



Summary Report | The Cultural Policy Hub x Arts Etobicoke's Artists, AI and Policy Roundtable

The Cultural Policy Hub at OCAD University is a national, bilingual platform that aims to build informed, inclusive and integrated cultural policy. It contributes to policy issues in collaboration with researchers, policymakers, artists and creators from across Canada's academic, government, non-profit and private spheres.

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Introduction

Artificial intelligence is rapidly reshaping how creative work is produced, distributed, experienced and valued, but its future is not fixed. Government regulations, strategies and policies around how AI tools are built and used are still taking shape; public pressure, cultural adoption and advocacy movements are influencing this policy work.

On July 21, 2026, the Cultural Policy Hub and Arts Etobicoke convened a public roundtable bringing together voices from the arts, education, research, advocacy, policy and legal sectors to explore this moment of opportunity, one where artists can have a say in the future of public policy on AI in Canada. This event was part of a series organized by Arts Etobicoke and Toronto's Local Arts Service Organizations (LASOs) centered on equipping artists and creatives to contribute to AI conversations. Panelists discussed the ways in which artists are already using AI, the protections and supports they need, the role of government and professional organizations in developing those supports and protections and, finally, the importance of ensuring that artists remain active participants in shaping AI governance.

While panelists recognized AI's potential to support efficiency, experimentation and new forms of creative practice, they emphasized that artists must be equipped with the knowledge, resources and influence necessary to have a say in how these technologies evolve. Conversations with the audience highlighted practical pathways for ensuring that AI development aligns with cultural values and doesn't compromise or replace critical thinking, as well as questions around what accountability for AI companies really looks like and what agency artists hold in this space.

A recording of the event along with more information about the panelists that participated [can be found on the event website](#).



Key themes

Four key themes and pathways for advocacy from artists and the cultural sector arose from this discussion:

Human creativity, artistic agency and transparency:

Panelists emphasized that one of the primary objectives of AI policy should be protecting the value and agency of human creators. They challenged the notion that innovation and artistic interests are in opposition; instead, they argued that creativity itself is a driver of innovation and that artists have an important role to play in shaping technological futures. Artists were described not only as users of technology but also as critical observers capable of examining its broader social consequences. The discussion reinforced that artists are not uniformly opposed to AI: many are already incorporating AI into creative processes, using it as a tool for ideation, exploration and experimentation.

The panelists argued that artists should retain meaningful control over how their work and creative contributions are used within AI systems. Many panelists stressed that transparency is a foundational requirement: artists need to know when and how their work is being used, whether it has contributed to training datasets and what mechanisms exist for consent, attribution and compensation. Several noted that protecting human artistry and preserving the value of creative labour must remain at the centre of policy discussions on this issue.

Accountability and responsible AI:

Panelists and audience members alike noted that technological systems are not neutral and that they reflect the priorities, assumptions and incentives of the people and companies that develop them, which raises questions on whose values are embedded in the AI systems Canadian artists are using. Some panelists pointed out that some artists want to get inside the AI tools themselves so they can experiment with modifying their coding and create models that better reflect their values and their applications. The possibility for artists to modify those codes would create both creative opportunities and risks that would require mitigation through legal guardrails.

The discussion also focused on the need for stronger accountability mechanisms for AI companies, as more and more lawsuits are being filed against technology companies for the harm their large language models (LLM) have allegedly caused to individuals' mental health, including that of children. While lawsuits are ongoing against OpenAI, Anthropic and others for their uncompensated and uncredited use of copyrighted work in LLM training, panelists and attendees agreed that there is a disconcerting lack of accountability on intellectual property breach. Panelists also pointed to the role of insurers, courts and public policy in shaping responsible AI practices, with insurers especially driving the development of responsible AI tools developed on data obtained with consent to limit legal risks. Creative businesses and arts organizations were encouraged to establish their own value-based guidelines, including commitments around disclosure and ethical use; one organization, for example, shared their position of not using AI applications in ways that replace creative labour.



AI literacy and capacity building:

Panelists agreed that artists, arts organizations and arts educators need a stronger understanding of AI technologies to take advantage of emerging opportunities, to mitigate risks and advocate for themselves and for creative labour. The panel also highlighted that policymakers sometimes lack the technical knowledge to understand how artists are interacting with AI tools and that this gap may lead to regulations that don't properly address artists' needs. Panelists noted that AI tools are fast evolving and learning about AI is work in and of itself, so artists need policies that invest in providing training resources and funding support to build capacity.

The conversation also highlighted concerns about overreliance on AI and the potential erosion of critical thinking, human judgement and creative autonomy. Rather than advocating for either unrestricted adoption or outright prohibition, panelists generally supported approaches that encourage experimentation with new tools and technologies paired with awareness, reflection and the appropriate guardrails to guide that experimentation. AI literacy was described not only as technical knowledge, but as the ability to critically assess when, why and how AI should be used: several panelists stressed the importance of teaching responsible use practices, including disclosure, attribution and critical reflection on our dependence on technology.

Rethinking artists' participation in policymaking:

Many panelists felt that existing consultation models used by policymakers are limited to isolated surveys or highly selective roundtables, leaving insufficient opportunities for ongoing engagement and dialogue. They highlighted the need for more iterative and accessible consultation processes that allow artists to contribute throughout policy development and to sometimes even co-design policies. For example, they suggested that public institutions could develop culture sector advisory committees so that artists, cultural workers and creative industries can be involved every step of the way in policymaking, or that they could implement processes that engage artists and civil society members through workshops to co-design, anticipate limits and problem-solve at every step of policy development. The AI and Culture Advisory Council announced by the federal government in March 2026 may be a move in the right direction, but its actual influence remains to be seen.

There was also recognition of a more fundamental problem: miscommunication. Artists and policymakers have very distinct priorities, perspectives and vocabularies, which are often at odds. This makes the need for intermediaries and translators who can bridge these worlds and facilitate deeper conversations all the more critical, especially when the issue at hand is the use of emerging technologies, which can be difficult to understand. One panelist highlighted that having artists serving in staff roles across all levels in government would contribute to a greater mutual understanding and to policies that reflect better the needs of the sector.

Panelists' Calls to Action

Panelists shared the following calls to actions for artists and arts service organizations.



- Educate yourself on the workings of AI tools, whether you want to experiment with them or not.
- Reflect on how you use AI and what your personal AI policy looks like, including how it addresses bias, transparency and ethical use.
- Share your narrative, be vocal about your needs and your concerns around AI with your audience online.
- Talk with fellow artists/arts organizations in your discipline and others to build cooperation and coalition.
- Get involved in your discipline's professional or arts service organizations and tell them what you need from them. Ask for support and share what you expect out of their advocacy so they can best represent your interests.
- Participate in surveys, consultations and engagement processes whenever possible; while AI fatigue and feelings of powerlessness may make it difficult, this participation is crucial to the arts and culture sector's inclusion in AI conversations.
- Call or write your local government officials and your member of parliament to share your views and to highlight the role the cultural sector should play in AI policymaking.
- Be confident in the value of your creative work; if AI outputs and the companies behind them are valued so highly, the inputs and data that models are trained on also have immense economic value as the source material that have enabled AI's growth.

Panelists also shared the following priority actions that artists can ask from policymakers when they engage with them.

- Create more continuous and meaningful mechanisms for artists' participation in policymaking, including advisory committees, iterative consultations and opportunities for dialogue throughout policy development.
- Include "artist translators" and "bureaucrat translators" in your conversations and engagement with artists to bridge the communication gap, deepen mutual understanding and improve policy development.
- Clarify copyright frameworks and strengthen protections that support artists' crediting, consent, compensation and agency in relation to AI technologies.
- Advance transparency standards for AI systems and training data, including clear disclosure of how creative works are collected, used and incorporated into AI models.
- Invest in AI literacy and capacity-building initiatives for artists, educators and cultural organizations, recognizing that learning and adaptation require time and resources.
- Support the development of value-based AI governance frameworks that reflect cultural priorities, encourage responsible innovation and reinforce accountability.



Ongoing Work and Public Consultation

The discussion demonstrated that artists are not simply interest holders affected by AI policy: they are essential contributors to its development and have the power to shape advocacy for the changes they want to see. As governments, institutions and industries continue to respond to the rapid evolution of AI technologies, artists can provide critical perspectives on AI impact on creativity and culture, but also on how AI tools can be used in a way that prioritizes ethics and public value.

The timing of this panel coincided with the [Department of Canadian Heritage's announcement of a new public consultation on the creative sector's readiness to adopt AI](#). The survey is open until September 15, 2026 and is being deployed to gather feedback from artists, creatives and other interest holders in Canada's cultural sector on how they have adopted AI, the challenges they have faced in doing so and the concerns they have about AI adoption. The feedback provided will inform the development of the Creative Technology Program, a \$50 million investment announced in the government's *AI for All* national AI strategy that is meant to help the cultural sector navigate this period of technological adoption and change.

The Cultural Policy Hub will continue to convene conversations that gather the arts, creative industries, government, education and technological sectors and to mobilize knowledge that empowers the arts and culture sector to participate in shaping the future of AI policy in Canada, such as through the public consultation outlined above. We encourage you to use the recommendations from this report to inform your submission to this consultation and in other discussions you will have about AI in the future. To stay up to date with the Hub's future works on AI, [follow us on LinkedIn](#) and [subscribe to our newsletter](#).