



SaskCulture Funding Renewal Project - Phase II

Community Consultation

May 23, 2025

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Land and Treaty Acknowledgement

We are all Treaty People living, working, playing and finding the best way of sharing and being on treaty land. It is important to always remember who we are, where we have come from, where we are now and where we are headed. How to get there is critical to our future together and to our cultural connections. SaskCulture has a big role and responsibility in creating the opportunities, space, places, resources and funding to help this happen in a good way. And all the groups and communities they fund do too. We are all treaty people.

Alex and Muriel Campbell – Elders/Resource to the project

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This was an exciting and valuable process, and it would not have been possible without the support and contributions of many individuals and organizations.

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We also gratefully acknowledge the support and input received from outside the culture sector. The Northern Inter-Tribal Health Authority (NITHA), Justice and Community Policing representatives, and leaders in economic development contributed important insights to this work.

Executive Summary

1. Consultation Process

This Executive Summary outlines the key insights and recommendations from the 2025 SaskCulture Funding Renewal Community Consultation. The work represents Phase II of SaskCulture's multi-year Funding Renewal Project and builds on earlier evaluations to explore how SaskCulture can strengthen equity, sustainability, and impact across Saskatchewan's cultural landscape.

More than 220 individuals and organizations contributed to the consultation process. Engagement methods included three sector-specific surveys (97 responses), focus groups (33 participants), one-on-one interviews (29 stakeholders), written responses, and targeted outreach to underserved and underrepresented communities (40 individuals). Participants came from a wide range of organizations, including:

- **Mainstream Arts, Culture, and Heritage Organizations**
- **Indigenous Organizations and Cultural Leaders**
- **Ethnocultural, Multicultural, and Newcomer-Serving Organizations**

Youth, rural and northern communities, informal groups, and volunteer-driven organizations were intentionally prioritized. The process emphasized cultural safety, accessibility, and relational accountability to ensure that diverse experiences were respected and reflected.

2. Context and Sector Landscape

It was clearly stated that a great deal of good work is being done through SaskCulture funding and related services, and there is significant benefit to communities across the province. Consultation responses highlighted the broader challenges facing Saskatchewan's cultural ecosystem. Economic pressure, rising costs, workforce burnout, aging infrastructure, and community fatigue have shaped organizational capacity and access. At the same time, there is growing polarization around equity and inclusion, and a desire for more substantive connection across the sector.

While SaskCulture is widely viewed as a trusted and supportive funder, many participants noted that some systems remain overly complex, exclusionary, and reactive. Organizations are increasingly being asked to deliver responsive, inclusive, and community-driven work without the necessary funding, staff, or structural conditions to succeed.

3. Key Findings Across Groups

SaskCulture is Valued and Encouraged to Lead More Strategically

Participants consistently described SaskCulture staff as accessible, professional, and effective in their support roles. Many noted the clarity and responsiveness of staff during the grant process. And, beyond these operational interactions, there was a broader interest in seeing SaskCulture take on a more strategic role in sector leadership. This included coordination across the cultural ecosystem, policy development, advocacy, and equity-focused planning, particularly in response to structural gaps, regional disparities, and evolving community needs.

Membership is Confusing and Transactional

47.4% of organizations confirmed they were current members of SaskCulture, while 25% were unsure and 28% reported they were not. Many described joining solely to meet funding eligibility, with little follow-up or engagement afterward. The purpose and benefits of membership were often unclear, especially for ethnocultural and grassroots organizations, some of whom were unsure if they qualified or how to apply. These gaps suggest that the current membership model may not be effectively supporting awareness, access, or sustained connection across the sector.

Funding is Essential but Inflexible

Most organizations, even those with limited reliance, emphasized that SaskCulture funding is core to their programming. The current model of short-term, project-based grants does not support long-term planning, sustainable staffing, or organizational growth. Volunteer burnout, gaps in infrastructure, and inability to retain staff were consistent concerns. Those receiving annual or core funding identified similar issues and stated that they would be more effective with additional support to address rising costs, increasing wages, and more focused training and capacity building.

Equity and Reconciliation are Valued but Under-Supported

Participants strongly supported the principles of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action. However, many organizations lack the resources, staffing, and internal structures to implement these commitments in a sustained or meaningful way. In several cases, equity-related responsibilities are downloaded onto racialized and Indigenous staff or volunteers who are not given adequate time, compensation, or decision-making power. Organizations also expressed a need for clearer frameworks, shared accountability, and capacity-building support to move beyond statements of support toward embedded practice.

Evaluation is Widespread but Misaligned

While most groups conduct evaluation, it is typically focused on attendance and satisfaction rather than outcomes like inclusion, identity, or wellbeing. Indigenous and Ethnocultural groups stressed that Western frameworks do not reflect their values and called for relational, story-based approaches to evaluation. Also identified was the need for evaluation tools, financial

support, and training to assist with measuring positive impacts made in communities and by the sector.

Underserved Communities Lack Access

Many informal or grassroots organizations, especially in rural, northern, and newcomer communities, struggle to access SaskCulture programs. Barriers included limited internet access, language and literacy challenges, complex application processes, and a lack of culturally relevant outreach or support. Some groups were unfamiliar with SaskCulture altogether, while others described being discouraged after unsuccessful applications. Participants emphasized that without dedicated relationship-building, mentorship, and simplified entry points, these communities will continue to be left out of funding and program opportunities.

Youth Want Leadership, Not Just Participation

Youth-serving organizations emphasized that culture plays a key role in youth wellbeing and identity. Young people want flexible, youth-designed programs, meaningful decision-making roles, and clear pathways into leadership and creative careers.

The Sector is Fragmented and Under-Coordinated

Across all groups, organizations reported working in silos. Many expressed a desire for SaskCulture to play a stronger role in sector convening, communication, information sharing and collective planning. A coordinated provincial cultural network was frequently requested, as was a long-term vision for the future.

4. Priority Recommendations

1. **Redefine SaskCulture's Role as Sector Leader:** Position SaskCulture as a connector, knowledge hub, and equity-focused leader. Co-create a provincial cultural vision and plan that supports alignment across communities, delivery partners, and funders.
2. **Expand Multi-Year and Operational Funding:** Prioritize core, multi-year, and flexible funding that supports staff, long-term planning, and stable infrastructure. Reduce reliance on project-based grants.
3. **Embed IDEA and TRC Commitments Across Programs:** Integrate measurable equity goals into all funding streams. Support organizations with training, evaluation tools, and mentorship. Share accountability for systemic change.
4. **Develop Youth-Led Structures and Programs:** Establish a youth-directed fund, youth advisory council, and mentorship pathways into cultural leadership. Co-design initiatives that reflect youth needs and strengths.
5. **Simplify Access and Remove Barriers:** Streamline application processes, offer plain language resources, and fund access supports like travel, childcare, and translation. Create pathways for unincorporated and informal groups.
6. **Support Indigenous-Led Revitalization and Partnerships:** Invest in Indigenous directed programs, language revitalization, land-based learning, and ceremony. Embed Indigenous planning and evaluation frameworks and continue to establish partnerships for shared program delivery and policy input.

7. **Launch a Provincial Cultural Network:** Fund the development of a sector-wide coordination network. Offer peer learning opportunities, shared tools, and centralized communications.
8. **Advance Evaluation as a Learning Tool:** Support culturally grounded evaluation practices. Shift evaluation away from compliance and toward reflection, learning, and values-based impact.
9. **Ensure Rural and Northern Inclusion:** Build long-term presence and relationships in rural and northern communities. Deliver region-specific supports and recognize unique access needs.

5. Additional Strategic Considerations

While the core recommendations in this report are grounded in the consultation data, several complementary themes emerged that may be useful to consider as SaskCulture continues to evolve its programs and strategic direction. These represent areas for reflection, planning, and possible exploration in future phases:

- **Revitalize past programs that worked**
Consider re-evaluating programs that were successful in rural and northern communities, especially those that lowered access barriers and supported grassroots innovation. Many participants shared that past approaches, while now discontinued, had met real needs and may still offer valuable design insights.
- **Leverage storytelling and sector visibility**
Participants noted a lack of awareness about SaskCulture's full role in the province. There may be opportunities to strengthen cultural advocacy through storytelling, awareness campaigns, and clearer articulation of SaskCulture's identity as more than a funder.
- **Support culture-sharing and knowledge exchange**
Several groups expressed a desire for more opportunities to connect across regions and sectors, particularly to learn from successful projects, access practical tools, and avoid duplication. A culture-focused knowledge hub or peer-sharing platform was suggested.
- **Deepen engagement with cultural advisors and Elders**
Within Indigenous communities, participants emphasized the importance of respectful engagement with Elders and cultural leaders in program design, delivery, and evaluation. This includes compensating cultural expertise and ensuring time for relationship-building.
- **Explore future-aligned strategic frameworks**

Some stakeholders expressed interest in rethinking SaskCulture's long-term strategic direction, including how current priorities align with sector evolution. This may include clarifying and aligning the organization's structure, enhancing and coordinating services, or refreshing how strategic priorities are developed and communicated across the network.

6. Conclusion

SaskCulture is uniquely positioned to lead the next chapter of cultural development in Saskatchewan. Communities across the province are ready to co-create an inclusive and sustainable future, one that centers belonging, equity, and cultural vitality. The insights in this report offer a clear roadmap for action. What is needed now is bold, collaborative leadership grounded in trust and guided by community priorities.

I. Introduction

SaskCulture Inc. is a non-profit, community-based provincial organization dedicated to fostering a culturally vibrant Saskatchewan. Through partnerships with volunteers, members, and community groups, SaskCulture supports and promotes access to diverse cultural experiences across the province. Funded by Sask Lotteries, the organization delivers programs, distributes cultural funding, and advocates for cultural engagement that reflects the province’s rich heritage and diversity.

SaskCulture is currently engaged in the multi-year Funding Renewal Project aimed at reviewing its strategic direction and renewing its funding programs to better reflect community needs. The key objectives of this project are to:

- a) ensure SaskCulture’s funding model is sustainable, adaptive, and accessible, and
- b) support continuous improvement in the delivery of programs, activities, and experiences that are more inclusive, diverse, equitable, and accessible in Saskatchewan.

SaskCulture engaged Flo Frank of Common Ground Consulting Inc. and Alicia-Marie LeJour of AML Consulting to contribute to, research, and support activities outlined within Phase II: Community Consultation. This phase builds on Phase I evaluation and research efforts by deepening engagement and consultation with stakeholders across the cultural ecosystem, including those historically well connected to SaskCulture’s programs as well as those who have remained underrepresented or unreached.

The goal of this work is to provide SaskCulture with a clearer understanding of sector needs, strengths, and challenges, while identifying opportunities for stronger alignment, structural clarity, and future-oriented investment.

Figure 1: Project Renewal Diagram



Note: Retrieved from SaskCulture Year in Review 2023-2024, by SC 2024, p. 9, Copyright 2024 by SaskCulture.

II. Methodology

Target Audience

The consultation process aimed to engage both reached and unreached/underserved organizations across three core target groups:

- a. Mainstream Arts, Culture & Heritage Organizations (hereafter referred to as Mainstream Organizations for brevity)
- b. Indigenous Organizations
- c. Multicultural Organizations (hereafter renamed as Ethnocultural Organizations within this report)

Special interest groups were also engaged, including all seven SCR Districts, the Saskatchewan Arts Alliance, Heritage Saskatchewan, and representatives from each level of museum funding.

Additional effort was made to engage groups not representing SaskCulture's traditional networks, such as the Northern Inter-Tribal Health Authority, rural and northern municipalities, youth-serving organizations, and a range of groups and individuals either unaware of or not directly connected to SaskCulture's programs and services.

Consultation Approach

This consultation was rooted in a community-centered approach that emphasized respectful engagement, accessibility, and relationship-building. Participants were treated as knowledge holders, and lived experience was recognized as essential to understanding sector realities. The process aimed to reduce barriers by offering multiple formats for participation, conducting outreach beyond existing networks, and creating space for voices that are often underrepresented. Care was taken to ensure that engagement was not extractive, but reflective of community priorities, strengths, and concerns.

Engagement Methods

The consultation process used mixed methods that included surveys, one-on-one interviews, small group discussions, and focus groups.

A general sector-wide survey was administered via SurveyMonkey to three core target groups, including Mainstream Organizations, Ethnocultural Organizations, and Indigenous Organizations. The survey explored key themes including SaskCulture membership, funding and sustainability, program delivery, Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), youth engagement, and evaluation practices. While the surveys were largely consistent across groups, questions specific to the TRC were tailored for Indigenous organizations.

The survey was conducted in two cycles, March 2025 and May 2025, to accommodate participants unable to engage in the initial round or scheduled focus groups. A total of 96

responses were collected: 68 from Mainstream Arts, Culture, and Heritage Organizations, 16 from Ethnocultural Organizations, and 13 from Indigenous Organizations.

One-on-one interviews were conducted with stakeholders from the three core target groups, as well as representatives from external sectors and special interest groups beyond the primary audience.

Four distinct focus group sessions were conducted using both in-person and virtual formats to enhance participant accessibility and facilitate in-depth discussions. During these moderated sessions, participants also completed a short questionnaire in which they wrote down additional insights based on their individual experiences, perspectives, and recommendations.

Table 1. Total Number of Participants Engaged in Community Consultations

Engagement Format	Description	Participants
General Survey	Sent to 179 contacts (8 bounced); 97 responses received	97
Regional Focus Groups	Four sessions held in Prince Albert (8), Saskatoon (11), Regina (10), La Ronge (4)	33
Focus Group Questionnaire	Tailored survey with 10 organization-specific questions for focus group participants	21
Interviews	1–3 hour interviews with SAA, Heritage SK, museums, multicultural organizations, SCR Districts and focused interviews with grant recipients	29
Targeted Outreach	Engagement with unreached groups including youth, artists, rural communities, community economic and cultural development planners	40
Total number of participants engaged		220

Strengths of the Process

This process engaged a wide range of organizations with strong geographic reach and sector diversity. Participants were candid and appreciative of SaskCulture’s outreach through multiple platforms. Surveys generated the broadest response, while interviews and focus groups enabled deeper, qualitative insights. Participants were encouraged to reflect on their broader cultural sector experiences as well as their organization’s specific community work.

Limitations

Participation may have been affected by the timing of the consultation, which took place near fiscal year-end. Despite multiple follow-ups, some organizations did not respond. Francophone and newcomer voices were underrepresented, which may reflect a combination of timing, outreach limitations, and broader structural barriers seen across the sector.

III. Findings: Mapping the Sector Landscape

Engagement with over 200 participants representing a diverse range of organizational groups revealed several overarching themes that define the broader context within which these organizations operate. While a detailed analysis of the data is essential, it is equally important to maintain a macro-level perspective on the external factors that significantly shape their experiences. These contextual insights are critical for informing the strategic direction of funding bodies such as SaskCulture.

Economic Uncertainty

Across Saskatchewan, economic insecurity is increasingly influencing public engagement with cultural activities. The increase in the cost of living has contributed to growing concerns about future financial stability and has led to decreased discretionary income, limiting individuals' ability to participate in community programs. Participants highlighted that people have less discretionary income, which impacts attendance, volunteerism, and access. Young people are increasingly concerned about the future, citing a lack of opportunities in employment, housing, and environmental sustainability.

Aging Infrastructure

Programming in communities is being impacted by Saskatchewan's unique infrastructure challenges. With over 700 municipalities serving a small, dispersed population, many lack the resources and capacity to maintain aging capital infrastructure and implement technological upgrades effectively.

Shift in Awareness

Participants described a cultural climate influenced by growing political polarization, rising racism, and pushback against diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. There is visible resistance to immigration and demographic change, especially in smaller rural and northern communities. Uncertainty around shifting identities, youth outmigration, newcomer arrivals, and changing cultural values is increasingly felt. There is a broader recognition of exclusion, privilege, and power. While many community members support inclusion in principle, and a significant number of positive examples exist, some are unsure how to engage beyond stating that "everyone is welcome."

Participants also noted growing concern about the broader political environment, including threats to democratic institutions. These developments contribute to a sense of instability and unease in local communities. The increasing influence of social media as a primary source of information was also raised. This speaks to a lack of fact-checking and diminishing access to in-depth news or journalism, which contributes to confusion, misinformation, and a breakdown in shared understanding.

Sector Workforce and Capacity

Generational transition in boards, staff, and leadership is a major concern. Many community organizations face succession gaps and lack resources to plan for the future. There is also limited investment in cultural sector careers, education pathways, and wages. Participants noted that the cultural workforce needs better promotion as a viable employment option and a more coordinated approach to professional development and career planning.

Technology use has changed how people work and communicate. With fewer people in offices and more remote operations, there is increasing expectation for in-person connection, even as the capacity to deliver it declines. Some worry that future funding will require increased fundraising or revenue generation from organizations that are not equipped to take on this challenge. Participants noted that groups are already heavily reliant on grants and that SaskCulture, even as a funder, is too.

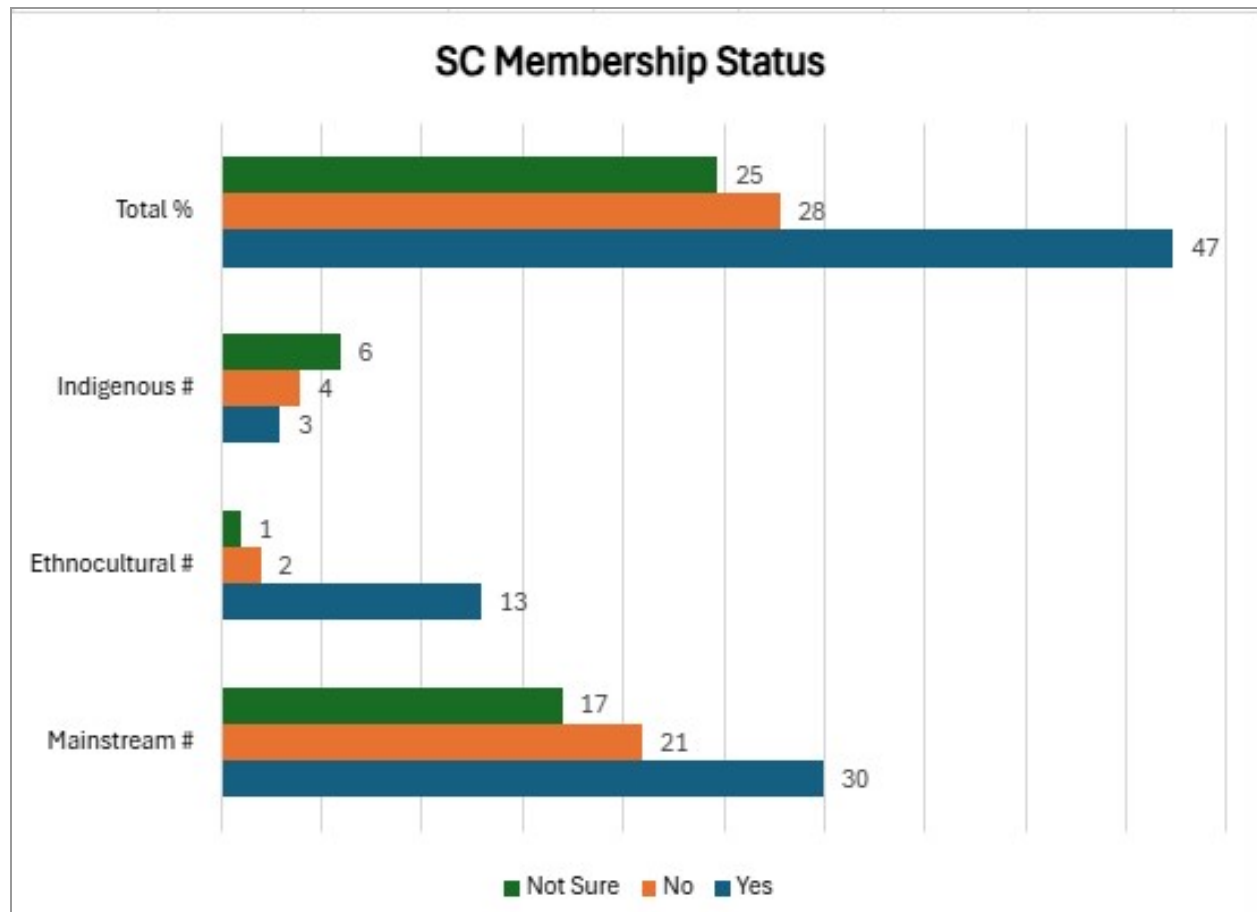
Siloing and Coordination

Participants expressed frustration with the lack of sector-wide coordination and knowledge sharing. Many strong projects and programs are developed and delivered in isolation, with no central place to share tools, ideas, or best practices. This leads to duplication of efforts and missed opportunities for collaboration. Volunteerism is also shifting. Fewer people are interested in long-term commitments, and while some youth are engaged, many are only involved when linked to incentives, employment or career advancement, family, or friends.

There is a clear call for more structure, connection, and sector-wide alignment. Participants asked for a provincial cultural network, a central hub, and even a phone line to access advice, tools, and information. Without a unifying structure, the sector is fragmented. Funding is seen as increasingly scarce, with new groups forming around equity and cultural identity, despite no overarching plan to manage growth or guide sector development. Coalitions are forming organically, but more intentional coordination is needed.

IV. Findings by Core Areas:

Figure 2. Organizational Membership Status with SaskCulture



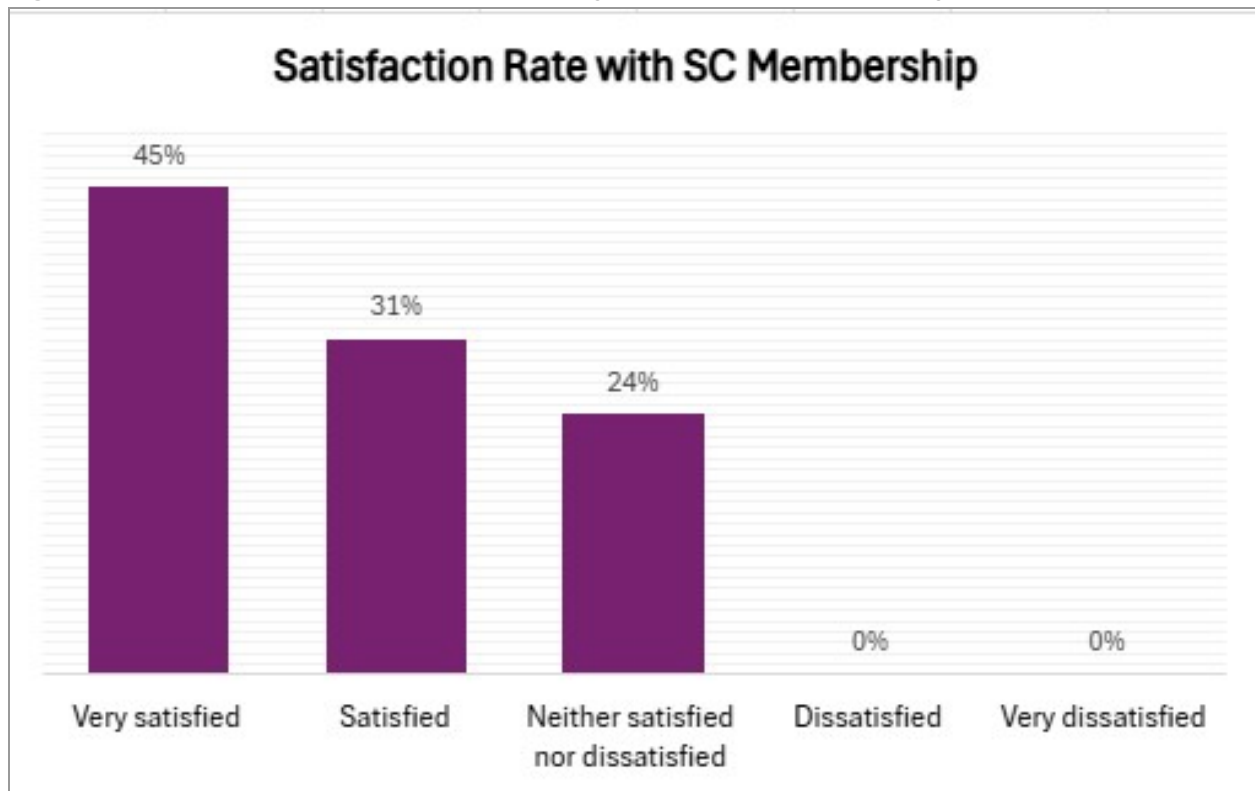
Note: The overall percentage is calculated across all respondents; group-specific values are reported in actuals.

Across all groups, 47.4% of organizations reported that they are current members of SaskCulture. However, 25% were unsure of their membership status, and 28% said they were not members. This level of uncertainty indicates that many organizations are either unclear on what membership entails or unaware that they are members at all.

Participants shared that their perception is that membership is often tied to applying for grants, with little follow-up or ongoing engagement. This raises questions about whether organizations are meaningfully connected to SaskCulture or simply meeting an eligibility requirement. The findings suggest that membership, as it currently stands, may be more of a transactional entry point than a sustained relationship.

"We get funding from SaskCulture, but I'm not sure if that makes us a member."

Figure 3. Reported Satisfaction Levels Among SaskCulture Member Organizations

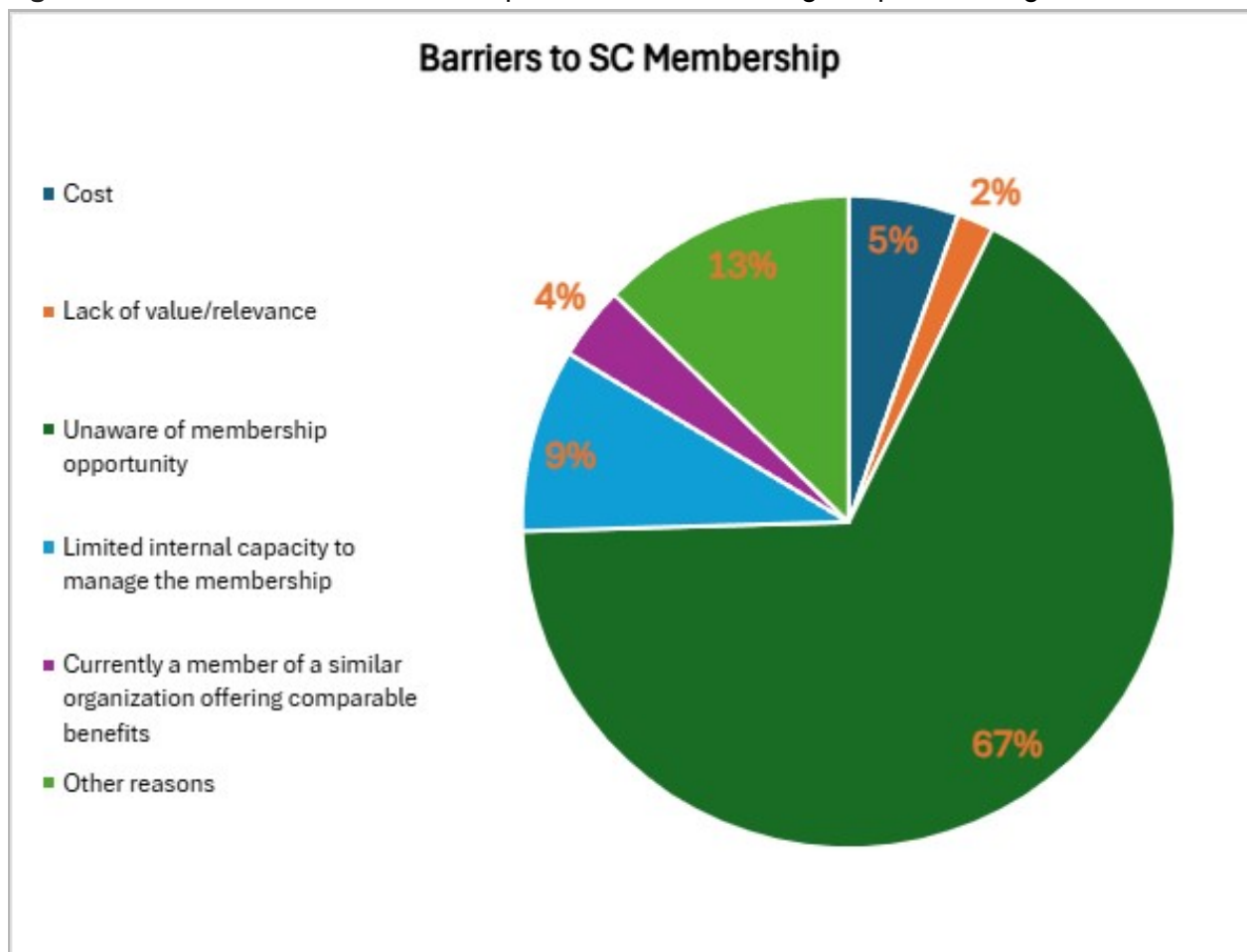


Among respondents who confirmed their SaskCulture membership, 76% expressed high levels of satisfaction. Respondents expressed high satisfaction with several aspects of SaskCulture (SC). They particularly appreciated access to grant programs, financial support (such as insurance discounts), and the helpful guidance provided by approachable consultants. Smaller nonprofits found the funding assistance especially valuable.

Participants also praised the presence of SC staff at events and their responsiveness throughout the grant process. In addition, members valued the education and professional development opportunities offered by SC, including access to training and regular updates on relevant resources. Many respondents highlighted the importance of SC's advocacy and community connections. Finally, members appreciated SC's support for cultural events, its shared expertise, and its active involvement in community gatherings, such as the River Valley Network.

"We believe in the mandate and programs of SaskCulture. We have benefited through their funding opportunities, resources and talented staff."

Figure 4. Reasons for Non-Membership in SaskCulture Among Respondent Organizations



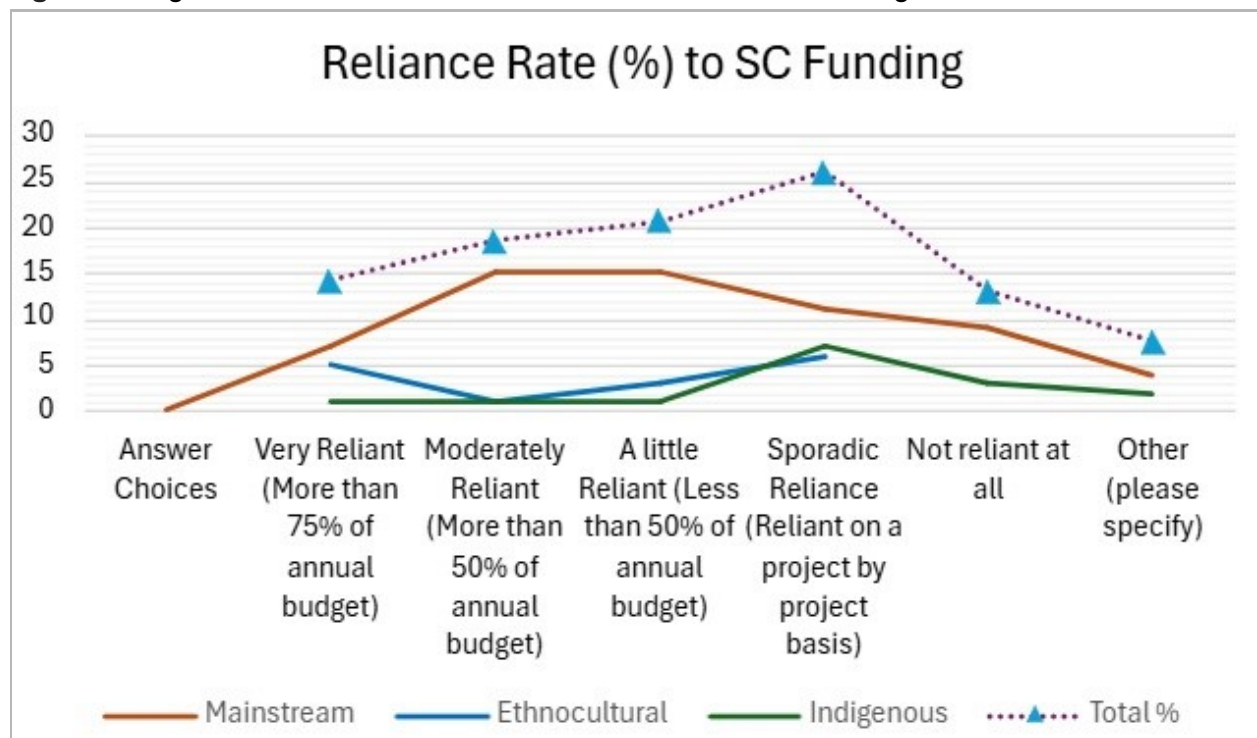
The primary reason non-member organizations cited for not joining SaskCulture was a lack of awareness, with 67% unaware of the membership opportunity. Additionally, 13% had misconceptions, such as believing membership required meeting attendance or that it was only for certain types of organizations. Some felt the membership value was unclear or irrelevant, while others reported limited follow-up after signing up during the funding process.

These findings suggest that SaskCulture's membership model may not effectively reach small or grassroots organizations, highlighting the need for clearer communication, streamlined onboarding, and increased outreach.

Figure 4 also highlights a divide between those who benefit from an ongoing relationship with SaskCulture and those who remain on the margins, unaware or uninvolved.

"Never Thought of it. SaskCulture needs to promote membership more!"

Figure 5. Organizational Reliance on SaskCulture for Annual Funding

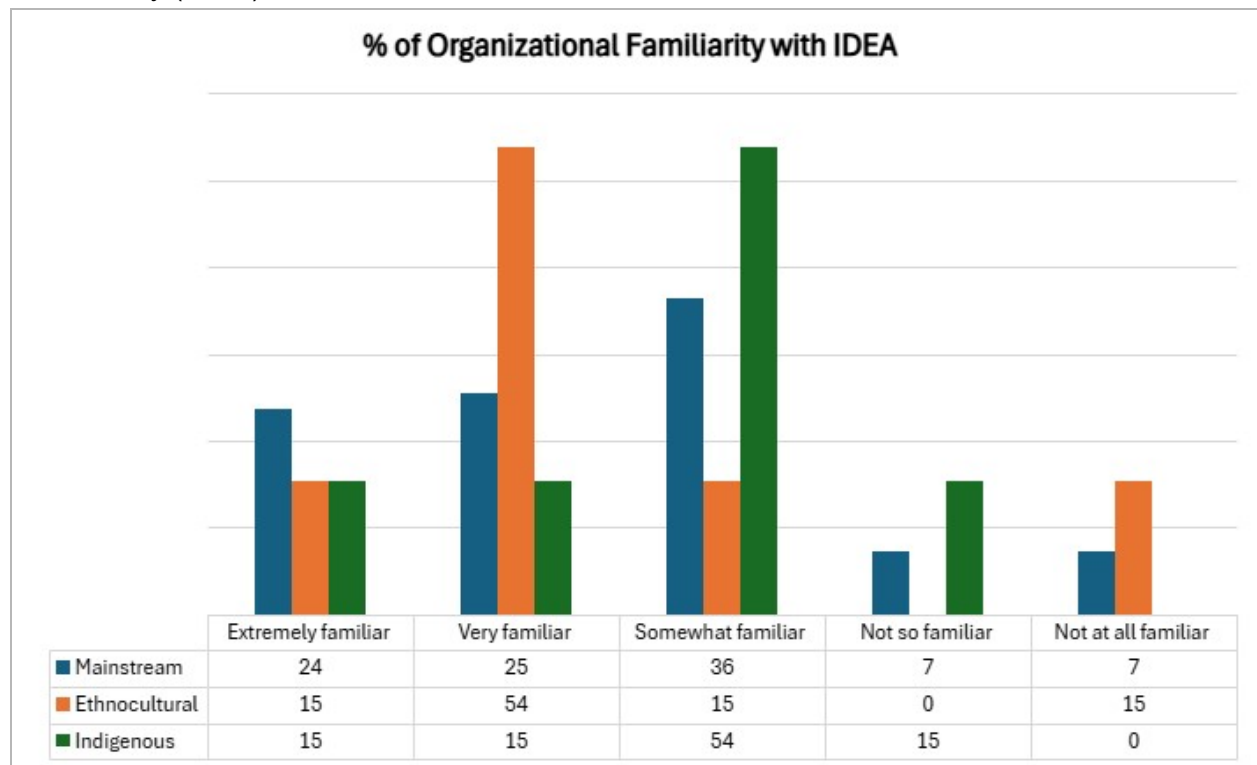


While only a portion of organizations reported heavy reliance on SaskCulture funding, many still identified it as critical to their programming. In the data, 26% said they rely on SaskCulture sporadically (i.e., for project-based work), and 21% reported that SaskCulture provided less than half of their annual budget. Even among groups that described limited financial reliance, participants emphasized that SaskCulture funding helps sustain core work, stabilize operations, and support community connection.

Organizations noted that without this funding, programs would become less accessible, volunteers would face greater strain, and organizational capacity would decrease. Figure 5 reflects a nuanced reality whereby even “limited reliance” is tied to essential impact.

“Although SaskCulture funding is only less than 50% of our annual budget it is very beneficial for our organization, without the funding we will not be able to cover other operational and project expenses that the other funding (which is only linked to a particular program) doesn't cover.”

Figure 6. Organizational Familiarity with the Principles of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA)

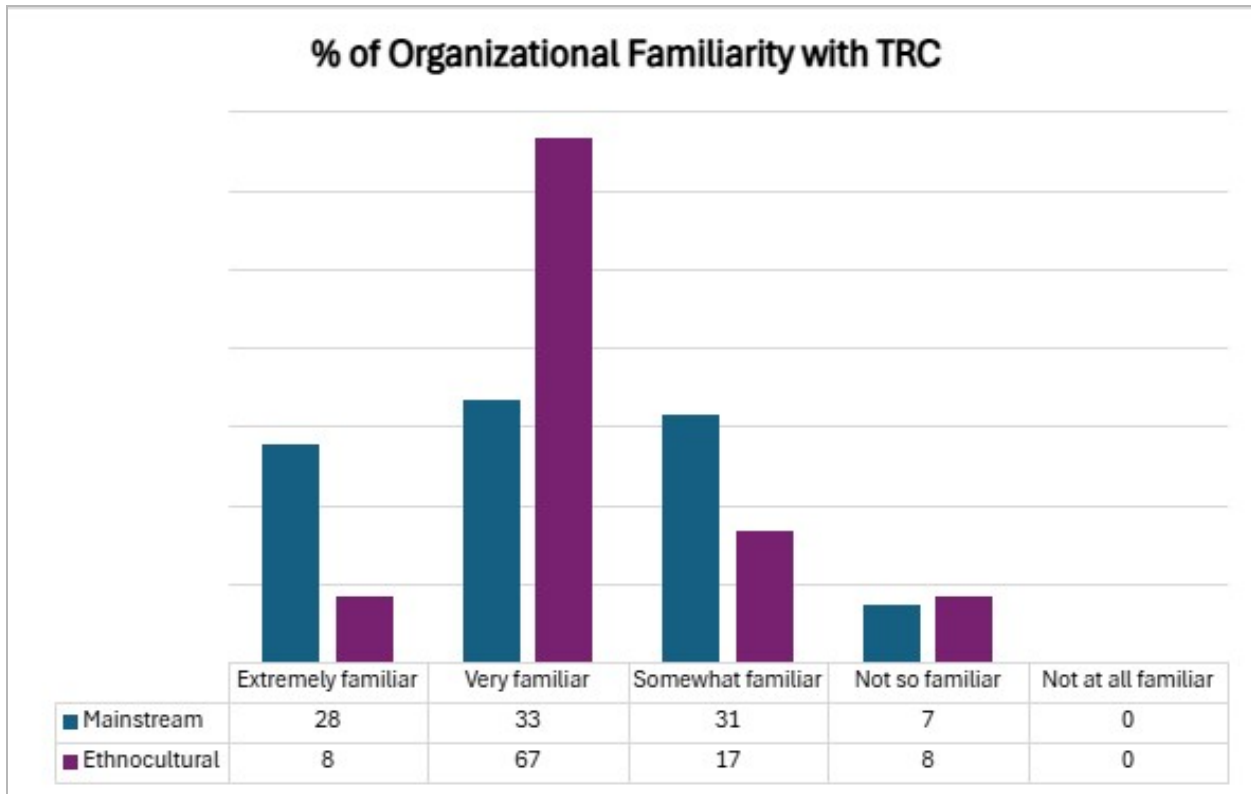


Ethnocultural organizations reported the highest levels of IDEA familiarity, with 69% identifying as “very familiar” or “extremely familiar.” Many explained that IDEA values were deeply embedded in their mandates and lived experiences. While awareness was generally high across groups, implementation remained uneven. Participants described barriers such as lack of funding, volunteer burnout, and difficulty creating accessible spaces or reaching underrepresented groups.

Some also raised concerns that IDEA responsibilities often fall on staff or volunteers from equity-deserving communities who are already overburdened and under-resourced. Figure 6 illustrates that while awareness of IDEA principles is widespread, it alone is insufficient to advance meaningful equity without corresponding structural support.

“The primary barriers to advancing IDEA are limited funding, policy barriers, physical accessibility issues, and lack of awareness.”

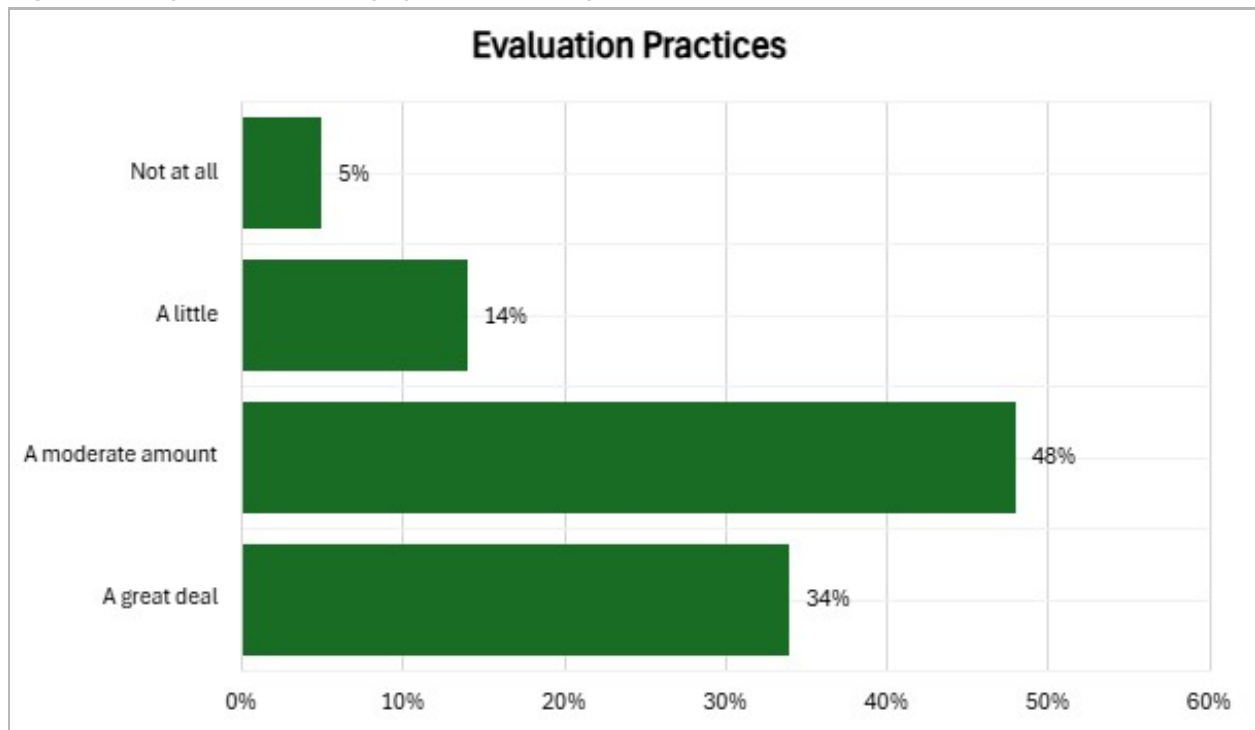
Figure 7. Organizational Familiarity with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action



Ethnocultural organizations once again reported the highest levels of familiarity with the TRC Calls to Action, with 76% indicating they were “very” or “extremely familiar.” Mainstream organizations reported moderate familiarity, and Indigenous organizations were not asked this question, having responded instead to a broader question about what’s needed to advance reconciliation. Participants cited several implementation challenges: difficulty accessing or compensating Indigenous knowledge keepers, the lack of Indigenous people in some communities, and a shortage of staff or volunteers to lead reconciliation initiatives. Rural organizations noted limited understanding of the TRC’s importance and difficulty creating culturally safe programs. Figure 7 reflects a high level of interest in implementing TRC but also reveals widespread structural gaps.

“Many Elders in our area are over-taxed by all the organizations asking for help; funding to be able to pay Elders and other cultural service providers appropriate honorariums/wages; not having TRC and Indigenization embedded throughout our governance/policies.”

Figure 8. Organizational Engagement in Program and Service Evaluation

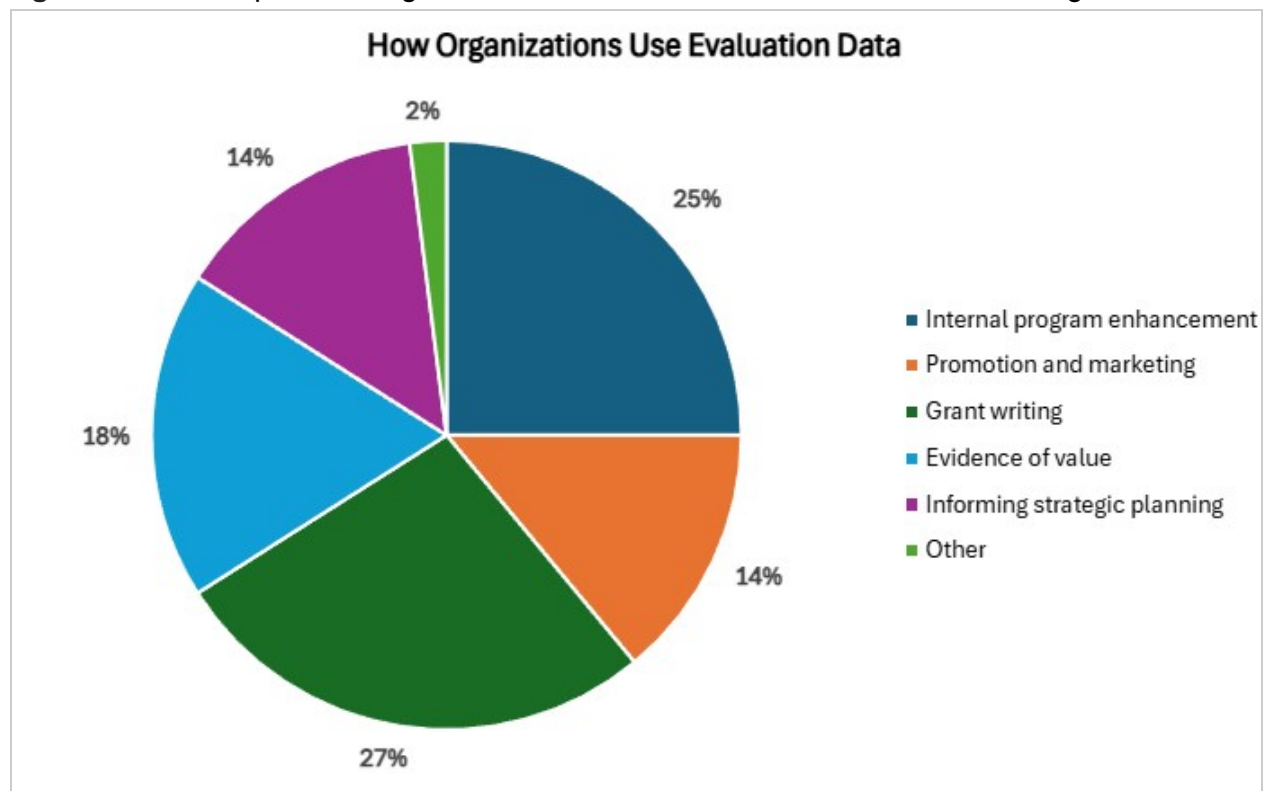


Most organizations reported engaging in some form of program or service evaluation, with surveys being the most used tool, followed by interviews and focus groups. Indigenous and ethnocultural organizations were more likely to employ qualitative methods, such as community conversations and storytelling, to gather insights. Respondents also identified a range of informal data collection methods, including casual conversations, written testimonials, email feedback, social media comments, and Google reviews.

In some cases, small organizational boards functioned as focus groups, meeting regularly to discuss emerging issues. Additional evaluation approaches included tracking attendance, collecting informal feedback and observations, gathering feedback letters, and obtaining input through word of mouth, customer comments, staff suggestions, private Facebook groups, and group text discussions. These varied approaches reflect the adaptive and resourceful ways in which organizations assess their impact, often with limited capacity or formal infrastructure.

"We don't communicate with surveys we talk to each other. If they really want useful information they should sit and talk to us. We know what we need and what works, we always have. Don't tell us what we must do ask us what we need."

Figure 9. How Respondent Organizations Use Collected Evaluation Data and Insights



Evaluation data is most commonly used to support funding applications, particularly grant writing (27%), and to provide evidence of organizational value (18%). While internal uses such as program improvement (25%) and strategic planning are acknowledged, they tend to be secondary priorities. This emphasis on immediate, output-based evaluation is partly reflective of the cyclical and often precarious operating conditions faced by many organizations, especially those in rural areas or with seasonal programming. Thus, evaluation functions primarily as a compliance mechanism to meet funding requirements, and only secondarily as a tool for organizational learning or program improvement.

Participants across all groups also noted that evaluation is typically focused on outputs, attendance, event completion, or satisfaction, rather than long-term impact. Far fewer measure impact on cultural identity, inclusion, or community wellbeing, even though these were described as key goals in qualitative feedback. Participants expressed a desire to evaluate how their programs contribute to connection, healing, and belonging, but said they lacked tools or frameworks to do so. Focus discussions revealed how although evaluation is widespread there remains limits to current methods, especially for measuring cultural outcomes.

V. Findings by Participant Groups

What SaskCulture is Doing Well

Participants across all demographic groups praised SaskCulture staff as approachable, helpful, responsive, and respectful. Communication during the application and reporting process was consistently described as clear and supportive.

The online portal and funding process were considered accessible and straightforward once engaged. Many appreciated the willingness of staff to answer questions and offer guidance, especially for smaller organizations less familiar with navigating the funding system.

Staff were noted for their presence at community events, which helped build trust and demonstrated genuine interest. Where staff showed up with consistency, relationships were strong and experiences positive.

SaskCulture's investment in operational funding, organizational training, and professional development was viewed as essential for sustainability, particularly for smaller and rural organizations. Grants supporting land-based learning, language revitalization, intergenerational work, and culturally specific programs were seen as aligned with community needs. Culture Days and Creative Kids were widely praised for their flexibility and accessibility, allowing broad participation without complicated criteria.

Participants described SaskCulture as one of the few funders supporting culturally grounded programming, including festivals, heritage preservation, youth initiatives, and intergenerational projects. Districts highlighted the value of working with SaskCulture to shape and refine programs and noted the quality of consultants and resource materials as strengths worth maintaining and expanding.

Communication and information sharing were also seen as strong points, particularly when program details were clear, examples of eligible activities were provided, and success stories were celebrated. Participants encouraged continued efforts to clarify programs, increase visibility, and showcase community impact.

Finally, the funding renewal process was recognized as a positive step. Participants welcomed the opportunity to provide input and saw it as a sign of SaskCulture's openness and willingness to evolve alongside the communities it supports.

Mainstream Organizations

Feedback from mainstream participants includes museums, galleries, theatres, festivals, historical societies, arts groups, multicultural organizations, municipalities, youth-serving organizations, and a range of urban, rural, and northern service providers. While many expressed appreciation for SaskCulture's staff and core programs, they also identified key areas for improvement, particularly in program delivery, communication, capacity building, and sector coordination.

Programs like Creative Kids and Culture Days were seen as accessible, flexible, and impactful. The funding renewal process was viewed positively and sparked hope for greater inclusion, increased capacity building, more flexible funding, and sector improvement. At the same time, participants raised concerns about overly complex application and reporting processes, unclear eligibility criteria, and a lack of operational funding, especially for small, rural, and volunteer-run organizations.

A recurring theme was the need for SaskCulture to clarify its role in the sector. Participants encouraged SaskCulture to determine whether it primarily acts as a funder, a program delivery agent, or a hybrid of both. Many noted a shift since COVID-19, from a visible community presence to a more administrative role focused on managing growing funding demands. With application volume doubling or tripling in recent years, organizations urged SaskCulture to reassess staffing models and resource allocation.

There was strong interest in building a provincial cultural network or hub to improve coordination, communication, information sharing, connections, and shared learning. Participants also emphasized the need for a broader definition of culture that includes wellbeing, identity, and lived experience alongside traditional forms of artistic or heritage expression.

Recommendations

1. Define SaskCulture's Role and Sector Commitments

Develop a clear sector vision and Culture Plan that affirms SaskCulture's leadership in advancing an inclusive definition of culture. This definition should be grounded in lived experience, identity, and intergenerational connection. The plan must clearly articulate SaskCulture's role, beyond that of a funder, as a partner, convener, and system leader, with aligned partnerships across Indigenous, Multicultural, Arts, and Heritage organizations.

2. Center Communication and Evaluation as Strategic Tools for Sector Equity

Create a province-wide communications strategy focused on trust-building, transparency, and cultural safety. Prioritize messaging that advances anti-racism, reconciliation, and youth engagement. Commit to reporting back on how community feedback informs decision-making. Include clear social, cultural, community, and economic impact statements based on evaluation that supports stronger sector visibility, championing, and advocacy.

3. Shift Funding Models Toward Flexibility, Equity and Impact

Move away from rigid activity-based criteria toward more flexible, unstructured, community-led programs. Commit to longer-term projects, continuity in program approval, and multi-year funding for a wider range of organizations that can best address community-defined goals with measurable impact. Prioritize funding access for underrepresented groups, small rural organizations, and those delivering long-term, relationship-based work.

4. Fund Sector Human Infrastructure

Expand program design to increase access to operational funding that supports staffing, the delivery costs of implementing grants, wage equity, and succession planning. Explore options to reduce or collectively purchase common administrative costs such as payroll, printing, technology upgrades, insurance, and bookkeeping. Invest in the systems that sustain the sector, not just the programs it delivers.

5. Rebuild Sector Capacity Through Peer-Led Learning and Career Pathways

Fund culturally and community-relevant training, mentorship, and career development for community workers. This should include on-the-job training and leadership pathways. Coordinate capacity-building across delivery partners and, with the Communities of Interest, establish a coordinated training plan to ensure continuity, reduce duplication, and promote equitable access.

6. Establish a Provincial Cultural Infrastructure Network

Build a centralized, accessible sector network that includes peer connection, funding information, regional events, shared evaluation tools, and policy-relevant research. Ensure that this network is co-designed with frontline cultural workers and accessible beyond urban centers.

Indigenous Organizations

Indigenous survey participants, focus group attendees, and community leaders shared feedback that highlights both the strengths and systemic gaps in SaskCulture's funding and support systems. Their insights emphasized the deep interconnection between culture, health, land, language and identity, and called for funding approaches that reflect Indigenous realities and values.

While staff were described as accessible and supportive, participants also pointed to significant challenges including a lack of core and multi-year funding, systemic inequities in access, and the need for trauma-informed and community-defined measures of success.

Participants emphasized that land-based learning, intergenerational programs, youth leadership, and language revitalization are not short-term projects but essential ongoing practices that require long-term investment. Concerns were raised about the complexity of funding applications, the exclusion of grassroots groups, and the continued practice of funding non-Indigenous organizations to deliver Indigenous programming.

The findings strongly called for culturally grounded evaluation tools, access to operational support, and a more flexible, trust-based approach to funding.

There was a strong desire to see SaskCulture evolve beyond the role of funder and act as a partner in reconciliation and cultural revitalization. This includes publicly identifying which TRC Calls to Action are being addressed, hiring Indigenous staff in leadership roles, supporting youth-designed programs, and developing Indigenous-led funding models and decision-making processes. Organizations expressed their readiness to lead but need resourcing, mentorship, and relational accountability from funders to make it possible.

What emerged was a vision of culture as a living system interwoven with healing, wellness, justice, education, and community well-being. Participants called for SaskCulture to build funding structures, partnerships, and policies that reflect this holistic approach.

Recommendations

1. Redefine Culture to Reflect Indigenous Worldviews

SaskCulture should broaden its organizational definition of culture to explicitly include health, wellness, language, land, ceremony, and intergenerational healing. Participants expressed that culture is not a program or output but a way of life. Redefining culture in this way would support more holistic and community-centered approaches and ensure cultural investments reflect Indigenous knowledge systems.

2. Establish Core, Multi-Year, and Flexible Funding for Indigenous-Led Initiatives

Introduce stable, multi-year operational funding for Indigenous-led culture organizations to support continuity, staffing, and community priorities. This funding should accommodate longterm work such as language immersion, youth mentorship, and cultural healing. Emergency and bridge funding should also be available to prevent disruptions caused by short-term grant cycles.

3. Make Indigenous Governance Central to Reconciliation

Ensure that Indigenous communities have a direct role in shaping policies and internal structures that affect them. Create an Indigenous Advisory Circle with decision making power to help shape SaskCulture's strategic direction, funding priorities, and reconciliation commitments. Include Indigenous specific indicators in strategic plans and publicly report on progress.

4. Recognition of Indigenous Evaluation Practices

Support trauma-informed and community-led evaluation approaches by accepting story-based, relational, and non-linear reporting formats that reflect Indigenous values and measures of success. Offer training in Indigenous-designed evaluation and partner with trusted organizations like the Red Circle Planning Group to scale culturally grounded and healing-centered evaluation tools across the sector.

5. Develop a Youth Leadership and Wellness Fund/Flex Fund

Establish a dedicated Indigenous Youth Access Fund that provides small, flexible grants for basic needs such as appropriate clothing, transportation, food, and other barriers to participation in SaskCulture-funded programs and activities. This support should be treated as an add-on to core program funding, not a separate application or a replacement for main project grants. This will better ensure that organizations are not penalized for seeking help to remove access barriers.

6. Simplify and Decolonize Grant Processes

Streamline grant application and reporting systems by reducing technical language, removing unnecessary requirements such as letters of support, and providing real-time assistance. Indigenous grassroots organizations and informal groups should be eligible to apply through sponsorship models or alternate eligibility pathways. Culturally safe mentorship and grant coaching should be embedded throughout the process to build confidence and access for those historically excluded.

7. Integrate Reconciliation Across the Entire Organization

Move beyond project-based reconciliation funding and embed reconciliation principles into the structure and operations of SaskCulture. This includes clearly stating which TRC Calls to Action are being addressed, supporting staff and board reflection on their individual responsibilities and commitments, increased training, and funding community-led reconciliation work on an ongoing, not one-off, basis. Reconciliation must be integrated into strategic priorities, operational culture, and all funding streams, not just targeted grants.

8. Increase On-the-Ground Presence and Partnership in Indigenous Communities

Reinforce SaskCulture's presence in Indigenous communities through consistent, in-person relationship-building, especially in northern, remote, or urban Indigenous contexts. Participants emphasized that trust is built through showing up, not just online or via email. Consider assigning regional cultural liaisons or partnership coordinators to work alongside Districts and Indigenous organizations in co-developing solutions that reflect local strengths, contexts, and priorities.

9. Expand Support for Digital and Technology-Based Cultural Engagement

SaskCulture should create dedicated funding and training opportunities that support the use of digital tools in Indigenous cultural programming. Youth participants emphasized the importance of integrating technology in ways that reflect their realities and interests, including photography, music production, videos, storytelling, and social media.

Ethnocultural Organizations

Ethnocultural and newcomer-serving organizations across Saskatchewan contributed extensive feedback through surveys, interviews, and facilitated sessions. Organizations emphasized the need for more inclusive definitions of culture, expanded operational and youth funding, recognition and connection for newcomer artists and culture workers, targeted support for underserved communities, and evaluation methods that reflect cultural and relational values.

Many participants urged SaskCulture to move beyond a Eurocentric or institutional lens of culture that centers mainstream arts or heritage institutions. For ethnocultural communities,

culture is also expressed through language, food, ceremony, storytelling, and lived experience. Recognizing these expressions as equally valid is essential to creating an equitable funding landscape.

Organizations also called for better outreach, support for collaboration, and a stronger effort to promote the visibility of smaller and lesser-known communities. Black-led organizations in particular shared experiences of structural inequity and the ongoing effects of anti-Black racism. While SaskCulture's IDEA commitments were appreciated in principle, implementation must be resourced, intentional, and reflect the realities of those doing the work.

Participants described exhaustion with short-term, competitive funding and the limited flexibility in program design. Groups serving youth, preserving minority languages, or working in isolated regions face unique challenges that require tailored responses. There was a clear request for SaskCulture to act not just as a funder, but as a proactive partner that supports sustainability, collaboration, and equity across the cultural sector.

Priority areas identified by respondents, and shared by other funded organizations, included core and multi-year funding; youth engagement tied to employment pathways; increased administrative and staffing support; and stronger action on TRC and IDEA commitments.

Recommendations

1. Acknowledge and address systemic inequities in funding

Recognize that Black-led, racialized, and newcomer organizations have faced long-standing underfunding and limited visibility. Ensure dedicated, multi-year operational funding streams for ethnocultural groups that reflect these historic gaps. Ensure that funding is equitably available to groups and organizations outside of the larger cities.

2. Create equity-focused funding streams with tailored eligibility and reporting requirements

Develop funding programs that meet the needs of grassroots, informal, or newcomer-serving cultural groups, including those not yet registered as non-profits. Reduce administrative barriers such as requiring incorporation, audited financial statements, or written letters of support, which disproportionately exclude under-resourced organizations. Offer flexible, accessible reporting formats that accommodate oral storytelling, photo documentation, or basic narrative summaries in multiple languages.

3. Build and sustain BIPOC-led leadership development pathways

Establish advisory roles, mentorship programs, and culturally grounded training for ethnocultural youth and leaders, with honoraria and decision-making influence. This includes representation in governance, program design, and policy input. Expand program criteria to fund greater connection to existing leaders in arts, heritage, multicultural, and Indigenous-funded programs, organizations, and community systems.

4. Embed measurable equity goals across all programs and funding streams

Require clear accountability for how programs serve racialized and underrepresented communities. Track and publicly report who is being reached, the impact it has, and who is being left out. A significant commitment to evaluation that measures equity goals within SaskCulture, community-serving organizations, and across the sector will provide much-needed data to inform and advance SaskCulture's program and service planning.

5. Collaborate with ethnocultural organizations to co-design outreach and engagement strategies

Partner with BIPOC-led and newcomer-serving organizations to design outreach campaigns, materials, and engagement opportunities and approaches that reflect the cultural values, communication styles, and lived experiences of diverse communities and their connection to the cultural mosaic of the province.

Underserved/Unreached Organizations

This section reflects feedback from groups and individuals with little or no access to SaskCulture's funding or support. It includes informal collectives, small ethnocultural organizations, people with limited digital access, unincorporated nonprofits, and those facing systemic barriers such as language, poverty, or discrimination.

Participants shared common barriers to engagement: limited awareness of SaskCulture, assumptions of ineligibility, misalignment between community needs and funding design, and lack of support for organizational growth and leadership development. People with disabilities or low income also noted challenges accessing cultural programs due to costs, location, or lack of physical accommodations.

Despite doing meaningful cultural work, these groups remain outside SaskCulture's reach due to structural barriers. They called for expanded eligibility, more inclusive outreach, and funding that addresses practical barriers such as transportation, childcare, and access to culturally and socially safe spaces. The feedback underscores a need to recognize informal contributions, invest in inclusion beyond traditional models, and design supports that reflect lived realities.

Recommendations

1. Increase Awareness and Visibility of SaskCulture

Promote SaskCulture programs to individuals and communities who may be unaware of available opportunities or assume they are ineligible. Use clear, plain language in outreach and remove jargon that creates confusion or exclusion.

2. Expand Eligibility and Outreach

Allow informal collectives, unincorporated groups, and grassroots organizers to access funding through sponsorship or alternative application models. Provide real-time support to help applicants understand how their work fits cultural definitions. Remove overly technical or

inaccessible language from criteria and ensure that funders offer outreach to groups beyond the existing network.

3. Fund Logistical and Practical Access Needs

Allow applicants to build in costs for transportation, childcare, food, language interpretation, and accessibility support. These are not “extras”, they are essential for equitable participation and should be explicitly eligible in funding guidelines. Work with other funders to identify larger funding supports for updating and improving physical access to buildings and at events.

4. Support Community-Centered Learning Spaces

Invest in shared learning opportunities rooted in lived experience. Fund peer-to-peer exchanges, community-led gatherings, receptions, and storytelling circles that support intercultural knowledge transfer, trust-building, sector inclusion and collective growth.

5. Address Funding Misalignment

Acknowledge that many groups feel forced to reshape their programs to fit existing grants. Revise criteria to support community-defined outcomes, timelines, and practices. Recognize relational work, like Elder visits, cultural mentorship, and land-based activities, as valid and impactful cultural work.

6. Redesign Funding to Reflect Community Realities

Shift away from rigid, pre-defined program structures and create adaptable funding models that reflect diverse community needs. This includes simplified processes, flexible timelines, and culturally grounded approaches that welcome innovation and grassroots leadership rather than restrict it.

Northern Communities

Northern Saskatchewan communities are undergoing profound shifts in governance, leadership, economies, and infrastructure. Centralized systems have replaced many community-driven planning processes, weakened momentum and disrupting long-standing community engagement and leadership structures. With widening economic and social gaps, communities face mounting challenges, particularly in sustaining cultural engagement, integrating newcomers, and supporting local champions.

Participants called for a return to values-based, community-led planning that centers relationships and northern priorities. They noted the disappearance of once-effective regional networks that bridged health, education, and culture, and emphasized the need for culturally grounded planning tools and facilitators who are rooted in local knowledge. There was a strong

desire to see SaskCulture more present and responsive in the region, not just as a funder, but as a trusted partner.

It was noted that a commitment to long-term investment, intersectoral coordination, and culturally relevant training will be essential to reduce systemic inequities and support sustainable, community-defined development in the north.

Recommendations

1. Restore and strengthen regional cultural networks

Work with the SCR Districts and northern community leaders to rebuild collaborative structures that connect culture, health, education, and other sectors. This will support integrated, community-informed cultural planning, relationship-building, and shared advocacy across northern Saskatchewan.

2. Invest in long-term, community-led cultural development

Establish 10-year funding streams that allow communities to plan and deliver cultural initiatives at their own pace and in their own way. Prioritize relationship-building, intergenerational learning, and sustained infrastructure investment.

3. Develop culturally grounded planning tools and facilitator training

Co-create planning tools and training programs with northern and Indigenous partners. Ensure facilitators are equipped to support local priorities, reflect northern values, and bridge planning and cultural engagement. Invest in purchasing and supporting existing Indigenous-designed training and tools and promote adapting or adopting these tools for mainstream use.

4. Increase SaskCulture's presence

Attend northern events and gatherings more regularly. Build relationships through consistent, face-to-face engagement that fosters trust and signals long-term commitment. Explore models of shared program delivery with northern community leaders and sector representatives.

5. Embed culture into planning and broader regional strategies

Develop tools and support that encourage cultural planning. Help promote the inclusion of culture as a goal within organizational and larger-scale community plans. With a broader definition of culture and a more focused emphasis on northern engagement, these plans would promote more funded program activity while reflecting the needs of northern communities.

6. Establish a northern cultural resource hub

Create a central, accessible platform for promoting SaskCulture's programs and services, sharing northern events, tools, evaluation practices, and community stories. Use the hub to support peer learning and cross-community collaboration.

Youth-Centred Organizations

Young people across all demographics shared that culture is essential to their identity, connection, and mental health. They described culture as both traditional and contemporary, expressed through family, land, language, art, technology, and shared experiences. Youth emphasized that their relationship to culture is evolving and often misunderstood by institutions.

Access to cultural programs remains inconsistent. Barriers include affordability, transportation, lack of appropriate clothing or equipment, application processes, and physical or cultural safety. Youth want to be engaged in ways that are flexible, relational, creative, and supportive of selfexpression. They want to contribute to culture and shape the programs intended for them.

Youth who participated in this process shared their experiences with racism, exclusion, and being tokenized. They expressed frustration with systems that claim to prioritize youth engagement but often limit their role to unpaid consultation or limited participation. Many noted that programs for youth are designed without them and are not reflective of their needs, communities, or strengths.

Participants called for programs and funding streams that center youth leadership, are youthdesigned, and reflect the actual conditions that youth are navigating today. They emphasized the need for relational support, mentorship, access to elders and culture keepers, and opportunities for cultural expression through digital and creative tools. They also called for better promotion of programs and opportunities that are accessible through school, community spaces, and online platforms.

Recommendations

1. Identify youth as a strategic priority across all SaskCulture initiatives

Make a formal policy commitment to recognize youth as a priority group across all SaskCulture initiatives. Embed youth perspectives in strategic planning, governance, and program design. Ensure youth voices are included meaningfully in decision-making processes at every level of the organization.

2. Create a permanent, independent Youth Council

Establish a youth-led advisory body with the authority to influence SaskCulture's policy, funding, and programming. Support the council with mentorship, resourcing, and meaningful input into decisions that affect them.

3. Develop a flexible youth-directed funding program

Fund a youth-designed and youth-administered grant stream that offers small, responsive grants for grassroots initiatives, community engagement, and leadership development. Streamline reporting and prioritize funding access.

4. Link youth programming to tangible career and leadership pathways

Connect participation in SaskCulture initiatives to school credit, employment readiness, civic engagement, and resume-building opportunities that reflect youth priorities. Ensure that organizations funded by SaskCulture have the knowledge and resources to do the same.

5. Provide more ways for youth to engage with each other

Partner with youth-serving organizations and youth leaders to provide input into SaskCulture's program priorities, design the framework for the new youth program, and establish the youth advisory council. Expand outreach and leadership opportunities to youth in rural, northern, and equity-deserving communities. Use technology, incentives, and co-design methods that reflect youth culture and lived realities.

Sport Culture and Recreation Districts

All Sport, Culture, and Recreation (SCR) Districts participated in the consultation process, providing valuable insight into the needs and realities of communities across Saskatchewan. Districts are deeply embedded in the cultural landscape, with strong connections to funding programs, community organizations, and individuals. They play a key role in delivering and promoting cultural programming in urban, rural, and remote regions.

Districts affirmed their role as a trusted resource and highlighted opportunities to strengthen collaboration with SaskCulture. They identified a need for more consistent communication, clearer funding processes, and programming that reflects community-identified needs. Districts emphasized the value of SaskCulture's support for inclusion, reconciliation, and youth engagement, and called for a more coordinated, long-term approach to addressing sector-wide issues such as burnout, lack of funding consistency, and succession planning. There was also a shared interest in co-developing a provincial culture network to improve knowledge sharing and maximize collective impact.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen collaboration with Districts

Establish regular communication channels and collaborative planning mechanisms with SCR Districts to better align on regional and provincial priorities, coordinate event delivery, and enhance visibility of programs and services.

2. Remove barriers to funding access

Simplify application and reporting processes, provide clearer guidance on eligibility and expectations, and share examples of successful applications to support grant application success. Districts are positioned to help build increased capacity in communities that experience lower uptake and will work with SaskCulture to assist both successful and unsuccessful grant applicants to deliver effective programs and strengthen their ability to access future funding.

3. Revisit effective past programs

Identify and revitalize past programs that proved impactful in rural, northern, and remote communities, updating them where necessary to meet current realities while preserving their accessibility and relevance. Obtain information from Districts about what they are hearing communities want and what they valued in past programming that is no longer available.

4. Maintain a visible presence

Commit to regular attendance at District meetings and community events to strengthen relationships, foster trust, and gain direct insight into emerging issues and opportunities.

5. Advance IDEA, TRC, and youth engagement

Collaborate with Districts to deliver culturally appropriate programming, raise awareness about inclusion and reconciliation, and prioritize youth voices through direct consultation, tailored initiatives, and leadership development opportunities. Partner with Districts and others to develop joint strategies for addressing systemic issues such as racism, burnout, and succession gaps, including shared training, peer support, and policy recommendations.

6. Support Sector Infrastructure Through a Provincial Culture Network

Collaborate with Districts, sector leaders, and community influencers to co-design and launch a provincial Culture Network supported by SaskCulture. The network would serve as a centralized hub for communication, peer connection, funding updates, and shared learning. Include a dedicated support line or contact system to provide timely guidance, referrals, and access to funding and other cultural resources.

VI. Alignment with SaskCulture's Framework

The work completed in this phase of the program and services review and renewal process does not stand alone. The research and resulting recommendations are part of a larger planning process and must align with SaskCulture's overarching policy and strategic framework, including (but not limited to):

- **The Lotteries Trust Licensing Agreement**
- **Public Interest Priorities:** indicators for the Globals
- **SaskCulture's Cultural Policy:** informing Ends within the Strategic Plan
- **SaskCulture's Strategic Plan:** guiding decisions making

A brief review of these documents suggests that the recommendations in this report align with SaskCulture's mandate and intent, requiring minimal updates to ensure that changes reflect public interest priorities and strategic direction. Specific references to these guiding documents support the potential for change and suggest that such change is both permissible and encouraged.

Advancing the Culture Sector

The report findings emphasize that advancing the Culture Sector overall is a clear priority. This reflects the natural evolution of a system that has been resourced and encouraged to build capacity. As cultural organizations grow and mature, they begin to identify:

- Shared needs that can be addressed collectively
 - Opportunities for shared data and information
 - Gaps in training and a desire for consistent capacity building
 - The value of coordinated sector networks

Organizations across the sector expressed a willingness to collaborate. They are ready to share knowledge, contribute time and resources, and work toward common goals with SaskCulture's leadership. They identified SaskCulture as the most logical organization to provide coordination, strategic support, and sector-wide leadership.

Assuming this role will require:

- A clear and intentional vision
- A realistic, actionable plan
- The reallocation of human and financial resources

This direction supports SaskCulture's vision of a culturally vibrant Saskatchewan and fulfills its mission to unite the cultural community and advance cultural vibrancy across the province.

SaskCulture Cultural Policy (2020)

SaskCulture demonstrates its values by:

- Recognizing strength in common purpose ○ Fostering an inclusive and cohesive cultural community ○ Advocating for culture and a healthy resource base ○ Encouraging cooperation and partnerships across sectors ○ Supporting the contributions of volunteers and cultural workers ○ Sharing responsibility for respectful relationships as Treaty people

Public Interest Priorities

The Public Interest Priorities emphasize the importance of:

- Leveraging resources to advance the sector
- Revitalizing the volunteer network and youth leadership
- Sustaining a culture of continuous improvement
- Ensuring strong collaboration and coordination across delivery networks

Strategic Plan Ends

Under Strategic Direction A, SaskCulture's Ends call for:

- A funding model that is sustainable and adaptable to changing needs
- Support for relevant, impactful cultural programming and activities in Saskatchewan

SaskCulture Cultural Policy: Cultural Impact

SaskCulture is mandated to make a unique contribution to Saskatchewan's cultural development. This includes providing leadership and ensuring that cultural investments reflect the province's evolving needs and diversity.

The sector is in transition. It needs an enabling strategy that focuses on:

- Strengthening relationships and partnerships
- Supporting sector-wide development and delivery
- Prioritizing inclusion, equity, diversity, access, and reconciliation

SaskCulture's Allies and Broader Role

SaskCulture does not operate in isolation. There are existing systems, partnerships, and funding agreements within the broader Sport, Culture, and Recreation (SCR) ecosystem. These include:

- **District Funding Framework**, which supports collaboration on professional development and capacity building
- **The Globals**, who share a mandate to improve quality of life in Saskatchewan through cultural engagement

In the long-term, coordinated SCR action could include:

- Elevating the collective SCR sector
 - Community-based professional development and career connections
 - Shared administrative services (e.g., bookkeeping, technology, printing))
 - Informed research and shared data on economic and social impact
 - Diversified funding, including capital support and wage increases
- Aligning volunteer efforts and engagement strategies to reach youth and equity-deserving populations

With appropriate vision, planning, and coordination, SaskCulture is well-positioned to lead this evolution and elevate the cultural sector across Saskatchewan.

VII. Opportunity Zones

Strategic Considerations: Looking at the Future

Based on the input from the consultations, data gathering, and analysis, three broad focus areas emerged that are reflected in the report's findings and recommendations:

1. SaskCulture Programs and Services
2. Culture as a Sector (elevation, alignment, coordination))
3. SaskCulture's Role and Opportunities – Ideas for Consideration

Respondents offered clear suggestions for how SaskCulture's programs could be made more accessible and relevant to local needs. While most affirmed their progress on inclusion, reconciliation, and youth engagement, thanks in large part to SaskCulture's support, they also identified concerns related to operational capacity, including funding stability, staffing, volunteer retention, board and management development, training, and succession planning.

The cultural sector, they observed, is evolving, yet continues to lack visibility, coordination, and clear leadership. Although key structures exist, such as SaskCulture, ECOs, COIs, the Globals, SCR Districts, and government partners, many noted that the sector remains fragmented. Organizations widely agreed that it is time to advance culture as a more unified and recognized sector. Many established organizations understand the social, economic, and cultural impacts of their work but voiced concern about uncoordinated advocacy, weak data infrastructure, inconsistent training, and a lack of accessible sector standards. Participants emphasized that communication and networking are essential to build on strengths, identify gaps, and work collectively toward a more collaborative future. While SaskCulture has supported some of this work, participants felt there was more that could be done.

They acknowledged the progress but strongly asserted that the current approach is no longer adequate. They believe the time is right, the need is great, and the momentum is growing, and that SaskCulture is well positioned to lead. Across the board, organizations emphasized the need to increase sector capacity, strengthen cohesion, and act with clear vision and intention.

Opportunity

SaskCulture is respected and trusted. Participants noted the value of its contributions to date and expressed a willingness to partner in future sector development. They want to work collaboratively within and beyond the sector and are eager to help move the work forward.

The recommendations below were not provided out of fear of funding loss or political correctness, but from a genuine belief in the importance of this work and a desire for transformational change. These suggestions reflect real experience, a hopeful outlook, and a strong commitment to cultural development.

Increase Awareness about Culture

- Develop a focused communication strategy
- Enhance cultural awareness, education, and engagement
- Provide and promote clear values statements on anti-racism, IDEA, and TRC
- Support collective advocacy and sector championing
- Provide tools to support the creation of community and organizational Culture Plans
- Share data that demonstrates social, cultural, and economic impact

Coordinate and Pull the Sector Together

- Create a vision and coordinated Culture Plan
- Establish a centralized hub for information sharing
- Form and support a provincial cultural network
- Expand research and evaluation that supports advocacy
- Work more closely with Districts and other delivery agents
- Increase support for youth engagement and leadership
- Promote career development within the sector
- Enhance training and support around core competencies and standards

Consider Innovative Funding Opportunities

- Develop a Youth Funding Program
- Establish a Youth Advisory Council
- Co-host a sector symposium and youth conference
- Develop a pilot intersectoral partnership with NITHA
- Expand the scope and support to diversity and inclusion efforts
- Reach underserved populations through targeted program adjustments

SaskCulture Internal Opportunities

- Clarify and promote SaskCulture's role and purpose
- Evaluate how staff time is allocated between the administration of funding and direct service delivery
- Improve internal and external communication and visibility
- Align COIs into four coordinated and representative pillars

- Revisit and enhance the membership model
- Build senior-level partnerships with municipalities and First Nations/Métis systems
- Extend SaskCulture's influence beyond the cultural sector

Adjustment Considerations for Program Improvement

An in-depth program review was not within the scope of this consultation; however, participants shared valuable program-specific feedback that may inform future review and refinement. These insights were drawn from surveys, interviews, and focus groups and are not meant to be comprehensive or evaluative. They are included here as context to inform future planning.

Participants consistently emphasized that SaskCulture's support, especially for new or emerging organizations, is vital and appreciated. Many shared that they are able to achieve significant community impact with relatively small amounts of funding, and they valued the flexibility of certain programs. Others noted that application processes and reporting requirements can be challenging for smaller or volunteer-run groups.

A few systemic challenges were raised:

- The "one grant per organization" rule in limits potential collaboration and community benefit, especially for larger municipalities and First Nations with multiple departments serving distinct cultural mandates.
- Grant-seeking takes significant time, skill, and capacity. Many noted the challenges of finding aligned funders, managing multiple deadlines, and navigating matching funds requirements.
- The SaskCulture website was highlighted as helpful, but participants suggested that aligning programs by eligibility and outcomes would improve clarity for new applicants.

Suggestions for Consideration:

- Allow exceptions to the "one grant per organization" policy where multiple departments or partners are contributing to distinct cultural goals.
- Provide training, mentorship, and funding support to help organizations hire or access grant writers.
- Develop a comprehensive directory or web resource that links to other funding sources beyond SaskCulture.
- Continue to streamline processes and explore innovations that reduce administrative burden.

Program-Specific Input and Observations

Participants also shared feedback on specific programs. While not part of a formal program evaluation, these insights may help identify areas for future review or adjustment.

Aboriginal Arts and Culture Leadership Grant

- *Observation:* Title should be updated from “Aboriginal” to “Indigenous.”
- *Suggestion:* Update terminology and clarify examples of “passive” and “performative” activities.

Community Cultural Engagement and Planning Grant

- *Observation:* Recognized as a valuable tool for aligning culture within broader community planning.
- *Suggestion:* Partner with SARM, SUMA, and Indigenous agencies to promote the program more widely.

Creative Kids

- *Observation:* Viewed as highly effective in public engagement and fundraising.
- *Suggestion:* Explore how the Creative Kids model could inform additional revenue generation or fundraising streams for SaskCulture.

Culture Days Hub Sponsorship

- *Observation:* Highly flexible, but HUB requirements are difficult for some smaller communities.
- *Suggestions:* Remove or relax the HUB requirement where not feasible. Clarify and broaden the definition of culture in program materials and include more examples of eligible activities.

Métis Cultural Development Fund

- *Observation:* Partnership with Gabriel Dumont Institute has increased access.
- *Suggestion:* Consider replicating this partnership model with other organizations. Capture and apply lessons learned.

Northern Youth Cultural Fund

- *Observation:* Effective partnership with the northern SCR District but perceived as a standalone program rather than a regional counterpart to Creative Kids.
- *Suggestions:* Link the two programs in promotional materials to clarify their relationship. Evaluate the northern partnership as a possible model for other programs.

Small Grant Accessibility Program

- *Observation:* Helpful for new or small organizations, but often too limited to support meaningful programming.
- *Suggestions:* Allow additional costs to hire qualified resource people (e.g., knowledge keepers, instructors). Increase flexibility when essential expenses are not covered by other funders.

Multicultural Initiatives Fund

- *Observation:* Program is valued, but timelines and reporting are challenging.
- *Suggestions:* Extend funding periods to 2–3 years for established groups. Simplify and streamline reporting requirements.

Museum Grant Program

- *Observation:* Important across all levels of museums.
- *Suggestions:* Improve coordination between SaskCulture, MAS, and the broader heritage sector. Clarify roles and align structures for better impact.

Annual Global Funding

- *Observation:* Lack of clarity about eligibility and how new organizations might qualify.
- *Suggestions:* Increase transparency around criteria, provincial reach and inclusion on the Minister's List. Encourage interested groups to connect with SaskCulture staff for guidance.

Working Together – The Globals

Participants expressed a need for greater clarity and coordination among the Globals (SaskCulture, SPRA, Sask Sport) and across the broader SCR ecosystem. There is confusion at the community level about which organization funds what, and the lines between “recreation” and “culture” are not always clear in practice.

For example:

- Activities like dance may be considered “recreation” or “culture,” depending on the funder.
- Some groups thought their programs were funded by SaskCulture when they were actually funded by SPRA.

Suggestions for Improvement:

- Increase communication between Globals to reduce duplication and confusion.
- Develop joint public messaging to clarify roles and funding mandates.
- Collaborate more visibly on shared goals such as anti-racism, IDEA, and Indigenous engagement.

- Work together to ensure communities understand how to navigate the SCR ecosystem more effectively.

Models for Consideration

The following models emerged through consultation as potential long-term strategies. While these are not immediate recommendations, they reflect sector priorities that may warrant further exploration by SaskCulture in future phases of strategic development.

1. Sector Cultural Vision and Planning Framework

- Co-develop a 20-year sector vision grounded in equity, inclusion, and reconciliation.
- Broaden definitions of culture to encompass health, wellbeing, and intergenerational impact.
- Align sector growth with clear outcomes: capacity, credibility, recognition, and revenue.

2. Realignment of COIs Using a Four-Pillar Approach

- Establish a more coordinated structure with equitable representation across:
 - Arts (SAA) ◦ Heritage (Heritage SK + MAS) ◦ Multiculturalism (MCoS)
 - Indigenous (potential: OTC/FSIN/Métis Nation)
- Focus this group on joint planning, capacity building, evaluation, advocacy, and program and policy input.

3. Youth Program and Advisory Council

- Launch a youth-managed funding program (suggested \$1M) to support flexible, community-led initiatives.
- Establish a stand-alone SaskCulture Youth Council with advisory authority and leadership development support.

4. Sector Training Strategy and Career Pathways

- Develop a coordinated, tiered training system focused on:
 - Organizational and operational training priorities
 - Sector-wide professional development and leadership training
 - Community-based credentialing or certification for cultural practitioners
- Create and endorse a core set of competencies for cultural work, potentially supported through modular training and peer learning models.

VIII. Participant Comments and Quotes

Much of the data collected during this process was synthesized into summaries and actionable recommendations. In doing so, some of the personal tone, energy, and deep pride in the work being done was inevitably lost, alongside the frustrations of working within evolving communities and a shifting sector. What remains beneath the surface is a powerful reflection of relationships, resilience, and real impact. The following direct quotes offer a glimpse into the voices that shaped our understanding and guided our analysis.

SaskCulture is amazing, it makes such a difference. We are so lucky to have a lottery fund.

I've been in this sector for decades and I see big changes happening. I often wonder if we are keeping up - then I think we are ok and then I'm not sure.

Yes, we have to make our ideas and plans fit into the program criteria (and it isn't always a good fit) but we are used to it. Our dream is that one day the program would fit into our ideas.

If Culture builds community, then racism pulls it down.

77,000 people are employed full time in the non-profit sector and the next generation wants to be involved -- but we can't rely on Volunteering.

Saying that everyone is welcome is no longer ok. I wear my "tell me your gender" pin and people know they are welcome, and it is a safe place.

Creativity and mental health issues are connected. But not everyone knows that.

We do so much with so little. During Covid I bought two thousand dollars' worth of chalk and put it all over the city. Everyone (and I do mean everyone - hundreds of people) picked it up and used it. Such colourful surprises on sidewalks, walls, benches. It kept everyone amused and engaged for weeks. Thanks, SaskCulture - you paid for the chalk!

Everything is changing so fast it is hard to keep up. What's going on in the USA (and even here) is frightening. We have to step up and do it quickly. We don't want to go backwards.

I've been to youth camp, have taken workshops and I have some experience. I need help figuring out how to use it or put it on my resume to show that I know how to put a project together, get people to come to an event, and even how to get sponsors.

I called SaskCulture and couldn't believe how helpful they were. They weren't even the right funder to answer my questions but they did.

Normalizing youth involvement normalizes everyone (whole families) coming into our gallery.

I carry a damp rag in my pocket for texture sensitivity (to keep fingers from being sticky) and just hand it to them (neurodivergent kids without question or comment). They smile and nod their heads – it makes their day.

Although I'm in a paid position - I still do a lot for free.

We have the best projects and results. It's crazy good but we have no way to share them with others. No time, no platform and actually we don't know how to talk about it in an easy way.

Gay people move to the cities because we have scared them away with our ignorance, hatred and redneck attitude. We are one of the most conservative places in the province and I feel like I'm fighting this on my own.

Many of us are on national boards looking at new approaches to board governance and systemic change. We know stuff but there's no way to share what we know.

We are trying to keep our eyes on the big picture and prove our worth.

I don't see myself as part of the arts sector because the work I do is deeply embedded in my culture – it is not a separate thing.

We have an obligation and a responsibility to provide voice for those who can't.

Gangs, guns and drugs are the family business in many of our communities. The kids don't want this to be their life and they have nowhere to go but our program.

What exactly is IDEA? Who is involved and how do we know what to do?

SaskCulture only has a small budget (\$15M). They should go to the government and tell them to match it. This is lottery money and a government responsibility.

Thanks SaskCulture - for all you do and for asking us what we think. Together we are making a difference.