



**ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL**  
**CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO**

an Ontario government agency  
un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario

April 14, 2021

Dear Ryan Orizabal,

Thank you for your e-mail of April 7, 2021, bringing forward concerns of anti-Black racism in the Media Artists Creation Projects program at the Ontario Arts Council (OAC).

At OAC, we are committed to striving for equity and take all concerns about racism, and anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism, very seriously. We recognize that racism and its effects are real. Our [Equity Plan](#) commits us to, among other things, "Provide fair and equitable access to OAC funding."

Since receiving your email, we have taken some time to reflect on the program and to gather statistics to review whether the reality of program assessment and results match your perception. We hope it will provide some insights into how we administer our programs, in particular the Media Artists Creation Projects program, and address your concerns.

In this program, like most OAC programs, decisions about grants are made through a peer assessment process, not by staff. Applications submitted to a program deadline are reviewed and assessed by a group of other media artists. The Program Officer facilitates the process but does not recommend who should or should not receive a grant. OAC ensures that the composition of each assessment panel is diverse in order to support the equity of outcomes. OAC's policy is to always have on each assessment panel at least one Indigenous assessor, at least one Person of Colour (POC) assessor, and to represent the geographic range of the applicants as well as the range of practices (e.g. animation, documentary) included in the applications to that deadline.

Over the period that you have been applying to the OAC (2017-2020) there have been ten assessment panels in the Media Artists Creation Projects program. With five assessors on each panel this is a total of 50 assessors and of these, ten were Indigenous (20%) and 21 were POC assessors (42%) for a total of 31 IBPOC assessors (62%). Of the 21 POC assessors, four were Black (13% of all IBPOC assessors, and 19% of all POC assessors). This program usually has two POC assessors, occasionally three in each panel. Along with the Indigenous assessor that means that three or four out of five assessors are IBPOC.

Applications to the Media Artists Creation Projects program are assessed on criteria of Artistic Merit, Impact and Viability. Application questions are structured into sections related to these assessment criteria to assist both applicants and assessors. Before the assessment meeting, the assessors review the applications, make notes, and score each application on the three criteria. When assessors meet for the panel, they look at their combined initial scores and determine the number of applications that will proceed to the discussion round of assessment.



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When an applicant calls for feedback on their application, the officer can only provide assessor feedback if the assessors discussed the application. When no assessor feedback is available, the officer may provide general suggestions based on their experience that could help an applicant improve any future application. The officer is not an assessor and therefore cannot provide feedback other than letting the applicant know if there was anything missing in the application. The officer's comment to you that there was nothing wrong with your application was meant to be reassuring and encouraging, to let you know that your application was technically complete.

Unfortunately, most OAC programs are highly competitive due to limited funding. As a result, submitting an eligible and complete application to an OAC program does not guarantee funding and many very good projects are not funded because of a lack of resources.

From 2017 to 2020, the Media Artists Creation Projects Program has been able to fund an average of 22% of applications. This means that 78 of every 100 applications are not funded. While POC made up 33% of applicants they received 46% of all the grants awarded. If Indigenous applicants are included, IBPOC artists made up 35% of all applicants and they received 52% of all grants awarded. With very limited program budgets, assessment panels have to make difficult decisions. In addition to the assessment criteria mentioned, assessors are guided by OAC's strategic plan and its emphasis on six named priority groups: Indigenous, People of Colour, Francophone, Deaf and disability, Regional and New Generation.

In 2019, the Media Artists Creation Projects program was able to fund 21% of applications. In comparison, 35% of applications from Black applicants were funded. While Black artists comprised 8% of all applications to the program, 13% of the grants awarded went to Black artists. There were similar statistics in 2018. In that year, the program was able to fund 20% of applications overall and 27% of applications from Black artists. Black artists comprised 11% of all applications to the program and received 14% of all grants awarded. From these results, I hope you will agree that racism is not a factor in the determination of grants in this program.

You identified that an artist who served as an assessor in 2017 received a grant in 2018. This individual's application was peer assessed and the assessors would have had no knowledge that the person had previously served as an assessor. Serving as an assessor can be a valuable professional development experience and OAC continually engages first-time assessors so as many artists as possible may have this experience.

You also correctly identified that until 2019 OAC had a policy that applicants to this program had to skip a deadline before reapplying. In 2020, considering the challenges artists were facing during the pandemic and that a similar program for visual artists had recently been updated to allow artists to reapply at the next deadline, this stipulation was removed from the Media Artists Creation Projects program.

You have also noted that in 2019 one artist was awarded a grant at both the spring and fall deadlines. The grant that was awarded at the spring deadline was for a project that fell through. The artist



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informed us right away, the grant was not paid, and the file was closed before the fall deadline. The artist was therefore eligible to apply to the fall deadline and they did receive that grant.

Please contact the program officer, Mark Haslam, and he will provide you with a Writing Tips document and a link to an information webinar about the program that you may find helpful. Mark is available to answer any questions you may have about future applications.

We recognize that a lot of work and passion goes into completing an application, and that it is disappointing when one does not receive a grant. While receiving a grant can be validating, not receiving a grant does not mean that there was no merit to your application. We note that you have won awards for your work and hope that you will continue to have success.

Finally, we recognize that there is more work to be done to combat racism and achieve equity in our institutions and in society. The OAC is currently in the midst of a strategic planning process that will guide our work over the next five years and help us build on our Equity Plan. Please consider contributing to the process when we begin public consultations. As a recent applicant, you will receive a request to participate in a stakeholder survey.

Sincerely,

Carolyn Vesely  
CEO