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## Alberta Arts budget barely up Minister's effort to double funding fails

**Graham Andrews**

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EDMONTON - Arts leaders disappointed by a smaller-than-expected increase in provincial arts funding criticized the government for its short-sightedness Wednesday.

The Alberta Foundation of the Arts budget is up to \$22.6 million from \$19 million last year, far less than the \$40 million sought by Community Development Minister Gary Mar.

It's only the second funding increase for the AFA in 16 years.

"It's just short-sighted and it shows a lack of vision in this government," said Tom McCabe, president of Theatre Calgary.

Earlier this year, McCabe organized a petition to support Mar's goal to double the AFA's budget. He complimented Mar for his efforts and blamed the provincial treasury board for stonewalling him.

"Most cabinet ministers were in support of it (the increase to \$40 million)," he said. "It got to treasury board and treasury board shut it down."

Mar said he will continue to press for more funding for the arts, but characterized Wednesday's announcement as "a step in the right direction."

"The increase of \$3 million is far short of what I believe is necessary to sustain and increase the arts and culture that this province enjoys."

Audrey Luft, who heads AFA's board of directors, said the group could always use more money, but she is pleased nonetheless.

"It's the same anywhere: We would like to have more, but I'm not unhappy with the amount."

She pointed to the \$15-million provincial grant, announced last year, to help pay for the expansion of the Art Gallery of Alberta in Edmonton.

The community development budget also includes \$600,000, which falls outside the AFA's funding, to send 150 Albertans to Washington, D.C., for the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in July. This is the first time a Canadian province has been invited to participate in the annual festival.

The AFA will pay to send three plays from last year's Edmonton Fringe Festival, [Spring Alibi](#), [Never Swim Alone](#) and [Simple Gifts](#), to perform in Washington at that city's first fringe, which follows the Folklife festival.

Book Publishers' Association of Alberta treasurer Ken Davis worried about the future of publishing in the province if AFA grants to his industry don't improve.

It's no wonder many companies are considering relocation to provinces with better funding, such as Ontario, he said.

"There isn't a single mid-size publisher in the province who isn't weighing their options right now. And that's because we're not supported."

[gmandrews@thejournal.canwest.com](mailto:gmandrews@thejournal.canwest.com)

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