



## **DIASPORA DIALOGUES CHARITABLE SOCIETY**

**The way we treat our most vulnerable citizens is the truest measure of our national character.  
We must include all residents in shaping Canada's future.**



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[WWW.DIASPORADIALOGUES.COM](http://WWW.DIASPORADIALOGUES.COM)

Diaspora Dialogues supports the creation and presentation of new fiction, poetry and drama that reflect the complexity of Toronto back to residents through the eyes of its richly diverse writers. Since its 2005 launch, Diaspora Dialogues has engaged over 400 emerging and well-established culturally diverse and Aboriginal writers and artists from literature, spoken word poetry and theatre in commissioned new work, a robust mentoring program, a popular multi-disciplinary performance series and artist-run workshops for youth in priority neighbourhoods. They also provide professional development seminars and networking events for writers and artists. In addition to creating collaborative opportunities for writers and artists to connect with each other and new audiences across cultural and disciplinary backgrounds, Diaspora Dialogues works to increase interest in the arts from all of Toronto's communities by devoting significant effort to audience development.

## **Diversity in the Arts Makes for a Sophisticated and Cosmopolitan Cultural Scene that is Marketable Both Domestically and Internationally**

Innovative strategies are needed to encourage a healthy arts sector that redefines the mainstream to be culturally diverse at every level. Canada is a prosperous country with a long history of immigration and diversity. In Canada, our cultural expression is a rich tapestry woven from a tremendous variety of backgrounds, and the cultural and artistic products that we produce and distribute, domestically and abroad, should be fully reflective of our citizenry. It is important for the economic stability of the arts, that the sector maintains and grows audiences of established and newcomer Canadians. It also serves an important purpose for belonging and civic engagement. As the Toronto Community Foundation's recent Vital Signs reported, only 61.6 percent of 34-44 year olds in the GTA felt a sense of belonging, with Canadian-born minorities reporting much lower levels of belonging.

Policies must be put in place that support culturally diverse artists, arts producers and arts administrators, and establish robust professional development and mentoring programs to train the next generation.



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### **Helen Walsh**

Helen Walsh is President of Diaspora Dialogues, co-founding the organization with Maytree in 2005. She has 20 years of experience as a writer, editor, publisher and producer in publishing, film, new media and, more recently, theatre. Helen is also co-publisher of the Literary Review of Canada, Canada's award-winning national monthly magazine of ideas. She is a past President of the Couchiching Institute on Public Affairs.

## Policy Ideas for Diversifying the Arts

### 1. Integrate “diversity” into mainstream programming, audience development and funding criteria.

Arts councils have made important strides in recent years by identifying cultural diversity and youth engagement in the arts as priority areas, which allow for more flexible funding formulas. Incentives and funding criteria must require arts presenters to further integrate diversity into their mainstage and primary programming slates rather than as secondary activities.

It is also important to undertake sustained audience development across the broader arts sector to encourage greater inroads into ethno-cultural communities. This is often undertaken for one production (stage or film), or one book title, but not pursued interculturally and on an on-going basis. If arts organizations had infrastructure support to pool resources (e.g., mailing lists, databases, production of marketing materials, advertising, labour), it would both leverage the resources spent as well as increase the chances of sustained diversification of arts audiences.

### 2. Increase translation funds through the Canada Council or provincial arts council to immigrants.

The federal government doubled the budget for the National Translation Program for Book Publishing (NTPBP), a Canada Council-administered Canadian Heritage program designed to increase the availability of Canadian-authored titles in both official languages. This is a very welcome move. However, opportunity to access translation funds for publication of work by third-language immigrant writers is not robust.

Writers who are immigrants to Canada and whose first language is neither English nor French face increased barriers to creating and publishing in this country. Most publishers will not publish books in a third language, nor is it economically feasible for publishers to pay for translation costs for domestic market purposes. A return on investment is unlikely at best.

At the same time, it is often very difficult for writers to write creatively in a language that is not their native tongue, even for those whose verbal language skills in English or French are quite advanced.

Translation funds for a wide variety of languages will allow third-language writers who are immigrants to Canada to begin to build an audience for their work.

### **3. Support language learning for artists.**

The market reality is such that writers who write in English and French will continue to be at an advantage to getting their work published in Canada. Training programs, funded through the arts councils and/or government departments, and administered by writers' service organizations, should be established which will help these writers access mentors and editors who can help them build their skills in a new language, and thus more fully leverage the potential audience they are growing.

### **4. Government departments and agencies should set targets for the recruitment of arts professionals from culturally diverse and Aboriginal communities.**

Culturally diverse and Aboriginal artists need to see themselves represented on our stages and pages, but just as importantly in positions of administrative power, able to create and implement constructive policies.

Governmental departments and quasi-governmental agencies should enact human resource policies which identify and track changes in the diversity of their staff. As a result, they will be able to set short- and medium-term targets for the recruitment, training and retaining of skilled arts professionals from culturally diverse and Aboriginal communities. This could be an important part of succession planning for the sector, which like many other sectors is expecting large numbers of baby boomers to retire within the next ten years.

### **5. Establish posts at Canadian embassies to promote cultural diplomacy, develop markets, and highlight Canadian cultural achievements.**

Canadian book publishers have increased their exports significantly over the last decade. According to the latest statistics, Canadian-owned publishers generated more than \$287 million yearly in exports and foreign-rights sales. Those receiving Book Publishing Industry Development Program International – Marketing Assistance now sell in over 90 foreign markets, compared to 41 markets in 1993. This includes major markets (the US, UK, France and Australia), as well as emerging markets (India, China and Eastern Europe).

If this trend continues as expected, writers with “international” appeal will be more valuable than ever. Developing Canadian writers from culturally diverse and often international backgrounds is a great asset. An ability to establish linkages between these authors and the international community is critical to fully leveraging this potential.

Support for the export of the cultural sector was diminished by Canadian Heritage's decision not to renew the ProMart and Trading Routes programs, and reduced efforts by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade in the area of cultural diplomacy.

The federal government, through Canadian Heritage, should promote cultural diplomacy, support the growth of international markets for Canadian artists and cultural products, and encourage the celebration of Canadian cultural achievements on the world stage by creating cultural posts within Canadian embassies and high commissions.



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