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Introduction

ArtStarts is dedicated to promoting art and creativity in young people's lives.

We focus on creating meaningful change where young people benefit most equitably and directly—in their schools and classrooms. By providing young people with access to arts-based learning experiences, we develop a generation that values the creative, collaborative and innovative skills necessary to thrive in learning and in life.

As a 21st century arts organization aimed at working with young people, we have an important role to play in advancing and strengthening the values of justice, equity, diversity and inclusion. We are taking a magnifying lens to our core programs and also taking a birds-eye view of ArtStarts as a whole and identifying how we can apply an equity and decolonization lens to our work. Social justice issues are no longer the responsibility of activist organizations, but instead a moral responsibility for all of us as human beings. Social justice through the arts is a powerful approach and now an integrated part of our work towards mission impact.

This five year strategic plan is our plan of action to achieve deeper mission impact. The plan is grounded by the following four strategic directions:

- 1. Expanding the Role of the Arts in Education**
- 2. Integrating an Anti-Oppression Framework**
- 3. Influencing Systemic Change**
- 4. Enhancing Organizational Capacity**

This is not work we can do alone. Supporting the creativity of young people in British Columbia extends far beyond our organizational boundaries. ArtStarts is committed to pursuing our mission by amplifying and supporting the work of values aligned peers, funders and communities. We look forward to our journey together.



Mission and Vision

Mission

ArtStarts in Schools provides innovative arts programs for young people, practical resources for teachers and artists, and leadership in advocacy for arts in education.

Vision

ArtStarts envisions a society where the arts are regarded as an essential part of educating young people and a catalyst for creating innovative, engaged and contributing members of society.

Guiding Principles

These principles are the lenses through which all organizational decisions are viewed. We model a principle driven culture by holding these principles tight.

Mission-focused	We see ArtStarts as part of a larger web of activity directed towards the common cause of promoting art and creativity in young people's lives. We work with values-aligned peers to advance our mission, not simply stimulate organizational growth.
Everyone is Creative	We separate creativity from artistic talent and skill. We believe that everyone is creative and that it must be nurtured in young people as it is an essential skill to thrive in learning and in life.
Student Agency	We have so much to learn from children—we just need to listen. We need to provide them with space and trust so that they develop confidence in the power of their own agency. Students need choice; a one-size-fits-all approach no longer works for 21st-century learners.
Process over Product	In a world that over-values product, we create space where process is key. We create and support experiences that focus on how and what we learn through the arts, not only what we make.
Consultation and Collaboration	We engage with the audiences (Artists, educators, young people and families) we serve to gather feedback and input. We commit to incorporating this feedback into the design and delivery of our programs and services to the maximum extent possible. We frequently check our biases and assumptions
Design is Key	Recognizing that the arts include aesthetic experiences, we pay attention to the design details of everything we do. From hosting a meeting to submitting a proposal to the way in which we model our space, design is key. By paying attention to design details, we create the conditions for creativity to thrive.
Equity and Access	We support students who face barriers to accessing art in education. We build capacity for artists who face barriers to the presentation of their work. We support an increasingly diverse range of marginalized artists to work in education so that young people see themselves represented in arts programming at school.
Anti-oppression	We are committed not just to ensuring equitable access to our programs but also helping young people think critically about social change through engaging with the arts. We respond to social justice movements in the education system through the arts.
Cultural Safety	We take cultural safety and cultural appropriation seriously, and work to ensure young people engage with cultural knowledge and stories in context. We explore ways to destabilize and move beyond colonial, Eurocentric ideas about "what is art" and who gets to be an artist.

Our Artistic Mandate

Our artistic mandate is built upon the belief that everyone is creative. Through our work, we are driven to explore ways to destabilize and move beyond colonial, Eurocentric ideas about “what is art” and “who gets to be an artist.” **By broadening the idea of arts and artists, we hope to expand the creative ecosystem.**

At ArtStarts, when we say “arts”, we mean the full spectrum of the arts including the performing arts, visual arts, and interdisciplinary arts. **Our work supports practicing artists of all disciplines who are at various stages in their journey including new and early career artists.**

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Why Does Arts in Education Matter?

Here are five distinct and overlapping reasons that inspire our work towards mission impact:

Arts are essential to the human experience

The arts enable us to experience joy, beauty, and wonder. They teach us to summon the imagination and it nurtures the development of our creativity. The fact that children have an innate and spontaneous calling to engage in the arts is evidence that arts are essential to the development of humanity. Without prompting, young children will: “make marks, decorate their bodies and possessions, move rhythmically to music, sing, make believe, engage in wordplay, and enjoy stories.” (Dissanayake, 2003, p. 247)



**Arts are
essential
to the human
experience**



**Arts build
21st century
skills**

Arts builds 21st century skills

In a rapidly changing world, and with the line between human and machine blurring, some of the most valuable skills to nurture in students today include: creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and empathy. Art plays a critical role in supporting students for the future of work.

Arts activate learning

A one-size-fits-all approach does not work for today's learners. "Arts integration is an approach to teaching in which students construct and demonstrate learning through an artform." This pedagogical approach appeals to children as it makes learning active, personal, and dynamic. Arts integrated learning also supports different types of learners (eg. visual, auditory, reading/writing, and kinesthetic), and provides multiple entry points for learning.

**Arts
activate
learning**

**Arts are
an upstream
investment**

Arts are an upstream investment

Anxiety, depression, social isolation, bullying, substance abuse... These are just some of the real challenges that face young people today. The arts are a valuable outlet to process feelings and ideas that are difficult to understand and express directly.

Arts are a vehicle for social justice

Building a truly inclusive society starts young. Schools can and should play a significant role in equipping young people with the right language and context to discuss past injustices and paths forward. Arts help students develop the capacity to see the world from different points of view and develop the capacity for genuine concern for others. Arts promote critical thinking so that information is not passively consumed but rather questioned.

**Arts are a
vehicle for
social justice**

1. Expanding the Role of the Arts in Education

CONTEXT

In our culture the arts are perceived as siloed and superfluous rather than integrated and essential. The root cause of this issue starts with how young people are taught to think about arts in schools. We are shown at a young age to separate subjects. One problematic belief is that arts provide children with something 'fun' to do away from the rigor of 'academic' subjects. With the elimination of arts specialists in most schools, a vital resource has been lost. As a result, the arts have been inconsistently implemented in schools across BC. Yet our collective need for creativity, critical thinking, collaboration and empathy is more acute today than ever before.

COMMITMENT

- Support artists to work in schools to strengthen arts integration in classrooms
- Provide resources and professional learning opportunities for educators to build their creative confidence and effectively engage artists in their schools and classrooms

ACTIONS

- Focus on arts integration
- Position ArtStarts as a partner to support the implementation of the BC curriculum which is focused on core competencies and big ideas
- Build partnerships with values-aligned school districts and schools
- Extend the impact of school performances by promoting workshops and artists residencies
- Identify and engage with values-aligned peers in the STEM to STEAM movement (adding Arts to Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math)
- Continue to focus the ArtStarts Gallery as a pedagogical space through exhibitions and programs that promote creativity as a process not a product
- Connect through focus groups, surveys, and social media with the older youth in BC schools and with the families of younger children

WHAT WE ARE TRYING TO LEARN

- Which schools are already integrating arts across the curriculum well?
- What are the varying challenges that teachers face in arts integration in our provincial districts?
- What feedback do the youth in schools have around arts-based approaches to education?
- What resources do artists need to share their skills through a pedagogical lens?

2. Integrating Anti-Oppression

CONTEXT

As a 21st century arts organization aimed at working with young people, we have an important role to play in advancing and strengthening the values of justice, equity, diversity and inclusion. Naming and confronting the systems of oppression at play in our society is a critical first step. Now is a time of raising consciousness about the impact of systems such as colonialism, white supremacy, patriarchy, hetero-normativity, capitalism, ableism, and ageism. These systems shape government, media, businesses, and schools. As a result, children are socialized into these systems of oppression, and consequently can experience and perpetuate great harm.

We see the arts as a transforming tool that can help us teach children (and ourselves) to think more deeply and critically about these challenging social justice issues. Through the arts, we can shift the discourse from dominant ways of thinking centered on a single story towards a more complex and deep discourse that brings in multiple voices and stories that stimulate critical self-reflection and learning

COMMITMENT

- Use our privilege and power as an established organization to address systemic oppression and colonial practices, especially those that we perpetuate.
- Take responsibility to educate ourselves and build our stamina to engage in the work towards decolonization.
- Bring to life, when possible, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and TRC Calls to Action as they are the framework for reconciliation.

ACTIONS

- Work with our communities to develop and refine our mission to better represent an anti-oppression lens
- Develop and update organization policies, practices, and norms through an anti-oppression lens.
- Identify and reduce barriers for equity-seeking artists to access our programs and reach the school market.
- Increase representation of equity-seeking artists on our directories so that more students see themselves reflected in arts programming at school.
- Support the growth and development of artists with dominant identities (those who hold power and privilege in the society they work within) through resources and learning opportunities related to: embedding anti-racism and anti-oppression into their art practice and understanding cultural safety and cultural appropriation
- Continue to build our role in the social justice ecosystem as both disruptor and bridge builder to dismantle inequitable systems, and the attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate them.
- Increase accessibility of our civic cultural space and in the design of our programs and events

WHAT WE ARE TRYING TO LEARN

- What are the barriers that equity-seeking artists face to accessing opportunities to work with young people in school and community settings?
- What other organizations are working toward the same objective, how can we amplify their work and how can we be supported by them?
- How do we consult our larger community to contribute to this lens in a meaningful way?

3. Influencing Systemic Change

CONTEXT

Our education system no longer provides students with comprehensive and consistent engagement in the arts. The absence of protected and targeted funding by the Ministry of Education has led to the critical loss of arts specialists and dedicated space. As a result, the arts have been deprioritized in schools and young people having unequal access to arts in education. PAC fundraising and outsourcing through private lessons does not benefit all children. The Government needs to increase funding for the arts and proportionally distributed to school districts who can then decide how to effectively leverage these funds. While education policy is set provincially, each school district, and sometimes each school is in a position to make important decisions about the role the arts play in education.

COMMITMENT

- Influence the flow of resources and shift mental models in order to keep the arts vital.
- Invest in building relationships with teachers as they make key decisions about the role of the arts in their classrooms.
- Work collaboratively as part of a network of values-aligned peers, recognizing we cannot make systemic change alone.

ACTIONS

- Invite and hold designated positions for teachers and students at our governance level of decision-making
- Develop our distinct public presence with clear branding and key messages
- Connect and learn from those who have already influenced policy change (eg. SOGI 123)
- Leverage BC Arts Council's support to bring the Ministry of Education to the table to support art in education
- Continue to connect with the BC Teachers Federation's newly named specialist organization: "Anti-Oppression Educators Collective"
- Share impact stories to inspire belief that art can and should be integrated into all aspects of life and learning
- Develop and implement an outreach strategy to reach PAC/DPAC groups
- Identify youth leadership networks and see how we might support their agenda and amplify their voice
- Keep at the forefront of research about the value of art in education to sharpen our case for support and test key messages

WHAT WE ARE TRYING TO LEARN

- Who is open to listening at a Government level?
- What is the impact of our advocacy efforts:
 - Are people receptive to our messages?
 - Are some messages more effective than others?
 - Did we have an impact on decision making?
 - If not, what are the barriers?

4. Enhancing Organizational Capacity

CONTEXT

Organizational capacity is what enables us to deliver our programs and services to achieve mission impact.

It is critical to invest in our management and governance systems, attend to our financial health and make continuous improvements to our administrative systems to keep pace with program growth. In terms of lifecycle analysis, ArtStarts was in a growth/mature stage between 2012-2018, and interestingly without ever being in decline, ArtStarts moved into a turnaround phase in 2018/19 and is now re-entering a growth stage, this time with a focus on systems change, through an explicit anti-oppression lens.

COMMITMENT

- Invest in nurturing a culture where people thrive
- Deepen mission impact through data-driven decision making
- Develop plans and proposals that are realistic and have achievable timelines

ACTIONS

- Embark on an annual consultation plan involving our supporters and community
- Invest in a culture of learning and relationships
- Build a model for shared leadership
- Continue to develop shared purpose culture to keep us aligned around externally focused goals
- Include process and quality goals in our planning (not just quantity)
- Building succession plans for continuity of leadership and culture
- Leverage technology to enable staff to focus on human-centred work
- Increasing predictable, sustainable, unrestricted revenue from the private sector to offset our reliance on grants
- Strengthen the composition of our Board to advance our strategic goals and mission

WHAT WE ARE TRYING TO LEARN

- What story is our data telling us?
- How can we best measure our impact?
- What funders are aligned with our initiatives?
- How can we re-imagine our governance and leadership to best serve the mission?

Our Aspiration

1. We aim to achieve a vision shared by youth, artists, educators, and families
2. We use an equity-based lens to serve all youth
3. We focus on building arts education capacity for artists, teachers, and organizations
4. We expand the role of arts in education by cultivating creativity and arts integration
5. We commit to achieving our provincial mandate
6. We facilitate sustainable and impactful arts experiences



**Where we
aim to be**

School aged youth are our beacon. We support them through artist run programming and by building relationships with the decision makers. We ensure our capacity to do this work through our institutional growth and development. We do this all so that our youth can move toward a bright and fulfilling future. As we evaluate our work we keep these three questions at the forefront.



Does our strategy elevate the social empowerment of all young people equitably?



Does our strategy foster creativity in young people in ways that encourage multiple ways of knowing and help them tackle the issues they are facing?



Do the perspectives of and input from our communities really inform our strategy?

The Outcomes

We asked the ArtStarts Board of Directors and Senior Leadership Team to express what they each hoped to achieve with our strategic plan, and we heard too many great statements to package and polish it into something new. So, we thought we would share some of our articulated desires, frame of mind, and statements with you. Check them out! What would you add?

“All BC youth are socially empowered, confident, and responsive to work towards their hopes, fears and challenges.”



“All students in BC have equitable access to relevant and representative arts-based experiences.”

“Future generations are individually & collectively self-actualized allowing ‘us’ to anticipate, respond, and work to resolve issues of our time.





“Arts are seen as valued and integral to the work and change required to create the world we need.”

“The infrastructure for creativity becomes generative and self-sustaining rather than reliant and negotiable.”

If you would like to share your perspective, please give us a shout on Instagram, Twitter, or LinkedIn with the hashtag **#ArtsEssential**. You can also reach out to **getinvolved@artstarts.com**