

**REGROUPEMENT
QUÉBÉCOIS DE
LA DANSE**



**For Sustainable Cultural Prosperity
Government of Canada Consultation on Canada's Digital Economy**

**REGROUPEMENT QUÉBÉCOIS DE LA DANSE
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on Canada's Digital Economy
Brief submitted by the Regroupement québécois de la danse
Title: For Sustainable Cultural Prosperity**

The Government of Canada's desire to create an advantage for Canada in the digital economy is to be applauded, and its openness to consulting stakeholders in the creative economy and citizens is appreciated. The Regroupement québécois de la danse (RQD) unites over 500 dance artists and organizations and represents all the professional sectors of dance practice: training, research, creation, production and dissemination. RQD draws on the strength of this broad representation to submit its thoughts and recommendations to the Ministers of Industry, Human Resources and Skills Development and Canadian Heritage and Official Languages.

In the document submitted for consultation, *Strategies for Sustainable Prosperity*, the Government's role in developing the digital economy is clearly stated. To make Canada a leader in the digital economy, the Government plans to implement a marketplace framework that will make it possible to take risks and that will provide the tools needed to succeed as creators, inventors and entrepreneurs. This is how the Government has formulated the challenges to be faced: to create innovative content that informs, educates and entertains a global audience; to seize a digital advantage on a creative global stage; and to develop a digital media industry, synonymous with a flexible infrastructure, as well as a fixed structure based on private partnerships and local, provincial and federal alliances.

In preparing this brief, RQD focused on Section 4 (*Canada's Digital Content*) and Section 5 (*Building Digital Skills*), since their themes concern the performing arts and address dance directly.

In order for independent dance creators and organizations – all of which are non-profit companies – to take advantage of the opportunities in the digital revolution and contribute to the development of the Canadian economy, the desired framework must, first and foremost, foster research and the development of artistic excellence and cultural exception in all their forms. Dance has extraordinary potential for development, both in terms of the creation, production and dissemination of choreographic works in real time or on one or another of the existing or future platforms, and in the distribution of dance repertoires or pedagogical or performance knowledge.

1. A digital strategy to benefit Canadian creative content

In order to stand out and gain prominence in the global digital universe, the Government must focus specifically on the promotion and dissemination of Canada's cultural and artistic heritage. The examples in architecture, cinema and television cited in the Government's consultation document (p. 25) suggest the potential that the Canadian digital framework could offer to all the creative content developed over the last five decades of performing arts. Investing more in the digitization of Canadian collections of works and publications, in all disciplines, would help gain some ground, since Canada has an enormous accumulated backlog in this area. In the case of dance, considerable upstream investments are needed in order to collect, archive and conserve the written, filmed, recorded, plastic and oral evidence of a choreographic wealth that deserves to be better known and more widely shared. Once brought together, such content will tell the stories of five generations of choreographers, designers, dancers and instructors on the Canadian digital infrastructure.



Parallel with the need to save this collective cultural memory (evidence of Canadian creative knowledge that is of global importance), we need to be able to open the floodgates and feed the Canadian digital infrastructure with innovative artistic content, now and on a permanent basis. The Government must therefore continue to increase its investments in the practices of research and development of innovative artistic content and, in the context of a global culture, the Government must strengthen its measures to support artists, producers and presenters in the performing arts in general and in dance in particular. Some of the highly predictable outcomes of such investments include larger audiences and expanded Canadian and international performing arts markets for live performances as well as wider recognition for Canada around the world. With respect to the design of interactive artistic content for the vast audience of the media universe, we can no longer afford to neglect the impact Canada can have by generating more opportunities for direct contact between artists and audiences of diverse cultures.

1.1. Strategic investments

Any investments considered by the Government should not generate confrontations between digital media artists and producers of artistic content. Rather, the investment strategy should encourage these groups to work together in synergy, take risks together and share the benefits on the basis of the creative investments made by each party. Any motivating and productive digital marketplace framework that adds considerable value will need to support the economies of the various sectors that will need to work together, in both for-profit and nonprofit industries, and balance their direct and indirect effects on the entire Canadian creative economy. For this reason, a review of the *Canadian Copyright Act* is needed so that artists and designers of artistic and digital content can receive royalties. No matter how the rules are applied, the Government needs to ensure that the basic principal of receiving a return on investment is respected by all stakeholders involved in the new digital content value chain.

Having the means to develop, produce, adapt, translate and disseminate diversified and top-quality creative content – widely and quickly – on technological platforms can only enhance Canada's advantage in the global digital universe as well as within Canada itself. An offering with a strong Canadian identity will depend directly on Canadians' interest in the digital and interactive content we propose. In this respect, there is much to be learned from the careers and success of many Canadian artists on the international stage: the more that content is derived from the specific nature of a culture and a community, the more it resonates as universal. We should not be afraid to invest in what sets us apart in this world: the creativity and talent of our artists.

1.2. A framework befitting the creative challenges ahead

The Government's consultation document expresses the following concern: "From the individual creator to the multinational company, experimentation and taking risks will be critical, knowing that success is not guaranteed and definitive business models remain elusive" (p. 25). We share this concern, since experimentation and risk taking are at the heart of the research and creative practices that the Canada Council for the Arts supports, and with an encouraging rate of success. Proof can be seen in the growing investments made by foreign programmers in Canadian coproductions and the growing number of tours made by Canadian performing arts companies, all around the world. The arrival of digital media has exacerbated the competition by globalizing supply, hence the interest in standing out among the largest suppliers by making innovative and energetic use of ICTs to promote the diversity of our creative practices to audiences at home as



well as abroad. This requires greater and sustained investments in a context of global competition, where the loyalty of programmers and audiences has great value.

Although we need to fully inhabit the new digital platforms in order to maintain and grow demand for Canadian content from audiences and programmers alike, we also need to ensure optimal conditions for research and for the creation, production, presentation and dissemination of live performances, as well as their digital derivatives. While the links in the traditional performance chain need to be strengthened to take advantage of the opportunities presented in the globalization of markets for contemporary creations, we also need to learn how to adapt the usual production cycles to the new digital value chain. While the intrinsic value of a dance performance depends on bringing artists and audiences together at the same physical location to interact in real time, any film, video or multimedia adaptation and any direct transmission of performances through digital technologies transforms the object and, by extension, the nature of how audience members participate and receive the work. The conventional wisdom is that digital technologies allow economies of scale in terms of time, energy and financial and human resources, yet this is simply not true, since they also bring greater competition, which raises the stakes in terms of innovation, excellence and distinction. The new game rules imposed by digital technologies in the creation, production, promotion and distribution of artistic content make it essential for artists to have access to the related equipment, resources and leading-edge skills as well as to funds that will support research and development. In other words, developing the Canadian digital marketplace framework must absolutely take into account the impacts of the digital economy on the conditions and modes of practice as well as on organizational structures and arts organizations.

Given these considerations, we recommend that the Canada Council for the Arts be given the means to develop programs suitable for the clientele it serves, in much the same way as Heritage Canada manages a suite of funds supporting digital advances in cultural industries. The Council understands the challenges faced in different sectors of artistic practice, and this would allow it to develop an appropriate framework for optimal deployment on the flexible digital infrastructure and in performance markets that are experiencing fundamental transformations. The changes that Heritage Canada recently made to its support programs for the cultural industry are as crucial to the artists and cultural workers supported by the Canada Council for the Arts, but along different parameters. Heritage Canada's new investments in cultural industries are aimed at helping them be competitive in their creation of Canadian digital content. The challenges are even greater for the various clienteles of the Canada Council, which must develop mixed management and operating models. At a time when the rules and modes of practice in the global market are being transformed, increasing the Council's budget of recurring funds to \$300 million is an inevitable and well-targeted strategic investment.

If digital media and content needs to be created in both official languages and include Canadian ethnocultural and Aboriginal communities (and rightly so), it must also allow for a full expression of diverse artistic practices, the basis of Canadian creativity, identity and pride.

2. Challenges and opportunities in the digital economy

The section of the document on building digital skills discusses challenges that vary in their complexity with the clientele targeted and the functions that they will need to fulfill in this new value chain. Any training and professional development strategy directed at digital technologies must therefore be based on an accurate evaluation of the needs of a broad range of target clientele, including basic users reading



news on the new digital platforms, artists creating artistic and digital content, operators of Web 2.0 platforms, workers on production lines, suppliers of public goods and services, managers, nurses, researchers, etc.

As discussed in the consultation document, digital skills represent a range of knowledge and know-how that require basic skills. To be able to classify, organize, save or discard, discuss, comment on and enrich the massive amount of information being disseminated today on all media and platforms, one needs to know how to read and write and have a wealth of knowledge that we call general culture. These are first-level functions needed by anyone living in society. In contrast, the execution, creation, production and dissemination of content or distribution of services require specialized knowledge, not only with respect to ICTs, but also within the affected professions.

Developing and putting in place a strategy with specific targets also requires consideration of other factors: the lives, education and work of the persons concerned, their age, level of education and original culture, the language(s) they speak, their current level of skills compared to the skills required to carry out the tasks in their job description, and the available means and resources for training.

In order to develop such a framework, it is crucial to access concrete training experience in the workplace of the profession concerned. The needs to be met in digital training and professional development in the dance sector should be seen as opportunities that need to be seized if Canada is to be a leader in the global performing arts market. The sector's development, economy and contribution to the country's sustained prosperity will all depend on adopting such a view. In this leading-edge industry involving the creation, production and dissemination of artistic content, technical training and training in digital technologies must be harmonized so that stakeholders can adopt one or the other cycle of production (linear or digital), depending on the nature of their project and the targeted audiences or clienteles and based on the organization's development model or business plan.

2.1. A strategy tailored to the dance economy

Even though the professional dance sector can count on abundant, highly educated and qualified labour in its artistic and pedagogical functions, challenges remain when filling key positions in management, market and audience development, communications and cultural mediation functions. The shortage of specialized labour in these functions could be addressed by implementing a strategy that promotes these professions to young dancers in our schools of professional dance training, since they who will inevitably need to change careers later in life. It is possible to transfer artistic skills into the functions of cultural workers (who now need digital technology skills), but only under certain conditions. Past experience has shown that when dancers facing a career change assume the functions of cultural workers in dance organizations, they need coaching, a considerable amount of time and a personalized training plan, and this taxes the resources of the team and the organization. Even so, these individuals acquire the skills quickly and, what is more, their aptitude in digital technologies makes the effort well worth the investment. The first winning condition of a training and professional development strategy is to count on existing strengths and actors. This strategy must have two objectives: (1) to train qualified labour in the functions that are essential to the development of dance organizations, and (2) to stage a digital revolution whether the applications are creative, technical, didactic, in communications, etc.

Having the means to seize the opportunities presented by the digital revolution will clearly energize the economics of the dance sector, since there will be more job openings and resources in



dance organizations and because the sector will have access to qualified resources, allowing it to become more efficient and productive and develop markets and new production and distribution niches through the digital platforms (film, video, multimedia design, interactive forms with artistic, entertainment or pedagogical dimensions, etc.)

2.2. Measures and tools that are within reach

One of the means that could be used to implement an efficient training and professional development strategy in dance organizations would be to have alternating work-study apprenticeships that would compensate the employee in training as well as the organization. Imagine the economic benefits to the sector as a whole if self-employed workers could report weeks of on-the-job training and weeks spent in the studio, performing and on tour in their employment insurance reports. We should target the transmission of knowledge and skills acquired in dance organizations by giving them the means to host and train an emerging, qualified work force in the various performance-related professions. In other words, we should implement measures that, through their flexibility and by leveraging existing programs, encourage and foster the integration and on-the-job training in related professions of a work force that is already specialized in dance. We should ensure that the organizations have access to grants that will allow them to acquire leading-edge digital equipment and, at the same time, be able to improve the general conditions of their work and practice. Finally, it is also understood that this represents taking risks in the development of “high-definition” artistic content, with no guarantee of success, an endeavour that requires time, additional human resources, leading-edge expertise, and equipment that will need to be continually updated.

Depending on the funds invested by the Government, entry into the global digital economy will help develop the labour market in dance, diversify dance organizations' sources of revenue, and strengthen its infrastructure for creating, producing and disseminating artistic and digital content. The new order will provide the sector with extraordinary opportunities for growth, knowing that an essential part of the sector's contribution to the Canadian economy stems from its great capacity for innovation and its international influence, which are well known but which could be so much greater.

2.3. Cultural exception to address the digital skills divide

Several times, the document submitted for consultation mentions the risk of a digital skills divide and the need to target more specifically Aboriginal, ethnocultural and official language minority communities, as well as seniors and people with less education. All these groups of citizens already experience a cultural divide that could be widened with the arrival of digital technologies and with the arrival in the Canadian market of a wave of foreign-sourced cultural goods and services. This is why our cultural anchors need to be reinforced by maximizing the contributions of Canadian artists and cultural organizations through the creation, production and dissemination of content that reinforces identity. Citizens' access to cultural goods and services that speak to them is a real issue, independent of the medium or form of transmission, given the predominance and power of the foreign mass media. In order to be able to make Canada a leader in the digital economy, the Government must find a way to regulate the flow of the cultural goods and services to which citizens have access, or at least exercise some control over its quality. The Government is right to search for solutions to the expected digital skills divide, but solutions will not be found without thinking about the foundations and diverse facets of an identity-affirming culture, and the means by which it can be cultivated and developed, locally and globally, as a valued asset.



The desire to secure a sustainable prosperity is a noble and great ambition that should not be limited to the ability to produce and sell the kind of mass-market products that are already found in profusion in the digital entertainment marketplace. Such products are already widely available, and one might conclude that it is not to Canada's advantage to join a race that already has so many contestants. The odds of success are better in the research and development of innovative Canadian content in various other areas, which presumes using and securing the full participation of a wide variety of cultural actors: innovative artists, instructors, managers, students, scientists, entrepreneurs and citizens, funding bodies, and public, governmental and paragonmental authorities. Without forward-looking commitments from the Government on culture, the environment, international development, and sustainable economic development – which would naturally accompany audacious and long-term policies – the risk of becoming collectively poorer is very real.

Under this cultural divide lie social divides that need immediate attention. This is where we could innovate and succeed in terms of sustainable prosperity. If there is one target to set as a priority in the Canadian digital strategy, it is the protection and development of our human, cultural and environmental capital. And in terms of a timeline, it is clear that working to provide a better future for our children, and to make what we have built sustainable over several generations, requires managing this project on a day-to-day basis.

3. Recommendations

We are convinced that artists and cultural workers make an invaluable contribution to sustainable prosperity, which is synonymous with social cohesion and cultural democracy, and all the following recommendations are aimed at improving their living conditions and conditions of practice. This is to the benefit of excellence, global cultural and digital competitiveness, and a fully embraced Canadian identity.

In order to inspire and expand artists' and cultural workers' contributions to the Canadian economy: We recommend that the Government ensure that artists and cultural workers have the means to rise, brilliantly, to the challenges faced in the global digital economy.

In order for the Canada Council for the Arts to effectively support artists in their research and development of innovative artistic content and help arts organizations develop markets, audiences and organizational models tailored to conditions and requirements in the global economy: We recommend that the Government increase the recurring funding in the Council's current budget to \$300 million.

In order for Heritage Canada to effectively support the many and diverse professional practices in creation, production, dissemination and training, in a global digital economic context where cultural industries and non-profit companies are facing the same challenges: We recommend that Heritage Canada adjust its programs and admission criteria to better reflect the various types of actors.

In order for artists creating content to benefit from the economic benefits of their creative investments: We recommend that the Government ensure that the rights and investments of artists are protected by instituting better timelines in the royalties system incorporated into the *Canadian Copyright Act*.

In order to develop and put in place an efficient and productive digital training and professional development strategy that responds to regional realities: We recommend that the Government provide financial support to initiatives taken by provincial governments in school and higher education as well as



in lifelong learning, in work and employment insurance, and in the professional development of a qualified labour force for a global, digital economy.

Montreal, July 9, 2010