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The New Gallery STORY/TESTIMONIAL

The New Gallery, established in 1975 as the Clouds & Water Gallery and Visual Production Society, is an artist-run non-profit organization. Their exhibition spaces, resource centre and online platform for web-based projects provide opportunities for artists to work, show and educate audiences through social and political art practices.

The artist-run space has a core operating principle that there should be no financial barrier for audiences or artists to access their galleries and programs. They rely almost entirely on public funding from three levels of government - sources that naturally ebb and flow. During Su Ying Strang's first two years as Administrative Director the organization erased an operating deficit and began running a modest surplus with a balanced budget ever since.

The New Gallery's 40th anniversary in 2015 presented an opportunity to look at ways of mitigating the risk posed by a high reliance on government grants. So they set out to develop a five year strategic plan to ensure the organization was working towards a stronger, more resilient future.

Interviews with investment portfolio managers were disappointing as there was no real understanding of the arts sector. An existing grantee relationship with Calgary Foundation gave them an entry point to talk about their long term financial goals. Strang met with Allison Schulz, VP Capacity Building at Calgary Foundation who explained how setting up an endowment could achieve many of their goals.

"I wasn't made to feel ignorant of the process or that the small amount of money we had wasn't enough" says Su Ying Strang. "She didn't talk down to us, she presented the process in layman's terms which made it very easy to articulate the scope of the commitment to our Board." Strang also states the importance of an alignment of values that they both had for building the arts community.

Allison's support extended to advising The New Gallery that they should take advantage of matching funds through Canadian Heritage's Canada Cultural Investment Fund – Endowment Incentives to help build their new endowment faster. A year later, The New Gallery was benefitting from those matching funds. Strang reports, "Our desire to shore up future Boards and staff, giving them greater power and flexibility to deliver on our mission really helped us overcome any initial doubts we may have had."

And how does The New Gallery feel about having made this commitment to the future? "We feel we're on the right track. Having that first conversation with Allison really made us realize we could do this. Allison has been very supportive - she has our back, even going as far as to remind us of grant deadlines!" Strang says she recommends any non-profit have a discussion with Calgary Foundation if they are looking to build for their future. "Your organization is never too small to start to thinking about diversifying your revenue."