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TAMRMS#: B06

Amplify Festival Funding

Presented by: Paul Pearson, Manager, Creative Industries & Cultural Development

RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Community Living Standing Committee recommend to Council:

1. That the St. Albert Amplify Creative Youth Development Program be transitioned into Community Services' regular cultural development work within the purview of the Community Cultural Coordinators and;
2. That Budget Motion PM-20-084, approving separate project funding for the St. Albert Amplify Festival in the 2021 and 2022 budget years, be rescinded.

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide a plan to City Council for transitioning the St. Albert Amplify Festival into a self-sustaining program (cost recovery) as directed by Council on November 21, 2019 in the motion set out below under the heading "Alignment to Council Direction"

ALIGNMENT TO PRIORITIES IN COUNCIL'S STRATEGIC PLAN

N/A

ALIGNMENT TO LEVELS OF SERVICE DELIVERY

Community Event Hosting: The coordination and delivery of arts, cultural, environment and recreation and parks events utilizing a combination of City and volunteer resources to expose the community to recreation, arts, and culture. Amplify Youth Festival Provides arts and cultural workshops, projects, performances, and entertainment opportunities for students grade seven to age 21.

ALIGNMENT TO COUNCIL DIRECTION OR MANDATORY STATUTORY PROVISION

On November 21, 2020 Council passed the following motion:

PM-20-084 That Amplify Festival is funded for \$60,000 in 2020, \$45,000 in 2021 and \$30,000 2022; and that a plan for transitioning into a self-sustaining program (cost recovery) is presented to Council by October 30, 2020.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

History

In 2012, City Council approved a Business Case empowering the development of a Youth Festival by what was then the Cultural Services department. This Business Case included the understanding that the approved funds would be allocated towards both project supplies, artist fees and rentals, and an additional contracted staff member to coordinate the project-eventually referred to as the Youth Festival Associate-as the department's staff resources were at capacity.

The cornerstone of the plan was to assemble and manage a youth advisory committee to not only advise staff on the cultural needs of youth, but to also actively participate in the marketing, programming and execution of the youth festival. This steering committee would provide a leadership opportunity for youth in St. Albert, allowing youth both input into shaping their community and the responsibility to do the work to accomplish their vision. The first advisory committee was assembled in 2013 and the first festival was held in 2014.

In 2014, the first event followed a two-day festival format. Guided by the Committee, it was determined that the festival would work on three levels:

1. Barrier free activities: free, accessible activities for beginners, that would encourage youth to explore without fear of judgement or financial barriers.
2. Educational workshops: a richer engagement for youth who were eager to learn more, for a nominal fee in order to maintain accessibility, while ensuring a commitment from registrants. They were required to be outside of the regular arts curriculum-in other words, we would avoid what was being taught at school or find some way to make the lesson unique (for example, bringing a practiced professional).
3. Presentation opportunities: a platform or outlet for youth ready to share their art. Examples of this would be the acoustic stage, the battle of the bands, the poetry slam, the art gallery, and the collaborative art pieces.

Programmers were careful to avoid redundancies with other youth programs, consulting high school and junior high school art teachers to complement, but not copy, their lessons. It was quickly apparent in our conversations that the presentation opportunities would be the linchpin of the event-the step beyond the classroom and the void Amplify would be most adept at filling.

The last pivotal programming choice made in the first year was the unique decision by the Advisory Committee to make it a parent free zone. Many, if not all, youth programs rely on parents to fill the seats and pay for the tickets. This would decrease potential revenue, but the Advisory Committee was adamant: Amplify would be for youth, by youth.

Within that first year several significant learnings were made.

1. Not all the goals of the program and the activities imagined by the Committee were best

accomplished in the festival format. While the festival was vibrant and exciting, some skills just couldn't be developed in two days. Examples include filmmaking, fashion design and long-form writing or storytelling.

2. Programmers discovered grant funding for youth-led initiatives that was inaccessible for an annual festival but would capitalize one-off youth imagined projects and activities.

3. The Committee also identified that we needed a stronger digital presence, which required both a year-round commitment to content and the creation of original content to work with both Facebook's and Instagram's algorithms. (Briefly, these algorithms reward consistent posts and consistent interactions with followers.)

4. The Committee was eager to do more. While they were happy with their level of responsibility during the festival-itself, the feedback they gave after that first year was there was an opportunity for them to do contribute further.

The result was that the Committee started to experiment with programming outside of the two-day festival using grant funding from outside sources, like the Edmonton Community Foundation and Rising Youth, and sponsorship dollars, which lead to the creation of the Amplify Creative Youth Development Program.

In 2019, Amplify Creative Youth Development Program supported or executed more than 30 projects, activities or events from January to December. Amplify was able to provide a performance or presentation platform to youth 350 times over the course of the year and we engaged over 2000 participants in our programming. Lastly, the Advisory Committee contributed over 1347 volunteer hours to bringing their programming ideas to their community.

Current Situation

The Amplify Creative Youth Development Program has changed the landscape of arts development in the City of St. Albert. This unique, St. Albert-built model combines the tenets of youth work and the City's commitment to the 40 Developmental Assets with the Community Services' cultural development objectives creating a cross departmental success.

While each success story is individual to that particular young artist, the result has unequivocally been a more robust cultural scene. Amplify has supported artists and encouraged their development to the point where "Amplify Alumni" have grown into touring artists, released albums, filled local venues, like Confections Cake Co or the Bourbon Room, and more. Our current Poet Laureate has performed at every Amplify since its inception-first as a youth, then as mentor. The examples are many.

However Covid-19 has also changed the landscape of event and arts programming for the foreseeable future, not only for safety reasons but also for financial reasons. Given the financial fallout from Covid-19, coupled with the uncertain future of large cultural gatherings, we recommend Amplify cease to function as an outside, annually reviewed project, and instead find a home within the City's regular cultural development work, executed by our City's Community Cultural Coordinators.

The success of the Amplify model will inform the City's approach to youth-based cultural development as we navigate our limitations during this pandemic and leave room for growth in a post-pandemic world. Essentially, Amplify will secure its place within the continuum of cultural development activities that we execute as a department.

While the loss in project funding means the festival itself will no longer be financially feasible, Amplify will be able to rely on modest grant funding, fundraising and cost recovery models to continue to provide some of its smaller, yet popular, events and activities, such as the Amplify Anthology, Illuminate (our art walk), open mics and the like.

The Amplify model provides exactly the kind of flexibility needed to support both youth and artists in these uncertain times. Imagined as a nimble program that is able to switch directions as appetites change in youth culture, Amplify is especially adaptable. Our strong online presence and history of making online content is yet another asset as we focus on surviving and thriving during this pandemic.

STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATIONS OR ENGAGEMENT

The following City departments, youth organizations and cultural partners were consulted on this matter:

- Musée Heritage Museum
- Art Gallery of St. Albert
- St. Albert Public Library
- Amplify Advisory Committee
- Youth Advisory Committee
- Community and Social Development
- Recreation and Parks
- RCMP

And while each external cultural partner expressed that they valued Amplify's programming, without additional funding and resources, they indicated that they would not be able to take on Amplify's programming or provide similar outcomes within their own programming.

Our partners made it clear though that they'd be happy to continue to work with us throughout the year on our cultural development programming for youth and they look forward to working together in the future.

Cultural partners were asked the following questions:

Does your organization have the capacity to take over some or all of Amplify's programming?

While each cultural partner expressed that they valued Amplify's programming, without additional funding and resources, they would not be able to take on Amplify's programming or provide similar outcomes within their programming.

Do the outcomes or programs Amplify provides overlap with the outcomes or programs that your organization provides?

While the occasional overlap was encountered and acknowledged, they were seen as strengths, as they were areas where Amplify and the above organization or department could form mutually beneficial partnerships. Areas of mutual interest were often fostered to create a stronger program together. It was often noted that artists needed multiple opportunities to perform, share their work and acquire feedback in order to develop.

The RCMP, the Amplify Advisory Committee and the Youth Advisory Committee were consulted about whether or not they thought the Amplify Advisory Committee could move forward as an independent body.

Feedback from our consultation of the Amplify Advisory Committee, the Youth Advisory Committee and the RCMP made it clear that the guidance, safety planning, mentorship and asset development; including:

- Other adult relationships-Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.
- Adult role models-Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.

The RCMP expressed concerns that youth left unsupervised tend to 'push boundaries' and felt that Amplify's positive safety record was the result of prudent planning and appropriate supervision.

IMPLICATIONS OF RECOMMENDATION(S)

Financial:

The City would save \$45,000 in 2021 and \$30,000 2022, alongside the reduction in funding already realized in 2020 due to Covid-19.

Legal / Risk:

None at this time.

Program or Service:

This would result in a service level reduction. The Amplify program would no longer provide its cornerstone event: the festival and there would be an overall reduction in activities related to both cultural development and youth development.

However, in this proposal, Amplify would be able to provide long term, modest cultural development

programming to St. Albert's youth, working from the strength of Amplify's successful branding, social media presence and partnerships.

Organizational:

Responsibility for the execution of Amplify's programming would move from the Youth Festival Associate to the Community Cultural Coordinators.

ALTERNATIVES AND IMPLICATIONS CONSIDERED

If Council does not wish to support the recommendation, the following alternatives could be considered:

Alternative 1. Do nothing. The decreasing funding provide in PM-20-084 will remain intact providing a transition period from Amplify's current service level to a reduced service level.

Alternative 2. The Amplify Creative Youth Development Program be retired. Project funding provided to the St. Albert Amplify Festival in the 2021 and 2022 budget would be rescinded and all youth-arts development activities related to Amplify within the City would cease.

Report Date: October 13, 2020

Author(s): Paul Pearson

Committee/Department: Community Services

Deputy Chief Administrative Officer: Kerry Hilts

Chief Administrative Officer: Kevin Scoble