

Igniting Rural Communities



Symposium for Performing Arts in Rural Communities

Thursday, October 27 to Sunday, October 30, 2016
Pinestone Resort & Conference Centre, Haliburton, Ontario

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

History: The inaugural Symposium for Performing Arts in Rural Communities (SPARC) was held in Haliburton County in April, 2014. It brought together a vibrant mixture of 139 performing arts creators, producers, presenters and amateurs from across Canada, as well as internationally. That event, with funding from Ontario Trillium Foundation, led to a Summit in November 2014 that began the process of evolving a network of regional hubs to connect rural performing artists and organizations. There are three initiatives:

- The SPARC website (sparcperformingarts.ca) is in place to foster electronic connection.
- The SPARC Network Committee and Coordinator have been listening to and talking with potential members to fine-tune our understanding of what is useful to rural performing artists. It has adopted the Constellation model (<http://socialinnovation.ca/constellationmodel>) used by the Ontario Non-profit Network, among others.
- Symposium '16, the second of intended biennial symposia, is the next opportunity to bring the developing network together in person.

Why rural? Canada is a rural country with a predominantly urban population. Art, particularly the performing arts, is sometimes (mis)understood as a primarily urban phenomenon. The intent of SPARC is to expose and validate rural performing arts for what it is -- an art form that creates and reflects community, an economic engine, a celebration of what Canadians are and hope to become.

Rural comes in many forms, and defining it as an organizing principle is a risky business. Rather, we need to hear from you, in your proposals, how you consider yourself rural.

Goals: The intent of Symposium '16 is to once again attract a broad spectrum of rural performing art creators, producers, presenters and amateurs to collaboratively consider their experience in order to improve it. We want to hear about what you have done from the particular perspective of what you have learned from your experience that can be of use to others.

We are also dedicated to growing the SPARC Network, so all participants will be asked to take part in a hands-on workshop led by the SPARC Network Coordinator that will orient them to using the SPARC website to connect with other performing arts individuals and organizations to mutual advantage. The website is an organic instrument; we will be looking at how it can best be used to meet the needs identified by our members.

The general theme of the Symposium is growth, how to nurture a seed into a full-grown creation that has demonstrable value. We want to include

- A mix of roles: creators, producers, presenters and animateurs
- A mix of art forms: dance, media arts, theatre and music
- A variety of instrumentals: organizational management, including partnerships and liaisons; audience development and promotional strategies; recruitment, retention and succession strategies; inclusionary community engagement, including but not limited to youth; measuring what counts and using it effectively, etc.

SPARC invites proposals within the following streams:

Growing performing arts in your community: Presenters in this stream will provide participants with practical skills for assessing and improving organizational health. In the business of performing arts in a rural setting: **how do you assess the health & developmental phase / maturation of your organization? Identify next steps for growth and sustainability? Access financial and human resources to support the next phase of development? Influence local policy makers and funding practices? Prepare for smooth succession? Put things together or pull them apart, die or begin again, jump ship or go down with it?**

Finding and celebrating community through the performing arts: Presenters in this stream will provide participants with techniques for identifying the uniqueness of their community and integrating it into their programming and marketing. The performing arts are all about finding character, giving voice, creating a presence – and wowing an audience. If rural communities are to compete in the creative world, they need to find and celebrate their unique character in a way that entrances their audience. What are the seeds of your community's uniqueness? People? Geography? History? Economy? How broadly do you engage the community in developing/strengthening your sense of uniqueness - e.g., might you partner with visual arts? culinary arts? literary arts? the landscape? What are the challenges in broad vs narrow engagement? How do you conceptualize your audiences (e.g. local, regional, cyberspace) and how does that influence your art and your business? Does performing arts reflect your community well? Does it put your community on the map?

Inclusion, the feeling and reality of belonging: Presenters in this stream will provide participants with strategies for assessing how inclusive their organizations are and/or want to be and mechanisms for meeting those goals. Recently there has been comment about the whiteness of the Oscars and the maleness of the top echelons of performing arts organizations. In small communities, the performing arts can exemplify divisions or bridge them. How do you value inclusiveness and how do you work to achieve it? Is there a place for exclusivity in the performing arts? How well does your organization reflect the character and composition of your community? How do you grow your audience to include those who don't usually come? How do you recruit other-than-the-usual in all parts of your organization, from board to back-stage to promotion?

The Heartland-Hinterland dynamic: Presenters in this stream will provide participants with helpful ways of thinking about the heartland-hinterland dynamic. Every place is heartland to some and hinterland to others. The hinterland feeds the heartland and the heartland pumps resources out to the hinterland; each needs the other. This stream will explore how the dynamic between these functions can be used to the benefit of both. Do small communities nurture creativity at some stages and starve it at others? If necessity is the mother of invention, does it also nurture innovation and fresh approaches? Do 'real artists' and 'real art' exist in the

hinterland or must they be 'found' in the heartland? Can performing arts rooted in rural reality engage urban audiences? How can funding formulas better accommodate the rural realities of scale and distance?

Consumer Research for Rural Reality: This stream will feature presenters who have collected and used data to assess the success of their events/organization and/or used it to improve/retain audiences and financial and human support. Funders increasingly require that data be collected and used to evaluate 'success'. Data collection is acknowledged as a necessary part of growing a successful enterprise, but small organizations often believe they lack the capacity to do it 'right'. What is a practical methodology for becoming fact-based about who your audience is and what brings/retains them? Do you have ways of measuring other elements that you value in your work e.g., economic impact, contribution to community vibrancy, personal health and well-being?

Finding the Balance: Entertainment/Community Asset/ Business: Presenters in this stream will explore how organizations balance the dynamic between providing entertainment, creating community and meeting budget, which sometimes appear to compete for consideration, e.g., well known names attract audiences but may cost more than organizations can afford, while local names create community and are less expensive but may not attract audiences. How do you find the balance between reflecting and developing audience tastes? Between giving local artists exposure and exploiting them as 'half-price' entertainment? Between doing what the community wants/needs and making money? Between showcasing local gems and putting bums in seats?

Types of sessions: Our focus is on maximizing learning from every presentation, so the last 30 minutes of each 90-minute time slot will be devoted to reflection on the material presented. This will be led by an external facilitator, with the goal of helping participants clarify their understanding and figure out how the lessons learned might be applied or adapted to their circumstances. We want also to share the broadest possible spectrum of experience and balance interests and learning preferences.

The formats may be seminars (primarily lecture style), workshops (hands-on learning), panels (up to three perspectives on a shared theme), research or community 'bytes' ('quick clicks' on studies or projects). You may incorporate elements of performing arts in your presentation within these formats. The SPARC Symposium Program sub-committee reserves the right to suggest a change in format and to recommend combinations of presentations to accommodate the goals of breadth and balance.

Submissions must include:

- Name, position, organization, address, phone and e-mail
- A statement of how your community is rural
- Title of the session
- Proposed format
- A sentence explaining how the proposed topic relates to a symposium stream
- A description of the session (max 500 words) that describes how you will use your experience to explore the topic stream, with a focus on lessons learned that may be adaptable to or instructive in other circumstances. This should be suitable for inclusion in the Symposium program (may be edited for style and clarity by SPARC staff)
- Your best guess at what three things in your presentation participants are most likely to find useful

- Brief biographical sketch (100 words max) of the lead speaker, and names, e-mail address and equally brief bios of co-presenters
- Audio-visual equipment needed (speakers are asked to bring their own laptops).

More is not better: not following the guidelines may be grounds for not considering the submission.

Selection process

The SPARC Symposium Program sub-committee will select submissions using the following criteria:

- Clear, specific, informative content that supports symposium goals
- An approach to the subject material that is engaging
- Achieving a balance among the presentations as a whole
- Reflecting the diversity and richness of performing arts practice in rural communities

Attending the Symposium

Confirmed speakers are expected to cover their own travel and accommodation expenses and to register to attend the full symposium to enrich networking. Financial assistance for speakers and others may be available but is not guaranteed. They will be eligible to apply to the Access Fund (application information to be released Friday, April 1, 2016).

Call Deadline:

All submissions must be received no later than Friday, May 20, 2016 at 5pm Eastern Standard Time.

Submission Format:

Must be in Word format. Please develop your proposal using the spell check and word count features of your word processor before submitting it.

Remember more is not better: not following the above guidelines may be grounds for not considering the submission.

Submit via email to:

rachel@sparcperformingarts.com

Questions?

Email or call Rachel Gillooly, SPARC Symposium Coordinator

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