

# Plain Language Executive Summary for Stakeholders

## Introduction

### About SaskCulture

SaskCulture is a non-profit organization that funds cultural activities in Saskatchewan through many different programs. Its goals include:

- building a culturally vibrant Saskatchewan
- uniting the cultural community
- increasing participation in and awareness of cultural activities

It does this by working within a cultural network that includes cultural organizations, partners, staff and volunteers to run programs that help grow cultural activity.

### About This Document

SaskCulture has been doing work to support cultural organizations better engage people with disabilities across their operations. One of the ways cultural organizations can better engage people with disabilities is through more equitable funding practices. Being equitable means being inclusive and fair, as well as finding ways to reduce barriers for people who don't have the same advantages or resources as other groups. There can be intersections between various groups. Intersection means when one of more things cross. This means that people can belong to or identify with more than one social or cultural group. When people identify with or belong to more than one group, this is called intersectionality. For example, a person who is blind can also be black and a woman. Those identities intersect and influence the lived experiences of that person in different ways. A person could also be deaf, Indigenous, and two spirited. While this work looking at equitable funding practices is focused on people with disabilities, SaskCulture recognizes that people with disabilities live intersectional lives. This influences the way people engage with culture.

SaskCulture wants to make sure it is promoting equitable funding practices for people with disabilities and helping cultural organizations do the same. To find out how to best do that, it hired an accessibility consulting agency called Left Turn Right Turn (LTRT). LTRT wrote a literature review that describes things organizations can do to make their funding practices more accessible and equitable. This document summarizes that literature review using plain language for accessibility.

The key question of the document is: what are similar organizations doing to increase opportunities for people with disabilities to access funding?

### What is Equity? Why is Equity in Funding Important?

Equity is a way of being fair and just in the way that you do things, and in the result of doing those things. Equity is different from equality. Equality is about getting the same treatment. But equity is about sometimes getting different treatment so that a level playing field is created. To do this, we have to understand barriers that exist for people with disabilities and other groups of people.

We know that culture plays an important role in shaping our communities. Making sure SaskCulture has equitable funding practices matters because it is an investment in local communities. This makes a difference economically. Equitable funding also reflects those communities that receive it. Having equity in funding makes it clear that diverse cultures are valued. It shows they are worth supporting and investing in.

### What is Different About Culture for People with Disabilities? What is “Disability Culture”?

People with disabilities have always existed. So, there have long been representations of people with disabilities in all streams of art and culture. It is through culture that people have made sense of what having a disability means. These meanings change over time and from place to place. They show some of the beliefs and values about disability in a particular culture or cultural moment.

At the same time, people with disabilities can also form culture in community with each other. People with disabilities have created art and done activism that pushes back

against the dominant culture. Often these cultural activities represent people with disabilities in positive or empowering ways. Disability culture is a culture that challenges social norms.

But disability culture is also very diverse, because of the unique experiences people with different disabilities have. Subcultures exist within disability culture. Examples of disability sub-cultures are deaf culture, crip culture and mad culture:

- Deaf culture is rooted in sign language, which many deaf people use.
- Crip culture borrows its name from “crippled,” which used to be a common and offensive way of talking about people with physical disabilities. Using this name is a way of pushing back against outdated beliefs.
- Mad culture is a push-back against ableist beliefs about mental illness. Mad culture is about celebrating the diversity of human brains/minds.

All three of these sub-cultures are about exploring what makes the members of those communities unique and worthy. These and other disability cultures challenge beliefs about disability, AND about culture.

## How did we figure out what the best practices for equitable funding are?

To figure out best practices SaskCulture could adopt, we looked at different types of material that discussed equitable funding. We looked at:

- academic, peer-reviewed research
- government, policy and position papers
- material from organizational and advocacy websites
- articles, blogs and vlogs from people in the cultural community

Using Google Scholar, we looked up articles about things like equity/equitable funding, accessible funding, cultural funding/access, arts organization funding, and so on. We did Google searches using similar words. We looked at the funding practices of other cultural organizations in Canada. We narrowed sources down to material created in the last 10 years, though most of it was from the last 5 years.

We were especially interested in using material that had to do with people with disabilities or other equity-denied groups. Equity-denied groups are people who have experienced discrimination in a systemic way. They have not historically had the same access to power and resources as other groups have. Examples of equity-denied groups are Black Canadians, Indigenous peoples, people of colour, people who identify as 2SLGBTQIA+, and people with disabilities. Among these groups there can be intersectionality. That is, people can belong to or identify with more than one group. The intersection of these identities can influence a person's lived experiences and perspectives.

### What are equitable funding practices for people with disabilities?

The literature review looked at what some of the best practices are for funding people and organizations in an equitable way. Here they are:

#### What is funded

##### Considerations

It's important to make sure that what gets funded by SaskCulture is meaningful to people with disabilities. Money for arts and culture often goes to big institutions (like museums) that reflect the dominant culture. Sometimes the physical space of those institutions or the art inside them can exclude people with disabilities. They might not consider that kind of culture to be relevant to them. So SaskCulture could think about what counts as "culture," and what counts as a project that is worth funding, because it could be very different from what the mainstream thinking is.

#### Related Recommendations

Sask Culture could also think about:

- allowing the people who get funded to use that money in a flexible way
- consulting with people with disabilities about their priorities for the ways funding should be given out
- increasing the number of people with disabilities involved in SaskCulture's operations. Related: making sure their hiring practices are inclusive of people with disabilities and other people from equity-denied groups

- making sure SaskCulture's policies are responsive to the needs of people with disabilities
- making sure SaskCulture's staff can learn about equity. This could include training, mentorship, listening circles, etc.

### Who Is Funded

#### Considerations

SaskCulture often funds organizations, not people. So, a key question is which people are involved in those organizations that get funded. If the organizations are large arts institutions, people with disabilities may not be actively involved. But people with disabilities, as a group, have many differences among them. Some have more social privilege than others. For example, an upper-class white person with a physical disability has access to more opportunities than an Indigenous person with an intellectual disability. So, SaskCulture could examine who is funded, through what institutions, and how certain people with disabilities might still be left out.

#### Related Recommendations

Sask Culture could also think about:

- making sure the process of applying for funding is accessible
- creating an equity plan that talks about SaskCulture's ability to fund people with disabilities
- addressing other fundings barriers arts and culture organizations may have when applying for funding

### How Relationships are Developed with Other Organizations and Communities

#### Considerations

This theme is about SaskCulture's relationships with the organizations who get funded. The more inclusive these relationships are, the more inclusive and equitable its funding practices will be. Relationships help information flow back and forth. They make both parties familiar with each other. This can help the success of an organization that applies for funding. The consideration for SaskCulture is how and where their relationships get formed, and who they form them with. It's also useful to think about how relationships get maintained. For example, how does communication happen? Is

that communication accessible? The more diverse the relationships, the more those relationships will shape funding opportunities.

#### Related Recommendations

SaskCulture could also think about:

- building relationships with disability and advocacy organizations
- maintaining those relationships
- consulting with those organizations about SaskCulture's initiatives. Do they meet the needs and priorities of people with disabilities?

#### Evaluation and Success Criteria for Funding

##### Considerations:

SaskCulture has criteria they use to determine who gets funded. But it's still up to people to decide what a worthy proposal looks like. (And people often have biases, even if they are not aware of them.) Another problem is that the organizations that get funding from SaskCulture may give out the money in ways that are not inclusive. It can be difficult for people with disabilities to get the skills and experience they need to write a strong proposal. If they had barriers in learning how to write a budget, they may face a barrier in writing a proposal. They might not have the work history that non-disabled people have. SaskCulture could think about the ways their process can create or remove barriers to disability organizations and people with disabilities.

#### Who is Assessing the Funding Programs?

##### Considerations

A related issue is about who assesses (review and makes decisions about) the funding applications. People who sit on assessment committees (the committee of people who review the applications) often have a lot of social privilege, such as being white, non-disabled, middle- or upper-class, etc. Without realizing it, they may bring certain biases to the process. For example, they might not really understand an application if the applicant has a completely different viewpoint than they do. Or they may not understand why some items are asked for in a budget (when those items are there to support accessibility).

A solution to this issue is to make sure people assessing applications have a diverse range of backgrounds. But it's important to make sure no one becomes the "token" representative of an entire group of people.

#### Related Recommendations

SaskCulture could also think about:

- Involving people with disabilities in the reviewing (also called adjudication) process. Other people from other equity-deserving groups should also be represented.
- Evaluation criteria should be accessible. They should account for the barriers with people with disabilities face.
- Including accessibility as a key criteria for evaluating applications. How will applicants prioritize accessibility in their cultural projects?

#### Accessibility, Equity, and Accountability Criteria for Funding Applicants and Recipients Considerations

Equitable funding is not just about funding equity-denied groups. It's also about making sure that the projects that get funded are inclusive. This means thinking about diversity in terms of:

- What is represented in the project?
- Who is celebrated in the project?
- Who is able to engage with the project?

It also means thinking about how organizations who receive funding will be accountable, and who they distribute the money to. For example, SaskCulture could consider including a requirement that all projects they fund are accessible to people with disabilities. This would make sure that applicants keep equity and access in mind.

#### Related Recommendations

SaskCulture could also think about:

- Offering application assistance to people with disabilities
- Offering supplementary (extra) funding for disability-related supports

- Require funded organizations/people to report back on the impact of their project, especially the impact on relevant communities
- Require that funded organizations/people have a certain amount of accessibility built into their projects
- Have disability and advocacy organizations take a lead in cultural equity planning
- Begin tracking the demographics (characteristics like disability, age, gender identity, economic background, race/ethnicity, etc.) of awarded groups. For example, ask applicants to identify their background, and use that information to make sure people are being funded equitably

## How are Funding Opportunities Communicated to Stakeholders? Before, During, and After?

### Considerations

People need to know about SaskCulture and its funding opportunities in order to apply. So, a key question is how those opportunities are communicated to people. The way information is communicated can sometimes exclude people, especially people with disabilities. For example, people who are blind or have low vision may use screen readers to access information online. But that information has to be compatible with the screen reader to work properly in the first place. That's why it's important for funding opportunities to be communicated to the community in a variety of ways. It's also important for the community to find out what projects have been funded. People want to be able to find out how to engage with local culture. This also keeps funders accountable to the people who are impacted by those decisions.

### Related Recommendations

SaskCulture could also think about:

- Ensuring that SaskCulture's communications channels are accessible to people with disabilities. Information about funding opportunities, funding awarded, and the impact of those decisions should be shared widely and in a variety of ways.
- There are best practices around how to make sure communications are accessible. One of them is making sure information is available in different



formats, such as large print, Braille, ASL, etc. For digital formats, accessibility features such as closed captions and alt text (descriptions of images) are very important to use.

## Who Benefits from the Funded Initiatives?

### Recommendations

Funding arts and culture is about making an investment in developing culture. But it's not always clear how that investment has an impact on the wider community. There needs to be a focus on equity to make sure people with disabilities and other equity-seeking groups don't get left behind. This is important both to impacted groups and the communities they live in and contribute to. When cultural investment is thoughtful and accessible, it can support opportunities for everyone and improve communities.