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YORK REGION ARTS & CULTURE TOURISM GRANT PROGRAM

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, February 18, 2004, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. The Arts and Culture Tourism Grant Program be modified as a co-operative Regional marketing partnership initiative and that funding for the grant program be utilized as outlined in this report.
2. Staff be directed to report back on the results of the modified program within 12 months.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Regional Council an evaluation of the Arts and Culture Tourism Grant program over the past three years and to propose a modified approach that would replace the Grant funding program for two-years (2004, 2005).

3. BACKGROUND

In 2000, Regional Council adopted a policy to establish an Arts and Culture Tourism Grants Program as part of the Region's tourism mandate and grants were awarded to the Red Barn Theatre and Resurgence Theatre Company.

Since 2001 through 2003, the Economic Development Operating Budget included an allocation of \$25,000 to provide grants to eligible community groups and organizations. Council's guidelines for the grant program allowed for a one-time grant that was limited to a maximum funding of \$5,000 per group and not exceed 33% of the organization's operating budget. A Sub-Committee of members of the Planning and Economic Development was formed each year to review the grant applications relative to the guidelines and recommend approval to Regional Council to award or reject grant applications.

Given the overwhelming response for the 2003 Grant program, Regional Council directed staff to evaluate the effectiveness of the grant program and provide recommendations that support the arts and culture sector as a component of the Region's economy.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Staff have reviewed the results of the Arts and Culture Tourism Grants program as it have evolved in terms of the following elements.

4.1 Increasing Demands for Support

Over the past three years, there has been a significant increase in the number of submissions and requests for grants.

- In 2001, 7 submissions, 3 received funding.
- In 2002, 9 submissions, 7 received funding.
- In 2003, 29 submissions, 23 received funding.

In 2002 and 2003 the total amount of funding requests has exceeded the \$25,000 funding available for grants. There has been increased community awareness of the grant program and the Region's support for the arts and culture sector has been acknowledged and lauded. However it is evident that the level of funding is insufficient to meet industry demand. It is also evident that a one-time grant program does little to ensure the grantee's ability to sustain the event or activity.

4.2 Limited Leverage of Grants

Few of the grant recipients have been able to demonstrate that the Region's grant has leveraged other partnership, resources or co-operative marketing relationships with the arts and culture and tourism business sector. Most grant recipients continue to work independently. This tendency limits the success of individual events and activities, and also limits the entire industry from the potential success of leveraging additional marketing dollars that could build upon the collective strength of the arts and culture experiences in York Region. This could be accomplished if the arts and tourism industry worked more collaboratively as a group.

4.3 Performance Measurements

Many of the grant recipients are volunteer organizations. Few have the experience or capability to measure the impact of the grants on attendance or net revenues.

Notwithstanding that the grant guidelines recommend recipients use the grants for marketing purposes, the funds are often used in ways that may or may not impact the awareness of the event or activity in the marketplace. It is therefore difficult to assess the overall effectiveness of the grants in increasing customer visitation and sales.

4.4 Program Administration

Staff spend an appreciable amount of time consulting with each prospective applicant to qualify their eligibility, provide guidance and direction to help complete the grant submission and ensure proper follow-up. Staff also spend significant time insuring that post-project reports are completed and submitted.

4.5 Overall Evaluation of the Program

The limited degree of leverage and limited performance measurements indicates that the current Arts and Culture Grant Program is not as successful as it could be in increasing the economic sustainability of the events and the arts and culture tourism sector as a whole. Staff understand that there is a need and a desire for the Regional Municipality of York to continue its support for the arts and culture community, but providing limited funding through a grants program is not the most effective means.

There are many organizations that provide financial and developmental support for the arts and culture groups including; The Department of Canadian Heritage, Ontario Heritage Foundation, Canadian Conservation Institute, Canadian Council for the Arts, Ontario Ministry of Culture, Ontario Arts Council, Ontario Trillium Foundation, Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Recreation, Community Arts Ontario, Human Resources Development Canada, Public sector, Private sector/foundations and Artslink York Region.

These organizations are mandated and funded to provide resources to individual artists and community events to help them develop their “product”. The Region’s role could more appropriately be focussed at helping the arts and culture “community” rather than individual businesses, to better position and market their product offerings as part of the Region’s overall tourism promotion efforts. In this way, more comprehensive and effective promotion of the arts and cultural events, as a tourist draw could be achieved. This would also lead to opportunities for “packaging” the arts and cultural experiences with other tourist offerings and generate more leverage for joint promotion and event advertising.

4.6 A Modified Program

Staff recommends that the current Arts & Culture Grants program be modified, and that the funding for the grants be used to develop a co-operative arts and culture marketing program. This modified program would see the Region working with a broad cross-section of the arts and culture community rather than a select number of individuals or organizations. The program would focus on production of marketing materials, promoting events and providing opportunities to create consumer awareness and demand through a strategic promotional approach. This would in turn encourage the arts and culture community to work collectively in a partnered approach to build the profile of this sector of the economy. This approach would replace a “grant” to individual organizations.

To accomplish this, staff would work closely with Artslink York Region, the York Region Funders Alliance, Municipalities, Chambers of Commerce and Business Development Associations, Arts and Culture groups and various industry organizations. This will lead to a broadly based region-wide marketing program to position York Region as home to a thriving and growing arts and culture industry.

Artslink York Region have already indicated to staff that they support this co-operative approach and will assist in connecting the various segments of the arts and culture community to develop this program.

4.7 Modified Program Elements

Staff proposes the following initiatives to support the modified program.

- **Promotions and Marketing**

The project activities would be determined in consultation with the industry but would consist of the development of an arts and cultural marketing piece that would be supported by advertising and marketing initiatives aligned in the tourism marketing program.

- **Education and Training**

Staff will work in partnership with the industry, Artslink York Region, the York Region Funders Alliance and government Ministries to determine appropriate educational initiatives to implement. These efforts will build upon the Region's current support of the Funders Forum held in June 2003 and the Proposal Writing Seminar held in January 2004.

- **Performance Measurements**

The modified approach provides opportunities to benchmark success through metrics that can be tracked including the number of consumer inquiries generated, the media relations coverage, attendance levels, the development of packages and cross promotional opportunities and leveraged partnered dollars and ad revenues generated.

- **Evaluation**

An evaluation review will be completed yearly with the arts and culture partners and the York Region Tourism Advisory Group to ensure the modified program is meeting the needs of the arts and culture community and providing a return on investment. Staff will report to Regional Council the results of this modified partnered approach within 12 months.

4.8 Relationship to Vision 2026

The support and the promotion of the Region's arts and culture product meet the strategic direction of the "Enhanced Environment, Heritage and Culture" and Vibrant Economy" sections of Vision 2026.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Funding for this program is included the Economic Development Operating Budget to support this initiative in 2004. The project costs will be partially offset through limited sponsorships and in-kind contributions from the arts and cultural sector.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Building awareness of a cohesive, vibrant arts and culture community will provide economic, social and community benefits through increased visitation, overnight stays and consumer spending within area Municipalities year-round.

7. CONCLUSION

Arts and cultural activities support the York resident quality of life experience as well as, representing economic engines within Communities. Given the global economic changes it is important for the Region to provide support to the arts where there is a measurement of success. In lieu of individual grant funding, the Region's support of the proposed modified-partnered marketing approach will assist in the development, growth and sustainability of the arts and culture community.

Staff recommends the Arts and Culture Tourism Grant Program be modified as a co-operative Regional marketing partnership initiative and that funding for the grant program be utilized as outlined in this report. Staff be directed to report back on the results of the modified program within 12 months.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.