

Share your thoughts: Help us build a better EI program

Saskatchewan Arts Alliance Submission to the Government of Canada

The Saskatchewan Arts Alliance (SAA) is a member-driven coalition of arts organization that provides a collective voice of the Saskatchewan arts community. Through its member organizations, which are representative of all arts disciplines, the reach of the SAA extends to individuals located in all parts of the province, including urban, rural and northern areas. In this way, the SAA is representative of artists and arts organizations throughout Saskatchewan.

The Saskatchewan Arts Alliance welcomes the opportunity to contribute information to the Government of Canada's review of the Employment Insurance (EI) program. The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the challenges artists face without benefit of social nets during times of duress. Programs like CERB, CRB and CEWS were critical to those in the sector being able to manage the crisis caused by the pandemic as best they could. The EI review offers the opportunity to include those artists and cultural workers – whose work circumstances are often non-standard – within the program.

Artists' Situation

- Artists constitute a highly educated and trained workforce yet their median income is 44% less than all Canadian workers.ⁱ
- Frequently self-employed or employed for short time periods, artists often have to subsidize or supplement their artistic income with other work. Self-employment is more than 4 times higher for artists than for the overall labour force (52% versus 12%)ⁱⁱ.
- Engaged or contracted to multiple engagers and employers (e.g. producers, promoters, contractors), artists have multiple workplaces or in many cases have no defined workplace.
- Fluctuations in income are common; for example, artists such as authors whose work can take more than a year to create before receiving payment.
- The seminal study Understanding the Arts Ecology of Saskatchewan surveyed the work lives of the province's artists including the time devoted to their 1) creative work, 2) teaching, and 3) work outside of the arts. On average the artist respondents were employed 48.5 hours per week where the average work week was 38.8 hours. Artists devoted on average:
 - 24.5 hours per week to their creative practice
 - 8 hours per week to teaching or mentorship in their creative discipline
 - 16 hours per week to employment outside their creative practice.

Of note, about 1/3 of the artist respondents (29%) worked 30 to 40+ hours outside the arts in addition to the average time devoted to creative practice and teaching in order to sustain themselves, their families and their creative practice.ⁱⁱⁱ

In addition, artists' level of volunteering exceeded the provincial rate by 11% with most of the time contributed to arts and culture. In terms of volunteering, their contribution of time to education and research was almost three times the Canadian volunteer rate.^{iv}

Vitally necessary to society and economic growth, highly trained but undervalued, artists have been asking for redress of inequities for a long time. The SAA submits the following recommendations can be taken to resolve some of these inequities through a revamped Employment Insurance program.

Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Expand the Regular Employment Insurance program to allow self-employed artists to join the program on a voluntary basis.

Recommendation #2: The program should reflect the reality of artists who earn both self-contracted and employment income.

Recommendation #3: That in the calculation of hours worked, artists are able to include their unpaid work hours for time contributed to arts and culture in the calculation.

Recommendation #4: That the contribution rate is similar to that of salaried employees.

The SAA commends the Government's commitment to modernize the Employment Insurance program. We offer these recommendations so that the EI safety net acknowledges and is inclusive of artists and cultural workers and their work circumstances.

ⁱ HILL, K. (Revised Version, November 2019) A Statistical Profile of Artists in Canada in 2016: Hill Strategies: <https://hillstrategies.com/resource/statistical-profile-of-artists-in-canada-in-2016> (accessed 6 October 2021)

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ BLACKSTONE, M.; HAGE, S.; MCWILLIAMS, I. (2015a) Understanding the Arts Ecology of Saskatchewan from the Artist's Perspective: An Overview of Results from the Artist Survey of 2014. Regina, SK: Saskatchewan Partnership for Arts Research (SPAR)

^{iv} Ibid.