CULTURE MAKES TORONTO

#ArtsVoteToronto





2026 Municipal Election Arts & Culture Platform

ARTS Vote

CULTURE MAKES TORONTO

74% of Torontonians say the arts make the City a better place

$11.4B in GDP

Attracts **4.3M visitors** annually

8% of Toronto's total workforce

A country builds resilience by honouring its distinct culture, the infrastructure that houses it, and access that lets every resident share in it. With geo-political shifts with the U.S. and across the globe, Toronto has a generational opportunity to put our City's culture at the forefront of our identity, globally and at-home.

Toronto is home to the largest concentration of professional artists and cultural workersin Canada, with the cultural workforce representing 8% of Toronto's total workforce. This ranges from film and television, festivals, music, visual and performing arts, community arts programs, and much more.

Toronto's arts sector is what makes us proud to live in this city, connected across neighbourhoods. It is a home-grown asset for economic infrastructure that generates jobs, draws tourism, and produces Canadian content and IP that grows more valuable.

Toronto's culture economy generates $11.4 billion in GDP and attracts 4.3 million visitors annually. We attract tourists to Toronto, with the average arts and culture trip nearly tripling the economic impact of non-arts and culture trips. And, for those living here, 74% of Torontonians say the arts make Toronto a better place to live, work, visit, and create.

Toronto has an opportunity to strengthen Canadian identity, with culture serving as a cornerstone for celebrating our shared strength.

As Toronto looks to reinforce its economic and sovereign future, culture is a strategic differentiator and lever for Toronto to retain civic and cultural pride in our City, in every ward and neighbourhood, and for our country.

ARTS Vote

#ArtsVoteToronto

CULTURE MAKES TORONTO

Candidates, lead in Toronto's vibrant future by:

1. Ensuring that Toronto's 2025-2035 Culture Plan is fully funded and implemented;
2. Integrating Toronto's arts & culture across city issue areas and infrastructure by naming it explicitly in plans, reports and consultations; and,
3. Lending your voice and leadership in the full implementation of the "Culture Makes Toronto" Platform *(below)* throughout your Council term:

CITY-WIDE ACCESS TO ARTS & CULTURE

At a moment when Toronto's cultural identity is being asked to do real work, both economically and nationally, that identity has to belong to the whole city. We need places and activities where civic pride is felt and celebrated. We can't lose sight of where we've been, where we're going, and who we are. We are proud of where we live, and our city can retain this pride by expressing its culture in its global reputation, and within each neighbourhood.

Why: Across Toronto, arts participation still depends too heavily on who can afford a ticket. That's a problem, because the arts do something ticket price shouldn't gate: they cross language barriers and build social connection and belonging. 74% of Torontonians already agree the arts make the city better, but too many residents rarely get to experience that firsthand.

What changes: Every Torontonian, regardless of income, postal code, or language, has the opportunity to experience the arts close to home.

ACTIONS:

- [ ] Commit to the full implementation of Toronto's Public Art Strategy 2020-2030 as a deliberate strategy for putting art in every neighbourhood residents move through, and as a deliberate visual identity strategy for how Toronto presents itself.
- [ ] Fund culture where people already are: libraries, schools, parks, and community hubs, including paid artist residencies embedded in these spaces.
- [ ] Guarantee one free cultural experience a month for every Toronto resident, as outlined in the Culture Plan, delivered by significantly expanding free, city- supported outdoor and public-space programming (building on models like Arts in the Parks), with a growth target for underserved wards specifically. Progress toward the target should be publicly reported and stewarded in partnership with the arts community.

CULTURE MAKES TORONTO

PROTECT AFFORDABLE CULTURAL SPACE

Every studio, rehearsal space, and independent venue lost to real estate pressure is a loss of the physical infrastructure that makes community engagement and cultural production possible. Protecting affordable, secure space for artists and organizations is local capacity building. It's how the city safeguards arts and culture for communities while ensuring that cultural production can continue to contribute to the city's economic growth.

Why: Toronto has lost more than 40 cultural venues since 2019, including 13% of its live-music venues. A studio or a community stage is where Torontonians' stories get shaped and told. When this is lost, a neighbourhood loses a place where it recognizes and celebrates itself. Protecting cultural space is how Toronto builds belonging, resilience, and pride in its identity. It's time to lead in affordable, community-led cultural space. This requires the City to bring tools the sector can't deploy on its own: zoning, tax policy, and development leverage.

What changes: Artists and small arts organizations stop losing the rooms they rehearse, create, and perform in every time a building sells. Toronto gains permanent, protected cultural space in every part of the city, not just downtown.

ACTIONS:

- [ ] Direct community benefits from new development toward affordable cultural space.
- [ ] Help community-led arts spaces purchase or secure long-term leases on the buildings they currently rent.
- [ ] Expand eligibility for the Creative Co-Location Facilities property tax subclass to include smaller and single-tenant spaces.
- [ ] Pass a bylaw protecting existing venues from noise complaints when new residential development moves in.
- [ ] Introduce streamlined, single-point permitting for small live-music venues and simplified public-space-use permits for cultural programming and public art.
- [ ] Prioritize space funding outside the downtown core and in underserved neighbourhoods.
- [ ] Establish a city-wide cultural space inventory and protection registry, flagging at-risk affordable studios, rehearsal spaces, and venues before they're lost, with bridge-financing tools to keep them in cultural use.
- [ ] Dedicate funding from Federal-Provincial infrastructure dollars to municipally-approved arts and culture projects.

CULTURE MAKES TORONTO

LEVERAGE TORONTO'S CULTURAL WORKFORCE

City-wide access to culture and the spaces for gathering and production are nothing without the people who make it possible. Artists and cultural workers form the backbone of a creative industry that drives tourism, media production, and civic life citywide, yet the nature of the work is characterized by income volatility, limited benefits, and gaps in social and workplace support. This is 8% of Toronto's overall workforce, and the conditions and gaps in labour support is a policy choice that Council has a chance to change.

Why: Toronto's cultural workforce represents 8% of the city's workforce. Yet, it's being priced out of the city it builds. The median Toronto artist earns $15,700 a year, below the poverty line of $27,000, and less than a third of the city's living wage of $45,000. You cannot have a vibrant cultural ecosystem built on a workforce that can't afford to live here.

What changes:Toronto's artists and cultural workers can build a career supported by decent wages, benefits and affordable housing. A thriving cultural workforce attracts and retains talent both within the arts and beyond, allowing more residents to contribute to the city's prosperity and quality of life.

ACTIONS:

- [ ] Fully support $2M annual increases to Toronto Arts Council's (TAC's) base budget as promised in the City's 2025-2035 Action Plan for Culture. The TAC is Toronto's main mechanism to invest in cultural workers and organizations.
- [ ] Fully support the promised doubling of Local Arts Service Organization budgets by 2029, as outlined in the Action Plan.
- [ ] Index all cultural grants to inflation as promised in the City's 2025-2035 Action Plan for Culture in Toronto.
- [ ] Pilot a portable benefits program for independent artists and cultural workers (health, dental, disability) to acknowledge the distinct nature of cultural work, and which follows the worker rather than the contract.
- [ ] Explore, with the Toronto arts & culture sector, policy design possibilities for a municipal artist income stabilization fund to smooth income volatility between contracts.
- [ ] Expand priority affordable housing access to include artists and cultural workers.

CULTURE MAKES TORONTO

LEVERAGE TORONTO'S CULTURAL WORKFORCE

ACTIONS (Continued)

- ☐ Protect dedicated equity funding streams already earmarked for Indigenous, Black, and other equity-deserving artists and communities.
- ☐ Commit to a further investment for Toronto's Culture Plan, beginning in 2030, to be able to fully realize the Plan by 2035. Funding for the Culture Plan is currently only committed until 2029.
- ☐ Engage artists in city programs, pay them competitive wages and fees, and invite artists and cultural workers into city-building consultations across City issue areas.