or another, they have felt identity with one or more of the terms. Typically, however, such terms were viewed with skepticism or even disdain, in part because of the constraining and limiting effect they often seemed to have on those being labelled. The terminology has sometimes been perceived by these

sector professionals to have had a negative effect on their lives and careers.

For example, in much programming, “newcomer” has been observed as a time-sensitive term. For instance, grant applicants must often demonstrate the duration of their residence in order to be eligible for the funding directed towards them and their colleagues. Seven years in Canada is a typical cutoff line for dedicated funding, such as grants or loans, for new Canadian artists and arts professionals to access. Some felt this cutoff point was arbitrary, citing the immigrant experience as not so easily defined and bounded, and the needs of newcomers, including those in the sector, extended well beyond this time frame.

Some participants also raised a more critical concern with “newcomer” funding as a categorization, with some feeling that by accepting funding or agreeing to programming for any such framing of practice, one risked compromising the integrity of one’s professional skills and experience. Applying to newcomer-targeted funding and programming was even seen by some to be self-deprecating, and to represent a devaluing of one’s own practice. By tacitly agreeing to the label, some asserted, sector professionals risk accepting the implied narrative that one’s art occupies a minor or lesser sphere, one that stands against or in the shadow of a more mainstream or legitimate practice. A number of artists and arts professionals spoke of having at times withheld or masked their status altogether in their funding applications, by doing so attempting to gain greater legitimacy in the sector, as well as more equitable access to the sector workforce, where deeper pools of non-specialized funding and resources were and are perceived to exist. Others suggested the practice of allocating funding based on identity criteria better served the interests of funders and services, and did little to meet the fundamental needs or career priorities of artists and arts professionals themselves. At the same time, others embraced the hybrid and complex nature of their personal and professional journeys. For some, the “immigrant experience” was positively perceived as a source of motivation and formal inspiration for their practice, performance, or production. For others, such experiences were yet another label to move past or resist, and were not seen as the same kind of wellspring of resources or experiences to be utilized.

According to some artists we spoke with, who identified as self-taught, there was the perception that artists who are self-taught or don’t have formal training or education are not eligible or held to the same standard as those who are. It was mentioned, based on the anecdotal experiences of our participants, that funders do not appear to favour artists working in non-traditional media, nor those whose practice doesn’t readily adhere to specific discipline categories, nor those that reflect what is interpreted to be a mainstream Canadian aesthetic. Some artists also indicated a perception that funding channels offer restrictions: in some situations, we heard, newcomer artists felt funneled towards multidisciplinary streams open to all disciplines. This was felt to be unfair and was seen by some to offer an advantage to certain disciplines (and certain newcomer practices) over others.

## Arts and Culture

Culture was another label raised by many of the artists and arts professionals we spoke with as concerning and confusing. Most commonly, the term “culture”—and, by extension, “arts and culture” or “culture sector”—was not typically perceived as synonymous with the arts and culture sector by new Canadians. This basic confusion, of *culture* rather than *art* as the key descriptor and internet search term for characterizing the sector, had a significant effect on new Canadians both prior to and subsequent to their arrival. Because of their embeddedness in this discourse, domestic resources and sites that might have dispelled the confusion, such as WorkInCulture or the arts councils, were neither typically found prior to arrival, nor made available by settlement professionals to those we spoke with during their settlement experiences. Even during independent searching and discovery these resources were not necessarily identified or considered as significant for those looking to find entry or continuation points into the sector. In addition, pre- and post-arrival newcomer artists and arts professionals searching for information to guide them, or for organizations to engage with, tended to search for the specific discipline, form, or medium of their craft. After such discipline-specific searches, “art” may have been a fallback search term for some, but “culture” almost never was. With very few exceptions, “culture” as an umbrella term for arts production, distribution, education, consumption, and aesthetic experiencing was perceived as having a very localized, North American or Eurocentric, pedigree.

Repeatedly, our participants indicated mixed experiences engaging newcomer and immigrant serving agencies and employment and settlement centres, both in terms of generalized support to access the local labour market, but also more specifically in terms of gaining information about career opportunities for artists and arts professionals. Our participants found that settlement and immigrant-serving employment organizations do not seem to possess even general information and awareness of opportunities in the local arts and culture labour market. (Where such organizations do, as will be discussed in Section 3.2 below, such information seems a result of uncommon efforts by individual settlement or employment workers who have taken personal initiative to develop non-standard knowledge about the sector, or who have adopted a participant-centred approach to client service delivery that honours and supports the initiative taken by the jobseekers they work with.) Most commonly, participants that engaged with employment and settlement told of being dissuaded, more or less actively, from pursuing careers in the arts—despite communicating their pre-existing training, professional experience, or motivation. Instead, and even despite a mismatch of skills and experience with these recommended alternative pathways, many of our participants indicated experiences of being directed towards employment opportunities and career pathways more typical of new Canadian and immigrant populations (such as retail, manufacturing, and other service professions).

Out of uncertainty or due to unsatisfactory employment and settlement experiences, and with an overriding passion for arts and culture, many of the participants we spoke

with ended up directly engaging with large-scale arts and culture sector institutions. For many of the arts professionals we spoke with, this engagement was most commonly and initially as audience-members or visitors. A few actively sought volunteer opportunities out of a desire to familiarize themselves with the Canadian context of arts and culture, both in general but also with specific disciplinary priorities in mind. A few participants spoke of how they were able to gain episodic or seasonal employment, though it is unclear whether this was serendipitous or intentional. While the foyers and lobbies of many of these institutions are often rich with cultural experiences, they are typically oriented to forms of cultural consumption and tourism rather than to a more complex engagement with their publics as also potentially arts professionals, and not merely visitors or audience members.

### 3.1.2 Transitional Points and Processes

*“It has been a rollercoaster ride.”*

#### *Maps or Compasses*

A point made repeatedly by the artists and arts professionals we spoke with was that the range of spaces and resources they needed to explore, to learn about, or to continue a career in the Canadian arts and culture sector was not readily available to them. Neither was information about sector opportunities directly accessible prior to their arrival in Canada, nor was it readily available through anticipated sources—in person or online—upon landing. As will be discussed below, this point was reinforced by individuals we spoke with representing settlement service organizations, including community settlement agencies but also community resource centres like libraries and public employment centres.

Not only was information commonly unavailable from expected sources but, as was often mentioned, artists and arts professionals found it fragmented and outdated when it was discovered. A “first steps” guide towards pursuing a career in the arts in Canada was a common desire amongst the individuals we spoke with; the substance of such a guide was a frequent and sustained topic of discussion during the roundtables. For many, conceptually similar physical hubs or landing spaces were also sought by our participants.

In the absence of such guides, hubs, or clearinghouses of information and experiences, those we spoke with almost invariably turned to internet search engines in order to source their information. As mentioned above, participants shared their experiences conducting internet keyword searches that had not been particularly helpful in clarifying the full range of arts opportunities available in Canada. Focused searches on the Toronto region or for new Canadians in particular did not yield better results. The

disconnect between expected and actual terminology (as discussed above) may offer only a partial explanation: efforts to simplify and unify complex occupational and industry classifications and labour market information to help describe, in plain language, the arts and culture sector in Canada are either yet to be made, or currently fail to yield meaningful internet search results. In short, the solution to getting new Canadian arts professionals the information they seek may not simply be about honing finer and more nuanced definitions, but about re-envisioning and redesigning the user experience during that process of inquiry and exploration so that more effective navigational tools and a more culturally sensitive strategy for curating content could better attract and lead this diverse cohort towards clearer information and a richer understanding of where the sector holds the promise of a future for them.

## *Access and Resources*

The issue of information access for artists and arts professionals should be seen as distinct from the issue of resource access, or the ways to secure space and capital to make a local practice possible. The general consensus from our discussions was that existing knowledge poorly and incompletely addresses the range and depth of potential barriers to pursuing a career in the arts or to establishing one's practice in the new Canadian context. Access to space in particular—in terms of both studio and rehearsal, but also exhibition and performance venues—was seen as far and away the most significant barrier to the artists we spoke with, particularly for performance-based artists.

While greater funding and more widely available government support was sought by some, also important were opportunities to connect with peers and finding and accessing networks or communities of practice. These networking and relationship building activities were seen as critical for supporting integration into the sector. We heard from participants that cultivating networks was a significant challenge, as investing time and effort in one community of practice (for example, one defined by a shared language or culture), often inadvertently limited access to others, including discipline-based networks. Disciplinary networks and language-based or cultural professional networks were seen to have minimal overlap with one another, neither in terms of membership nor in terms of the kinds of supports each was designed to offer.

Arts administration seemed a more promising professional stream and possible entry point into the sector, at least according to several of our participants. We further heard that working as an arts administrator is not necessarily a common vocation in other countries, nor was it promoted to newcomers as a potentially meaningful pathway for them to pursue. Instead, it often meant that participants had to pursue additional and sometimes costly training or accreditation, as well as engage in sometimes precarious work arrangements (such as through internships, seasonal contracts, and so on) before finding more permanent or sustainable roles. In many cases, those we spoke with who had pursued this path did so in hopes of sustaining their artistic practice, or returning to

it on a full time basis.

In short, the complex nature and the labour particularities of the Canadian arts and culture sector have created a number of challenges specific to the experiences of newcomer arts professionals demanding significant levels of commitment and resources that continue to be poorly understood. As one of our participants put it succinctly: “No one really tells you the level of perseverance you need to work in the arts and culture sector.” As another said of her journey to date, “It has been a rollercoaster ride.”

## *Canadian Culture, Arts Professionalism, and Non-Arts and/or Non-Canadian Experiences*

This misunderstanding about Canada’s workplaces and Canadian professional cultures is seen as a primary challenge for newcomer artists and arts professionals, and contributes to a further misunderstanding about the Canadian labour market, both from the “supply side” perspectives of arts professionals and the “demand side” perspectives of sector employers. The technical skills, training, and professional development required in sector employment is sometimes seen as less important than ‘Canadian experience’ and understanding of the ‘Canadian context.’ In other sectors, strength or weakness in this area may help or hinder job search processes; however, in arts and culture it may further impact a candidate’s chances for success in funding applications.

Demand side, employer misperceptions about the relative importance of Canadian experience or knowledge of the Canadian context may present further barriers to newcomer jobseekers, especially in employment contexts where such experience is not of primary significance: that is, where technical skill and proficiency is largely utilized. Unfortunately, it continues to be a challenge for employers and workforce developers to identify roles that would provide sector-specific pathways into the Canadian labour market for candidates with specific skillsets; this is the case not just in arts and culture nor solely for newcomers, but for many equity seeking communities across the Canadian labour market.

Despite a strong desire by newcomers to contribute to the Canadian narrative, there continue to be significant barriers to individuals doing so effectively and equitably. Moreover, and despite artists and arts professionals being perhaps uniquely positioned amongst the newcomer community to bring a breadth of voices and a range of visions to the Canadian cultural experience, biases in the recruitment and hiring practices of arts and culture employers are perceived to persist. Several participants highlighted their frustration with the dissonance of sector organizations touting values of inclusivity and diversity in their programming and engagement while not reflecting these principles in their employment efforts.

## *Survival Jobs and Career Development*

For many of the arts professionals we spoke with, and practicing newcomer artists in particular, cultivating a professional practice in Canada came to mean several things, none of which entailed their practice being a sustainable career in and of itself. These included:

- **Unpaid, low wage, temporary, and/or “volunteer” labour.** Many participants indicated the several or numerous invitations they and their colleagues have received to present or perform their work, often only for “exposure,” and without consideration of their own costs and expenses, remuneration, or other benefits.
- **Monetizing and branding.** Some participants, particularly visual artists, spoke of the ways they were encouraged to be entrepreneurial and more business-like in their approaches to their disciplinary practice. Some pointed out the challenges of knowing where to begin; others the disdain for such strategies felt by those holding more traditional notions of art; and still others the time expense involved in learning how to set up a business.

Arts professionals also spoke of the pressures to find employment, of any kind, or to leave the sector altogether. For some, these pressures came from counselors at settlement and employment services, who argued—often with an air of authority and perceived legitimacy, despite misunderstandings and a lack of sector information already described—that there was little or no work in the sector. For others, these pressures came from members of their own communities, and even their friends, family, or spouses and partners. Our participants lamented that many of these trusted sources provided opinions (solicited or otherwise) about the urgency of finding work outside of the sector, and were rarely supportive or understanding about finding work in arts and culture.

Many newcomer and immigrant artists and arts professionals we spoke with were encouraged to explore industries that were not in line with their training, experience, or both (such as in information technology or engineering). They were advised, again by diverse but often multiple sources, to seek the most accessible and available job placements in order to gain relevant experience, even if that contrasted with their already existing skills and experiences. Some of our participants recognized that these types of survival jobs would not necessarily build on existing skills or allow for career transitions into the arts and culture sector. At the same time, our participants acknowledged the intent behind the advice: their sources were often familiar with the limited opportunities for newcomer employment, and echoed their own frustration with the seeming lack of entry points into the sector. For those few who were able to find initial work, this almost always took the form of contract-based work, volunteer roles, or internship positions, which left many feeling overqualified and still under-employed.

It was clear amongst our participants that gaining access to people and networks within the sector was felt to be a real key to initiating a sustainable professional practice in Canada. It was also clear that such access was not as simple as a list or resource that one might merely stumble upon: rather, it was built through grit, determination, and a

tenacity to remain in the sector and cultivate a professional career. While not hearing back from job interviews and not following up with prospective employers (to learn, post-interview, what to do in the next one) is common practice in the sector, as in many others, individual efforts to challenge this status quo were seen as decisive actions for helping our participants achieve a degree of success. The connections built through such efforts were seen to foster in our participants a better understanding of the resources available to support artistic development and presentation in Canada (including funds, mentorship, networking opportunities, translation services, and so on), and the professional strategies needed to grow a sector career.

Of course, many of our participants detailed precisely the opposite experience despite doing many or all of these things. A few were critical of the approach, and several of the roundtables featured extended conversations about the many problems with this “hidden labour market” narrative, and entrepreneurial approaches to career mobility in the sector in general. A number of participants pointed out the ways this strategy failed them despite repeated efforts, while others perceived the sector as fundamentally stratified and deeply inequitable. For many of our participants, sector employment woes presented not only unwanted challenges and obstacles, but had a fundamentally negative impact on their sense of professional value and belongingness in the sector. Many, in short, took it personally.

### 3.1.3 Home, Health, and Well-Being

Our participants were generally, though not entirely, reluctant to speak about the ways their experiences of work in the arts and culture sector were seen to impact their health and well-being. Many of the individuals we spoke with highlighted ways that their career journeys, particularly uncontrollable and avoidable delays and setbacks they experienced, had a variety of detrimental effects on their home lives, their personal health and well-being. Participants with families often mentioned heightened levels of pressure to prioritize family commitments including child care, elder care, and related settlement processes for the family unit.

Access to resources and services also impacted feelings of health and wellness. Concerns about dedicated and accessible space were key worries for all, but many also cited the fatigue and anxiety caused by a ‘commuter syndrome’ of having to rely on transit to move between and amongst home, work, and supportive (settlement and employment services) scattered across the GTA.

Many conveyed feelings of isolation and alienation, but many also mentioned the significance of mentorship relationships they cultivated. For some, these mentorship relationships were formed with individuals sharing a common culture, ethnicity, language, or religion; only a few formed mentorship relations with arts and culture professionals, and of these fewer still were with professionals who shared a common



disciplinary expertise. Despite this, it was unanimous that these relationships were seen as valuable: these one-on-one relationships were felt to have helped individuals to navigate social situations, sector experiences, and cultural encounters in important ways, and at times helped to connect professionals with needed resources or networks. For many, these relationships offered reassurance: safe spaces to discuss experiences and problem-solve potential solutions.

### 3.1.4 Another Study, Another Report: When Will Change Happen?

A final point to note about our conversations with participants was the frequent reminder that they had spoken about this before: whether in other roundtables and interviews, in other initiatives and efforts claiming to want to improve the newcomer experience in arts and culture, and elsewhere. Our participants, despite their personal warmth and appreciation towards us, as well as generosity with their time and expertise, made it repeatedly clear to us that our conversations were not new. They wanted us to know and understand that the experiences of newcomers, from the promises they are given about life in Canada prior to their arrival to the disillusionment they often experience once they begin to make their home here, continue to fall into similar and problematic patterns—even, and perhaps especially, for newcomer arts professionals. As one senior-level practitioner we spoke with candidly reminded us, “There is still a picture being painted that there are so many opportunities [in Canada]. But, when it comes to the arts, there is no indication of the competition for those opportunities.” We intend to address this criticism, and to introduce a strategy to break this cycle, in our report’s recommendations. Next, however, we will detail the experiences and insight of our participants coming from roles in settlement employment services and with a concern to better support the professional and career development of newcomer artists and arts professionals.

## 3.2 From Settlement and Employment Services

In the next section, 3.3 “From the Arts Sector,” we will discuss observations and experiences of arts sector leaders. In this section, we will look to the experiences of professionals from the settlement sector. While for the most part this includes individual representatives from federally mandated settlement services and provincially mandated employment services, this also includes representatives from local immigration partnerships (LIPs) and organizations that have a broad service mandate or organizational mission who, while not explicitly serving a newcomer community, have found a core audience of newcomers amongst their clients or constituents (perhaps most notably this includes Toronto Public Libraries).

*“You don’t know what you don’t know – a mind shift needs to happen to encourage artists and arts workers to pursue opportunities; support providers need to be better versed in the career opportunities available to them.”*

### 3.2.1 Recognition and Misrecognition of Gaps and Barriers

Most of the representatives from settlement and employment focused organizations that we spoke with indicated that they and their organizations did not nor could not currently support the specific needs of arts and culture sector professionals: neither specifically for those identifying as new Canadians, immigrants, and refugees, nor for sector professionals in general. This was a frank admission that did not undercut the skill and capability of such organizations to support newcomer jobseekers into other forms of employment or other sector pathways more common to Canadian newcomers. Nor did it imply that they were uninterested in such initiatives: most of the settlement and employment representatives we spoke with highlighted their involvement in a number of small-scale and pilot initiatives, including some no longer being offered, that served to address the local or contextual needs of arts professionals. Such pilots were often developed by visionary organizational leadership, vocal and active community members, or both. Of these examples, none were continuous programs, and none had a reach beyond a local community, signaling a gap in sustainability and system-level delivery.

Our conversations with these participants in our study involved speaking with senior management from several settlement and employment service agencies. Through these conversations, our participants identified a few important factors that helped explain how organizations were often ill-equipped to meet the needs of the arts and culture sector professionals in general, and of new Canadian, immigrant, and refugee artists and arts professionals in particular. These factors include the following:

- **There is a lack of clear, centralized, and up-to-date information about the sector.** Organizational representatives have no access to a central, trustworthy, and up-to-date employment and/or career information source that they could share with their constituents and clients. In other words, those who are interested in developing or continuing as arts and culture professionals can find little beyond general labour market data in the vast majority of settlement and employment services, and little in the sources such organizations rely on. Representatives from the employment and settlement agencies we spoke with made it clear that they currently do not have, nor recently have had, any internal capacity to collect, curate, and maintain a more useful database. While it is clear that those we spoke with would appreciate such a resource as it would help them

better fulfill the mandates of their organizations, the extent to which such a data source would be used, particularly by the broader employment and settlement ecosystem, is unclear. A database could be useful, in short, but only if accompanied by resources to help agencies incorporate its use into their existing and planned work activities.

- **There is a lack of sector/ecosystem organization and understanding.** A distinct but interrelated issue involved misunderstandings about the structure and organization of the arts and culture sector. Besides a lack of access to key sector information, those we spoke with suggested that many employment and settlement professionals held a poor understanding of the sector's defining features, particularly professional development options in arts and culture, as well as common subsector pathways for those at any and all career levels (that is, for professionals at early-career, mid-career, and senior levels).

As was detailed in Section 3.1, this lack of understanding amongst those providing coaching and counselling advice to new Canadian, immigrant, and refugee arts professionals has meant that career and professional guidance has been more general than sector-specific in nature. How transferable such general advice may be to the arts and culture sector is uncertain, but the chance of it being used to discourage sector entry or transition has already been noted.

- **There is a devaluing of the arts and culture sector.**

While our participants acknowledged the value of arts and culture, they also admitted that their perspective was not shared by many of their colleagues within the social services (employment and settlement)—at least not as a professional pathway for employment opportunities. While few specifically raised the same concerns as the newcomer artists and arts professionals (that is, about how such a lack of understanding may contribute to the active discouraging of new Canadian, immigrant, and refugee artists and arts professionals from careers within the sector), all were willing to recognize the often-echoed experiences of newcomer arts professionals, and to acknowledge that failing to provide appropriate support to newcomer jobseekers and professionals about identified sector goals was a problem.

Admittedly, it is unclear the extent to which artists and arts professionals are discouraged from entering the sector, encouraged to make a lateral move into a different sector pathway, or both: little concrete data beyond anecdotal experience exists. Accordingly, whether such advising contains prudent advice serving the broader public interest, or even individually meaningful information, is impossible to evaluate. What is clear, however, is that the artists and arts professionals we spoke with were disappointed by such types of advice, as these echoed a devaluation of their work and expertise that they had heard from other sources in their lives. Moreover, and while the overall effect on the artists and arts professionals we spoke with was complex, the receipt of such advice often seemed to cultivate an increased level of distrust by the artists and arts professionals we spoke with of institutions designed to support them. In short, it may be that not only is better information a requirement of any intervention, but

so too is a distinct service orientation capable of better reflecting the values and priorities held by newcomer arts and culture sector professionals.

- **Stronger partnerships are both needed and desired.** The employment and settlement professionals we spoke with were at a largely senior and managerial level in their organizations, while the arts professionals were more uniformly spread across both a range of ages and levels of professional experience (including as both cultural producers and cultural administrators). Perhaps because of this greater degree of senior-level experience, the employment and settlement professionals we spoke with voiced opinions about the need for both inter-organizational and cross-organizational partnerships—so-called “upstream” or systemic solutions to remedy the “downstream” or personally-experienced effects of limited support and resources on sector professionals.

### 3.2.2 “Canadian Experience” and Improving Labour Market Outcomes

As discussed in the previous section, the pressure to gain “Canadian Experience” is ubiquitous to all those entering the Canadian labour force, regardless of whether they are entering with previous labour market experience (as with new Canadians, refugees, and immigrants), or because they have little employment experience (as with youth), and regardless of what employment and economic sector job seekers are keen to enter into. Employment and settlement professionals acknowledged the unique challenges faced by new Canadian arts professionals needing to gain such experience, and had some suggestions about the kinds of strategies they could see being introduced into support and service interventions, both generally and more specifically for arts and culture sector professionals.

- **Career bridging programs.** A bridging program that could better connect arts and culture professionals to the broader professional sector, including both for-profit and nonprofit or governmental employers, was recommended. Many public sector employment services, such as Employment Ontario funded agencies, have developed sector-targeted bridging programs for new Canadian professionals to gain a foothold in the Canadian labour market based on previous training, experience, or both. ACCES Employment, for instance, maintains a roster of programming for IT, Electrical Engineering, Financial Services, Healthcare, and more (ACCES Employment, 2021). Such programs are typically designed to minimize or streamline re-credentialization pathways and timelines wherever possible, and also to support language learning through the lens of a contextualized, workplace or professional communication approach. Bridging programs are typically framed around integrating work with education, so that full time schooling is not a requirement, and so that adult education pathways—such as for professional certification or towards graduate degrees—are clarified for participants.
- **Employability skills and workplace culture(s).** More general and shorter duration

adult education and/or professional development offerings for new Canadian artists and arts professionals were also suggested by the employment and settlement representatives we spoke with. As with bridging programs, these also already exist as general offerings for new Canadian jobseekers through public employment and some settlement services. These often include lessons and activities designed to engage learners on topics like:

- Canadian culture and social cues (especially in professional and workplace contexts)
- Communicating professional identity and value through common strategies (such as “branding” or “self-marketing”) and using common tools (such as LinkedIn or resumes)

However, while employment and settlement representatives highlighted the importance of such initiatives, they acknowledged that better contextualization to the unique needs of arts and culture employers and arts professionals was necessary. It was argued that some form of resources for training employment and settlement staff how to better recognize and serve artists and arts professionals’ needs were desired.

- **Entrepreneurial skills pathways.** The employment and settlement representatives we spoke with also highlighted their experience supporting arts and culture professionals in entrepreneurial ventures, whether directly or through referrals. While largely in support of independent fine and craft arts producers to set up internet-based or independent small businesses, more robust curriculum on creative sector business plan development or arts collective incubators could be imported and adapted from work recently done in other sectors.

### 3.2.3 Partnerships and Silos in Human and Social Services

As mentioned at the beginning of the section, the employment and settlement professionals we spoke with were quite adamant that cross-sector partnerships were critical to better supporting new Canadian artists and arts professionals. The professionals highlighted the many current initiatives underway to connect new Canadian arts professionals to the local arts sector, but also pointed to limitations in funding or program scope that constrained the scale and impact of such initiatives. Complicating efforts is evidence of relatively weak labour market outcomes generally experienced across the sector across the Canadian labour force: the median income of full time workers across all arts and culture sectors is well below the median income of the labour market as a whole. However, recognition of the many non-economic benefits of a healthy arts and culture labour force, particularly for historically marginalized and racialized communities, is increasing, and the funding of several federal and local workforce development initiatives addressing employment pathways into the sector offers encouragement that novel partnerships and initiatives may be acknowledged, legitimized, and even funded.

## 3.3 From the Arts Sector

For this study the authors consulted with representatives from arts organizations serving both newcomer, immigrant, and refugee communities, as well as those with a broader service mandate supporting a range of arts professionals and audiences (this group includes WorkInCulture). Common to representatives from both of these organizational groups, and echoing much of what we heard from our other participants and stakeholders, was the perception that there are multiple and significant barriers to supporting newcomers and immigrants effectively. The following list summarizes the most pressing of these challenges as drawn from the perspective of these organizations:

- **Knowledge about immigrant, refugee, and other newcomer communities is felt to be partial and incomplete.** Some organizations, including arts serving organizations (ASOs), have developed informal, anecdotal, and/or partial understandings about the individuals and communities with whom they work. This understanding may be deeply local and is often concerned with the most timely relevant moments within the settlement journeys of clients and constituents.

While accumulating such localized and contextualized knowledge was seen by our participants to be important to effectively serving their clients, it was not always felt to be well connected, intentionally and systematically, to the wider understanding of challenges faced by their broader communities, nor well connected to the knowledge base of other arts serving organizations (including discipline-specific organizations). Such understanding was also not felt to be entirely representative of the newcomer population as a whole, nor of newcomer arts professionals collectively.

- **Short-duration, project-based, and individual-focused funding models present barriers.** Our participants spoke at length of the many ways that short-duration and project-based funding, as well as individualized (artist) grants, profoundly affect and limit the ways ASOs may develop, or even conceive of initiating, newcomer-specific programming.

Our participants spoke of the many ways long-term and impact goals were virtually impossible to prioritize, as the more immediate needs of their active communities, the periodic reporting requirements of this funding ecosystem, and the continuous pressures of organizational sustainability and financial stability repeatedly and necessarily took precedence.

- **There are nuances to the mismatch between needs and capacity.** With a complexity of community needs, ASOs are limited in their organizational abilities and the degree to which they can tailor programming, training, or resources (such as the use of space) to address the particular needs of community subgroups. In other words, and with exceptions, ASOs must often prioritize general service delivery and programming in order to meet the most prevalent needs of their majority stakeholders effectively.

In short, representatives from arts organizations, including and particularly from local ASOs, were often able to recognize the challenges they face within their own organizations, as well as the systemic limitations of the arts and culture sector and its disciplinary subsectors. However, and unanimously, all felt constrained in their capacity to effectively surmount these barriers. Representatives indicated that they were eager to explore ways that their organizations could lead or contribute to efforts for better understanding and improving the systems and processes of settlement that are experienced by newcomers identifying as arts and culture professionals. At the same time, they were also quite candid about their current capacity to do so. In many ASOs, staff and program leads have already stretched their organization's time and resources to the limits to fulfill their mandates, and many are leveraging existing programming, services, and resources (as well as the goodwill of staff, volunteers, and their community) to engage in a variety of arts-adjacent activities, including providing accessible and inclusive (if not always dedicated) support for newcomers and newcomer communities.

While such organizational capacity limits seem to have prevented or stalled many arts organizations from providing targeted support for this community, all of the representatives we spoke with emphasized their organization's willingness and potential to grow their existing service mandate to the newcomer community wherever appropriate. Many representatives indicated the ways their existing programming already serves to offer informal support their clients and constituents at key moments within the settlement journey of arts and cultural professionals. Most are already providing ad hoc career and professional development support to the newcomer community within their existing programming frameworks, activities, community-building opportunities, and partnerships, whether in their core or their seasonal programming. All of those we spoke with are interested in doing more, including exploring partnerships with newcomers and other committed organizations, but were also very clear that such collaboration must be properly resourced and institutionally supported, whether with other ASOs or settlement and employment organizations. All were convinced that such efforts could help formalize ad hoc activity and improve the overall experiences of arts and cultural professionals.

*"It takes time a lot of patience while wading through uncertainty. When is enough enough? When do artists and arts workers end up deciding to leave the sector? How do we shorten these cycles so that people are not leaving the sector?"*

## 3.3.1 Spaces and Opportunities

A key observation made by representatives from ASOs had to do with the importance of space for newcomers. For some artists and arts professionals, space was an urgent and critical need, as it had to do with access to and affordability of rehearsal, performance, production, recording, storage, and/or other physical resources imperative to supporting a continuity and development of professional practice. Participants echoed the views of artists, arguing that without such accessible and affordable spaces, including both shared and dedicated spaces, many newcomer practitioners were simply unable to continue as professionals, and were being effectively forced out of the sector. Participants shared their own anecdotes about arts professionals unable to continue their engagement with an organization, and their observations of the ways survival priorities took precedence and forced some professionals out of the sector labour force; in some cases, out of the labour force entirely.

Another important point raised was the orienting and bridging role that ASOs often play through their generalized programming. This notion of space was less about particular locales than about the coordination of opportunities for artistic and cultural activities. In this sense, space was a metaphor for dynamic, exploratory, and sometimes therapeutic opportunities to which newcomers, among others involved in the arts, were welcome. Open opportunities and general arts-based activities, those available to anyone interested in engaging with arts including newcomers and other communities, were seen to create dynamic, emergent, and unpredictable opportunities for professionals, including opportunities to learn about Canadian community and workplace cultures.

### *Providing opportunities to experience arts and culture*

ASO representatives reinforced a key observation made by newly settled artists and arts professionals about the local sector. They acknowledged that knowing where to find the artistic communities and venues in Canada, and Toronto specifically, was not easily done, particularly by newcomers. ASO representatives often saw this as a core challenge and priority for their organization, but also one not easily resolved due to the complexity of outreach and engagement, and the limits to organizational capacity.

Some community- and municipally-based organizations felt that programming and community-engaged activities and events fostered practical connections to the arts for those seeking to engage with local practitioners. However, these representatives also acknowledged the challenges of programming that offered little disciplinary focus, that was offered too infrequently or episodically to serve continuous and emergent needs, or that was focused on communities of audiences rather than of practitioners and professionals. In short, representatives acknowledged that these events afforded exposure to arts and cultural activities, but provided inconsistent support and did not necessarily clarify opportunities to paid employment or pathways into sector professions.



## *Providing opportunities to engage with arts and culture*

Some representatives from ASOs identified the importance of eliciting voices and highlighting stories from amongst specific Toronto communities and/or catchments, including those representing particular diasporas underrepresented in the Canadian cultural mainstream. Although this goal and the strategies for achieving it does not explicitly target arts and culture sector professionals, these representatives felt that cultural engagement constituted a fundamental groundwork for subsequent employment and professionalization in the sector.

A number of organizations across the city, including several represented by participants we spoke with, have embedded such amplifying and engagement approaches into their programming, and have developed events, initiatives, and creative opportunities to engage newcomer, immigrant, and refugee communities into the arts and culture ecosystem. For some, this has meant removing barriers to access, by providing free and low-cost programming, as well as offering translation services, transit fare, child-minding, or mentorship; for others, removing barriers has meant a more radical embedding of programming and activities directly within communities, and cultivating a participant-led and artist-facilitated participatory approach. As with the above-mentioned initiatives, where these opportunities typically falter is in how such engagement and experiences can be translated and formalized into career pathways: both into formal education, as well as paid work and career mobility within the sector.

## *Providing spaces for sector professionals*

For representatives from ASOs, space was undoubtedly the most important need and priority for supporting newcomer and immigrant arts professionals effectively. Representatives from newcomer-focused arts organizations were particularly adamant about the imperative of space: without spaces to produce, rehearse, exhibit, or perform their craft, entry into the local sector was often seen as impenetrable. Without such spaces, whether mixed-use or dedicated, live-in or accessible by commute, mid- and senior-level professionals are unable to import their practices, and those emerging or in their early careers are unable to find solid footing in the sector.

### **3.3.2 Pathways in the Arts**

#### *Volunteer Experiences and Paid Experiences*

Volunteer experiences, including unpaid internships, continue to have an important place in enhancing sector entry. At the same time, and justifiably, they have been maligned as exploitative and exclusionary practices. The reality is that while some organizations leverage unpaid experiences in ways that primarily benefit themselves and not their labour talent, others aim for these experiences to be more transformative,

with learning and professional development goals for their volunteers, and with goals to enhance engagement with patrons, audiences, and professionals for their own organization. A challenge for the arts and culture sector, as with employers in most sectors of the labour market, is to ensure that unpaid sector experiences effectively meet these goals and contribute positively to both organizational priorities and the career and professional ambitions of those accessing them.

## *Awareness building of career opportunities with the arts*

The sector provides many unpaid opportunities to engage in arts practices and with local arts organizations. For instance, community arts initiatives across the City of Toronto have long tried to offer resources and experiences to honour voluntary community participation. While remuneration is sometimes found (typically as honoraria), it is often not possible: meaningful alternatives to encourage and support participation often include childcare, transit fare, snacks, and other incentives. Community arts organizations also offer project-based opportunities periodically though continuously, including entry-level contracts, paid and unpaid, and low-cost or free access to spaces. Though these are often for artists working primarily in visual arts (e.g. mural work, teaching and facilitation, gallery exhibitions, and so on), it also often includes opportunities for craft-based, media, or performing artists. Many other small-scale arts organizations offer volunteer leadership opportunities, such as through governance (Board of Directors) positions. With any of these offers, the quality and meaningfulness of the experiences may vary.

Many representatives indicated their awareness of and interest in the employment support and labour market integration strategies of local service agencies, such as job shadowing and wage subsidy approaches. Some representatives were interested in these strategies for arts production opportunities, but many expressed an interest in the role to support placements for arts professional and arts supportive roles. Representatives again pointed out, however, their limited capacity to work out the details for such strategies, as well as for ensuring optimal experiences for individuals. Some were hesitant because of the logistics and anticipated challenges of working beyond the sector to partner with settlement and employment agencies.

The challenges of effectively conducting targeted recruitment of new Canadians was also raised as a concern and capacity issue. Representatives expressed uncertainty about how to conduct effective outreach to newcomer, immigrant, or refugee candidates, as well as about what a more inclusive, newcomer-positive hiring process (from job posting to interview) could and should look like. Some were concerned about their own and their organization's potential for expressing unconscious bias during the hiring process, as many cited fit (or "fit for culture") as both an important but potentially problematic criterion for equitable and inclusive hiring practices. A lack of resources to contract HR consultants as well as a limited diversity amongst internal leadership was recognized as potentially perpetuating the issue.

## Skills Development

The mandate of nearly all of the organizations whose representatives we spoke with included priorities to provide services and resources in support of developing their artistic communities. For smaller-scale organizations, this meant more informal opportunities; for larger ones, this included a variety of accreditation options, such as certificates, diplomas, and undergraduate or graduate degrees for postsecondary programs. Among these, a number of diverse opportunities for skills development for newcomer artists and arts professionals were highlighted. In general, however, those seen to be most salient for this cohort were not those focused on technical skills development, but those that supported career continuity and efficient transitions into the local labour market. These were seen to include:

- **Networking events.** Whether formal or informal in design, and whether conducted between and amongst disciplinary professionals or a more general audience, networking was seen as a key way for exchanging and transferring highly contextual and targeted knowledge, allowing participants to find out about sector opportunities, make connections with prospective opportunities, and occasionally build relationships that would lead directly to employment in arts and culture. Accordingly, effective networking was not just perceived as a pathway to skills development experiences and opportunities, but as itself an opportunity to rehearse professional interpersonal and communications skills. Networking sessions focused on, or directly offered to, the career development of newcomer artists and arts professionals were seen as particularly valuable by the sector professionals we spoke with, though some echoed the concerns voiced by newcomer arts professionals (and mentioned earlier), namely that those organized to mix newcomers with more established sector professionals, with or without a disciplinary focus, were perhaps more effective and impactful opportunities.
- **Mentorship.** Traditional, one-to-one mentorship was perceived by the representatives we spoke with to be highly useful at addressing the specific professional and skill-based needs of newcomer artists and arts professionals, as these were often an efficient way to help newcomers better determine where eligible resources exist, where their communities/peers may be, and what sector and career development opportunities are available. Although the mentorship experience was recognized to be subjective, it was generally still favourably considered, as it was seen as a way to explore new professional landscapes organically and holistically. Echoing the arts professionals we spoke with, representatives from arts organizations highlighted the importance of addressing affect and emotion in conversations about professional development. This was seen to be particularly important given the life changing nature of settlement transitions experienced amongst newcomer and immigrant artists.
- **Dedicated programming initiatives.** Representatives from arts organizations highlighted the perceived value of dedicated and targeted programming for

newcomer populations, despite the fact that many of this programming was offered inconsistently or as part of a pilot program. As this includes a potentially wide range of training, upskilling, skills assessment, events, bridging programs and other activities, a more systematic review and understanding of what is most likely to be of benefit to the career development of newcomer artists and arts professionals. At a minimum, however, representatives were unanimous in arguing that, whatever form such initiatives should take, they should avoid the ubiquitous info session and offer something more interactive and participatory.

- **Entrepreneurship.** Some representatives indicated an interest in exploring arts-engaged entrepreneurship with newcomers. While some organizations indicated materials and resources related to starting creative small businesses, others saw further potential in this, including possible connections between newcomer arts professionals and social enterprise development.

## 4. What Comes Next

In the previous section we explored the ideas, opinions, and experiences shared by the groups and individuals we spoke with during the roundtables, as well as of the artists and organizational leaders we interviewed independently. Although we recognize these findings as by no means a complete or adequate summary of this complex sector and its diverse community of stakeholders, we nevertheless feel this report presents a useful and meaningful categorization of the insights shared with us by the broad demographic of professionals we spoke with. In this section we will attempt to summarize key recommendations with an aim to highlight the importance of, and potential solutions for, key issues and opportunities for sector stakeholders, and critical needs that must be met in order for newcomer arts professionals to achieve success.

*“How do we create sustainable interventions that provide access to these communities, and how do we engage multiple stakeholders in that space to come together and figure out those action steps?”*

### 4.1 Core Recommendations

Based on our summary and the analysis of what we heard, we have synthesized the following four (4) recommendations. We conducted these roundtables and interviews to better understand the ways immigrant and new Canadian arts professionals achieve success, or experience barriers to it, in the Toronto arts sector. As is clear that many more new Canadian art professionals struggle than succeed in the sector, these recommendations have been made to encourage the development of research and policy

initiatives as well as programming and partnership innovations across, and beyond, the arts and culture sector in pursuit of better sector outcomes for immigrant and newcomer arts professionals.

To help clarify the scope and intent of these recommendations, beneath each we have indicated ways that WorkInCulture (WIC) proposes itself playing a role in realizing each initiative. This role may be as lead or in support, but always assumed to be in partnership. WorkInCulture hopes that additional sector organizations, alongside other stakeholders not present in these conversations (such as government bodies), will also work to identify the roles they will commit to playing or the actions they will agree to take in response to this report.

## **1. Enhance professional development resources and supports for new Canadian, immigrant, and refugee artists and arts professionals to enable independent learning and community development.**

- WIC will support an audit and possible customization of existing content, plus drafting new business / enterprise development and organizational development resources to meet identified priority needs
- WIC will help engage postsecondary institutions to identify ways of demystifying career and professional development pathways in arts and culture (postsecondary, graduate school, and so on) for new Canadian, immigrant, and refugee arts professionals at all levels (such as adult learners and international students)

## **2. Initiate new and cultivate existing cross-sector collaboration and partnership opportunities, prioritizing commitment and active participation from all levels of government, the employment and settlement sector, ASOs, and postsecondary institutions, prioritizing a newcomer-led, newcomer-initiated mandate.**

- WIC will continue to convene and/or participate in formal discussions amongst key stakeholders to help clarify and prioritize emergent and continuous needs (such as COVID impacts on newcomer artists and arts professionals and deeper integration of the arts and culture sector resources into pre-arrival, settlement, and international student systems and structures)
- WIC will intensify engagement with government and funders to improve understanding and enhance service for new Canadian, immigrant, and refugee artists and arts professionals

## **3. Develop new and enhance existing communications and outreach strategies to better inform and connect new Canadians, including pre-arrival immigrants and refugees, to timely and relevant arts and culture sector services and resources.**

- WIC will support efforts to systematize and/or “standardize” (design, branding, messaging, and so on) career and professional development strategies directed towards new Canadian, immigrant, and refugee arts professionals across arts and culture subsectors

- WIC will support community-level integration within and beyond the sector of new Canadian, immigrant, and refugee serving organizations (including with Neighbourhood Arts Network / Toronto Arts Foundation, Toronto Public Libraries, ASOs, employment and settlement, and community health / community multi-service agencies)
- WIC will support organization-led partnership development initiatives by leveraging existing cross-sector leadership expertise and experience
- WIC will leverage the Job Board and Discovery Board technical digital infrastructure in the above initiatives and efforts

#### **4. Design a physical and/or virtual hub for supplying consolidated, up-to-date, and accessible information about the arts and culture sector for a new Canadian audience.**

- WIC will consider its role (lead, co-lead, support) amongst the design team and explore scope for the design and development of an information and resource “hub” for new Canadian, including pre-arrival immigrant and refugee, artists and arts professionals
- WIC will support design and development of a feasible model that will balance central availability (a “gateway”) with accessibility (a “guide”) and utility for both the newcomer community (a resource and opportunity “hub”) and stakeholders committed to the health and sustainability of the sector (a talent development “hub”)

##### **4.1.1 New, Familiar, and Unanswered Questions**

It is worth highlighting a few key points that did not make it into the summary or our recommendations, as they are points we feel need some further consideration, even if this isn't the place or the project to do so.

As we mentioned at the end of section 3.1, and as the arts professionals we spoke with made clear, our study was not the first time many participants had been invited to speak about what change is needed in the sector; nor, did many expect, was this the last time they would be required to put into words what for many was so glaringly obvious. All of the people we spoke with were quite appreciative of our willingness to listen and empathize, but all were also eager to see change and not simply another trammeling over well-worn ground. We feel it is important to reiterate this point once more because the urgency of taking action in support of this cohort of Canadian professionals and their collective and individual needs continues to be so necessary and overdue.

The experiences of international students enrolled in postsecondary art and design programs is also worth mentioning. The experiences of international students in creative sector programs is difficult to categorize because even though their enrolment and student status is explicitly not a route to settlement, their learning in Canada is designed to set them up for success in this context. The recent prioritization of experiential, work-

integrated opportunities as significant components of many postsecondary art and design curricula presents unique challenges to international students, as employment, immigration, and educational policies limit opportunities for international students to engage in these curricular innovations.

Finally, the abstract idea of a resource and support hub for immigrant and newcomer arts professionals should be explored as a model rather than a singular proposal. A hub model, a decentralized network rather than a central space, may be a more appropriate, and indeed feasible, approach. Given already existing digital infrastructure in libraries, Employment Ontario service providers, and other multi-purpose community spaces, the design recommendation might be better seen as a design and redesign strategy where a thoughtful investment in both new public infrastructure and revitalized public spaces might offer a more reasonable and sustainable context to develop.

#### 4.1.2 Key Priorities and Next Steps

WorkInCulture (WIC) is committed to continuing conversations in support of new Canadian and immigrant artists and arts professionals, and is eager to cultivate partnerships with the individuals, organizations, and institutions dedicated to this community.

Key priorities beyond the completion of this report will include:

- Creating mechanisms to remain connected with the participants and contributors to this project in order to further discussions initiated with this group, and serve as a continued platform to invite others to join in on the conversations. This includes publishing this report widely and bringing awareness to the project through a communications campaign;
- Auditing existing resources to determine what could actively serve this community, and what can be easily adapted to meet the needs of new Canadian and immigrant arts professionals moving forward. Similarly, WIC will apply a newcomer and immigrant arts professionals lens to active projects to determine where and how the community could be further engaged through upcoming activities;
- Seeking funding to activate the co-design and/or co-development of series of projects to create a more concerted effort in addressing the recommendations above will be pursued.

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