



# Ottawa Valley Community Arts

## Five-Year Strategic Plan 2025-2030



### Land Acknowledgment

Ottawa Valley Community Arts (OV-CAOS) is based in what is now known as the Upper Ottawa Valley and operates on unceded Algonquin territory, known as Omàmiwininàki. The Algonquin Nation has stewarded this land since time immemorial, and we all have a responsibility to care for these lands and waters with good hearts. OV-CAOS is committed to creating meaningful space for Indigenous artistic expression and the creation of community. We seek to honour Indigenous peoples, particularly members of the Algonquin Nation, by creating spaces where all people feel welcome and connected in community through artistic practice.

### Forward

Art can be a transformative force in an individual's life, whether it is music, visual arts, literature, or the performing arts. Art has the power to elicit unconventional perspectives and help the brain adapt. It can fuel creativity and problem-solving skills, support the development of emotional intelligence, empathy, and critical thinking. Exposure to the arts supports the development of new neural brain pathways. Practicing art is neuroregenerative and healing.<sup>1</sup>

We are in an era of rapid change, which presents numerous challenges. Canada, the province of Ontario and the population of Renfrew County are contemporaries of these trending issues: opinion polarization, under-addressed climate challenges, destabilizing geopolitics and the rise of armed conflicts, rising income inequality in inflationary times, mental health challenges and feelings of isolation. We live in a connected world where people feel disconnected and isolated. Art can help. OVCAOS can help.

The 2025-2030 Strategic Plan reaffirms OV-CAOS' vision of a world where creativity is valued and the arts are woven throughout the multicoloured fabric of community life, and that the organization contributes to community wellbeing by offering opportunities for people to come together and come alive through visual, performative and literary arts and talking about what matters to us as individuals and communities.

*Message from Marie-Josée Lévesque - Board Chair, Ottawa Valley Community Arts*

## Our Strategic Priorities

- 1) **We are Resilient** - adaptive to internal and external changes
- 2) **Our Programming Makes a Difference** - contributing to individual and community wellbeing
- 3) **We are a Voice for Rural Arts** - advocacy for community arts, public art and artists

## Context of our Work

**Social** – For thousands of years the Algonquin Peoples have lived and cared for the lands of the Ottawa Valley. The descendants of the early settlers and in more recent years “newcomers” join the communities of the Valley. The Ottawa Valley is geographically large with significant distances between communities. The proximity to an expanse of undeveloped landscape inspires strong arts, crafts and trades skills. The Petawawa and Pembroke area sees frequent population changes due to CFB Petawawa Garrison. Particular social challenges include mental health issues, substance abuse, violence, food insecurity, and isolation. At the same time, Ottawa Valley residents are resilient, have maintained strong cultural ties, and operate within a culture of neighbourliness and support for each other.

**Human Relationship with the Natural Environment** - The Ottawa Valley is a rural area with many hamlets, towns, and one small city. Residents are generally very aware of and connected to the natural environment. Even those living in larger towns are geographically close to the forests, farms, lakes, and rivers of the Valley. Many rural residents plant large vegetable gardens in the summer and heat their homes with wood during the winter. Nature is a part of everyday living.

**Political** – More municipalities and regional governments are recognizing the importance of arts and culture in community-building and economic development, particularly at a time when people are searching for belonging. The levels of preparedness for acting on arts development vary greatly.

**Economic** – There is a wide variety of income levels across the region. Larger municipalities tend to be populated with a higher proportion of relatively higher-income families, and small rural municipalities have higher concentrations of lower- echelon earners. Employment opportunities are limited, with some seasonal employment.

Economic drivers include forestry, nuclear research, military base, agriculture, tourism, and public service. The contribution of the arts to our local economy is currently neither tracked nor officially recognized. Despite this, we know that the Ottawa Valley has a wealth of artists, creative people, and innovative thinkers.

**Technological** - High-speed internet infrastructure is limited in more isolated communities. Some areas have varying levels of reliable cellular coverage.

**Laws & Regulations** - Charitable status can aid fundraising and open more grant funding opportunities.

## Growing Roots Together

OV-CAOS has been in existence since 2011. In this time, it has received funding for more than 30 projects, contributed over \$1 million to the local economy, reached more than 50,000 people in 20 communities, and hosted 100+ workshops, events, performances, and exhibitions.

Using arts as a vehicle for change, OV-CAOS is committed to working toward reconciliation with Algonquin and Indigenous communities and creating spaces for rural culturally diverse artists and creative people to thrive.

In its short life, and given its modest means, OV-CAOS can boast about the significant impacts it has created in the community. As we plan for the future, it is time to focus on ensuring stability and continuity for the organization so that the community can continue to benefit.

## Our Vision

OV-CAOS contributes to community wellbeing by offering opportunities for people to come together and come alive through visual, performative, and literary arts and talking about what matters to us as individuals and communities. OV-CAOS envisions a world where creativity is valued and the arts are woven throughout the multicoloured fabric of daily and community life.

## Our Values

***Creativity, imagination, and curiosity*** – Encouraging the joy of creation and life-long learning

***Equity*** – Ensuring accessibility and fairness, to recognize diversity in serving all individuals

***Intellectual Freedom*** – Guaranteeing and facilitating access to expressions of art and intellectual activity

***Community Service*** – Ensuring high quality and excellence in responding to the needs of our community

***Community Connectedness*** – Enhancing organization service through partnerships and consultation with the community

***Teamwork*** – Fostering a work culture that advocates cooperation, communication, respect and training





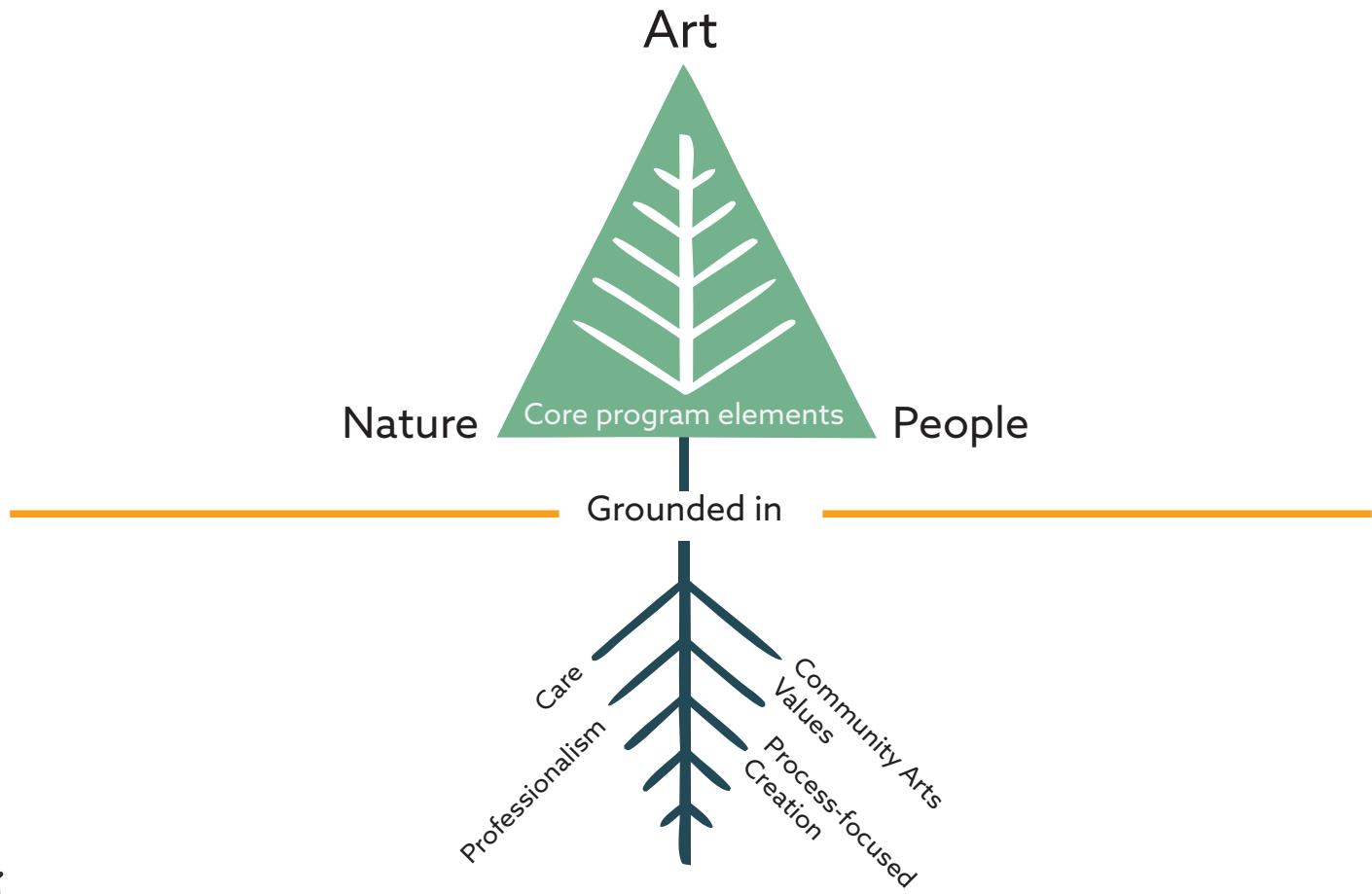
## Current focus and success

### The ART Helps Model

In March of 2024, OV-CAOS received funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation's Resilient Communities Fund to support mental health and community wellbeing in a post-pandemic world. The Art Helps program delivered unique workshops that fostered creativity and connection among people living in the Ottawa Valley. Participant feedback found overwhelming evidence that bringing people together to make art with natural materials in natural settings supports well-being and builds a sense of community, which led us to develop the Art Helps Model:

- 1) Making art with other people in a natural setting generates and increases feelings of creativity as well as connection to others and to nature; and,
- 2) The nonprofit Community Arts approach adopted by OV-CAOS contributes positively to feelings of creativity, connection and well-being among workshop participants.

The Art Helps model will guide the development of our core programming offerings in the future, enabling us to better support the well-being of individuals and communities.



## **Working Toward Reconciliation with Algonquin and Indigenous Artists and Communities**

Ottawa Valley Community Arts is committed to working toward reconciliation with Algonquin and Indigenous peoples here in the Ottawa Valley and across Turtle Island. We partner with Algonquin and Indigenous elders, artists, and organizations to deliver programming that creates opportunities for cross-cultural knowledge sharing and relationship building. In recent years, we have collaborated with Eganville District Public School for the Mino-bimadiziwin, La Bonne Vie, The Good Life pebble mosaic; created a best practices guide for working with Indigenous artists and collaborated with Nenaawateg to offer programming.

We are excited to welcome Christine Luckasavitch, Algonquin Anishinaabekwe and mixed settler, to the OV-CAOS team as Algonquin and Indigenous Cultural Liaison. We continue to collaborate with The Circle of Turtle Lodge and Nenaawateg to develop and offer programming.

## **Arts Advocacy and The Art Gallery of the Ottawa Valley**

The culmination of the Pop Up Art project in 2023 led to a Canada Council for the Arts-funded project in which we developed a scope, vision and business plan document for what will become The Art Gallery of the Ottawa Valley (AGOV). The AGOV is a centrally managed system of public art spaces embedded into public facilities across the Ottawa Valley. The AGOV will be the cornerstone for supporting our arts ecosystem and ultimately act as a mechanism to grow and better understand how the arts contribute to cultural economic development.

## **Our Strategic Planning Process**

Strategic planning began in February 2025 with the formation of a Strategic Planning Committee composed of the Artistic Director and volunteer members of the Board of Directors, under the guidance of the Board Chair.

The objective of the Strategic Planning Committee was to undertake a review of the organization's strategic position and provide onward direction. The following actions were completed between February and October 2025:

**SWOT analysis** - identified internal strengths and weaknesses, external opportunities and threats.

**Environmental scan** - The Strategic Sub-Committee and Board created a picture of the world OV-CAOS functions with in, with a particular focus on regional and local specificities.

**Strategy analysis** - examined the appropriateness of OV-CAOS' service offerings with the communities served; its internal resources and capabilities to continue delivering in the long term.

**Member and public survey** - delivered during the summer of 2025 to consult with OV-CAOS members and the public at large.

**Strategic stakeholder review** - the draft strategic plan was reviewed by the board, staff, and selected members and partner organizations (October 2025)

# Advancing Our Strategic Priorities

The following strategic priorities will help guide us as we move to advance our mission and vision.

## Strategic Priority 1: We are Resilient - adapt to internal and external changes

### 1a. Financial resilience

OV-CAOS has received financial support from numerous public grantmaking organizations since its launch. We believe that the project-based nature of grant programs and fluctuations in funding priorities are becoming greater risks. It is time to build the structures needed to become more financially self-reliant. Financial self-reliance will enable OV-CAOS to focus on the needs of the community. We have observed that centralized granting organizations can sometimes be disconnected from the realities of the rural communities we serve. This strategic priority does not mean OV-CAOS will stop submitting grant applications – just that it will no longer be solely reliant on public funding to run its core programming.

- 1a. 1      Obtain Charitable Status
- 1a. 2      Develop & Implement Fundraising Strategy & Playbooks
- 1a. 3      Develop & Implement Corporate Sponsorship Program
- 1a. 4      Develop & Implement Merchandise Sales Capabilities
- 1a. 5      Offer Art-Making Events as Service to Institutional/Corporate clients
- 1a. 6      Offer Artist Representation Services



## 1b. Governance resilience

We will strengthen our governance structure to ensure the continuity of board and staff with a view to supporting the continued delivery of services supported by efficient and effective governance. We continue to seek a greater diversity and inclusion in our leadership and staffing to reflect our unique demographics here in the Ottawa Valley. When spaces are welcoming and accessible, participants are empowered to contribute to decisions, fostering opportunities for leadership to emerge from within and potentially move into or “bubble up” into organizational leadership roles.

- 1b. 1      Review of By-Laws
- 1b. 2      Develop Board Recruitment Strategy
- 1b. 3      Develop Board of Directors Onboarding Process
- 1b.4      Develop & Roll out Volunteer Program
- 1b.5      Develop Future Staffing Model
- 1b.6      Review and Update Human Resources Policies

## **Strategic Priority 2: Our Programming Makes a Difference** - Programming that contributes to individual and community wellbeing

Our goal is to offer a core program of 20 workshops/events in 10 different communities annually that supports the wellbeing of OV residents. Using our newly developed Art Helps model, we will deepen our focus on mental health, community wellbeing, and inclusivity.

- 2.1 Develop a playbook for administrating our core programming
- 2.2 Expand our media arts and performing arts offerings
- 2.3 Implement the Art Helps Model and recommendations
- 2.4 Explore new ways to meaningfully engage with equity-seeking groups in the design and implementation of programming



### **Strategic Priority 3: We are a Voice for Rural Arts -**

Advocacy for community arts, public art and artists

We know that engaging in the arts (community arts, public art or commercial art) have profound impacts on our social and economic health. Although we have a large population of active artists and creative people in the Ottawa Valley, there is a gap in this understanding within the general population and governmental structures. The work that OV-CAOS has done over the past 14 years has helped to close this gap, however there is still work to be done. It is a core strategic objective for OV-CAOS to become recognized across the region as a leader in arts-based community development.

- 3.1 Develop social and economic return on investment (ROI) formula for community and public arts
- 3.2 Develop and roll out public education campaign
- 3.3 Work with partners to develop a social prescribing campaign
- 3.4 Pursue the Art Gallery of the Ottawa Valley project
- 3.5 Update communications plan
- 3.6 Deepen existing and build new community partnerships

