

this town is small

prince edward island's artist-run centre

STRATEGIC PLAN



**2022
-
2025**

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Executive Summary, Lisa Theriault

A brief overview of the past, present, and future of this town is small:

Over the past twelve years, this town is small (TTIS) has established itself as a respected and responsive artist-run centre that is committed to supporting contemporary art across Prince Edward Island. It was established as a non-profit organisation following a series of conversations between Island artists who recognized a lack of opportunities and infrastructures to support the visual arts on P.E.I., especially for early to mid-career artists and artists who work in unconventional/experimental mediums outside of the commercial sphere. TTIS thus began its work, taking a community-centred approach in revitalising contemporary art locally.

In 2011, Art in the Open became the organisation's first major project as a partnership with the Confederation Centre Art Gallery and the City of Charlottetown. The one-day contemporary art festival has since taken place annually and has become known for its energised presentations of artistic projects in outdoor green spaces located across downtown Charlottetown. With a combination of curated and juried projects, the festival brings together both early-career and established artists as well as creative initiatives by community groups, solidifying the impact and the need for a platform for contemporary visual arts. With the growth of the festival, Art in the Open has since incorporated as a separate entity and this town is small has continued to participate in the festival as an active partner.

Executive Summary, Lisa Theriault continued...

Around the time of separation from its most notable project in 2017, this town is small secured operational funding provincially from Innovation PEI through the PEI Culture Action Plan. This enabled TTIS to hire a permanent staff member and develop new programming, all while continuing to operate as a spaceless organisation. Sharing and exchanging resources has become a crucial aspect of increasing capacity within the local cultural sector, and this town is small has built its programming on this model, providing professional paid opportunities to Island artists to exhibit their work with partnering exhibition venues that include farmers markets, community galleries, cafes, breweries, parks, community halls, and more, as well as providing artist residency programs, workshops, artist talks and panels, and other events. These initiatives have covered a wide region of P.E.I., making programming accessible to a range of audiences and communities in unexpected contexts that are also stimulating environments for artists to situate their work.

In 2021, while faced with the COVID-19 pandemic, this town is small has continued to make progress by securing its first major grant from the Canada Council of the Arts, the first step towards eligibility for multi-year funding that would provide higher levels of financial support and a sustained commitment to the organisation. As a growing organisation, TTIS is committed to expanding its community of artists, becoming a hub for the contemporary arts for local artists and creatives through a dedicated space, and supporting challenging artworks being made in the province and in conversation with contemporary art nationally and internationally.

Our intentions with this Strategic Plan:

This plan was developed following two strategic planning sessions with TTIS's staff and board of directors (led by local consultant and artist Kirstie McCallum), also referencing anonymous feedback that was collected from a strategic planning survey that was distributed online. These sessions allowed for discussion around the trajectory of this town is small to date, the successes, failures, areas for improvement, and areas of focus. This resulting document charts a course that integrates the past, present, and future of the organisation according to these discussions, but it is not complete nor is it definitive. We acknowledge the many gaps that exist in a limited consultation and planning process, further complicated as a multifaceted and growing organisation that responds to many needs, and we intend to return to this plan periodically to reflect and re-evaluate on changing circumstances to make adjustments. This is how we can begin to track our progress; This is a living document.

MISSION

this town is small (TTIS) is a leader of contemporary art creation, presentation, and events. We promote dialogue about and access to contemporary art and create opportunities for artists on PEI.

VISION

To foster sustainable contemporary arts practice on PEI by supporting local artists within a regional, national, and international context.

Consultant's Notes, Kirstie McCallum

Since its inception in 2010, TTIS has grown from a volunteer-led artist-run centre to an established organisation with a broad membership, an Executive Director, and contract staff associated with programs. TTIS provides support and creative leadership in the contemporary arts, serving emerging and established artists in a wide range of creative disciplines; its 70+ members are active across PEI in both rural and urban areas. As a growing organisation, TTIS is looking forward to new creative opportunities that will shape its evolution within the arts community of PEI. In 2021 the TTIS board and staff engaged in a series of planning sessions designed to set strategic priorities for 2022-2025, which include the following;

Identifying new funding strategies that will support the growth of the organisation. Maintaining good alignment between staff and programming to ensure programs are well-supported. Developing strong relationships with like-minded partners whose values resonate with the TTIS emphasis on experimentation, excellence, and self-determination in contemporary art. A commitment to identify long term independent venue opportunities for exhibitions, workshops, and other programming. Updates to annual programming that reflect a balance between growth and sustainable operations. TTIS will dedicate time to equity, diversity, and inclusion planning to apply this lens to all their activities.

As an artist-run centre, TTIS puts high importance on empowering artists to set the direction for creative activities in their own communities. TTIS members make vibrant contributions to Island culture, by sharing their work, their skills, and their visions of contemporary art. Prince Edward Island itself offers unique opportunities for artists to engage with traditional and contemporary artistic practices in natural, rural, and community settings of different scales. A strong tourism sector, a growing newcomer community, and access to the natural beauty of beaches, trails, and parks create unique audiences and sites for retreats, performances, and public art, while robust community relationships encourage collaboration between sectors and organisations. Within this rich cultural environment, TTIS remains committed supporting local PEI artists within a broad regional, national, and international context. These values are reflected in the strategic plan for 2022-2025.

GOAL #1:

Supporting experimentation, excellence, and self-determination in contemporary art

2022-2025 Objectives:

TTIS will continue to be led by and work with artists to bring their visions to life. TTIS will advocate for the fair payment and treatment of artists, empowering them to present their work in a variety of contexts while encouraging public dialogue and engagement with their work so that they can sustainably pursue their art practises as independent artists on a local stage. TTIS looks to engage with ever-expanding communities of artists working in this region, broadening our community through relationship building and with focused initiatives.

Gallery Exhibitions:

In the short term, TTIS will continue to work with partner organisations to secure temporary exhibition spaces to provide presentation opportunities to artists that prioritise their visions in engaging environments. In the long term, TTIS will begin the process of obtaining an independent venue for exhibitions & programming, operations, and events. Once secured, this will lead to sustainable opportunities for members and the wider community.

Project: Partnering Exhibition(s) and Presentations (Year 1-2)

Continue to provide professional exhibition opportunities to PEI-based artists with partnering galleries and venues, prioritising exhibitions that share artworks that are created in a variety of mediums and that broaden our community of participating artists and audiences to showcase a wide range of excellence within the visual arts (and acknowledging the multidisciplinary nature of many artistic practices on PEI).

Project: A Space for TTIS (Year 3)

Transition to an independent venue for this town is small in order to present exhibitions, workshops, events, discussions, and more, prioritising a truly self-determined and artist-led vision for programming and increased public visibility of our organisation's work, while continuing meaningful collaborations with space partners that continue to be valuable. An independent venue will also allow for more opportunities to welcome visiting artists.

Rural Presentations

TTIS will continue to develop relationships with rural communities on PEI, supporting and contributing to artistic initiatives within these regions while expanding the reach of our artist-run centre.

Project: Radiant Rural Halls Site-Specific Presentations (Ongoing)

Provide exhibition opportunities to PEI and Atlantic/National artists within rural community spaces, recognizing that many local artists live in rural regions and explore related themes in their works. This project will prioritise performances, community engaged projects, media artworks, installations, screenings, and other experimental art forms.

Arts Writing, Photo and Video Documentation, and Publications: (Ongoing)

TTIS will look to prioritise high-quality photo and/or video documentation of our exhibitions, projects, and events as a best practice and to further the reach of the work of artists. TTIS will also commission writers and produce pamphlets/catalogues/publications to compliment projects or as specific initiatives.

Opportunities for Local Curators:

(Ongoing) TTIS will continue to provide opportunities to local curators who have experience in the cultural sector, are considered leaders/mentors that can productively encourage artists they work with, and have established relationships to a network of artists. Recognizing that opportunities to gain knowledge and experience in curating are limited (to non-existent) regionally, TTIS is committed to providing support for initial curatorial experiences (if capacity allows) or soliciting off-Island curators who may have different regional networks and more experience.

GOAL #2:

Supporting artistic growth and development

2022-2025 Objectives:

TTIS will develop opportunities for artists that encourage learning, skill-development, and growth in supportive and inclusive environments. These activities may include: mentorship opportunities, supportive presentation opportunities, workshops & training, and residencies.

Residencies:

TTIS sees residencies as an opportunity for artists to have focused time for research, experimentation, and production while being immersed in a new environment that contributes to their art practice. TTIS will provide opportunities to PEI artists and artists visiting from off-Island to encourage collaboration, sharing, and exchange.

Project: Rock Barra Artist Residency (Ongoing)

Provide two PEI-based artists with a weeklong site-specific residency, immersed in a secluded environment with beach and wooded trails, that culminates in a public event on the North Eastern shore of the Island in partnership with Rock Barra Artist Retreat.

Project: Radiant Rural Halls Artist in Residence (Ongoing)

Provide an artist with a week-long residency opportunity in partnership with a rural community hall on PEI, prioritising mutually beneficial and reciprocal exchanges for the artist and for the local/artistic communities in areas that may include: encouraging the use of specialised art techniques, exchanges of research/knowledge, expanding community networks, and other collaborative endeavours.

Presentation Opportunities for Emerging Artists:

TTIS will remove barriers for initial exhibition experiences to artists who are committed to the serious pursuit of their art practice through juried open calls for submissions, opportunities on a “first come, first served” basis, and with curated/focused initiatives.

Project: Peake Street Members Exhibition (Ongoing)

In collaboration with Peake Street Studio, provide a group exhibition opportunity on a “first come, first served” basis to PEI-based artists in a supportive, community-centred environment.

Project: TTIS Members' Exhibition and Opportunities (Year 3)

With our own exhibition space, TTIS will present an annual members' exhibition and have other opportunities for members to access space for presenting and creating their work, as well as working collaboratively and sharing skills/resources.

Project: Mentorship Opportunities (Year 2-3)

Continue to provide support on a one-on-one basis through support from Peake Street Studio (and depending on current organisational capacity) and develop a more formalised/accessible mentorship initiative to support visual artists on PEI.

Workshops:

TTIS will continue to offer workshops for artists to develop their skills, learn new techniques, and socialise with their peers.

Project: Workshops (Ongoing)

Continue to provide at least one creative workshop a year, with additional workshops made available as capacity increases. Workshops will initially aim to make links with pre-existing programming of either TTIS or with partnering organisations to draw from resources that are already available to us (artists we are already working with, initiatives that are already in place, utilising equipment/tools that are already accessible, etc.). Over time, workshops could develop into more ambitious and specialised techniques presented by visiting artists to provide exposure to information that is not otherwise easily accessible to local artists.

Project: Radiant Rural Halls Workshops (Ongoing)

Continue to provide at least one creative workshop a year in rural communities on PEI, presented by both visiting and/or local artists, that give insight into techniques, approaches, and equipment that are utilised in the presenting artists' artistic practices, expanding on insights into their work.

GOAL #3:

Community engagement & inclusivity

2022-2025 Objectives:

TTIS will continue to promote inclusivity and access to contemporary art by engaging in public-facing communications, events, and activities that encourage a culture of openness, transparency, inclusivity, and accountability. This town is small will continue to develop initiatives that decenter white, ableist, classist, western, and heteronormative perspectives, as well as other forms of oppression, and that support the cultural independence of the Indigenous nations and communities on Epekwitk and in Mi'kma'ki. This includes educational initiatives for TTIS staff, Board, and the wider community to be better equipped as a supportive organisation that is committed to ongoing reflection, making productive improvements, and reducing harm.

Outreach:

TTIS will continue to promote through a wide variety of communications channels aimed at reaching diverse audiences. Staff and Board recruitment and calls for artists will be inclusive of a wide range of community members, with deliberate attention to historically underserved or marginalised populations. TTIS will continue to host a range of events across Prince Edward Island, reaching different regions and audiences through programming.

Project: Monthly Newsletter (Ongoing)

Project: Continuing to develop relationships and partnerships with diverse community groups and leaders that are invested in artist-led culture and are representative of the population demographics of PEI (Ongoing)

Project: Annual Member Social Events and Discussions (Year 1-3)

TTIS will host community and member events aimed at strengthening relationships, networking, and collaborative opportunities for creative practitioners on PEI.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

TTIS staff and board, at times in consultation with other stakeholders, will develop a plan with goals and commitments for the organisation in areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Initial steps will include reviewing current programming and selection processes (in-progress) and the current audiences being reached, noting gaps and suggesting improvements that can be made.

Project: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) training (Ongoing)

TTIS staff and board will partake in annual DEI training.

Project: Policy, Procedures, and Practices Development (Ongoing)

Integrate the anti-oppression policies developed by Atlantis: Association of Artist-Run Centres from the Atlantic into this town is small policies, through their (TBC) Activating Policies workshop set to take place in summer in Charlottetown 2023. Continue to review policies, procedures, and practices on an ongoing basis.

Project: Accessibility (Ongoing)

Continue to work in collaboration with Creative PEI and Innovation PEI to ensure high standards are met for accessibility, including direct feedback from artist stakeholders with accessibility needs.

GOAL #4:

Organisational sustainability

2022-2025 Objectives:

TTIS has grown from a small volunteer-run organisation to one that employs a full time Executive Director and project-specific contracted staff; it also receives provincial operating funding annually. Looking forward, the organisation will continue to work towards financial and operational stability to support its growth and development. It also recognizes that burnout is an ongoing issue within artist-run culture and looks to improve conditions in the sector and meet high standards as an employer.

Diversifying our Revenues:

Growing from our operational funding support from the PEI Culture Action Plan through Innovation PEI and project support from various funders, TTIS will continue to diversify our revenues by pursuing: Canada Council for the Arts grant programs (eg. Concept to Realisation, Public Outreach, Sector Innovation and Development, and the Strategic Innovation Fund) Skills PEI, Funding opportunities through Rural and Regional Development (PEI Gov.), Rural Jobs Initiative (PEI Gov.), and Young Canada Works for staffing support, Heritage Canada grant programs, City of Charlottetown or other municipal funding opportunities. Sponsorships, fundraising, subsidies (eg. rent subsidies), and other relevant grant programs and funding opportunities as they arise.

Canada Council for the Arts (CCA) Multi Year Funding:

Meet eligibility requirements to obtain multi year funding support from the CCA under our profile as an artist-run centre for increased stability and capacity for our operations and ongoing initiatives

Improving Staff Salaries, Benefits, and Hiring Additional Staff: (Ongoing)

TTIS will continue to work towards employing two full time staff members, improving staff salaries to meet (or exceed) national standards, and offer additional benefits and stipends.

Streamlining Program Offerings: (Ongoing)

TTIS will continue to streamline and adapt programming and activities to align with staff and organisational capacity as it evolves.

Policies and Procedures: (Ongoing)

TTIS will review our policies and procedures annually, updating and adding to them as necessary to reflect the current best practices in the sector.

Professional Development: (Ongoing)

TTIS will look to increase our professional development support to staff, including reviewing training needs each year with staff and establishing funding to support professional development needs. TTIS will work with sector partners who provide professional development supports as well