

Engaging the Soul of Brant

An organizational vision, mission, and strategic direction for
arts, culture, and heritage in Brant region



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Introduction

This foundational document presents a vision statement and strategic direction for Grand Culture, a culture council that will operate as a grassroots and arms-length organizing body with a mandate to promote, support, and develop arts, culture, and heritage in Brant Region, Ontario.

The overarching goal is to build and sustain a cultural sector in the region that is organized, visible, energized, and generative. Our strategic approach is informed by data collected via the Arts Census conducted in Summer 2022, participant observation, and informal interviews with culture industry stakeholders, as well as the broader community. It was developed by the Brant Region Culture Council Working Group formed in September 2022, with meetings beginning in summer 2023.

Grand Culture is born out of a need to document, showcase, and support our rich cultural contributions and to nurture a future that will continue our heritage of outstanding creation.

By investing in culture, we are investing in ourselves. We believe that people—and the communities within which they live, work, and play—are elevated and situated by the dynamic and creative force of culture. There are three principal reasons we believe Brant Region must become a stronger champion of our culture:

1. Engaging in and advocating culture makes cities more livable, meaningful, and connected. It bolsters and grows the economy, is a fundamental social pillar, and is a medium for community pride, placemaking, and social engagement.
2. The contributions of Brant Region's creative and cultural industries to Canadian society are remarkable. Brant Region is a cradle for creative and cultural contributions that are renowned and influential.
3. The stories we harbour are cornerstones of Canadian heritage and identity. Our region is at the intersections of Indigenous, settler, and migrant populations—a sociocultural geography that is unique in Canada.

Why Now?

The coming together of this document and this organization is driven by both need and opportunity. As identified in the Art Census of 2022 and in a number of subsequent working groups, there is an overwhelming need for publicity and for connection within, and to, the arts, culture, and heritage ecosystems here. In terms of opportunity, the City of Brantford, the County of Brant, and Six Nations of the Grand River have acknowledged the culture sector as being of great economic and strategic importance.

Grand Culture, its mission, and strategy are expected to evolve over time as the organization matures and the diversity of our cultural sector grows, becoming more visible and connected. This document outlines a plan for the present and serves as a launchpad for the future.

What is Culture?

And why is it important?

A contested term, the concept of culture can be difficult to encapsulate yet is deeply felt among its constituents. We often speak about and use the concept of culture as though it is universally understood, but its varied definition and continued shaping is indicative of its inherent multifaceted nature.

In Canada, cultural master plans, and the organizations that create and support them, employ bespoke definitions of culture that reflect the communities which they service. That is, they are aware of, and lean into, the specific context and perspectives that define the culture of their communities.

In Brant Region, we consider culture as the soul of our community, encompassing both tangible and intangible elements that define what it means to be a part of and from Brant's Ford. Situated at the intersections of Indigenous and settler worldviews, we are shaped by our rich creative and industrial heritage, our legacy of sports, and our multicultural social tapestry.

We consider our culture to encompass a broad spectrum of human creations and expressions, including art, creativity, heritage, museums, libraries, archives, food, events, sports, recreation, languages, communal identity, history, mythology, customs, traditions, values, beliefs, and any element that anchors us to our sense of 'home.'

Grand Culture is designed to champion the stakeholders of our culture, including artists, creatives, designers, makers, chefs, publishers, curators, historians, librarians, media and communication outlets, Indigenous communities, immigrant and diaspora communities, the tourism industry, educational institutions, and social advocacy groups.

Producing and advocating a unique understanding of culture that is tailored for our community is important because it grounds our strategic approaches to cultural development and engagement in ways which are reflective of those who preserve, make, and share our culture.

Our concept of culture is broad, yet it maintains a singular focus on comprehending and championing the essence that uniquely defines our home—locally, provincially, nationally, and globally. In this inaugural strategic plan for a culture council in Brant Region, it is crucial to recognize that this document, along with Grand Culture's forthcoming work over the next few years, is a work in progress. We commence with this broad yet focused definition of culture, intending to further refine our collective understanding of culture in the Brant Region as we endeavour to engage and share the soul of our community.

Revealing Our Creative Roots

Harnessing Creativity, Inspiring Change

Returning to our creative culture roots is a powerful journey of rediscovery and revitalization. It involves reconnecting with the artistic expressions, complex social tapestry, and rich traditions that have shaped the identity of Brant Region. By embracing our creative cultural roots, we tap into a wellspring of inspiration, knowledge, and wisdom that transcends time. It is a reawakening of the essence of who we are, enabling us to celebrate our unique cultural heritage while also fostering innovation and pushing boundaries. Embracing our creative culture roots nourishes our collective spirit, fuels artistic exploration, and strengthens the bonds of community. It is a transformative path that not only honours our past but also ignites a brighter future, where creativity thrives and culture blossoms, enriching our lives.

Brant Region has long been a cradle for Canadian creativity and innovation. Many creative visionaries claim or have claimed a home in Brant Region: Alexander Graham Bell, James Hillier, Pauline E. Johnson, Lawren S. Harris, Phil Hartman, Deborah Brown, Shelley Niro, Jay Silverheels, Andrea Brooks, Thomas B. Contain, Sara Jeannette Duncan, John B. Lee, Marsha Skrypuch, Blanche Crozier, and Paul Kneale, among many others. Our innovative contributions to the artistic and creative landscape of Canada have been legendary and our creative roots run deep.

Our region's cultural contributions to Canada are renowned. Founded by Joseph Brant, our region is situated at a significant fork of the Grand River, symbolizing the social reality where we exist at the crossroads of Indigenous and settler worlds. Moreover, we serve as a destination for migrants to Canada. Through successive waves of migration, the Brant region has transformed into a mosaic of global cultures, evident in our thriving cultural institutions and halls, distinguishing us from many other regions. This convergence of complementary and opposing ideas shapes Brant Region's narrative and empowers our unique voice, one that we must continue nurturing for the future.

Arts, heritage, and culture play significant roles in generating both economic and social profit. Economically, culture and creative industries generate jobs and profits, draw visitors and local tourists, foster entrepreneurship and innovation, and advocate for sustainability. Socially, culture and creative industries contribute to and maintain a shared sociocultural identity, offer educational and personal development opportunities, encourage community engagement and social inclusion, promote health and well-being, and empower social resilience through giving it a voice. Investing in arts, culture, and heritage enriches our quality of life and economic prosperity, fostering a vibrant and prosperous society.

As we seek to revitalize our region and inspire change for the better, we must harness our legacy of cultural innovation so that Brant Region may continue to be a beacon in Canada the next 150 years and beyond.

Vision, Mission, and Values

Vision

We imagine a vital cultural sector in Brant Region that is organized, visible, energized, and generative, with a strong and unified local and national voice.

Mission

The mission of Grand Culture is to champion, support, and amplify the diverse cultural assets within our community. We strive to cultivate a nurturing environment that empowers artists, cultural organizations, and residents to explore, create, and engage in meaningful cultural experiences. Through advocacy, collaboration, and strategic initiatives, we aim to facilitate growth, sustainability, and equitable access to the arts, culture, and heritage across Brant region.

Organized

Connect creators, audiences, organizations, institutions, facilities, and sponsors.

Build a community of creators and patrons, and foster participation and collaboration.

Facilitate collaborations to increase the reach, viability, and exchange of ideas.

Energized

Celebrate through awards, publications, and events.

Stimulate by fostering innovation, supporting talent, creating conducive environments, and promoting collaboration.

Support through financial and professional support, such as administering grants and facilitating training.

Visible

Advertise events, organizations, activities, and individuals to the general public.

Champion our regional culture through discovery, sharpening, and promotion of our local story through strategic initiatives and leadership.

Advocate through regular research and reporting, providing input to municipalities, institutions, and stakeholders, and promoting the value of culture within and beyond Brant region.

Generative

Develop sustainable and lucrative practices, events, and organizations.

Create new means and modes to engage in and export our culture.

Measure the economic impact and social profit of cultural initiatives.

Values

These fundamental beliefs and principles shape our behaviour, guide decision-making, and define our character and identity. They serve as the compass by which the organization will be managed and through which priorities in decisions will be established:

1. Creativity and Innovation

- Encourage and support the exploration of innovative ideas, creative expression, and imaginative thinking in Brant Region and beyond.

2. Collaboration and Community Engagement

- Focus on fostering partnerships and collaboration to create a stronger and more cohesive cultural ecosystem.
- Engage with residents, organizations, and stakeholders to understand their needs, aspirations, and ideas, and actively involve them in the planning and implementation of cultural initiatives.

3. Integrity, Respect and Inclusivity

- Operate with honesty, transparency, and ethical behaviour in all interactions and decision-making processes.
- Treat all expressions with respect, embracing a spirit of open-mindedness and appreciation for diverse perspectives.
- Embrace and celebrate diversity in all its forms, fostering an environment where everyone feels welcomed and valued.

4. Accessibility and Empowerment

- Strive to ensure that cultural activities, programs, and spaces are accessible to all individuals, regardless of their background, abilities, or socioeconomic status.
- Empower artists, cultural practitioners, and community members to express their voices, pursue their passions, and contribute to the cultural vibrancy of Brant Region.

5. Cultural Preservation and Sustainability

- Respect and support the preservation of the heritage, traditions, and knowledge of Brant Region's diverse Indigenous and multicultural communities.
- Strive for environmental, social, and economic sustainability in cultural practices, operations, and initiatives, ensuring long-term benefits for the community and the environment.

6. Excellence

- Strive for excellence in all endeavours, promoting high-quality cultural experiences, programming, and services.

Strategic Direction

Our strategic direction is delineated into short-term and long-term goals. These fundamental ideas aim to ensure greater consistency of action within this organization and among its stakeholders. This list was compiled based on external and internal surveys, focus groups, and meetings of the Brant Region Culture Council Working Group.

Strategies

1. Development and Promotion:

- Facilitate the development and promotion of diverse cultural activities, including visual arts, performing arts, literature, music, and traditional heritage practices.
- Collaborate with local artists, cultural organizations, and community stakeholders to organize exhibitions, performances, festivals, and cultural events that showcase Brant Region's rich cultural heritage.
- Expand the impact and significance of culture, both within Brant Region and beyond.

2. Infrastructure and Spaces:

- Advocate for the development and maintenance of cultural infrastructure that provide spaces for artistic expression, exhibitions, and community gatherings, such as performance venues, art galleries, and cultural centres.
- Collaborate with municipal authorities, businesses, and partners to identify opportunities for creating and revitalizing cultural spaces, ensuring that they are accessible, well-equipped, and welcoming to diverse communities.
- Develop and maintain digital spaces for arts, culture, and heritage, including a Digital Hub, Regional Asset Database, Artist Directory, and CRM (Customer Relationship Management).

3. Community Collaboration and Partnerships:

- Forge partnerships with local businesses, community organizations, educational institutions, and government bodies to create a collaborative network that strengthens the cultural ecosystem in Brant Region.
- Engage in community outreach initiatives, seeking input from residents and stakeholders to ensure that activities align with the community's needs and aspirations.

4. Economic Development through Culture:

- Promote the economic value of the cultural sector by highlighting its contribution to tourism, job creation, and overall economic development in Brant Region.
- Collaborate with economic development agencies and tourism organizations to leverage the cultural sector's potential for attracting visitors, fostering entrepreneurship, and enhancing the Brant Region's reputation as a cultural destination.

5. Funding and Grants:

- Identify and secure funding opportunities from various sources, including government grants, corporate sponsorships, and philanthropic foundations, to support the growth and sustainability of the cultural sector in Brant Region.

- Develop fair and transparent grant programs that provide financial assistance to artists, cultural organizations, and community projects that align with the Grand Culture’s vision and mission.

6. Social Profit and Pride Building:

- Demonstrate the intangible profit of culture, which stands alongside economic profit, as vital to the prosperity of Brant Region.
- Build community pride through culture in order to strengthen how our citizens and visitors view Brant Region.

7. Accessible Culture and Creativity:

- Advocate for accessibility and inclusivity in all cultural initiatives, ensuring that people of all backgrounds, ages, and abilities can participate and benefit from cultural activities.
- Develop programs and initiatives that remove barriers to access, including targeted outreach to underrepresented groups, providing accessible venues, and offering support for individuals with disabilities.

8. Education and Engagement:

- Promote cultural education by providing workshops, seminars, and training programs that enhance artistic skills, foster creativity, and encourage lifelong learning.
- Collaborate with local schools, colleges, and universities to integrate cultural education into the curriculum, promoting a well-rounded education that values creativity and cultural awareness.

Short Term Goals

1. Formalize

1. Establish formal board of directors
2. Define charter and ratify
3. Establish seed funding to support initial activities (web page, incorporation, launch event, etc.)
4. Not-for-profit incorporation
5. Define, establish, and support regional government collaboration and fit

2. Establish Digital and Social Media Properties

1. Web Presence for Grand Culture (grandculture.ca)
2. Social media presence
3. Events calendar
4. Member lists and advertisements
5. Asset mapping of venue availabilities, grant information, professional resources, etc.
6. Advertising and sponsorship opportunities

3. Establish Liaison(s) with Stakeholder Groups, Organizations, and Institutions

1. Establish liaison and advisory committee from other organizations, groups, and creatives
2. Define membership, voting rights, participation, and benefits
3. Identify members, collect baseline data

Organization

Structure

- A registered not-for-profit
- Board of Directors made up of representatives from across arts, culture, and heritage sectors
- Relationship with municipal governments
 - Board may include municipal councillors
 - Potential for formal agreement with municipalities to administer grants
 - Potential for board to be an advisory committee of arts, culture, and heritage to the municipalities
- Subcommittees of individuals tasked with or focused on specific projects and initiatives

Areas Served

Grand Culture serves and operates within Brant Region, a definition we draw from Statistics Canada's Census regions, encompassing Brantford, Brant County, Six Nations of the Grand River, and Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.

Stakeholders

There are 3 main groups of stakeholders to be served by Grand Culture:

Creators

1. **Artists, Performers, and Creators:** The artists, performers and creators who create and showcase their artistic and cultural work in Brant region.
2. **Institutions, Organizations and Groups:** The bodies who govern and oversee regional operations and activities, both for-profit and not-for-profit.
3. **Collaborators and Partners:** The other organizations and individuals who collaborate or partner with the creatives and regional cultural organizations on projects or initiatives.

Consumers

4. **Patrons:** The individuals who attend the region's performances, exhibitions, and events.
5. **Community-at-large:** The residents and organizations in the region may be stakeholders who are not necessarily in arts, culture, and heritage but value its impact on the community such as the general public, academic and educational institutions, local businesses, tourism and recreation organizations, civic and community groups.
6. **Media Outlets:** The media outlets that cover and promote regional cultural activities.

Supporters

7. **Staff and Volunteers:** The staff and volunteers who manage and support cultural operations.

8. **Donors and Sponsors:** The individuals, corporations, and foundations who provide financial support to the region.
9. **Governments and Grant Organizations:** The municipal, provincial, and federal government agencies that provide funding, permits, and other forms of support to this region.
10. **Facility Providers:** those places within the region that make space available for creative and cultural activities.

Landmark Acknowledgement

In the heart of the Brant Region, we gather on the current and ancestral lands of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe, and Neutral Peoples, among others. We recognize and respect the enduring presence, traditional knowledge, and profound contributions of these Indigenous nations to the rich cultural tapestry of this region.

We acknowledge the history and ongoing impacts of colonization, which continue to shape the lives and experiences of Indigenous Peoples in this area and that this colonization socioeconomically benefits non-Indigenous Canadians. We honour the enduring connection that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities maintain with the lands, waters, and resources in Brant Region.

We are committed to restoring and supporting treaty obligations through reconciliation and partnership with Indigenous Peoples, guided by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We recognize that acknowledging the past is essential to shaping a more inclusive and just future for all who call the Brant Region home.

This acknowledgment is a reminder of our shared responsibility to respect, protect, and celebrate the cultural heritage of Indigenous Peoples in the Brant Region, as we strive for a harmonious and equitable community that embraces the spirit of reconciliation.

