



en piste

REGROUPEMENT NATIONAL DES ARTS DU CIRQUE  
NATIONAL CIRCUS ARTS ALLIANCE

UPDATED 2023-2027  
SECTOR DEVELOPMENT PLAN

# EXTENDING OUR REACH

FOR THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
OF THE CIRCUS ARTS

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# INTRO- DUCTION

An incomparable ecosystem in the cultural sphere, circus is creative, diverse and innovative. In just a few short years, it has become a leader on the world stage. The discipline's success is a source of pride in Quebec and is felt throughout Canada.

The sector is complex and atypical. To support its development throughout Canada, the 2017–2027 Sector Development Plan, *Extending Our Reach*, was developed following consultations with a hundred members, a public presentation with En Piste members and discussions with the board of directors, staff and a scientific committee. *Extending Our Reach* is intended to be a common thread connecting the steps that need to be taken to tackle the challenges facing each link in the value chain in a structuring and structured way.

At the midway point, and amid the post-pandemic recovery, it was time to bring the plan up to date by adjusting previously identified challenges and reflecting on the achievements of recent years, which have laid a solid foundation for the future. This updated Sector Development Plan is innovative in that it presents areas of development to allow us to look even further ahead. The next step will be to establish priorities and lay the groundwork for En Piste's strategic plan, which will need to be developed in consultation with members of the circus arts ecosystem.

These updates to the Sector Development Plan come as government funding is resuming and adapting. We can only hope that the proposals in this document help lay the groundwork for structuring assistance that is tailored to the post-pandemic reality of the circus sector in Quebec and throughout Canada. This will require the collaboration and involvement of everyone concerned. En Piste will be there to carry out projects, mobilize the sector and drive it forward.

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# BACK- GROUND

To fully appreciate the proposals in the updated 2017–2017 Sector Development Plan, *Extending Our Reach*, it is important to understand the unique circumstances in which it is being developed.

On the surface, since 2022, the circus arts sector would appear to have fully recovered. In Quebec, circus is taking root again; Cirque du Soleil is back at the Old Port of Montréal; the Montréal Complètement Cirque Festival has resumed throughout the city; and small-and large-scale shows can be found in the streets, in urban spaces and even on tour, gracing stages in various regions of the province. From the Festival de cirque des Îles in the Magdalen Islands to the Arctic Circus Festival in Iqaluit, Nunavut, as well as the newly created Bastringue festival in Joliette, circus continues to thrill and excite us.

Thanks to *Destination cirque*, En Piste’s assistance measure for circus show circulation, around 40 Quebec performance venues have been presenting a wide variety of circus works throughout the year for audiences of all ages since 2021.

The pandemic has not stifled the creativity of artists or the cultural workers around them. New artistic proposals are still being offered. Young people have resumed practising circus recreationally and are enrolling in schools that offer advanced training. Social circus continues to expand.

However, although audiences have returned to the circus, artists, companies and schools face a growing number of challenges. From training to international touring, ballooning costs and staffing shortages are jeopardizing performance opportunities. The community must be strengthened while adapting to new societal and performing arts paradigms.

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# Challenges

Some concrete examples of challenges the circus arts sector is facing include:

- Despite being world-renowned, advanced training schools are struggling to attract Quebec students with sufficient training. Five years ago, the MCC provided \$1 million in funding to support their development. Unfortunately, no funding has been provided to roll out the training pathway development plan. Additionally, schools are grappling with a shortage of technical, teaching and administrative staff.
- Artists need more places to train, companies are seeking more creation spaces, the dissemination network still needs help hosting circus shows, and schools need assistance to develop training facilities.
- The labour shortage is an ever-present issue and inflation is yet another obstacle to touring. Only a handful of companies are in a position to mount major tours. Some are running a deficit due to skyrocketing transportation costs.
- Ticket sales are still lagging. It is becoming increasingly challenging for companies to sell their productions and for promoters to break even.
- In Quebec, only 10 or so organizations receive financial assistance to support their operations. It should be noted that there are large disparities between the amount of assistance provided.
- En Piste remains the only circus arts alliance in Canada. Its operating budget has not increased in the last five years, despite growth in its services, activities and membership. It has not received additional assistance to support its post-pandemic recovery, with the exception of joint projects such as *Destination cirque*.
- Finally, the responsibilities involved in promoting diversity, inclusion, sustainability, digital development, and social behaviour and lifestyle changes are growing and must be applied to modes of creation, production, dissemination and training.

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## A vulnerable economy

The abrupt, months-long shutdown of public performances dealt the sector a heavy blow. Over 90% of most circus companies' revenue comes from abroad and from selling shows and numbers to special events and the corporate sector. The apparent health of the sector masks just how financially vulnerable most companies and artists are.

The Quebec circus ecosystem includes some of the most renowned companies and schools in the world. The \$21.8 million in funding granted in 2020 and 2021 made it possible to avoid bankruptcy and keep the community afloat. This funding was a lifesaver for major organizations, who would not have been able to make it through those two years and keep their premises open for creation residencies and artists' training without it. This financial assistance also led to increased investment in project creation by providing more support for companies and artists and highlighting the lack of public support for the circus arts sector. Few cultural sectors received this level of funding.

Unfortunately, this funding was not extended in 2022 in the MCC's recovery plan last spring. This has raised real concerns in our community, and its full impact has yet to be understood. We should also mention that most companies and artists are supported by limited, one-time funding. What's more, fewer than 10 circus organizations receive funding for their operations. Only five schools in Quebec are supported by the Ministère de la Culture et des Communications. Most receive less than \$100,000 in financial assistance.

## First growing pains

After years of strong growth, the pandemic dealt the circus community its first "growing pains." The lockdown forced many professionals and companies to reflect on their futures. In this new reality in which we find ourselves, adaptability and diversification are crucial. International touring has become increasingly fragmented and costly and will need to be re-examined. New forms of management and creation, such as collectives and small forms, are becoming more common. The community is calling for advanced training in technical and performance professions to embrace other realities of practice. Continuing education for experienced and mid-career artists and artists in transition must be expanded so that the sector can benefit from their experience. Research and development must be strengthened, particularly by creating a university program like for other disciplines. The community is feeling the need to mobilize and move away from a culture of competition where information is restricted, instead moving toward an open and cooperative model that promotes exchanges within communities of practice or communities that share the same values. In just a few years, En Piste's membership has doubled to nearly 600 members.

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# UPDATING THE SECTOR DEVELOPMENT PLAN

This document is the result of more limited consultations than the ones that were held to develop the initial Sector Development Plan, which required two years of work. One-on-one interviews were conducted from a sample of En Piste members in Quebec and throughout Canada, as well as with the leaders of peer organizations (RIDEAU, CINARS, La danse sur les routes du Québec, the Conseil québécois du théâtre, CliquezCirque). The findings from these consultations were presented at the AGM Forum, to which all En Piste members were invited. A work session was specifically organized with emerging artists to ensure that the Sector Development Plan would reflect their values and outlook before being submitted to the board of directors.

This updated version of the Sector Development Plan still contains the key orientations and strategys from the original version, since they are still valid. It includes a sixth key orientation and 22 strategys:

## **ORIENTATION 1**

Providing training from childhood to maturity

## **ORIENTATION 2**

Supporting and developing creativity and artistic diversity

## **ORIENTATION 3**

Meeting audiences

## **ORIENTATION 4**

Structuring and federating the circus arts sector

## **ORIENTATION 5**

Enhancing the status of the circus arts

## **ORIENTATION 6**

Funding sustainable development

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## Vision

Create conditions conducive to sustainable development by strengthening every link in the value chain, from introducing children and audiences to the circus arts to preserving and sharing our heritage.

View the ecosystem as a whole, the ultimate aim of which may be (but is not limited to) specializing in performing and technical roles to pursue careers with major, internationally successful troupes. Support an ecosystem that promotes a wide range of circus practices and expressions.

Position circus as a way of expressing an artistic intent, just like other performing arts.

Foster a circus and audience culture among young people and their loved ones, as well as a sense of pride in belonging to the same community throughout Quebec.

Boost our capacity to address environmental and social challenges that require significant attention from our organizations.

## Orientations

### ORIENTATION 1 PROVIDING TRAINING FROM CHILDHOOD TO MATURITY

#### STRATEGY 1.1

Structure the education network in Quebec and introduce support measures for schools and

#### STRATEGY 1.2

Structure, develop and emphasize the value of recreational training.

#### STRATEGY 1.3

Structure, develop and emphasize the value of preparatory training.

#### STRATEGY 1.4

Develop and emphasize the value of higher education and research.

#### STRATEGY 1.5

Promote talent retention and strengthen the community through continuing education.

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## Achievements

- Introduction to the practice via summer camps across Quebec: École du cirque de Québec, Université de Montréal, Camp Geronimo in Lachute, Camp Académie in the Québec City area, FLiP Circus School, École de cirque Vire-Volte, Cirkana, École de cirque Garuda, André Grasset, Complexe sportif Claude-Robillard, etc.
- Preparatory and recreational schools in multiple regions of Quebec: Polyvalente de Disraeli, École de cirque de Verdun, École de cirque des Îles, École Horizon-Soleil, La Caserne 18-30, Centre de recherche en art clownesque, Studio CirQus, Château de Cirque, École de Clown et Comédie Francine Côté, Le Petit Cirque sablon, etc.
- Two advanced education institutions, the National Circus School (NCS) and its Centre for Circus Arts Research, Innovation and Knowledge Transfer (CRITAC), and the École de cirque de Québec (ECQ).
- The National Circus School Research Chair and the Montreal Working Group on Circus Research.

## Areas of development

1. **Establish a training pathway**, from cultural recreation to university education and research, to cultivate emerging talent from all regions of Quebec.
2. **Increase the admission rate of Quebec talent to post-secondary schools** by supporting preparatory schools and seeking recognition for “Arts-études” programs by the Ministère de l’Éducation.
3. **Establish a university program** (bachelor’s and master’s degrees) to promote research, creation residencies, experimentation and critical reflection like in other artistic disciplines.
4. **Provide advanced training that considers various aspects of practice:** performance, technique, creative circus and circus with societal value, staging/creation, teaching, management.
5. **Help address the shortage** of technical, teaching and administrative staff by supporting knowledge sharing and career transitions. Expand the number of teaching opportunities to provide competitive salary levels through higher course loads.

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## ORIENTATION 2

### SUPPORTING AND DEVELOPING CREATIVITY AND ARTISTIC DIVERSITY

#### STRATEGY 2.1

Encourage risk-taking, creativity and the creative processes of artists, collectives and organizations.

#### STRATEGY 2.2

Expand access to suitable creation and production spaces and encourage sustainable development practices.

#### STRATEGY 2.3

Help circus reach its full potential as the expression of a common goal shared by a diverse range of people.

#### Achievements

- A rich and diverse ecosystem that includes a multinational company, approximately 10 internationally successful troupes, collectives, 10 or so social circus organizations and troupes aimed at young audiences.
- Creative spaces for “major” troupes where anyone can train, as well as rehearsal spaces (Québec City’s Caserne Dalhousie, Montréal’s Caserne du CSCE).
- LAB7 and its annual forum based at The 7 Fingers Creation and Production Centre, which explores how to adapt cutting-edge technologies to the physical realities and limitations of live performances, in partnership with CRITAC and other research institutions and programs.

#### Areas of development

1. **Support the transfer of experience** acquired internationally and on the big stage to smaller forms. Foster innovation and stimulate exchanges by hosting international shows.
2. **Facilitate research and development** in creative circus and circus with societal value without the pressure of instant audience success and as a complement to performing, production and show circulation.
3. **Promote service pooling** to reduce administration for creators if they wish. Strengthen the role of the producer.
4. **Assist collectives** as a stepping stone toward creating small troupes to bring diversity and dynamism to the ecosystem.
5. **Continue to offer collective services** such as the CNESST, the Artists Training Management Service (ATMS), career transition training, and financial assistance to allow international artists who are ineligible for grant programs to pursue continuing education.

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## ORIENTATION 3 MEETING AUDIENCES

### STRATEGY 3.1

Document circus arts dissemination across all markets.

### STRATEGY 3.2

Present diversified shows to audiences of all ages and backgrounds throughout Quebec and the rest of Canada.

### STRATEGY 3.3

Help organizations, collectives and artists be more competitive in international markets.

### STRATEGY 3.4

Seek recognition for social circus and outreach programs for diverse populations across Canada.

### STRATEGY 3.5

Educate audiences about the many forms and diverse aesthetics of circus.

### Achievements

- A specialized presenter, TOHU, whose programming is linked to that of Théâtre Le Diamant in Québec City. In Montréal, the specialized presenter Le Monastère is making circus a major tourist attraction.
  - Festivals and events for tourists that are making circus accessible to a wider audience: Montréal Complètement Cirque festival, Festival international de cirque Vaudreuil-Dorion, Turbo Fest juggling festival, Iqaluit's Arctic Circus Festival, Montréal Clown Festival, Festival de cirque des Îles, etc.
- The *Destination cirque* measure, created in 2021, supported by the CALQ and run by En Piste, that has made it possible to present shows at nearly 40 performance venues throughout Quebec.

### Areas of development

1. **Incorporate cultural mediation into the creation cycle** by creating more opportunities for dialogue to foster greater appreciation of works, creators and their intent. Promote the diversity of contemporary circus among adult audiences by showcasing troupes and their artistic and societal choices.
2. **Strengthen the technical and programming capacity of rural presenters** through access to employability measures and financial incentives for risk-taking (promotional, infrastructure and ticketing costs). Forge partnerships for tourism purposes.
3. **Boost the profile of circus in foreign markets and missions:** RIDEAU, CINARS, the International Market of Contemporary Circus (MICC), Canadian Heritage creative industries trade missions.
4. **Seek partners and partnerships throughout Canada** to circulate productions more effectively.
5. **Seek out new audiences** by adapting works into other formats: immersive experiences, virtual reality, recordings, exhibitions, etc

## ORIENTATION 4

### STRUCTURING AND FEDERATING THE CIRCUS ARTS SECTOR

#### STRATEGY 4.1

Recognize and support the development of the circus arts sector.

#### STRATEGY 4.2

Encourage initiatives that spark exchanges, partnerships, networking and information sharing.

#### STRATEGY 4.3

Document the sector and focus on emerging practices and issues.

#### Achievements

- Incorporation of En Piste, the only circus arts alliance in Canada, in 1997. Membership growth from 300 to nearly 600 members in just a few years.
- Consolidating the community around Montréal's Cité des arts du cirque hub, whose most recent development has involved welcoming international artists to the Montréal Complètement Cirque festival and working with foreign (mainly American) programmers.
- The emergence of a comparable hub in the Limoilou area of Québec City.
- Pan-Canadian participation in En Piste's board of directors and annual AGM Forum.

#### Areas of development

1. **Change mentalities** by adopting a new paradigm of openness and collaboration with emerging talent at all stages of the training cycle.
2. **Support the emergence of communities of practice** through networking and sharing activities with established and emerging professionals (e.g., Turbo 418 and meet-ups organized by Cirque Hors Piste).
3. **Strengthen the management capacity** and help develop the next generation of leaders through experience sharing by established troupes. Establish an internship and emerging talent program.
4. **Diversify and decentralize anchor points** for circus and audience development from existing centres.
5. **Take action to recognize and leverage the dynamism of the circus community and Québec City-based institutions.**

## ORIENTATION 5 ENHANCING THE STATUS OF THE CIRCUS ARTS

### STRATEGY 5.1

Showcase the excellence, quality and richness of the sector.

### STRATEGY 5.2

Position the sector in the digital sphere.

### STRATEGY 5.3

Preserve and share our heritage.

### Achievements

- Government support for Cirque du Soleil, which made it possible to keep its headquarters in Montréal and weather the COVID-19 crisis.
- Government recognition through the \$21.8-million one-time emergency measure during the pandemic.
- The National Circus School's documentation centre, a global leader in preserving, disseminating and promoting the value of circus arts resource materials.

### Areas of development

1. **Strengthen Montréal and Québec City's position as leaders on the world stage** through a concerted international branding strategy and through high-calibre complementary events (creation residencies, communities of practice, competitions). Create the right conditions to train and retain top international talent.
2. **Achieve full recognition for circus in government policies and programs** as a major discipline in its own right. Include circus in research used to inform public policy, particularly research conducted by the Observatoire de la culture et des communications du Québec and the Université du Québec.
3. **Develop a circus culture by documenting and emphasizing the value of the creative heritage** of various circus disciplines in Quebec and the rest of the country.
4. **Implement the *Status of the Artist Act*** to improve working conditions, including grants and fees to resume or improve existing shows.
5. **Increase coverage of circus news** on the Web and in the media. Improve digital discoverability through metadata.

## ORIENTATION 6

### FUNDING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

#### STRATEGY 6.1

Foster creativity through operating assistance.

#### STRATEGY 6.2

Ensure funding is better tailored to the needs of circus creation, whose development cycle is unique and different from producing a new profit-oriented show.

#### STRATEGY 6.3

Promote philanthropy by encouraging businesses and sponsors to take part in promising and unifying projects for the circus community and the population.

#### Achievements

- Recognition of the circus arts as a major art form by the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec (2001), the Conseil des arts de Montréal (2008) and the Canada Council for the Arts (2009).
- Financial assistance focused primarily on production and dissemination.

#### Areas of development

1. **Expand operating assistance eligibility** to make it more equitable at every level of the value chain. Assess the long-term effects of public funding (assistance for operating expenses, projects, creation grants, etc.) from different levels of government to increase its relevance and impact.
2. **Ensure circus artists participate in governing bodies and selection panels** of federal, provincial and municipal arts councils.
3. **Raise funder awareness of the specific costs associated with circus practice** (infrastructure, equipment, risk management, insurance, health and safety) by analyzing various business models.
4. **Maintain performing arts tax credit equity** with other cultural industries.
5. **Reevaluate how assistance programs are allocated** (currently, they are primarily focused on producing and disseminating shows) to strengthen the overall value chain, including education (preparatory, advanced and continuing), research and development and expertise sharing.

FOR THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE CIRCUS ARTS

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FOR THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE CIRCUS ARTS

A document produced under  
the direction of En Piste

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