

July 30, 2021

Ontario's Workforce Recovery Advisory Committee
Via email: OWRAC@ontario.ca

Attention: Susan McArthur, Chair

Re: Ontario's Workforce Recovery Advisory Committee – Call for Comments

Ontario Creates welcomes the news that the government has appointed a committee to look at ways to help employers and workers adapt to workplace and economic changes ushered in by the pandemic. An agency of the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries (MHSTCI), Ontario Creates has a mandate to support the economic development of Ontario's creative industries, namely the music, book, magazine, film, television and interactive digital media sectors. These industries contribute \$7.2B to Ontario's economy annually and are responsible for nearly 65,000 jobs.

Our sectors include some of the hardest hit industries, such as live music, which has lost 79% of its revenues, and also beneficiaries of the extra time consumers have spent at home, like video game creators that have reported growth in their user bases. All companies have had to adapt their ways of working over the course of the pandemic, from film sets that introduced new health and safety protocols and increased their reliance on virtual production methods, to book publishers who were required to quickly pivot marketing strategies to increase their focus on online promotion and social media over traditional retail displays.

Although challenges were reported, broadly speaking many in the creative workforce were able to effectively transition to remote work, employing innovative strategies to maintain productivity while containing costs. As the province begins the transition to a "new normal," companies must contend with how to move forward in a hybrid or flexible fashion, supporting employees who successfully and productively worked from home and wish to continue to do so now that the business model has been proven. The remote work paradigm may open up new possibilities for workforce development, recruitment and for collaboration by Ontario companies, but also heightens the need to ensure Ontario remains an attractive and competitive jurisdiction in which to live and work. Ontario Creates will closely monitor impacts of these changes, including the outcomes of labour and employment law reforms that could be forthcoming, especially as it relates to eligibility for the tax credits the agency administers on behalf of the Province. It is worth noting that the definition of, and requirement for, a permanent establishment in order to meet eligibility criteria for various government supports to business may need to be reconsidered in the context of new hybrid and flexible work arrangements.

Ontario Creates has been engaged in several workforce development and training initiatives – particularly in the film sector -- and through investment funding, supporting industry organizations

to build capacity for nascent companies to reach the next level of success in industries such as music and interactive digital media. Collaboration and strong business relationships are key to success in the creative industries. Over the course of the pandemic, networking and other business development activities were particularly challenging for emerging companies that did not have the benefit of existing relationships to build upon, as well as for new professionals starting out in the creative industries. Training and support strategies going forward should recognize this deficit, and offer peer mentorship and coaching opportunities as part of the broader mix of supports being made available.

It is also important to recognize that the pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on underrepresented groups and emerging talent in the creative industries, making it imperative to consider an equity lens in future planning to ensure a strong and balanced labour force and robust economic recovery.

We look forward to reviewing the Workforce Recovery Advisory Committee's recommendations and are available for additional consultation, as well as to facilitate conversations with stakeholders from our vibrant and vital creative sectors.

Sincerely,

Karen Thorne-Stone
President and Chief Executive Officer
Ontario Creates