



# Connected Dots: **A One-stop Digital Platform for Ethnic Artists**

Executive Brief

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# Connected Dots: **A One-stop Digital Platform for Ethnic Artists**

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## INTRODUCTION

This white paper is preparing the research, justifications, and the basis to implement a digital platform for ethnic artists in Canada, the Connected Dots platform. It has infinite possibilities and ample scope to bring diverse voices together; in the multi-cultural tapestry of the Canadian creative economy, and in the aftermath of the COVID pandemic, the Connected Dots platform is envisioned to help create sustainable, meaningful discoverability, exposure, and career support to help ethnic artists and arts professionals. Connected Dots platform aims at providing the means to facilitate cross-disciplinary cultural collaboration and dialogue. It is intended to transform the ability of ethnic artists to access and connect with each other and with the public, by providing opportunities to collaborate, share knowledge, and build civic and artistic powerbases.

This platform is expected to be a modern digital stage where artists, performers, curators, researchers, as well as the general public can engage interactively on several levels. The ethnic artists' profiles, consisting of short biographies, samples of their work, and exhibitions will underpin this multi-layered platform. These artists' profiles will then be connected to four other components in an interactive environment, where artist management services, arts education, art marketplace, and virtual performances come together. Tirgan as an organization will help populate this interactive environment with various artistic disciplines and activities. In the process the system will be identifying the common elements to connect them while reorienting and expanding the corresponding details.

## THE GAP

Today, the survival of Canada's art and cultural ecosystem is at stake. Venues and festivals, for instance, have been threatened by exponentially rising rents, taxes, and insurance rates, development pressures, and a shifting entertainment landscape (Nordicity, 2020). More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought many artistic and cultural activities to a standstill, with no immediate prospect of a return to the way things were. The pressure of 'going online' is here for good and one can expect it to stay and change some of our practices forever.

Online platforms such as social media and personal websites are dissolving the gap between the artists and their audience. However, artists and arts organizations must respond to new intermediaries such as search engines, applications, streaming services, online booksellers, and on-demand downloading options. Simultaneously, newcomers and ethnic artists, one can argue, face more complicated

challenges. They experience seasonality, a prevalence of limited-duration and part-time contracts, a reliance on volunteerism and low wages, and insular professional networks, among other of the sector's characteristics (Work in Culture, 2021).

## METHODOLOGY

This paper draws upon both qualitative and quantitative approaches to investigate in what ways the Connected Dots platform can benefit the ethnic artists in Canada.

- We first portray the art sector in Canada through the characteristics of (ethnic) artists and art consumers and their relationship with the internet and the digital world.
- Further, we use stakeholder engagement to understand the context and its implications for individual artists and art organizations in Canada before, and during the pandemic through stakeholder consultation meetings:
  - In-depth interviews with artists were conducted between February and April 2021
  - Online surveys were distributed and analyzed for a wider outreach and feedback about the platform's ideas
  - Stakeholder consultation meetings were also held with 14 stakeholder organizations at the federal, municipal, and local levels.

## KEY FINDINGS

- According to the census in 2016, there are 158,100 artists in Canada, representing almost one percent of the overall **labor pandemic force** (0.87%). Also, more than one-fifth (22%) of artists in Canada are musicians and singers, 18% and 17% are authors/writers and producers/directors/choreographers, respectively and 13% are visual artists.
- In terms of **art consumption** in Canada, Allophones (or those who speak a language other than English or French at home) are more culturally active than Anglophones or Francophones across the country (Culture Track Canada, 2018).
- While Ontario and British Columbia reside with most artists, they are not **where art is consumed** the most, with Québec and Prince Edward Island residents engaging in the greatest number of cultural activities (Culture Track Canada, 2018).

- In Canada, there are limited attempts at creating digital platforms for artists. CultureBrew.art, Art in Canada, and the Virtual Platform for Indigenous Art by OCAD, are the only close examples.
- According to our **stakeholder map**, artists of different disciplines, local art service organizations, and artist managers are our key stakeholders, when it comes to attracting the right and best audience to the website.
- We had **in-depth interviews** with 19 artists, who embraced the idea of being part of this platform, in the hope of getting more exposure to the world. Most of these artists participate in **educational activities** and are open and willing to offer online classes on the platform. The need for a stronger **virtual presence** was confirmed by our participants and more importantly, **connecting with other artists and art organizations** was expressed to be their motivation for participating in this project.
- Earning a living out of their art, understanding the trends, and self-branding have been some of the **challenges** articulated by the ethnic artists that we interviewed. The pandemic has made it extremely difficult for many of our interviewees to produce high-quality work or teach art classes, especially those related to performing arts.
- The **incentives for participation** in the Connected Dots program, have been mentioned to be getting a wider audience, inspiration, and teaching, among others.
- Almost two third of the artists in our survey believe that there is a need for a digital platform to **improve artists' activities**. 72.4% of our respondents could not participate in events, exhibitions, festivals, and shows due to the lock downs during the COVID pandemic. As a result of not being able to physically present themselves and their work, 58.6% expressed difficulties in terms of finding customers, selling their artwork, and more generally, being present to the public.
- While 70% of artists in the survey are teaching art classes, a slightly less percentage (65.5%) are willing to teach online courses on the Connected Dots platform. The survey results showed a higher interest in the marketplace, where almost 80% of the respondents expressed their willingness to put their artwork in the platform's marketplace.
- Through in-depth discussions in the stakeholder meetings, the need for this digital platform was confirmed by art organizations. Art organizations sometimes work in silos and if a platform can facilitate communication between the organizations and the artists, it will benefit the industry as a whole.
- The possibility of partnership and collaboration through linking networks and sharing workshops, funds, and other resources was discussed and agreed upon during these stakeholder consultation meetings.
- Some of the limitations that the stakeholder representatives discussed include: 1) implementation of the platform; 2) digital literacy of artists; 3) funding opportunities and sustainability; and 4) partnership forms and scope.

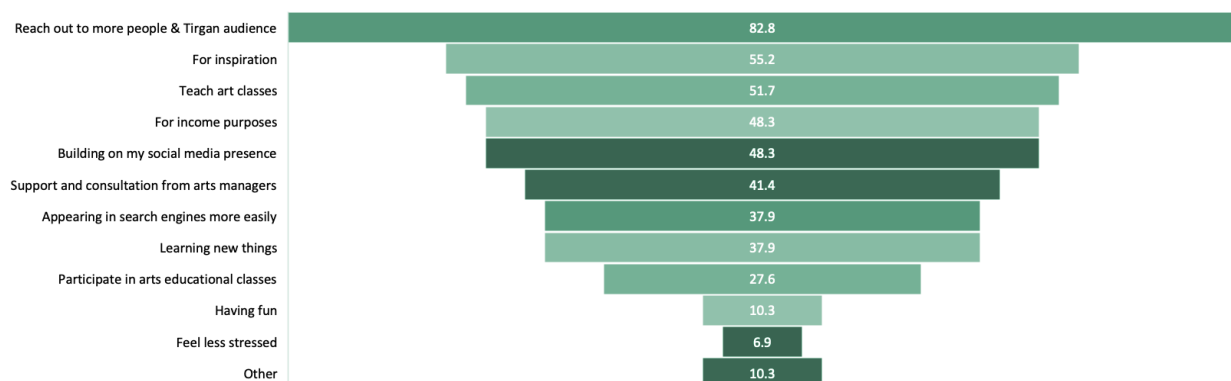
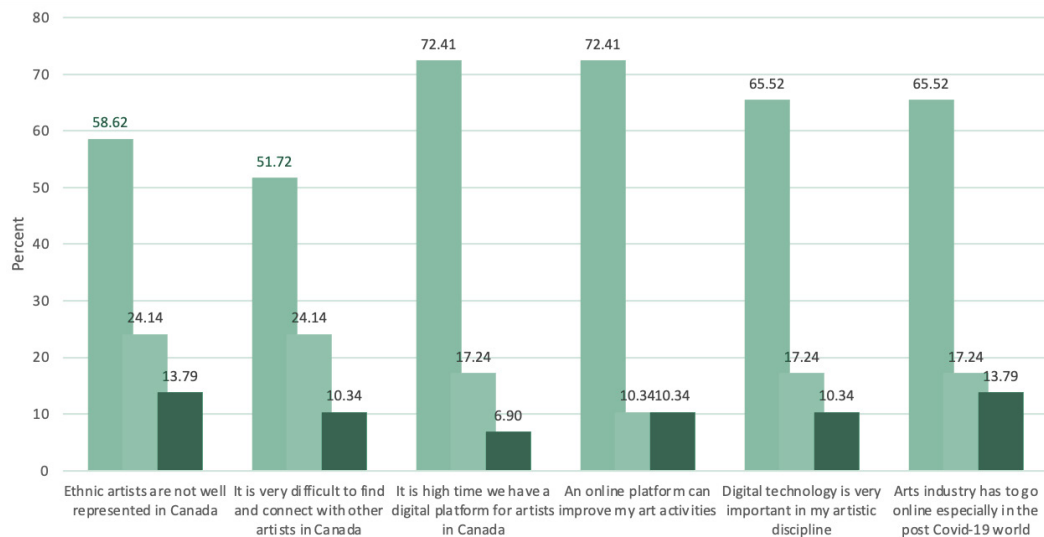


Figure ES1- Incentives for participating in the Connected Dots platform- in percent

**Figure ES2- Artists' opinions on their challenges in Canada**

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### *The Canadian ethnic artists' digital repository (CEADR)*

- The profiles will provide a reliable and updated repository of artists within Canada, where other artists, the public, art promoters, curators, and producers can easily find them based on strong filtering tools. In other words, the profiles will expose the artists to a large and global audience and provide them with new advertising and promoting opportunities.
- It will also be a space for the artists to connect to each other, enabling collaboration on a diversity of projects. The profiles will be an interactive place for artists to find each other and expand their artistic and cultural experiences. Since the purpose of these profiles is to enhance the exposure and discoverability of the artists, they must be encouraged to provide detailed information about themselves (they can use whether that will be visible to the public or not).
- The ethnic artists profiles will include artistic features (such as disciplines, medium, tools, and teaching experiences), socio-demographic features (such as gender, age, languages, nationality, and work experience), and other features (including biography, social media links, personal website, tags, and the number of followers and likes).

### *The Virtual Performance Component*

- The Connected Dots platform will be able to present high-quality, monitored, and moderated content that focuses on ethnic performing artists and serves as a digital space to create collective memories.
- Access to a variety of arts performances, events, exhibitions, and festivals will be provided to the public, and will offer a combination of free and ticketed performances to excite audiences and encourage the public to use the website.
- The key features will consist of a box office, a live and pre-recorded performance section, backed up with strong filtering and discoverability features including but not limited to language, nationality, age-restriction, and medium or style.

### *The Art Education Component*

- This component will provide a safe place for individual artists, arts educators, and art institutes to share their skills and knowledge through one-on-one and group lessons and workshops, where the quality and consistency will be maintained and monitored by Tigran's team.
- It will also focus on enhancing learning standards through professional development using conferences, workshops, webinars, and publications. There will be both free, open-to-all classes as well as paid courses in this component, for everyone to use. We have also envisioned a mentorship program, with a focus on ethnic artists and newcomer professionals.

### ***The Art Marketplace Component***

- By creating a comprehensive and diverse online market where users can have access to a diversity of artworks and art-related services.
- This component will help financially sustain the platform, while connecting the artists to the bigger audience, empowering them to broaden their reach to a much larger pool of art appreciators and potential consumer base.

### ***The Artist Management Component***

- This component would enable artists to focus on their creative activities while outsourcing all other administrative, logistical, and legal formalities to the Connected Dots agents.
- Tirgan can establish the set-up, connected to experts with whom the artists can consult, free of charge or for a small fee, for further assistance or specific management services.
- Key sections here can focus on all administrative services regarding artists' contracts, legal services, negotiations on behalf of artists, accounting, and publicizing services, CV and portfolio preparation, and marketing and graphic design services.

## **IMPLEMENTATION AND SUSTAINABILITY**

- Connected Dots needs to be designed in a manner whereby the user enters the artists' repository (CEADR) in an inviting visual interface to explore art and the artists along other opportunities.
- The implementation has been suggested to follow five phases (including the research phase). The scope and outreach to both artists and the audiences, need to be planned and phased separately, to strategically attract all ethnicities of all disciplines to the platform.
- The access and content will be moderated by a specialized team hired by Tirgan to ensure accuracy, consistency in content, format, delivery and to take care of the legal and copyright aspects.
- Identifying potential revenue sources at developing and maintenance stages, we have provisioned a revenue model to make the project sustainable by generating returns from four of the components.
- Accessibility, affordability, and approachability are key to the success of this project.

## **PROJECT TIMELINE**

Given the large scope of this platform and the complicated legal requirements, while duly recognizing that it is vital to have the legal team involved in the design and structure of the user interface(s), data collection, management, and storage systems; a timeframe of about 4 years, between June 2021 to October 2025 is allocated in the table below.



**Table 1- Anticipated project timeline for the Connected Dots platform**

	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22
Arts Education (Honar)	Feasibility Study - Business Plan	Data Collection and Analysis		Coding				Testing and Improvement	
	Marketing and Outreach to art schools, university programs, art educators, and mentorship programs								
	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22
Repository	Feasibility Study - Business Plan	Data Collection and Analysis		Coding				Testing and Improvement	
	Marketing and Outreach to artists, art organizations, and similar platforms in Canada								
	Feb-23	Mar-23	Apr-23	May-23	Jun-23	Jul-23	Aug-23	Sep-23	Oct-23
Virtual Performance	Feasibility Study - Business Plan	Data Collection and Analysis		Coding				Testing and Improvement	
	Marketing and Outreach to performing studios, groups, organizations, and performing artists								
	Feb-24	Mar-24	Apr-24	May-24	Jun-24	Jul-24	Aug-24	Sep-24	Oct-24
Art Marketplace	Feasibility Study - Business Plan	Data Collection and Analysis		Coding				Testing and Improvement	
	Marketing and Outreach to individual artists								
	Feb-25	Mar-25	Apr-25	May-25	Jun-25	Jul-25	Aug-25	Sep-25	Oct-25
Artist Management	Feasibility Study - Business Plan	Data Collection and Analysis		Coding				Testing and Improvement	
	Marketing and Outreach to artist managers and related organizations								

## REFERENCES

Starting with the Tirgan community, this platform will need to expand its reach and understanding to other ethnic groups. Ultimately Connected Dots will evolve into a sustainable platform and contribute to the digital art environment in Canada and the world. The art and culture that we preserve, carry, and promote will ease migration and transition for new ethnic artists while strengthening the existing and emerging trends and arts activities.

- Nordicity (2020) Re: Venues, A Case and Path Forward for Toronto's Live Music Industry. Prepared for Canadian Live Music Association, Toronto, ON.
- Work in Culture (2021) Navigating a Career in the Arts for Newcomers, Findings and Recommendations.
- Culture Track Canada (2018). Culture Track: Canada, Business / Arts. LaPlaca Cohen, Nanos Research. LaPlaca Cohen Advertising Inc. Business and Arts



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