

RESILIENCE THROUGH EQUITY

STRATEGIC PLAN
2022-2024



ASSOCIATION FOR
OPERA IN CANADA



LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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DEVELOPED BY REBECCA
CUDDY, MÉTIS MEZZO-
SOPRANO

Our offices are located in Toronto, Ontario, also known as T'karonto which in Kanien'kéha (Mohawk Language) means, 'the place in the water where the trees are standing'. It is a privilege for us to work, live and play on the traditional lands of the Wendat 'People of the Island', the Anishinaabe 'Original People', Haudenosaunee 'People of the Longhouse' and the Mississaugas of the New Credit 'River of the north of many mouths'. Toronto is now an international hub, with many diverse people who call this place home. That being said, we recognize, support and celebrate the enduring presence of Indigenous Peoples on this land.

Furthermore, as the Association is a national company, we extend this gratitude to the many Nations across Turtle Island. We will not lose sight of the fact that land acknowledgements exist as a small step in the process towards truth and reconciliation. However, there cannot be reconciliation before there is truth. We recognize the historical and continued oppression of lands, cultures and the Indigenous Nations in Canada. We commit to continue learning, educating and healing with our kin. We believe in the strength of the arts to aid us in creating a better world for us all.

MISSION

The Association for Opera in Canada is a membership-based association that includes opera companies, opera artists, businesses, teaching institutions, and individuals. Our mandate is to create and sustain an environment that makes opera central to Canadian life.

We work with members across the sector to mitigate challenges, celebrate successes, and help opera thrive in a changing environment. We are a communications hub, a connector and convenor, a champion and catalyst for change, and a relentless advocate.

CORE SERVICE COMMITMENT

Communications: Continuously improving our services as a communications hub from AOC to members, the public and stakeholders, and between members; and to better tell the story of the positive impact opera has in communities across the country.

Convening: Acting as a convening body for the sector to come together

Advocacy: Advocating at the federal level for and on behalf of the opera sector to support increased investment in the sector through greater public engagement.

Member Services: Delivering an evolving program of member services to the sector that responds to the changes in the field;

Collaboration: Working collaboratively with other arts service organizations to maximize impact.

KEY PARTNERSHIP

Our innovative and forward-looking relationship with OPERA America is one of the strengths of AOC and allows us to create a truly unique arrangement that responds to the needs of its members and the broader Canadian opera and music theatre community. Governed by a unique fee-for-service agreement, all AOC members access the services and benefits of OPERA America, connecting members with their North American colleagues, sharing information such as production directories, coproduction opportunities, and HR information. Through OPERA America, our members deepen opportunities to connect and explore in the many forums OPERA America offers from New Works, Tech/Production, Marketing, and Governance, to name just a few.

RECENT MILESTONES

Recent milestones include our 20th Anniversary in 2020 when we re-branded as Association for Opera in Canada, as well as the innovative new Opera Civic Impact Platform, helping the opera sector tell a coordinated and collective story of the impact opera is having in communities all across the country.

OUR CONTEXT

This strategic plan emerged from two strategic consultations; one pre-pandemic, and the other post pandemic, the latter a more inclusive consultation on the theme The Future We Want.

In between the two consultations, we were completing our last strategic plan, which led to the Opera Impact Framework, designed to tell a better collective story of how opera contributes to social good in its communities. We were working towards becoming a more inclusive and holistic association reflective of all the stages and practices of our sector. We had early success with two annual Opera Summits, the most recent one at UBC in September 2019, that were seeing membership growth across all levels. We were on the verge of our 20th anniversary with plans to re-brand. In step with our funders, we had made plans to increase equity, diversity and inclusion in our organization. However, there were also troubling trends on the horizon.

Even though overall productivity in the sector was virtually unchanged over a three-year period, paid attendance was continuing its downward march, hitting a five-year low in 2018. (Source: [OPERA America Annual Field Report](#)) We were investing more than ever in meeting our fundraising goals and experiencing a growing need increased public funding.

Innovation was needed and desired but these warning signs had not yet added up to market failure, the usual precursor for the emergence of novelty and invention in a sector. Then, the pandemic struck.

It's important to note that although COVID19 has been the cause of severe new problems in the sector, it also amplified old, existing ones, while also presenting some new opportunities.

Inequities in employment in our sector were exacerbated by the pandemic as our sector's own essential workers, artists, saw their livelihoods dry up in an instant.

Generational inequities have also been laid bare, the most recent [NACIS survey \(page 23\)](#) highlighting that the younger respondents were the most likely to report high levels of stress and anxiety both before and during the pandemic.

New opportunities arose to innovate and rapidly learn new skills in digital production and dissemination, just the kind of innovation we craved pre-pandemic, but we are still seeking a sustainable business model for these digital offerings.

As I write this, most of the opera sector is poised to re-open for live in-person events in the coming months, and yet we are still lagging behind other sectors in terms of recovery to pre-pandemic times.

Twenty months into the pandemic, the live performing arts continue to be one of the hardest hit industries in Canada with a 62.9% decline in GDP in the second quarter of 2021, compared to pre-pandemic levels. ([National Culture Indicators, CAPACOA Analysis](#))

CONTEXT

All of this is happening against a global backdrop reflecting similar trends at a macro level. Globally, the pandemic has exposed deep socioeconomic, generational and gender inequities. First, the virus targets older populations most at risk of death from contracting the virus. Those with occupations that allowed them to work from home and to isolate stayed safe, while essential workers, gig-workers, self-employed, and low-wage earners, often members of a younger generational cohort, bore the brunt of the pandemic.

Global macro trends are often presented in tandem with a warning of what might happen if we don't address the issues. This plan presents a different question - what will happen if we do? Because we can.

We are not "just opera" in a global sea of macro trends. We are a small microcosm of a larger system, and because we are small, we can actually model this change.

Because we are opera, we have stories and music that not only entertain and delight, but can move people, unlock emotions, create empathy, provoke, discover and change minds. All through our unique power to convene and create a powerful shared experience and our innate power to include.

THE FUTURE WE WANT CONSULTATIONS

It was in this context, we held our second consultation in fall 2020, asking the sector to imagine the future we want, post-COVID, in a recovery world where we commit to not going back to normal, but to building back better. In a nod to the StatsCan and NACIS data, and because we were talking about the future, we involved a younger emerging demographic in the conversation for the first time ever.

We worked with Good Roots Consulting, who hosted 10 multi-generational focus groups, over a 4 month period with over 86 participants.

WHAT WE HEARD

We heard that we need to focus on equity in our sector. Across the board, at all levels of stakeholder consulted, with or without the COVID crisis, we heard that we are a sector with equity on our minds; that we need to prioritize our people and create opportunities for decent work at all levels; that our art form needs innovation in order to grow and thrive; and that we need to turn structural resistance into structural resilience by thinking differently about how we prioritize our resources to achieve equity, diversity, and better social outcomes and leverage our funding potential.

And we heard that we must review all of our practices through an intersectional, equity, anti-oppression and diversity lens to champion not only the moral case for diversity but the business case as well as it is uniquely tied to our resilience and ability to thrive into the future.



WHAT DOES A RESILIENT OPERA SECTOR LOOK LIKE?

A RESILIENT OPERA SECTOR IS
ONE THAT...

PRIORITIZES ENGAGEMENT

with its community in creating positive social change and contributing to civic good.

COMMITTS TO ACTION

when it comes to equity, eliminating systemic inequities, racism and oppressive practices.

CREATES OPPORTUNITIES

for decent work and skills development at all levels.

INNOVATES ARTISTICALLY

and values and prioritizes a diversity of artistic expression, stories and experiences on stage.

RECOGNIZES THAT GROWTH & PRODUCTIVITY IN OUR SECTOR

is tied to our ability to diversify the artistic experience to resonate with and reflect our contemporary world, and therefore attract audiences

PRIORITIZES RESOURCES

Prioritizes resources to achieve equity, diversity, and better social outcomes.

GOAL 1

EQUITY AS A GOAL, EQUITY AS A LENS

Position equity, diversity, and inclusion as both a goal and a lens for all our services to the sector, using an intersectional approach that champions justice for the oppressed and marginalized, including Indigenous, Black, racialized, Deaf, disability, and 2SLGBTQ and gender-diverse communities, women, and artists at intersections of these identities.

STRATEGY 1

Develop a three -year EDI pledge, evaluation framework for measuring change, and gather baseline equity and diversity data for all levels of the opera sector including artists, creatives (stage managers, directors, conductors, costume designers, hair and makeup artists, and lighting designer) administrative staff, senior leadership and board).

STRATEGY 2

Audit AOC's internal sources for systemic inequity and exclusion through a bylaws review, revision and correction.

STRATEGY 3

Provide training opportunities in cultural competency, implicit bias, anti-racism, and anti-oppression for all organizational and individual members and their boards.

GOAL 2

SUPPORT DIVERSITY IN THE ART FORM AS A KEY DRIVER OF THE LONG-TERM GROWTH AND PRODUCTIVITY OF OUR SECTOR

Long-term growth and productivity in our sector is tied to our ability to diversify the artistic experience to resonate with and reflect our contemporary world, and therefore attract audiences. This work includes centering the voice of diverse creators, addressing and eliminating harmful or negative stereotypes and stage practices, and addressing themes and storylines that may be oppressive in a contemporary context.

STRATEGY 1

Support a diversity of artistic expression, stories and experiences on stages by creating opportunities for diverse creators to showcase their work to opera producers.

STRATEGY 2

Provide grants for new works development by diverse creators.

STRATEGY 3

Provide resources that highlight harmful themes, issues, and potential triggers in the canon, and include suggested events and interventions to contemporize and ameliorate oppressive themes and storylines.

STRATEGY 4

Provide training opportunities in non-white Cultural Stage Specificities to prepare non-white artists for the stage (wig technicians, makeup artists, and lighting designers).

GOAL 3

STRATEGY 1

Provide a national paid mentorship, apprenticeship and work experience skills development program for artists in the sector with a priority on diverse and equity-seeking applicants.

STRATEGY 2

Provide opportunities for skills diversification and parallel careers.

STRATEGY 3

Offer paid Fellowship/Mentorship Programs for Emerging Artists.

STRATEGY 4

Offer virtual online learning series for Opera Artists.

STRATEGY 5

Strengthen power sharing and provide supportive opportunities for people to feel empowered at all levels.

STRATEGY 6

Provide training opportunities in power-sharing, bystander intervention training, ally-ship and leveraging agency and privilege, and conflict resolution for all organizational and individual members.

THRIVING, DECENT WORK ENVIRONMENTS

Support opera artists and professionals through better employment opportunities.



GOAL 4

ENSURE AOC AND THE SECTOR ARE WELL-CAPITALIZED TO ACHIEVE THE GOALS OF THIS PLAN.

Prioritize the allocation of existing and new assets to support the equity outcomes of this plan.

STRATEGY 1

Advocate for federal funding that responds to the current and changing needs of the sector.

STRATEGY 2

Fundraise for additional opportunities.



PERFORMANCE & EVALUATION

THE RESILIENCE FRAMEWORK

A frequent question asked during our consultations, was how we would track our performance? Our answer is through the Resilience Framework, a performance measurement tool to track and report on the progress of the commitments in this plan.

A Collective Framework

We cannot do this work alone. The Resilience Framework is designed to be used by the association and also by you, our members. Through self-assessment, it will allow you to establish a baseline, make your own goals and commitments and measure your progress in achieving them. The Resilience Framework will be available to all members in a variety of formats to ensure the greatest accessibility and participation.

We look forward to centering the work of our future in-person and virtual convenings around achieving these commitments, and providing you with reports on our progress at future annual general meetings.
