

Topic	Impacts, challenges and collective capacity of community-engaged arts/artists working in the rural, remote and First Nation contexts of Northern Ontario.		
Date	October 12-14, 2018	Location	Tamarack Meeting Room, Days Inn, Thunder Bay, ON
Host(s)	Robin Sutherland - Founding Artistic Director, and Miranda Bouchard – General Manager, Thinking Rock Community Arts		
Participants	<p>Miranda Bouchard - Thinking Rock Community Arts, Thessalon Betty Carpick - Freelance, Thunder Bay Art Gallery, Thunder Bay Holly Cunningham – Near North Mobile Media Lab, North Bay Sophie Edwards - OAC Northeastern Rep, Kagawong Alana Forslund - OAC Northwestern Rep, Thunder Bay Shelby Gagnon - Neechee Studio, Thunder Bay Stacey Hare Hodgins - CAHEP, Thunder Bay Carol Kajorinne - Workman Arts Northwest Ontario (working title), Thunder Bay Binaeshee-Quae Nabigon - Freelance, Biigtigong First Nation Sierra Nowegejik - Freelance, Thunder Bay Jamie Oshkabewisens - Jumblies Theatre, Tkaronto/Wikwemikong Maria Parrella-Ilaria - OpenArt Studios/ArtSpeaks, Sault Ste. Marie Reilly Scott - Freelance, Sioux Lookout Cora Rae Silk - Myths and Mirrors, Sudbury Robin Sutherland - Thinking Rock Community Arts, Thessalon</p>		
Notetaker(s)	Seanna Connell, Project Director, ArtBridges		
Facilitator(s)	Phyllis Novak, Artistic Director, Sketch		
Invitation	"What challenges and opportunities are community-engaged artists and organizations based in the rural and First Nation contexts of Northern Ontario facing, and what support, research, and policy might help make this work easier/more sustainable?"		
Perspectives and thoughts	<p>Challenges related to our Social Context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Navigating tensions between Indigenous and Settler communities: racism, disconnection, lack of intermingling, avoidance (driving around reserves even though it is quicker to drive through them), lack of understanding/recognition of our country's ongoing colonial legacy • Historic dependence on resource extraction economies leads to narrow minded view that does not take into account how economic, social, cultural development are interdependent, not mutually exclusive • Seasonal demographic shifts: rural communities have low 		

	<p>populations in winter but some double over the summertime with cottagers. Though this can be good for tourism economy, not for social connections. Also financial disparity exists between residents and cottagers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changing demographics in bigger centres (Sudbury, Sault Ste. Marie, Thunder Bay) with post secondary institutions increasing number of people from other countries leading to increased cultural diversity; however these cultural communities are often isolated from the rest of the community; little opportunity to become involved in wider community; overt racism and xenophobia exists toward newcomers exacerbating issue • Youth migration out of the North to pursue post secondary education and jobs • Addiction, homelessness, severe trauma, opioid crisis, poverty • Stigma and lack of appreciation about Northern Ontario from rest of province: “all we do is play hockey and ride moose” <p>Challenges we face in delivering our work in this context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isolation/lack of connections between community-engaged arts initiatives; very localized work, spread over vast geographic distances (many hours of driving or expensive flights via Toronto); rarely able to get together to see one another’s work or share learnings, practices, or knowledge. Weather inhibits this further in winter. • Often have to go to conferences/gatherings in larger urban centers to see each other; northern contexts, realities, experiences are not represented in those spaces. • Often organizations/individuals from outside of our communities (often southern Ontario) are often unaware of what is happening in the North and want to “help us” by offering collaborative projects without the necessary relationship building & without a sustaining plan or consideration of what work is already happening. This can use up valuable and limited resources of locally based artists and is a colonial way of working. In the north, we are careful to only offer programming when/where invited. • Travel costs are a significant barrier to project participation in the north and we are not able to bring in enough funding to cover travel costs for artists or participants. This means employees often pay out of pocket for gas, hitchhike or carpool. Using personal vehicles means putting many miles on without compensation. Winter travel is also very difficult and dangerous. Greyhound buses are suspending services west of Sudbury beginning end of October, which will make travelling even harder. There is also a lack of (good) transportation services that provide participants with disabilities (who are also often on financial assistance and cannot afford taxis) with a ride to-and-from programs. In urban centres, city bus systems are often unreliable (long wait times, poor ploughing for access). Cities and
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	<p>communities are very dispersed which is a barrier for folks commuting. This leaves program managers feeling obligated to provide rides which is not compensated and also creates liability issues.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Difficult and draining to be working on the front line of reconciliation/relationship building between Settler and Indigenous communities: Vicarious trauma, cultural appropriation, tokenism, racism, white fragility come up in the work: “sometimes I feel like we’re expected to represent an Indigenous world view”, “don’t want every project to be about Truth and Reconciliation”, “there is discomfort, being a Settler on traditional territory”, “people are building identity, getting knowledge, we don’t necessarily know our identities, we’re learning”.• Funding: many community-engaged arts initiatives are under-resourced, there are “not a lot of local or regional resources to get initiatives off the ground, or sustain them”. Few foundations fund work in the north, and groups have little knowledge/connections to the ones that do. Region’s economic disadvantage makes it difficult to attract individual or corporate donations. Because of limited funds there is considerable perceived competition between groups.• Lack of context-specific awareness from Funders: many Funders ask for numbers instead of stories to determine impact. Predetermined surveys from Funders at times can be damaging not only to the program and its philosophy, but also to the participants who happen to live in vulnerable contexts and can re-create harm. Funders can tokenize participants and there can be a lack of understanding about how much support/time is needed to build relationships that are an essential part of community-engaged arts. Funders don’t often take into account in delivering funds whether small grassroots groups have operating funding compared to established institutions.• Lack of art supply stores (need to go to dollar stores, Michaels, or order online and pay shipment costs) means we are working with lower quality art supplies.• There is a lack of arts administrators, managers and skilled/experienced grant writers in North Ontario – difficult to attract and retain appropriate staff even when we are able to attract enough funding to pay them.• Local rural governments and decision makers chronically undervalue and exploit artists: they “do not view arts and culture as important or necessary”; and it “seems as if primary cultural tourism is about the Group of Seven”. City staff often lack the knowledge and experience of the arts sector, for example about what equitable pay is for hiring artists or running programs, often asking artists to volunteer or expect artists to do the cultural work
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	<p>of the city for honouraria, ‘experience’ and ‘visibility’ in lieu of fair pay.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feelings of being undervalued in precarious work that involves mental, financial, and emotional strain leads to burnout: “hard to say no”, “we need to keep ourselves healthy”, “we need money to buy food and pay the rent, sometimes it feels like the work is not valued enough”, “feeling of guilt, if there are slim resources to be shared, and we are concerned about our co-workers”. • People need to change positions/jobs as they come up, for personal economic survival. “Need to reflect on and cultivate awareness about our emotional capacity, economic capacity, physical capacity, when we look at capacity.” There is a lack of funding/foresight to honour succession planning and transfer of knowledge in a good way when such shifts in staff occur (which can be sudden, negatively affecting organizational structures and philosophy, etc.) • Organizations often over-rely on youth workers and interns. Can be unavoidable when resources are limited and they do provide learning opportunities and work experience for young people, but often youth and interns are hired in lieu of professionals. This can result in lack of training for interns, unfair compensation for young workers, and less opportunities for people that are no longer considered 'youth.' <p>Despite these challenges and barriers, we have seen community-engaged art processes have the following impacts in our communities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connecting people to the land by exploring land-based practices and work that is inspired and informed by the land • Creating opportunities for young people to connect to the arts who don’t normally have access to arts because of financial barriers, lack of local arts programming, lack of art programs in schools • Telling the (often unheard and buried) stories of where we live by engaging our communities in multidisciplinary participatory arts processes • Decreasing social isolation by creating vital local hubs for community-engagement, relationship building and connection through arts • Addressing mental health, accessibility and inclusion through community-engaged arts • Working toward relationship building between Indigenous and Settler populations: “We bring people in our communities together that don’t normally come together, we’re not just artists, but change-makers.” • Working on the front lines to address local social issues through arts for social change: working in mental health, addictions, correction facilities, trauma, community living, seniors, etc. • Creating opportunities for place-based, locally-informed, accessible artistic programming in rural, remote and First Nation
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	<p>communities; we live here and we work here, we are not parachuting in from urban centres</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connecting with partner groups, training and knowledge regionally, provincially and nationally to bring learnings, models and practices to our communities and adapting them to the local context • Revitalizing downtowns and public spaces in economically depressed communities • Contributing to job creation (particularly in arts and culture sector), employing youth and others who face barriers to employment, providing professional development for artists, buying local (accommodations, materials, food, etc.), attracting funding dollars to be spent in our communities <p>What are our strengths, what keeps us whole in doing this work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have knowledge and experience about working and living in the North. • We bring a variety of perspectives and experiences: “We are a community of practice, comprised of artists in different stages of our practices.” • We are adaptable and resilient: it’s common for community artists to have different jobs, roles, to not typically do one thing. • We work from a place of humour, humility, and a willingness to be vulnerable. • We are stronger together: “We’re more connected, less isolated, by coming together.” “It’s a time of intentional connections, a time for unity, working together.” “We all live and work in the North, we can feel so isolated, and even though we are far away from each other, coming together enhances our ability to share, this is a springboard for strengthening our connections that builds a sense of hopefulness, friendship-building, professional connections.” • We explore and create identity for our communities: “We all have important stories to share”. “What’s happening in our communities? People here are deeply listening, in tune with their communities”. “Identity of artists as interpreters”. • We focus on the process, not just the product: “We go where the need is and where invited; our work is process-based”. • We recognize that relationships take time and that is central to how we work: “Connecting with, and joining conversations about your neighbourhood, and generating ideas for future projects takes time and patience, can’t just jump into a community work, maybe the community doesn’t want the program.”
<p>What research</p>	<p>Some of the questions we were left with that research and/or further conversations would help us answer include:</p>

<p>would be useful?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we move to financial resiliency? • How do we create our own North Ontario funding program? • How do you get community to buy in to financially support the work? • What decision makers do we need to have involved to get more support for this work? • How do we articulate our stories and the value of our work in a way that resonates? • How can we speak with a common voice to better advocate for our work? • How can we collectively evaluate our work to show tangible impacts in our communities that tell the full story of what we do and why we do it? • Can we share capacity? Can we share capacity in admin between orgs and communities? • How do we attract, retain and support artists and arts administrators up North? • How can emerging artists start a new project or organization without overlapping/competing with other programs? • How can a community of practice be supported sustainably, collaboratively, in a healthy way? • What are some methods for self-care we can use to support ourselves mentally and emotionally? • How can we build a system that honours and encourages the time to care for and nurture ourselves - and write this into grant applications (ie providing leave for artist to work on their individual arts practice)? • How can we gently move our communities toward being okay with vulnerability when they have faced so much trauma and distrust?
<p>Whose voices are missing around the table?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other Northern community-engaged arts organizations and artists who weren't able to attend this gathering • Artists from other communities in the north: Timmins, Hearst, remote– winter road access, or fly-in communities • Francophone initiatives/artists • Elders & Chiefs of Councils • Emergent orgs, start-up projects • Financial supporters, philanthropists • General public, community members • Municipal Councillors, city/town staff, Band employees, and people working in economic development and community development • Champions – policy makers, who can speak on our behalf • Unlikely allies who get what we do and can speak on our behalf • Other services/sectors including mental health
<p>Resources & Links (mentioned)</p>	<p>Mass Culture Jumblies Theatre Artist Exchange Program Jumblies Theatre Arfare Essentials Training</p>

<p>during discussion or shared afterwards)</p>	<p>Youth Social Infrastructure Collaborative Jude Ortiz /NORDIK research on arts and culture in Northern Ontario Art for Social Change research</p>
<p>What next steps were mentioned as a result of the Gathering?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need to come together again and add more voices to the table. In the meantime, we need to stay in touch, call, write, connect and collaborate. • We need to create a collective representing community-engaged artists in Northern Ontario: “We need to build a collective for the North, a collective of all of us. Together we have impact.” “We’re more connected, less isolated, by coming together.” • We need to keep figuring out a way to keep things going, there’s a lot of hard work ahead. We, and our work, will benefit if we keep up the momentum. • We need to keep working together on this work to make it easier for the next generation of community artists to get started and keep going. • We need to find ways to provide mutual support, mentorship, promising practices in self-care and help prevent burn-out for each other across distances. • We need to figure out how we can move this work to a place of financial resilience. • We need to find champions from North Ontario to have the right people in the right places to advocate for us and our work and make necessary policy changes. • We need to find a way to get more seed money to get initiatives off the ground in the early stages so more of this work can happen. • We need to learn how to communicate about the value of what we do to our local communities and decision makers.