



2025 in Review

January

2025 kicked off with a huge milestone: the official merging of Arts Network Ottawa and the Ottawa Arts Council. Two organizations, each with over 35 years of history, coming together to create something new. It was exciting... and a little chaotic. We spent the month merging logistics, updating our mission and values, and figuring out how to move forward as one stronger organization. As our programs continue, we've shifted and reevaluated them to center advocacy, mentorship, and collaboration – strengthening our community and advancing a more sustainable future for the arts in Ottawa. This month, we also hosted our first [Open Office Hours](#) in the Byward Market, where we had food, drinks, and great conversations while reintroducing ourselves and reconnecting with our community: the people who give us a reason to do the work we do, setting the tone for the year.

February – March

We immediately jumped into the important work we set out to do as Arts Ottawa and launched our [Learning Labs](#). In these labs, we invited sector leaders to come and share their knowledge with our staff as well as the public where we could all learn together. Topics ranged from governance models, advocacy within the arts, artist leadership, trust-building, and cross-sector collaboration. We explored untraditional approaches and reimaged new and inclusive approaches of how to run this new organization – all with our community and it's well-being at the core. These sessions bridged sector-wide learning with localized, actionable solutions.

April

In April, we moved into [Co-Creation Labs](#), bringing community members together with staff to prototype ideas for our new governance model. Based off what we learnt in our Learning Labs, we mapped, debated, used an obscene amount of sticky notes, and imagined what a truly community-driven organization could look like.

May

May marked the start of one of our biggest projects: tackling access to affordable space for artists. This was the beginning of our first [Action Lab](#), Shared Ground, aimed at reimagining underused or vacant spaces in downtown Ottawa as vibrant cultural hubs.

June

Halfway through the year! Can you believe it? By June, we had already accomplished so much. That month we hosted the last AGMs for Arts Network Ottawa and the Ottawa Arts Council, marking the end of their truly impactful eras. On June 25, we hosted the inaugural [Shared Ground Learning Day](#), bringing together artists, business leaders, developers, community organizers, and civic partners. Together, we brainstormed, tested concepts, and modeled real-world solutions to activate vacant spaces in our city. These conversations didn't end there, they continued throughout the year, growing into future events like (Un)Common Grounds and Community Living Rooms in October (which we will get to!)

July

By mid-year, we saw a clear formation of our community anchors: our [Core Leadership Circles and Community Advisory Members](#) – and we give so much thanks and recognition to these people. The Leadership Circles are sector leaders who have joined with us to expand research and development that they have already been working on individually, so that we can combine the work and be a stronger sector. Our Community Advisory Members is, well, YOU – the arts community. After synthesizing everything we heard from each learning lab, co creation lab, action lab, meeting, email and survey, we finalized our new governance model. This model clarified exactly how Arts Ottawa would operate moving forward, solidifying a structure that puts community at the heart of everything we do.

August

With governance in place, we shifted focus to supporting the arts community with some exciting initiatives:

- [Giving Circle](#): donors now have a say in where their contributions make the biggest impact.
- [Updated Volunteer Pathway](#): recognizing and supporting the incredible people who give their time to help us thrive.
- [Artist Talk](#): an online platform where the community can share events, opportunities, and ideas.

September

We launched our second Action Lab, [Social Impact Evaluation in the Arts](#), to help artists and organizations measure their impact and make the case for the vital role of the arts in Ottawa's economy and community wellbeing. After nearly a year of talking with the community, we realized this was yet another area where artists and the arts sector were running into real challenges. How do we measure the impact of arts, individually and collectively? How do we build a clear, concrete case for the value of the arts — one that shows just how essential they are to our economy and collective wellbeing?

In September, we also focused on refreshing one of our longstanding programs: the [Arts Ottawa Awards](#). To ensure the program truly reflects our community, we convened a group of Community Advisory Members to lead a months-long rebranding process — examining who is recognized and how, all through the lens of accessibility and inclusivity.

October

October was busy! We continued Shared Ground with [\(Un\)Common Grounds and Community Living Rooms](#) at Urban Art Collective. The event brought artists, organizers, and community members together to explore cultural space and community infrastructure in Ottawa. This sparked meaningful dialogue among attendees about how culture can shape more connected and resilient communities.

In October, we also launched our Collaborative Strategy Sessions to map out our focus areas for 2026. These sessions brought together all the sector leaders and Leadership Circles we'd connected with throughout 2025 — everyone who shared similar goals, finally in the same room. It was a chance to align our efforts, build on each other's work, and strengthen our collective impact. These sessions were incredibly valuable, and the reports are coming out in the new year — we can't wait to share them with you!

November

November was all about celebration and recognition. We hosted the Arts Ottawa Awards Launch Party, unveiling the newly reimagined awards after months of rethinking who and how we celebrate. These awards recognize Ottawa-based artists, creatives, educators, businesses, and organizations who contribute to a liveable and engaged city — across disciplines, stages, and communities. Nominations also opened this month, and we encouraged everyone to submit entries that reflect the rich diversity of Ottawa's arts scene.

December

And now, here we are in December, wrapping up the year with our final [Social Impact Action Lab event, Get. Together.](#), introducing new strategies, sharing insights, and learning together as a community. We look forward to continuing this work in 2026 where we will explore how to capture the individual and collective impact of arts activities in Ottawa and show the value of the arts and advocate for funding and policy change.

Nearly every single month in 2025, our organization held [Open Office Hours](#), where we invited the community to come in, either virtually or in person, to discuss specific topics or just to get informed about the work we do, and every comment or advice that was shared was noted and helped our organization learn and plan.

What a year it's been! We're so proud of everything we accomplished (even if it took a ton of work!). None of it would've been possible without you — our community, partners, volunteers, and artists. Thank you for believing in our mission, supporting the arts, and helping us build a more inclusive and sustainable future.

Here's to 2026!

 **ARTS OTTAWA**