

Board

Candidate Summary Information

(as of May 1, 2026)

Category	Number of Positions	Length of Term	Candidate
Chair	1	2 years	Christine Ruys
Demonstrated knowledge of the arts	1	2 years	Kathy Allen
First Nations ancestry and a demonstrated knowledge of First Nations culture	1	2 years	Brad Bird
Demonstrated knowledge of heritage	1	1 year	Valerie Mullholand
Membership at Large	2	1 year 2 years	Nicholas Akas Olubunmi Ayantunji
Demonstrated knowledge of multiculturalism	1	2 years	Rowena Materne Mirtha Rivera

CHAIR

Christine Ruys

Christine is always amazed by the collaboration of Saskatchewan people. There are so many people who have a heartstring cause and many of these groups somehow intersect with others - which promotes this amazing synergy that you don't find in other places. Having been born and raised in Saskatoon by Dutch immigrant parents, Christine understands how important these connections can be. She saw her father, Henk Ruys, with a vision of a first indoor soccer centre in Saskatoon, make it a reality by collaborating with only Saskatchewan supporters.

Christine has been an avid volunteer for so many causes over her lifetime. Starting with Folkfest and volunteering within the Holland Pavilion and then on the Folkfest Board spending over 40 years in total. She has volunteered with Persephone Theatre for over 15 years and organized hundreds of events within Saskatoon, including many years as volunteer captain for the Wintershine Soup Cook Off and Fireworks Festival.

She currently sits on the Discover Saskatoon (previously Saskatoon Tourism) Board and the Saskatoon Sports and Special Events Committee. She is also Vice-Chair of the Saskatoon Zoo Society for the last eight years wanting to give back those amazing memories of the zoo to other children. Christine has volunteered as board administration for the Restorative Action Program (RAP) 2013-2022, Cochair of the Rotary Badge Star Shield Dinner 2019-2023, and Development Appeals Board (City of Saskatoon) 2010-2015.

Christine has retired from the University of Saskatchewan after 28 years in many administrative capacities. She won the Saskatchewan Volunteer Medal in 2020 and the Queen Elizabeth Volunteer Medal in 2023.

Christine has served on the SaskCulture Board since 2023 and was Vice Chair for the 2024-25 and 2025-26 year. Christine is very knowledgeable of Board Governance, Finance and Strategic Planning.

ARTS

Kathy Allen

Kathy is an artist who greatly values the role of arts and culture to connect people. A lifelong volunteer, she is dedicated to creating inclusive and accessible environments so that all people can experience a sense of belonging and find community. Kathy is a big believer in the mission of SaskCulture and has tremendous respect for the high quality of the organization's work.

Kathy trained as a theatre artist and spent many years working in the theatre while maintaining a small visual arts practice. Early in her career she toured Saskatchewan extensively, first with Greystone Theatre's production of You're A Good Man Charlie Brown, and later through the Saskatchewan Drama Association and the Saskatchewan Cultural Exchange Society (including visits to fly-in communities in the far north) where she taught theatre and visual arts workshops to thousands of students. This experience provided a deeper understanding of the province and the people in it.

Highlights of Kathy's theatrical career include: Directing the Canadian Premier of The Beauty Queen of Leenane (New Theatre Co-op); Stage Manager of Z (25th St Theatre); ASM for The Hobbit (Globe Theatre); and ASM/Props/Rosaline for the acclaimed bilingual production of Romeo et Juliet (Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan Festival).

Kathy was a founding member of both 25th St. Theatre's Women's Festival (1999) and the SK Theatre Design Festival (2021). These opportunities provided a broad understanding of working in the arts and festivals in Saskatchewan.

Kathy was the Dance, Music, and Theatre Consultant at the Saskatchewan Arts Board from 2004-2013 where she had the privilege of meeting and working with independent artists and arts administrators throughout the province and arts funding colleagues across the country. This role deepened Kathy's understanding of arts funding administration, the arts and culture sector in Saskatchewan, how the sector fits into a national context, and how provincial government works.

From 2013-2025 Kathy worked as the Arts and Grants Consultant in the Community Development Department at the City of Saskatoon. She was responsible for a variety of culture, sports, and recreation grants; sat on over ten national committees; led the City's 2018 Culture Plan Refresh; and chaired the host committee for the 2019 Creative City Network of Canada Summit. She received a 2019 Tourism Saskatoon Tourism Leadership award for her work on the Summit. Working in Community Development expanded Kathy's understanding of the Saskatchewan Lotteries system, cultural planning, museums, recreation, and municipal government. Shortly after retiring from the City, Kathy received the 2024/25 Community Builder SATA (Saskatoon and Area Theatre Award).

Kathy lives in Treaty Six Territory and Homeland of the Métis in Saskatoon with her partner, actor Kent Allen. They are the parents of two adult children and proud grandparents. Kathy is a member of Saskatoon Makerspace where she has a studio space and is over halfway through making five thousand sculptures and prints of "keys" for her 5000 Keys to Infinite Places art project.

FIRST NATIONS

Brad Bird

Brad was born and raised in Saskatoon, is a member of the George Gordon First Nation with strong Métis roots and a proud dad of a 13-year-old daughter. His experience includes working with the Friendship Centre movement as a board member for the Saskatoon Indian and Métis Friendship Centre from 2005-2017 and working for the Aboriginal Friendship Centres of Saskatchewan from 2012-2017. He's also worked for United Way of Saskatoon and Area as the Director, Community Engagement and Strategic Partnerships and has experience adjudicating for SaskCulture.

Currently, Brad works for the Saskatoon Public Library (SPL) as Director, Reconciliation since 2019 with portfolios that include reconciliation, programming, welcoming initiatives, community partnerships and safety and security. Working at SPL provides the opportunity to contribute to ensuring there is a welcoming place committed to representing and serving everyone who calls Saskatoon home.

Brad is proud of the work he's done in being a part of the groups that created the Wicihitowin – Indigenous Engagement Conference, Rock your Roots – Walk for Reconciliation and other initiatives that have brought newcomers and Indigenous people together to share culture and learn about each other in organic ways. Working with and supporting First Nation and Métis Elders and Knowledge Keepers is important to Brad, acknowledging that as survivors, their hard work, determination and sacrifices opened doors for young Indigenous people to be successful.

HERITAGE

Valerie Mullholand

Valerie was born, raised, educated in Saskatchewan, and except for a year in Alberta and three in Ontario, her career as an educator happened here. For example, she was a science information officer at PFRA (Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration) and a high school teacher. An archive project she completed at PFRA changed how she understands prairie settlement and agriculture. The last 22 years of her career were spent at the University of Regina where she taught in the Faculty of Education at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Her last title was Associate Dean of Undergraduate Programs and Student Services.

During her U of R years, Valerie volunteered as an adjudicator which provided her with a rich opportunity to learn about the cultural organizations funded by SaskCulture. Reading, writing, debating, pondering and ultimately recommending alongside other grant adjudicator volunteers was one of the most rewarding experiences of her working life.

As an academic she studied, wrote and presented on museums as sites of knowledge production. Valerie understands museums in Saskatchewan as influential in determining the stories educators tell children about the past, the present and the future. Museums are curriculum; curricula are plans for the world we want to live in and the people we want to be.

She served on the Museums Association of Saskatchewan Board for three years (2020-23) and completed the MAS Certificate in Community Museum Studies with the intention of being a useful museum volunteer in retirement. The people she met in those courses, both participants and instructors, were from museums and galleries across the province. She learned directly about the quality of the work they do and the challenges they face.

Other volunteer roles Valerie had held relevant to SaskCulture include serving on the Saskatchewan Professional Teachers Regulatory Board (SPTRB) and the Saskatchewan Teachers of English Language Arts (STELA).

Valerie's commitment to this province and its people is genuine. She has a deep respect and affection for the organization and employees of SaskCulture.

MEMBER AT LARGE

Nicholas Akas

Dr. Nicholas Chielotam Akas, Full Professor, is an internationally recognized scholar, performer, and cultural leader whose work advances the intersection of Indigenous performance, cultural identity, and community development. Beginning his career as a dancer grounded in African indigenous traditions, he has grown into a globally engaged academic whose research and practice position the arts as powerful tools for education, healing, and social transformation.

As a Full Professor of Performance Studies, Dr. Akas brings extensive experience in teaching, research, and academic leadership. He has held key roles, including Postgraduate Coordinator, where he supported academic programming, mentored students at all levels, and contributed to institutional development. His scholarship and creative outputs demonstrate how culturally grounded performance can shape identity, influence policy conversations, and strengthen community resilience.

In Canada, Dr. Akas integrates arts, mental health, and community wellbeing through innovative, interdisciplinary work. He is currently a Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Socially Engaged Theatre at the University of Regina, where he focuses on performance as a vehicle for community engagement and social impact. He is also undertaking a Postdoctoral Fellowship in Arts and Brain Study at Trinity College Dublin, exploring the connections between artistic expression, cognition, and human behaviour.

His international fellowships; including the Centre for Ballet and the Arts, New York University (USA), the Ife Institute of Advanced Studies (Nigeria), and the Global Arts in Medicine Fellowship (United Kingdom)—reflect a sustained commitment to advancing global discourse on culture, performance, and wellbeing.

Dr. Akas's work aligns strongly with SaskCulture's mandate to foster cultural vitality and inclusion across Saskatchewan. He brings a strategic, interdisciplinary perspective that bridges cultural preservation with contemporary innovation, offering valuable insight into cultural policy, program development, and community-based initiatives. His leadership is grounded in a vision of culture as a catalyst for social cohesion, education, and sustainable community development.

Olubunmi Ayantunji

Olubunmi is interested in serving on the Board of SaskCulture. With a strong commitment to community development, equity, diversity, and inclusion, Olubunmi believes his experience and dedication align well with the mission and values of SaskCulture.

Olubunmi Ayantunji is a lawyer by training and currently serves as Senior Policy Analyst with the Government of Saskatchewan. He is a policy and governance expert with extensive experience in legislative processes, public policy analysis, and intergovernmental relations. He holds a Master's degree in Legislative Studies and Policy from the University of Benin, as well as a Master of Public Administration (MPA) from the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy, University of Regina.

He previously served as a Senior Legislative Advisor at the Nigerian Federal Parliament (Senate), where he coordinated inter-parliamentary, intergovernmental, and agency-level relations with the office of the President of the Nigerian Senate. Bunmi has also held a number of leadership roles, including serving as President of the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School Student Association (JSGS-SA), Secretary to the Board of the Institute of Public Administration of Canada (IPAC), Saskatchewan Regional Group, and as a member of the JSGS Equity and Diversity Board. He also currently serves as the Secretary on the Board of Directors of the Saskatchewan Council for International Cooperation (SCIC). Through these roles, he has demonstrated a strong commitment to inclusive governance, public service leadership, and the advancement of equity and representation in public institutions.

He currently works as a Senior Policy Analyst with the Government of Saskatchewan and he resides in Regina. In his free time, he enjoys playing the talking drum and volunteering at his local church community.

MULTICULTURALISM

Rowena Materne

Rowena previously served a term on the Board of Directors of SaskCulture & Creative Kids from 2021–2023. During her time on the board, she was actively engaged in activities and represented the board on numerous occasions across the province. These included participating as an MC for FolkFest in

Saskatoon, speaking at the grand opening of the Indigenous section of the Western Development Museum in Yorkton, and taking part in the opening ceremony of the Doukhobor Dugout House National Historic Site. Her family has long been active in the Filipino community, and Rowena has grown up promoting and celebrating her Filipino heritage through various community events, particularly in Northern Saskatchewan.

Through her background in Communication Arts and Management, a significant portion of Rowena's professional career in Canada has been dedicated to working with Indigenous or Indigenous-focused organizations. Her experience spans a variety of sectors, including media, such as with Missinipi Broadcasting Corporation, Saskatchewan's Aboriginal radio, and executive leadership roles in Indigenous health services, Indigenous government, and Indigenous economic development. In these roles, she has promoted Indigenous community cultural wellness and advocated for and created opportunities for cultural reconciliation. She has also been involved with the Canadian Federation of University Women, an organization committed to improving the status of women in all their diversity by promoting public education, human rights, social justice, and peace, and creating opportunities for women to apply their knowledge and skills in leadership and decision-making across political, social, cultural, educational, and scientific fields.

Rowena's community advocacy roots were significantly influenced by her parents and mentors, who instilled in her a strong sense of responsibility to contribute to society, uplift others, advocate for those who feel they do not have a voice, and honour and celebrate cultural diversity. She views SaskCulture as a meaningful opportunity for Saskatchewan citizens to demonstrate their appreciation for the province's rich cultural and heritage diversity, and to actively advocate for inclusion and belonging as strengths that help make Saskatchewan a welcoming and vibrant place to live, raise families, and celebrate diverse backgrounds.

Rowena has shared that her mother was among the early recruits of nurses who came to Saskatchewan from the Philippines in the 1960s. She grew up in La Ronge, where her mother worked as a nurse and her father, an agrolgist, served as the Provincial Wild Rice Specialist after beginning his career in northern Saskatchewan's economic development field. Rowena has two brothers and considers herself a proud "northerner," shaped by a childhood rooted in the north and a lasting connection to the land and its people. She and her husband have travelled extensively with their son but always return to their home in Buffalo Narrows, a place that holds deep personal significance.

Professionally, Rowena has a background in communications and media, has held executive management roles for nearly 20 years, and has experience in post-secondary education and academia in both Canada and Australia. She holds an undergraduate degree in Communication Arts, an MBA focused on marketing, tourism, and project management, and doctoral studies centered on building ethical organizations. Her certifications in governance (Relationship Model) and in chairing boards through the Institute of Corporate Directors, along with her extensive governance experience, provide her with a strong understanding of board roles and responsibilities, and the confidence to contribute with accountability and integrity.

Mirtha Rivera

Mirtha grew up in Chile, a preschool teacher and performer who came to Canada in 1975. Since then, she started teaching dances and songs from Chile to new Chilean community members. She was the co-chair of Common Weal Community Inc. and is a popular theatre educator who formed 'Life' (Little Improvs for Education) for APSS in 1992.

Mirtha has been a part of many community boards including AIDS Programs South Saskatchewan (APSS), Carmichael Outreach, Women's Centre, and Sexual Assault Centre Regina.

She is very active in the 2SLGBTQIAP+ community and volunteers for the houseless population providing meals every Sunday at Pepsi Park. Mirtha was appointed to the SaskCulture Board in October 2025 and has served one year in the multiculturalism position.