

Immigrants and the Creative Economy

Final Report

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Executive Summary

To better understand how immigrants to Canada access the creative economy, the Intergovernmental Committee of Economic and Labour Force Development (ICE) commissioned Nordicity to conduct a study focused on how immigrant artists and creative sector workers are integrated into Toronto's creative economy – and the services that help them do so. The study, in turn, consists of the creation of a database and a series of qualitative interviews/roundtables. Notably, the study's authors note that the present study can only capture a portion of the many immigrant experiences – and that further study is required to comprehensively document the many entry points by which immigrants may access Toronto's creative economy.

The **database** was created from desk research and information gathered during roundtable discussions and interviews. Organizations included in the database were those programs that specifically supported immigrant artists and creative workers that wished to continue their careers in Canada. Through roundtable discussions and interviews with immigrant creative workers and support organizations it also became apparent that, as professionals, immigrant creative workers also needed information on accessing industry specific programs (e.g., training, mentorship, professional membership, conferences). Professional organizations that are specific to the creative economy were also added to the database when individual immigrants mentioned them. Other, more general, programs were only added if immigrant creative workers or service providers mentioned them during discussions or interviews. The database is a **living tool** that is intended to evolve as it is used.

The key objectives were to identify **barriers that immigrant artists and creative workers experience** in accessing employment in the Toronto creative industry; to **identify current gaps** in professional development and funding programs available to immigrants; and to **identify successful programs** that immigrant artists and creative workers have pursued to secure work and opportunities in Toronto's creative sector.

Successful points of entry identified were **mentorship, funding and knowledge sharing programs**. Immigrant creative economy workers found the most success with programs that provided mentorship, or provided funding for the creation of new work, or programs that shared knowledge about the creative sector (e.g., mixers, meet-ups, workshops).

Key barriers that immigrants identified include **lack of information, isolation, financial insecurity, age, and racism**. Immigrant creative economy workers felt it was difficult to find information about their professional industries. The isolation from family/friends/community, financial insecurity and racism that were present because of their immigrant status lessened their likelihood to take career risks. Additionally, many felt that programs that would help them gain Canadian experience were focused on youth and they no longer qualified for such programming.

Gaps in the services currently offered identified **included information/knowledge, new experience, access to space, and industry specific language training**. Immigrant artists and creative workers desire programs that can share information and knowledge about their professional industries, help them gain new Canadian experience, assist in the access of space to do their work, and assistance in acquisition of industry specific language/terms.

Although some barriers faced by immigrant artists and creative industry workers have crossover implications with other immigrant/newcomer services (e.g., assistance with English language issues may be offered in non-art-specific capacities), there were desires for more specific creative economy assistance in mentorship, new experience (bridging education, internships), physical/rental space, and understanding industry language. **The immigrants trying to access the creative economy did not feel that current organizations/resources addressed these needs enough—or that the knowledge of these resources was accessible to immigrants.**

1. Introduction

1.1 Nordicity's Mandate

The Nordicity team was asked by the Intergovernmental Committee of Economic and Labour Force Development (ICE) to examine how immigrants to Canada can (and do) access Toronto's creative economy.¹ The study has two principal components:

1. Documentation of the **services and programs offered** to immigrants to Canada who may desire to integrate into Toronto's creative economy, and
2. An analysis of the **entry points used** by immigrants to access Toronto's creative economy.

In addition to these two components, Nordicity also presents a number of observations (drawn from the two principal research components) on the gaps in service provision --- and the impact of those gaps on immigrants' ability to pursue opportunities in the creative economy.

The layout of this report follows the structure of Nordicity's research, as articulated above.

What is the Creative Economy?

For the purposes of this document, the "Creative Economy" should be understood to include both the *arts sector* (including visual arts, performing arts, literary arts, and media arts) and the *creative industries* (including film/TV production, interactive digital media, music, and publishing).

1.2 Methodology

In order to answer the questions posed by ICE, Nordicity undertook a research agenda that consisted of two main lines of inquiry. First, the team undertook extensive desk research to identify and document the services that could be used by immigrants to enter the creative economy. This research was then organized into a database format designed both to facilitate analysis (for this report) and also to form the basis of a searchable tool to be made available to stakeholder after this study is concluded. Notably, the database research targeted services and programs available to immigrants located in Toronto that are specifically oriented towards (any aspect of) the creative economy. Accordingly, general resettlement/job training programs were not included.

At the same time, Nordicity undertook two roundtables (one with immigrant participants and one with supporting organizations) to better understand how actual immigrants engage with these services (or not). These roundtables were then supplemented by a series of 13 interviews to allow for a greater number of perspectives to be heard. For example, the participants roundtable was attended largely by members of the arts community, so subsequent interviews with participants were focused on creative industry workers.

A list of the individuals and organizations consulted for this study can be found in Appendix A.

¹ It should be noted that the term "immigrant" should be understood as anyone who has relocated to Toronto from outside of Canada. The term thereby includes recent immigrants (newcomers), established permanent residents, asylum seekers, refugees, and naturalized Canadians.

Limitations

Despite the efforts outlined above to ensure a balance of perspectives, there are a wide variety of immigrant experiences – far more than could be accommodated in the present study. For example, the experience of an asylum seeker with family commitments will likely be vastly different than an established immigrant arriving from a more stable jurisdiction – even if both are in the same cultural domain (e.g., visual arts). Indeed, the multiplicity of experiences represents the principal limitation of this report. That said, the analysis seeks to identify commonalities between these experiences.

At the same time, the database of services should be understood as a “point-in-time” snapshot of what is offered to immigrants. As new programs are created – and others discontinued – the database will need to be (continually) updated. Furthermore, it is likely that there are some programs that are available to immigrants in Toronto that are not included in the database (despite Nordicity’s best efforts). It is for this reason that the database is best viewed as a starting point for a longer-term resource.

With these limitations in mind, the observations made in this report are nonetheless reflective of the overall orientation of the services offered. The scope of this project was limited and many of the larger issues that are brought out in the research cannot be addressed in detail in this project. Additional research is required to comprehensively address many of the issues raised by this report.

2. Services and Programs Offered

2.1 Database Overview

As alluded to above, the database constructed for this study serves a dual purpose: to inform this study and to be a living resource. For the purposes of this report, it provides the quasi-quantitative data required to conduct a high-level analysis of the services offered to immigrants looking to participate in the creative economy.

As such, the database includes two main sections, as depicted in the following table:

Table 1: Database fields

	Basic Information Fields	Categorization Fields
Main Purpose	To form the basis of the searchable database	To inform the analysis of services offered
Column Headings	Program Name Organization Name Program URL (link) Program Location Program Frequency Next Start Date Program Cost (if any) Residency Eligibility Criteria (if any) Current Status (Active/Inactive)	Subject Matter Organization Type Program Format Participant Career Stage Major Cultural Domain (Arts, Creative Industries, or Both) Minor Cultural Domain (a sub-set of the major domain) Target community (if any)

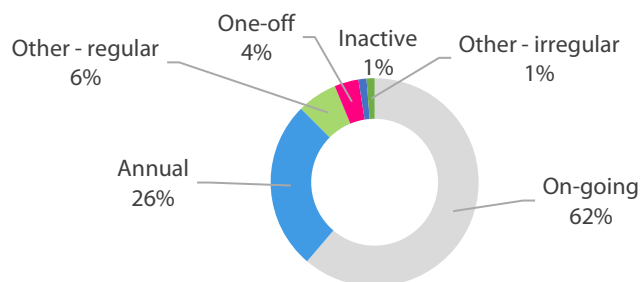
It was also envisioned that the “categorization fields” could be used to create filters for a graphics user interface (should one be developed).

2.2 Observations

At the conclusion of the research phase of this project, a total of **82 unique programs** were identified. Using the categorization fields – and some of the basic information fields, Nordicity was able to make the following observations.²

First, it is apparent (as illustrated by Figure 1) that most services offered are either provided on an on-going basis or have an annual application.

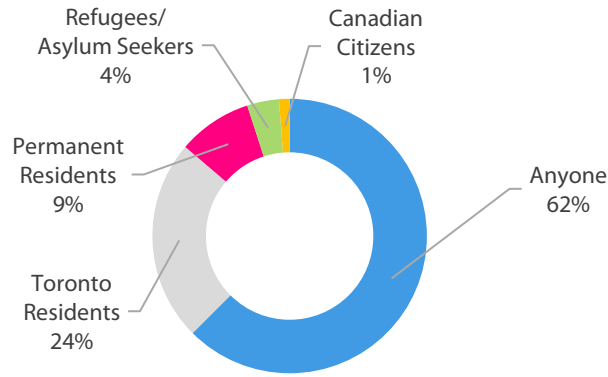
Figure 1: Program frequency



² Note: the analysis presented in this section includes all programs captured in the database, and is not limited to those programs currently being offered.

Very few observed programs were offered on a regular basis throughout the year (e.g., quarterly). At the same time, the programs offered are typically available to anyone – and are not specifically oriented to a specific legal status of an immigrant experience (e.g., citizenship, refugee), as shown in Figure 2.

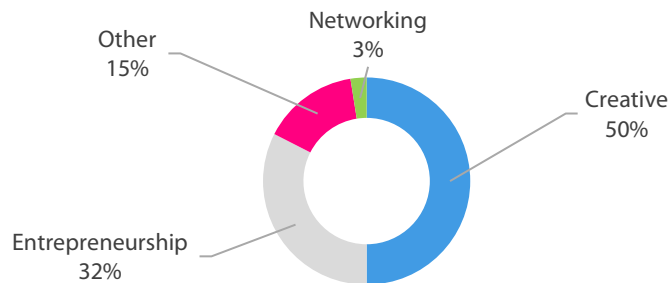
Figure 2: Residency eligibility requirements



As depicted above, there are some (though few) programs particularly geared to the refugee/asylum seeker experience, whereas the most common requirement is that the participant be a resident of Toronto. At the same time, the clear majority of programs and services (76%) are targeted to participants of all levels of seniority, with 15% of observed programs aimed at emerging creative economy workers.

In terms of the subject matter addressed by the observed programs, the emphasis seems to be on developing creative skills, rather than business/entrepreneurial skills (per Figure 3).

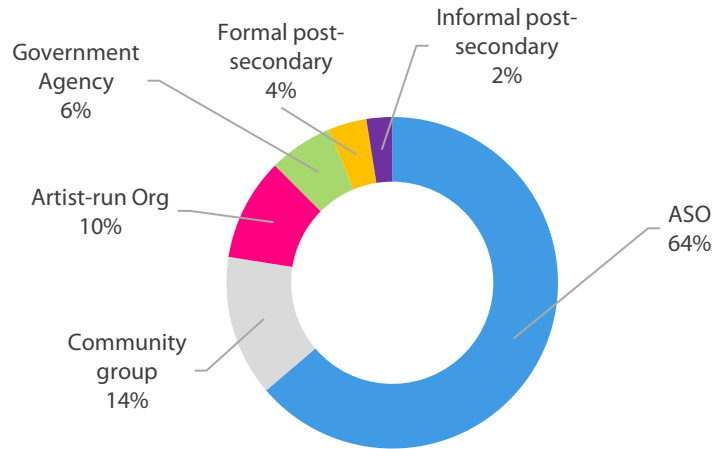
Figure 3: Subject matter



The “Other” subjects covered by observed programs include health-related, counselling, and job board services.

In terms of the organizations delivering the services, most are “Arts Service Organizations” or ASOs. Figure 4 depicts this finding:

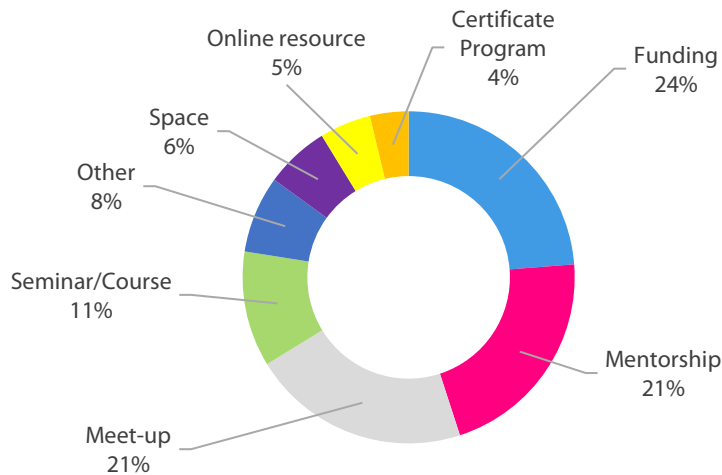
Figure 4: Service delivery organization type



Importantly, community groups deliver a significant portion of the services not delivered by an ASO. In Nordicity's view, there are very likely a significantly larger number of such programs that service particular communities. However, the limitations of this study (as discussed in Section 1.2) mean that only a portion of such communities could be contacted and/or researched. As such, these groups are likely subjects for further research.

The programs and services offered by these organizations range widely, with the plurality being funding programs (see Figure 5).

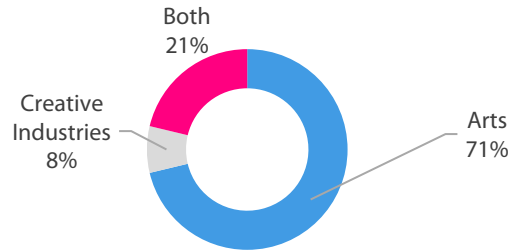
Figure 5: Types of service/program



Additionally, one can observe that over two fifths (42%) of the programs identified involve creating personal connections (via Meet-ups or Mentorships).

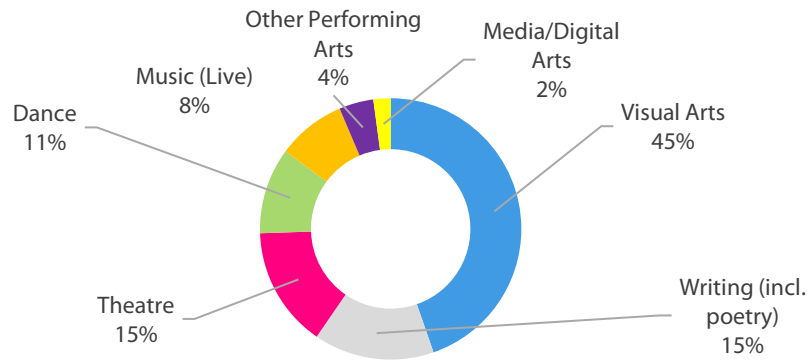
Finally, most of the programs examined are targeted to workers in the arts sector (as depicted in Figure 6).

Figure 6: Major creative domain targeted



Within the arts sector, the largest number of programs targeted the visual arts (per Figure 7).

Figure 7: Arts sector programs/services



2.3 Key Findings

Based on the database of programs and services collected, one can make the following key (yet broad) observations:

- Programs are generally offered annually (if they have any application deadlines);
- Only a minority of programs have any status eligibility requirements – and most are targeted to participants at any stage of their career;
- Although many programs offer funding opportunities, most seem to address networking or inter-personal needs;
- Creative development offered by arts service organizations (who are part of the arts sector) are the most commonly available programs;
- The visual arts seems to be best-supported sub-domain and/or the sub-domain in which the available service offering are best communicated; and
- Conversely, few programs appear to be available to workers in the creative industries.

3. Points of Entry to the Creative Economy

As introduced in Section 1.2, the creative economy covers many different industries and types of workers. As the term “creative economy” encompasses individual artists and large companies alike, dancers, animators, sound editors, novelists, community artists, and fashion designers all fall under the same broad concept.

As such, any study that endeavors to understand the barriers faced by those seeking employment in the creative economy will have its limitations in scope. Indeed, each type of industry has different successful entry points. To this point, even within a single industry, how one measures success can be very different. For example, some filmmakers seek editing equipment for a small independent local film, while others are looking for financing for large multi-million-dollar projects. Thus, the analysis presented below is based on generalizations from a variety of different experiences and from people who seek different forms of employment and engagement in the creative economy.

3.1 Successful Entry Points

The power of human connections should not be underestimated. Many artists and creative workers found that mentorship programs and meaningful volunteer opportunities were key successful entry points to a career in Toronto. **Mentorship** often meant a guide into the local market and industry, assistance in developing a product that could be marketed in Canada, and networking opportunities that have led to employment. For example, one writer was able to write a book, learn how to market the book to publishers and have it published through a mentorship program. Grants, funding, and competitions that provide **funding to develop products** are also successful means for immigrants to develop work in Canada. Programs and grants from Toronto Arts Council, Ontario Arts Council and Neighbourhood Arts Network were mentioned as useful means for financing the production of work.

Services that were reported to be the most effective were those that provided information or knowledge or services that provided the ability to create work and/or gain local experience. Such services include those that provide information. These information services could be individualized (e.g., mentorship) or more generalized (e.g., workshops). To illustrate this point, several immigrant creative economy workers interviewed found they did not know key terms for their field in Canada or did not know where to apply for work or funding.

More broadly, knowledge of career paths -- or how their segment of the creative economy works in Canada -- is critical for immigrant workers' success. Many creative economy workers need work produced in Canada in order to be competitive in the Canadian creative economy. Services that allow for production of work are key to many artists and creative workers' success. This type of service can be in the form of grants and funding, or it can be the provision of space or equipment.

3.2 Complementary Services

Many immigrant creative workers are **using multiple services** in order to build their careers. Knowledge services are often used to find other services that will allow for the production of work or to make job connections in their field. For example, an artist might use services like Paralia Newcomer Arts Network to learn about grant opportunities—from there they may apply and receive the grant. Often, immigrant artists need **community support**, funding and networking opportunities, thus a combination of different services are used to create a successful career. Indeed, many successful mentorship programs work hard to connect immigrant creative workers with their respective professional communities in Toronto.

Key hand-off points between organizations are from knowledge providers and production supporters or employers. Few immigrant workers can jump right into their respective industries in the creative economy. They often need to find mentors or organizations that provide them with knowledge around their industry in order to pursue their careers in Toronto.

3.3 Key Barriers Encountered

Many immigrant creative workers have trouble finding information about their field of work. Immigrants found that when they spoke with settlement officers, they were often advised to **change their career instead of being given information on the creative economy**.

Many Canadian organizations and employers insist on ‘Canadian experience’—which is very difficult for immigrant workers to have before arriving in Canada. It is also often unclear to immigrant workers what ‘Canadian experience’ means and how to gain ‘Canadian experience’ once they are in Toronto. Many programs that are designed to help creative economy workers gain experience in their industry are focused on youth and not open to mid-career or experienced workers from other countries. For example, one artist applied for an entry-level job at an organization and was told she had too much experience for the job, but when she applied to a higher-level job in the same organization, she was told she did not have enough ‘Canadian experience’ for the position. Employers often seemed to not know how to interpret or value international experience, as illustrated by the experience of a creative worker who recounted being in an interview where the employee admitted to not knowing how to rank their international work experience. Because many employers do not recognize foreign experience there is little incentive to hire immigrant creative workers that lack ‘Canadian experience.’

The creative economy is often based on **short-term projects, temporary contracts or precarious work**. This kind of instability can be hard on any worker and can lead to the need for secondary ‘survival’ jobs. However, this is particularly difficult for immigrant creative industry workers who are often in a less risk tolerant position. One artist illustrated this point when she observed that upon moving to Canada, she was alone without any family. She no longer had a ‘parent’s basement’ to go back to if contracts did not work out or arrive. Thus, for many immigrant creative workers the **lack of family** support in Canada means they often cannot rely on the types of short-term work that are common in the industry. In another example, one creative worker took a ‘temporary’ job outside of the creative industry but decided to stay and not return to the creative industry because he found more mentorship, stability, and support in his new career.

The creative economy also recruits employees and operates internships through **Canadian educational programs**. Many immigrant creative workers already have degrees from foreign programs and do not have the time or money to re-do credentials. This means they do not have the same access to the recruitment paths of those that are Canadian educated. For example, several artists mentioned they felt disadvantaged because they did not have access to the OCAD industry mixers. Other creative workers mentioned not being able to access internships to gain Canadian experience because they were done through educational programs. Many of these creative workers felt they did not have the resources to redo their qualifications and needed to work to support themselves and their families.

Many immigrants also find struggles with **language barriers**—both in learning and communicating in English and French, but also in the language of their own industries. For instance, one artist realized that she had been using the term ‘community artist’ incorrectly because it meant something different to her career outside of Canada. Several creative workers also mentioned that they felt disadvantaged in not having a working knowledge of French. Many of the creative economy jobs they saw advertised or had applied for mentioned a preference for knowledge of French. Several found the ‘preference for a knowledge of French’ intimidating (especially for some that were already self-conscious of their accents in

English). To illustrate this point, one creative industry worker mentioned that although they had knowledge of several languages (including English), they felt held back from many higher-level jobs because they had not had time to also learn French.

Finally, many immigrant creative workers found that **racism** was still a barrier in the creative economy. One effect of this discrimination concerns how diverse art forms are viewed by arts organizations. For example, several artists spoke about being expected to create a specific type of art because of their cultural background—instead of the type of work they had built their careers around. Several creative workers mentioned that even though they have heard lots of talk about diversity, it seemed that leadership roles in creative organizations were still not being offered to people of diverse backgrounds. These are just some of the ways that racism manifests itself in the creative economy. Furthermore, there are structural aspects of the creative economy that may exacerbate racism. It may be the case that the precarious nature of much of the work in the creative economy means that many workers do not feel protected from discrimination. Many organizations are small and lack human resources departments, so workers do not know where to turn for assistance in discrimination. Additionally, those workers that are self-employed may feel they have no protections or resources to access when they are faced with such issues.

4. Gaps in the Service Landscape

Broadly speaking, immigrant creative workers are struggling to gain knowledge of how the creative economy operates in Canada and Toronto. Little information is centralized and/or available through settlement agencies. Partly due to this lack of information, many creative professionals feel pressured to change careers. As such, more knowledge of services and avenues for employment could be made available at first points of contact for immigrant creative professionals.

Immigrant creative professionals have work experience that is not being recognized by the creative industry. Many professionals have degrees that are not accepted in Canada. Additionally, many jobs or galleries request 'Canadian experience.' Without bridging education programs for those with foreign credentials, many professionals are asked to make the choice to change careers or to start their degrees over again. As well, without 'Canadian experience,' professionals are not able to apply for jobs that match their experience level.

Programs that provide industry knowledge and help individuals capitalize on their unique skills have been the most successful programs for immigrant creative workers. Mentorships and meaningful volunteer work are currently the most successful means of finding employment for immigrant creative workers.

In conclusion, the following gaps were observed in the service provision landscape (as it relates to immigrants' participation in the creative economy):

- **Information/Knowledge Gap:** Settlement agencies currently seem to lack knowledge of the local creative economy and how newcomers can access it. More information on the ways that immigrants can access the creative economy needs to be shared with first points of contact for immigrants and newcomers. Settlement agencies, and other groups that are in frequent contact and support of immigrants could be made aware of ways that professional creative workers can continue in their fields. One potential (partial) remedy to this issue may be the sharing of the database tool (or some version thereof) with settlement agencies – along with the appropriate training regarding the application of that tool to various immigrant experiences.
- **New Experiences:** Programs in the creative economy that help individuals gain experience are often directed at youth. Immigrants and newcomers are being asked to have 'Canadian experience' in the industry but are not able to find means of gaining this experience. Newcomers need access to programs that are focused on helping mid-career and established professionals gain 'Canadian experience' to add to their already impressive backgrounds.
- **Access to Space:** The high cost of rental space in Toronto is prohibitive of many practices that require large amounts of space. Having access to performance and studio space is imperative for many (though not all) creative economy professionals. As most immigrants cannot afford to rent a home *and* workspace, more affordable workspaces are needed for creative workers to continue their work in Toronto.
- **Language Gap:** Language acquisition can be a challenge for many immigrants no matter their profession. In addition to the learning of Canada's official languages, immigrants in the creative industry have also voiced a need to learn the "language" of the Canadian arts and creative industries.

Appendix A. Creative Workers and Organizations Consulted

Individuals

- Claudia Arana
- David Cruz
- Aitak Sorahitalab
- Marta Keller Hernandez
- Karina Garcia
- Mirna Chacin
- Arlette Ngung
- Samyuktha Punthambekar
- Costin Mau
- Maria Queiroga
- Banafsheh Erfanian
- Maryam Pazooki
- Nour Kaadan
- Terek Ghriri
- Rakefet Arieli
- Mayank Bhatt
- Varun Kadle

Organizations

- Neighbourhood Arts Network—Eva Hellriech, Outreach and Events Coordinator
- The Artists' Health Alliance—Julie Dawn Smith, Executive Director
- Art Starts—Julian Carvajal, Special Projects Manager
- Toronto Public Library—Elsa Ngan, Senior Services, Specialist Multicultural Services
- Theatre Ontario—Costin Mau, Executive Director
- Work in Culture—Diane Davy, Executive Director and Stephanie Draker, Program Manager
- FACTOR—Taiwo Bah, Project Coordinator
- Ontario Arts Council—Bushra Junaid, Officer
- Toronto Arts Council—Jennifer Marambra, Grants Assistant
- Interactive Ontario—Carly Beath, Program Director
- Charles Street Video—Ross Turnbull, General Manager
- New Canadians TV—Gerard Keledjian, Executive Producer
- Myseum—Nadine Villasin Feldman, Director of Public Programs
- Paralia Newcomer Arts Network—Marta Keller Hernandez, Managing Director
- Airsa: Professional Development for New Canadians in the Arts—Aitak Sorahitalab, Executive Director