



August 3, 2023

A Letter from the RWAF Board to the Region of Waterloo

We are writing this letter to update you about changes happening within the Region of Waterloo Arts Fund (RWAF).

The changes being shared now are ones that have been made over several years of work and the result of many conversations internally and externally within Waterloo Region.

The changes are intended to move RWAF towards being a more equitable funder to all Artists within the region.

The Arts Fund was started 20 years ago and in that time has facilitated over \$4,000,000 in grants to Artists within the region.

Towards the end of 2021, the RWAF Board of Directors put out a Request for Proposals to initiate an equity, diversity and inclusion needs assessment. This resulted in the launch of a process called [Imagining Equitable Futures](#) facilitated by Jenn Chan of the Department of Imaginary Affairs.

The *Imagining Equitable Futures* process is designed to move towards living in the equitable futures we imagine.

This process was rooted in understanding the existing impact of the Arts Fund, the changing demographics of the region, the Board of Directors knowledge of equity-based funding models and alignment with existing equity initiatives within the region.

As a result of this process, two milestone changes will be happening - changes to the Board of Directors and a pause for the Fall 2023 round of funding.

As of August 1, 2023, we have implemented a new Board of Directors stepping into the roles of leading the Arts Fund towards being a more equitable funder.

The Board of Directors will be led by Raechele Lovell, Founder and Executive Artistic Director of DiverseWorks Dance Co. Raechele will be the first Black Woman to Chair the Arts Fund.

Joining Raechele as new members will be Ian Mark Kimanje, Lily Gyamfi-Kumanini, Claudia Aguirre and Sam Varteniuk. The incoming Board of Directors are artistic visionaries who are active in the community at a local and national scale with experience in anti-oppression, anti-racism and decolonial practices. Additionally, Regional Chair Karen Redman and Councillor Kari Williams will remain as members appointed by the Region of Waterloo.

Lindsay Golds, one of the outgoing Co-Chairs, has been working with the incoming Board of Directors through the transition and will address questions regarding the Spring Round 2023 of funding. Lindsay is currently holding the position of Vice-Chair, with a term ending on October 1, 2023.

Through this transition, we will continue to work in consultation with the Department of Imaginary Affairs and Jenn Chan.

As the new Board of Directors transitions into leading the Arts Fund towards being more equitable, we will be pausing the Fall 2023 round of funding to audit the existing funding process and to connect with Artists within the region.

From a recommendation from the *Imagining Equitable Futures* process, RWAf added equity-seeking data questions to grant applications in Fall 2022 and Spring 2023. Equity-seeking data allows the Arts Fund to identify gaps and opportunities based on Artists self-identified data.

Based on the previous two rounds of equity-seeking data, we are in a position to create stronger guidelines to ensure that moving forward funds are distributed equitably.

While this change might feel new within the work of the Arts Fund, it is built on rigorous research conducted throughout the arts and philanthropic sector.

We recognize that this announcement will have a direct impact on Artists and organizations within the region and we are open to feedback and comments. As a board led by and mostly composed primarily of artistic leaders from within our region, we deeply understand the measures that we are taking and that some of these changes may come as a surprise to our community.

Despite these changes, we are anticipating the continued support of our community at large, as the health of our regional arts sector directly impacts the wellbeing of all communities across our Region. As volunteer board members, we are highly invested in the success of the Arts Fund and how meaningful this tool is to our artistic community.

We are committed to communicating updates about ongoing changes by November 1, 2023.

We acknowledge that while the next few months at the Arts Fund are unclear, we are confident we will emerge with a strong action plan grounded in relationships within the region.

We see this as an opportunity to move towards becoming a funder that truly represents the growing diversity within the Region of Waterloo.

As in years passed, our aim continues to be supporting individual Artists to live and thrive within Waterloo Region.

We can be reached directly at info@artsfund.ca