

## **EM IRONSTAR - “PERSPECTIVES” PRESS CONFERENCE SPEAKING NOTES - March 4th, 2026**

### **WELCOME**

Good morning, everyone. Thank you for being here at The Artesian, and thank you to the staff for hosting us.

My name is Em Ironstar. I’m the Executive Director of the Saskatchewan Arts Alliance, the SAA.

The SAA works to ensure the lively existence and continued growth of the arts and cultural industries in Saskatchewan. We are a collective voice for arts organizations, arts workers, and artists. We represent over 60 arts organizations with a collective reach of about 8,000 individuals across the province.

We are the only organization in Saskatchewan devoted to supporting in-depth primary research on our provincial arts community.

Before I begin, I want to acknowledge that we are gathered on Treaty 4 Territory, the traditional lands of the Nêhiyawak, Anihšīnāpēk, Nakota, Lakota, Dakota people and the homeland of the Métis Nation. As a provincial organization, the SAA works across lands covered by Treaties 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 10.

I offer this land acknowledgement as a recognition of the traditional territories we live and work on today, and also as a reminder that culture is not just a nice-to-have. It’s how communities and people have carried language, memory, values, and belonging since time immemorial.

### **PURPOSE OF TODAY**

We’re here to publicly release a new SAA research report: *Perspectives on the Arts & Culture Scene in Saskatchewan 2025*.

This is a province-wide public opinion study conducted by Inshtrix in fall 2025 with 400 Saskatchewan residents. The sample was built to reflect the province by age, gender, and region using 2021 Saskatchewan Census data, with a margin of error of plus or minus 4.9 percentage points.

Today is about sharing what Saskatchewan people told us. In a way that is useful to the public, the media, and decision-makers heading into budget season.

## **KEY MESSAGE 1: ARTS AND CULTURE ARE VALUED ACROSS SASKATCHEWAN**

Here is the simplest version of what this survey tells us: Saskatchewan people value arts and culture, and that support shows up across the province.

Nearly three-quarters of respondents, 74%, said arts and culture are important to life in Saskatchewan. And this isn't concentrated in one place. We saw strong support across rural and urban communities, which matters in a province like ours.

People also connected arts and culture to the things that make communities feel livable and connected.

Eighty-four percent said the arts improve their local community. Eighty percent said the arts bring people together, and 86% said arts and culture are important for children and youth.

## **KEY MESSAGE 2: GOVERNMENT FUNDING MATTERS, AND THE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDS THAT**

Another clear result is that people understand the role government plays.

Eighty-six percent of respondents said government should maintain or increase support for arts and culture. More than half, 54%, said government should increase that support.

I want to frame this carefully. This is not about politics as theatre. It's about public infrastructure.

Public funding supports the stability required for organizations to plan, hire, tour, and serve their communities consistently. It supports access and inclusion work that doesn't pay for itself through ticket sales. And it helps ensure that cultural life isn't something only a few people can afford.

Public funding for arts supports:

- Professional development and mentorship
- Accessibility
- Community engagement

There are several groups represented in the room today, connected by phone and online, who can speak directly to how public funding translates into real programming, real access, and real impact.

### **KEY MESSAGE 3: AFFORDABILITY IS A BARRIER, AND SASKATCHEWAN PEOPLE ARE NAMING IT**

One of the most important findings, in my view, is about affordability. Eighty-one percent of respondents told us that affordability limits participation in arts and culture. That is a very strong signal.

This matters because it tells us something concrete: people want to participate, but many are being priced out. And in a province like ours, affordability stacks on top of distance.

So when we talk about public support, we also have to talk about access. If we want arts and culture to remain something that belongs to everyone, we have to treat affordability as a policy issue, not a personal or organizational failing.

There are also smart policy options that can support affordability and sustainability, including measures like removing PST from arts and culture events.

### **THE SMALL MINORITY WHO DISAGREE**

The survey does show a small minority of respondents who hold negative views about arts and culture, roughly in the range of 2 to 10 percent depending on the question.

We don't dismiss anyone's point of view. But it's important context: that perspective is in the clear minority, and it also shows us where public education is needed.

Part of why we are here today is to close that gap with facts and with clarity.

## **ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DIVIDENDS: NATIONAL EVIDENCE, SASKATCHEWAN SPECIFICS**

Alongside this Saskatchewan survey, we also want to connect public support to the broader evidence on impact, including economic impact.

A recent national report from the Canadian Chamber of Commerce estimates that arts and culture contribute \$131 billion to Canada's economy and support over 1.1 million jobs nationwide.

But I want to bring it home to Saskatchewan.

In Saskatchewan, the report indicates that arts and culture:

- Supports approx. 20,000 jobs
- Contributes \$2.2 billion in GDP
- Generates \$216 million in tax revenue, including federal and provincial personal and corporate tax

And there's another piece of context that matters here. Saskatchewan has the highest proportion of rural arts and culture non-profits in the country, with 70% of arts organizations located in rural communities. That is Saskatchewan's reality. Our arts ecosystem is deeply rural.

Now, zooming in even further: the SAA also produced a 2023 economic impact report focused specifically on SK Arts-funded organizations. Using audited financial data and standard Statistics Canada multipliers, that report found:

- SK Arts-funded organizations generated \$74 million in economic output within Saskatchewan
- \$92 million in economic output across Canada
- Generated \$50 million in GDP at basic prices, with \$41 million of that in Saskatchewan

It also found that these organizations reported \$46 million in total revenue, and that provincial funding helped leverage significant additional support from other sources.

I also want to add a bit of context about what it means to talk about “economic impact” in the arts.

First, artists and arts workers pay taxes. We are part of the tax base, like everyone else, and we want those dollars spent wisely. We care about strong public systems and good governance because we live inside the same realities as everyone else.

Second, most artists are entrepreneurs. Many artists and arts workers are effectively small businesses, doing contract work, managing projects, hiring collaborators, renting space, purchasing supplies, touring, and taking on real financial risk. The arts are a labour force, and they’re also a network of micro-enterprises.

And third, the Artworks report from the Canadian Chamber of Commerce makes a point that I think is especially important in Saskatchewan. It says the arts and culture sector “offers an economic premium” compared to other major sectors, including manufacturing, oil and gas, and agriculture. In other words, this sector serves as an economic driver in ways comparable to industries we more readily recognize as “real” parts of the economy.

So when we talk about investing in arts and culture, we are talking about a sector. We are talking about jobs, GDP, tax revenue, and community stability and vitality. We are also talking about a workforce that is already contributing and already building value, often with fewer supports than people assume.

## **CALL TO ACTION AND CLOSE**

So today’s message is steady: Saskatchewan people value arts and culture. They support public investment, and that investment yields strong returns. They want their kids and their communities to have access to the arts and the improved quality of life that brings. And they are telling us affordability is a barrier we can address.

I’ve been holding onto a line from Michelle Chawla, the CEO of the Canada Council for the Arts, because it captures what I think many people are feeling right now. She said: “The arts make three impressive contributions all at the

same time: build the economy, express uniquely Canadian experiences, and improve quality of life and wellbeing.”

That’s what this research points to. People are turning to the arts because they help us build, connect, and imagine. They help us stay human in hard times, and they help our cities, towns and communities feel like home.

Thank you for being here.

Before we move to questions, I want to repeat that we have additional spokespeople available today who are joining us from outside of Regina. Jesse Campbell from the Mann Art Gallery in Prince Albert and Nicole Theissen from the Station Arts Centre in Rosthern are available by phone or Zoom following my remarks.

We also have folks in the room representing arts organizations who have volunteered to be available to the media today. And I especially want to encourage you to reach out to Jesse and Nicole. Rural perspectives and voices are essential to this conversation in Saskatchewan, and while we’re holding today’s press conference in Regina, the arts ecosystem we’re talking about spans the entire province.

I’m happy to take questions.