

SHARED GROUND

Big Ideas. Bold visions.

On June 25th, Arts Ottawa launched its Shared Ground initiative at 300 Sparks Street, marking the first step in transforming Ottawa's downtown into a vibrant ACE District (Arts, Culture, Entertainment) by 2026. The event brought together artists, community leaders, business innovators, and cultural thinkers to explore the potential of revitalizing vacant spaces, including two historic theaters and empty office and commercial spaces, into thriving arts and culture hubs.

The day began with a tour of the underused spaces, followed by a series of workshops and activities designed to help participants consider how these spaces could be reimagined.

THE KEY OBJECTIVES OF THE EVENT

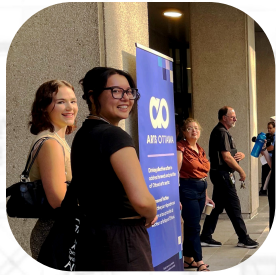
1. **Launch the Shared Ground initiative** and introduce the ACE District vision to the community.
2. **Engage diverse stakeholders**—artists, planners, developers, and community members—in shaping ideas for adaptive reuse of vacant urban spaces.
3. **Identify the needs of the arts ecosystem**, including spatial, economic, and social infrastructure.
4. **Explore models for sustainable activation**, including “meanwhile use” of spaces and revenue-generating strategies.
5. **Co-create a collective vision** for the future of downtown arts infrastructure through interactive design and planning activities.



Session One:

Kwende Kefentse from **Memetic Media** led the first session, encouraging participants to reflect on their roles in the arts ecosystem.

Through worksheets, attendees identified the spaces that are critical to their practices and explored how these spaces connect to the broader community. This exercise allowed for a collective understanding of how arts spaces support local culture and what resources flow in and out, highlighting both the opportunities and challenges faced by the sector.



Session Two:

The second session, led by Alex Glass and Eva Hellreich from **ArtsBuild Ontario (ABO)**, provided valuable insights on activating temporarily vacant properties for cultural use.

They shared ABO's work on providing artists with access to studio space in "meanwhile spaces" and shared lessons from their pilot projects. Their presentation emphasized the importance of community involvement in shaping spaces and addressing challenges through responsive, community-driven solutions.

We ended the day with an activity focused on two questions.

One highlighted immediate community needs, while the other reflected the long-term desires of the community.



The first question asked how attendees would approach activating them if they had immediate control. The most consistent responses centered on making the spaces accessible and creating meaningful connections with local neighbors, potential partners, and individual champions. Participants also emphasized the importance of revenue generation, with suggestions for funding that could feed back into the spaces and community while maintaining an affordable, arts-centered approach.

For the second question, which asked participants to envision the spaces by 2030, there was broad agreement around the need for studio spaces, co-op or affordable housing for artists, and utilizing the ground-level space as a commercial venue that could subsidize these projects. Suggestions included turning the commercial area into a café, art supply store, or exhibition space, with the possibility of transforming it into a music venue or other alternate use during evenings. Most responses also supported utilizing the theater spaces as a multipurpose community venue—a flexible space that can serve the needs of the local community while remaining affordable and accessible.

The Shared Ground event was an inspiring day of collaboration, offering valuable insights into the types of spaces Ottawa's arts community needs. It set the stage for future efforts to transform underused urban spaces into cultural assets that will contribute to a more vibrant, inclusive, and resilient downtown.

The vision shared at this event will inform ongoing efforts to activate the ACE District and create sustainable, arts-forward spaces that support both creative practice and community life.

Next Steps:

- ★ Document & Disseminate Key Findings
- ★ Refine ideas for activation, explore collaboration models
- ★ Host follow-up roundtables or working groups
- ★ Begin co-designing pilot projects.

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