



International Downtown Association - Award Submission

London Arts Live— the first program of its kind in Canada—is a city-wide pop-up art program that places professional artists in urban spaces to reinvigorate, support, and strengthen local businesses and to offer Londoners new opportunities to engage with and experience the arts. With a particular focus on downtown, the program showcases London’s artistic talent across all performative disciplines — including dance, multimedia, music, theatre, and visual arts — by funding artists to perform in parks, streets, and buildings.

Program Development:

In early 2016, the London Arts Council, acting on community feedback received through our Cultural Prosperity Plan consultations, led The City of London’s Culture Office and Music Office in exploring opportunities to activate downtown London as a “Culture District.” We knew by using London’s streets and heritage buildings as a back-drop for music, visual arts, theatre, and dance, we could promote downtown as a safe and unique cultural destination and confront downtown challenges related to poverty, homelessness, and substance abuse. We appreciate how busking programs in larger cities can create safe spaces, engage tourists, and foster shared arts experiences – however, as a professional arts organization, it is our mandate to pay artists for their work and create an environment where arts can be as accessible as possible. Using funds from our Community Arts Investment Program (municipal funding), we pay artists at an industry-standard rate.

We worked closely with Downtown London to determine ideal locations and peak times for performance, hosted an open juried audition process and accepted artists into the program, and achieved a high level of curatorial planning, booking artists for peak places and times that appealed to their audience demographics. In June 2016, we officially launched London Arts Live with an overall program budget of \$25,000. Our program quickly grew and, by 2017, the budget was increased to \$60,000 with some additional funding from private sources.

Our Impact:

Our innovative program is designed to support the economic development, branding, and cultural vitality of London’s downtown. We do this by measuring our impact on downtown in four key priority areas:

1. **Culture district branding:** London Arts Live aims to support the branding and policy efforts for downtown London as a “Culture District” by increasing accessibility to quality local arts programming. By funding artists to perform in community spaces, we give Londoners opportunities to engage – for free and in a more accessible format – with the same high quality and wide variety of performative arts they can experience in London’s arts venues. From June 2016 to December 2017, we coordinated **220** live arts performances (**66** visual arts animations, **134** musical performances, **7** clowning/mime performances, and **13** dance performances) in **45** downtown locations (**24** indoor and **21** outdoor).
2. **Industry and venue development:** We work to foster the growth of the arts sector by encouraging private businesses to offer future paid opportunities directly to musicians. We partner with downtown restaurants and storefronts, especially those hesitant to try live professional music in their venues for fear of profit loss. In funding musicians to perform at these venues on one or more occasion, we highlight the value of live art in attracting new patrons and engaging existing patrons.

After partnering with us, several businesses have directly hired local artists—both musicians associated with London Arts Live and other professional musicians.

3. ***Downtown revitalization:*** London Arts Live creates specific arts animations to alleviate social distress in certain areas of the downtown core. These animations are designed to reduce crime, promote a sense of safety among downtown shoppers, and encourage Londoners from other areas of the city to visit the downtown core. We book multiple artists of different disciplines in large groups. Each artist is trained to engage with passersby as well as people experiencing challenging psychotic or substance-induced episodes. London Arts Live artists have reported calming down upset individuals by engaging them in quiet painting/drawing activities, increasing walking traffic by creating a “sound tunnel” of live music, and decreasing busking efforts by non-professional artists.

4. ***Job creation for artists:*** Another key priority of the program is to increase paid professional opportunities and career development for artists. We are always accepting new artists to the program – each of whom is juried and auditioned by a panel of arts professionals and community members and selected for addition to the roster based on artistic excellence and ability to engage audiences. By selecting for artistic excellence, we ensure a high-quality arts experience, and by including community members on the jury, we ensure artists selected resonate with Londoners. Our roster includes **54** individual artists. Each artist earns \$50/hour and can collect tips during their performance. Visual artists are reimbursed for material expenses. Additionally, we offer artists compensated professional development workshops and meetings, for which they are paid at \$25/hour.

Our Program Today - Sustainability and Replication:

We have partnered with **38** downtown organizations to support the growth of the program, including **10** arts organizations, **12** non-arts charitable organizations and collectives, and **16** private businesses and restaurants. We have also developed sponsorships for the program, receiving over **\$12,000** from other non-profits and private organizations to include London Arts Live programming in their offerings. Such sponsorship opportunities ensure the program’s growth and visibility beyond municipal funding.

Working closely with Downtown London, we also support other place-making initiatives and complement and promote other downtown events, whether by funding the inclusion of the arts in these events or by placing artists as animated waypoints to direct passersby to event locations. We have directly promoted or provided arts programming to **52** downtown events, including sports events, food/shopping festivals, community presentations, and civic events.

London Arts Live is an incredible opportunity for public art and place-making initiatives. Since its launch, we have seen similar programs discussed among public art and arts investment departments in municipalities across the country. In 2017, for example, the City of Mississauga launched their own municipally-funded program, paying artists \$25/hour to animate designated spaces in the city. And we are pleased to have shared our “lessons learned” with the Public Art Network of the Creative City Network of Canada, City Planners, Southwestern Ontario Tourism Corporation, and business improvement associations.