

Digital Innovation Group – Digital Organizational Change Research

Executive Summary

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DIGITAL INNOVATION GROUP



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Executive Summary

The report contained herein explores how the Digital Innovation Group (DIG)¹ can respond to digital acceleration and leverage digital tools to transform how the arts councils of Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands operate, collaborate, and communicate. The project involved primary and secondary research, including interviews with DIG's member arts councils, a community roundtable, and a strategic foresight session. In order to assess relevant practice, the Project Team conducted an extensive literature review and an environmental scan of digital trends, tools, and best practice.

The Context

Five themes emerged from the literature review into current trends at the intersection of digital technology and the arts, described below:

Modern audiences and the “attention economy”

There is ever-increasing competition to capture the attention of audiences, as cultural consumers' interests, habits, and expectations shift in response to digital technology. More specifically, even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, 33% of cultural consumers in Canada indicated that they were interested in digital experiences as part of an art/design museum or gallery experience.²

The value of the arts

The arts have long been long recognized as having intrinsic and symbolic value. Nonetheless, the arts and culture sector is under increasing pressure to evaluate its economic value and demonstrate positive social impact. Collecting and reporting on digital data is a powerful and under-utilized way for arts practitioners and cultural organizations to demonstrate impact. Organizations are able to build on existing data and frameworks such as Statistics Canada's [Canadian Framework for Culture Statistics](#); CAHSEIM's [Culture, Arts, Heritage and Sport Economic Impact Model](#); Canada Council for the Arts' [Qualitative Impact Framework](#); and, Arts Council England's [Impact and Insight Toolkit](#).

Impact of COVID-19 and innovation in the arts

The COVID-19 pandemic has further accelerated the adoption of digital technology and the appetite for online programming. Digital is no longer an optional extra for any organization, but a necessity. Although the impact of COVID-19 on the arts sector has been debilitating, there are new opportunities to increase innovation, expand online reach to connect with audiences, and to foster a stronger sense of community, locally and internationally.

Digital organizational change

Digital should be considered a mainstream part of organizations' operations, and not a 'nice to have' extra. This can require a shift in mindset, including taking a step back to look at the organization's mission and aims, and day-to-day operations. There are many free guides available on how to lead digital change within arts and culture organizations, including Nesta's [Making Digital Work: Digital Toolkit for Arts and Culture](#) and [Making Digital Work: Business Models \(Digital R&D Fund for the Arts\)](#) reports as well as Arts Council England's [Digital Culture Compass](#) and [Digital Culture Network](#).

¹ The DIG group comprises the Ladysmith Arts Council, Hornby Island Arts Council, Cowichan Valley Arts Council, Salt Spring Arts Council, Comox Valley Arts and The Old School House in Qualicum Beach.

² Culture Track: Canada 2018 <http://www.businessandarts.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/CT-Canada-Report.pdf> Survey of 6,444 respondents nationwide (over 1,000 of which in BC) administered by Business / Arts in 2017-2018. All respondents were 18 years or older and had participated in at least one cultural activity in the past 12 months.

Digital programming

For digital experiences to be successful, they must feel authentic, enriching, and be simple to use. Cultural consumers are especially interested in experiences that offer community, connection, and discovery. Digital programming can include online lessons, live tours of galleries, sharing photos or videos of work-in-progress content, or live Q&A sessions with artists. Additionally, there are organizations posting never-before-seen recorded performances, hosting online silent auctions, and even facilitating digital competitions. Arts practitioners and organizations need to see offline and online cultural creation as two sides of the same coin, where each adds value to the other.

Key DIG Findings

The main findings from Nordicity's primary research identified DIG's Strengths, Challenges and Opportunities and Threats, in the table below.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A collaborative mentality, being open to sharing and learning from one another. ▪ A strong foundation of committed members who support the council in various ways, including as volunteers. ▪ High engagement from members in response to digital communications (such as email newsletters). ▪ At least one member of staff or board member with a strong understanding of digital tools or an appreciation for digital's potential. ▪ A strong base of diverse earned income streams – between 40% and 80% of income is earned, largely through art sales and membership fees. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Limited resources and funding to support digital transformation. ▪ Lack of time to reflect on what is/is not working or missing with digital activities. ▪ Being stretched too thinly across too many digital tools – especially for digital marketing – with a lack of integration between platforms. ▪ Difficulty 'making the case' for investment in highly integrated digital software systems that could help save time, such as Customer Relationship Management software (CRMs). ▪ Lack of familiarity with data collection tools or methods to assess impact and value. ▪ Resistance to change from some members or key community stakeholders who prefer the status quo.
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To build upon regional interest in the DIG initiative and general support for the councils. ▪ To collaborate with the tourism sector to ensure cultural attractions are seen as valuable contributors to visitor experience. ▪ To celebrate island First Nations arts and traditions under the leadership of Indigenous leaders. ▪ To build upon the Island's grassroots, authentic, natural, and vibrant arts community as a key community benefit. ▪ To engage growing number of island youth and new Canadians to further diversify community programming. ▪ To share data and resources to understand and bolster community impact, sharing the story of Vancouver Island arts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A lack of diversity in the communicates served by the DIG arts councils. ▪ An aging population on Vancouver Island and within the membership of many of the DIG arts councils. ▪ Uncertainty regarding the future of funding that support arts activities. ▪ Falling behind other organizations (arts or otherwise) that are able to adapt faster to digital transformation.

DIG Strategic Framework

Foundational Priority: Sharing Knowledge

Objective 1: Formalize knowledge exchange

Knowledge exchange could be supported by formalizing sharing sessions where DIG members or outside experts host a session on a specific theme, and by establishing a dedicated cloud platform to streamline resource and knowledge sharing.

Objective 2: Explore opportunities for shared resources

This objective could involve enlisting a shared 'digital coach' or expert(s) to help guide DIG through specific digital challenges or innovation opportunities. The group could also explore pooling resources for shared digital tools to be used by all group members.

Growth Priorities

Growth Priority 1: Optimizing Operations

Objective 1: Streamline membership and volunteer management

This objective could involve exploring the use of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software to help manage both activities, and/or using cloud-based software for remote collaboration.

Objective 2: Minimize resources spent on managing ticketing or sales platforms

DIG could also be supported with a robust 'all-in-one' digital platform to manage ticket sales alongside CRM, volunteer management, e-commerce store management and digital communications. Although software like this can be costly, having just one system could minimize pay multiple separate fees for different platforms.

Growth Priority 2: Expanding Audiences

Objective 1: Build online presence and discoverability

Expanding audiences could involve establishing a shared voice online (e.g. @IslandDIG) and a memorable, cohesive narrative about what artistic creation means locally to entice those who are unfamiliar.

Objective 2: Leverage partnerships to further reach

Leveraging partnerships could involve collaborating with economic development groups, and tourism operators to engage visitors both domestic and international. It could also involve exploring partnerships and collaborations that help advance equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI).

Growth Priority 3: Assessing Impact

Objective 1: Utilize tools that make it easy to assess your own impact

Assessing impact could involve first establishing a plan to identify the right data metrics and what is needed to collect data assess metrics. Once the data is being collected, a single digital platform could be used to pull together data from different digital platforms to view it in one place, gaining insight to help show impact and inform strategic decisions.

Objective 2: Share data to find harmonized and replicable means for collection

The group could define common key performance metrics and indicators to enable benchmarking, comparison, and shared learning between arts councils. Data could include footfall, website analytics (such as number of online views) and ticket sales metrics.

DIG Action Plan

While the Strategic Framework above provides a high-level guide for shared DIG activity as well as potential use by each council, a feasible action plan for the group was also developed. As detailed below, 9 sequential recommended actions are proposed for DIG to action in the short, medium and longer term.

In the immediate term, DIG will build on a strong collaborative foundation and focus on strengthening processes to ensure success. In addition, it will work with external contractors to provide the specific capability needed to take the next steps as a group (i.e., IT auditor and impact assessment expert).

In the medium term, DIG will focus on building sustainability and community relevance by supporting its members to continue executing the processes established in the short term. In addition, it will continue to explore opportunities for community collaboration and partnerships.

Beyond December 2021, DIG will look to secure continued financial support (e.g., grants or social enterprise development) required to act as an umbrella organization for island arts going forward.

Figure: DIG Action Plan

