

A Community-Led Implementation Plan

Strengthening London's UNESCO City of Music Ecosystem

Executive Summary

London, Ontario holds the distinction of being Canada's first **UNESCO City of Music**, a designation that recognizes the depth and vitality of the city's musical culture. This recognition reflects decades of work by artists, educators, venues, festivals, recording studios, and community organizations that have contributed to London's rich musical identity.

As London continues to develop its music strategy, it is essential that future initiatives be grounded in a comprehensive understanding of the existing music ecosystem and developed through meaningful engagement with the music community.

This document proposes a **community-led implementation plan** focused on strengthening the foundations of London's music sector through research, collaboration, visibility, and strategic coordination.

Rather than focusing initially on new infrastructure, this approach prioritizes initiatives that will:

- document and understand the existing music ecosystem
- strengthen connections between organizations
- support artists and educators
- increase visibility of London's music scene
- build broad community support for long-term initiatives

These foundational steps will ensure that future investments are aligned with the needs and strengths of the community and will position London as a global model for sustainable music ecosystem development.

1. Context

London's music community includes a wide range of contributors, including:

- professional and emerging artists
- performance venues
- recording studios
- music educators and schools
- festivals and concert series
- academic institutions
- community music programs
- arts organizations and cultural institutions

Many of these organizations have been central to London's musical life for decades. Together they form a dynamic ecosystem that supports artistic creation, education, and cultural participation.

The UNESCO City of Music designation provides an opportunity to further strengthen this ecosystem and to promote London's music culture locally, nationally, and internationally.

To fully realize this opportunity, future initiatives should be developed through **collaboration with the music community and informed by comprehensive knowledge of the existing sector**.

2. Guiding Principles

Build on Existing Strengths

London already possesses a wide range of music assets. Strategic initiatives should strengthen and connect these existing resources rather than duplicate them.

Community Engagement

The music community should play an active role in shaping the future of London's music strategy through structured consultation and collaboration.

Ecosystem Development

Healthy music sectors develop through networks of organizations and individuals working together. Long-term success depends on strengthening these relationships.

Accessibility and Inclusion

Music initiatives should support participation across all communities and ensure access to music education and creative opportunities.

Sustainability

Strategic initiatives should focus on long-term ecosystem growth rather than short-term projects.

3. Foundational Initiatives

3.1 London Music Ecosystem Inventory

A comprehensive inventory of London's music sector should be undertaken to map the full range of organizations, artists, and resources contributing to the city's music ecosystem.

This inventory would include:

- performance venues
- recording studios
- rehearsal spaces
- music educators and schools
- festivals and concert series
- artist organizations
- community music programs
- instrument makers and service providers
- media and promotional platforms

The inventory would also identify both **paid and free music education programs**, ensuring a clear understanding of opportunities available to residents.

Outcomes

- a comprehensive map of London's music ecosystem
- identification of opportunities and gaps
- improved coordination between organizations
- data to support future strategic decisions

3.2 London Music Education Access Map

Music education is one of the strongest foundations of a thriving music city.

This initiative would create a publicly accessible directory of all music learning opportunities available in London, including:

- private teachers
- community music programs
- school programs
- university and college programs
- youth orchestras and ensembles
- free and subsidized initiatives

The directory would help residents easily identify opportunities to participate in music learning at all stages of life.

3.3 London Music Heritage and Identity Project

London has produced an extraordinary number of influential artists and music initiatives. Documenting this history would strengthen the city's cultural identity and provide valuable educational and tourism resources.

This initiative could include:

- oral histories with musicians and music leaders
- archival documentation of venues and organizations
- digital storytelling and multimedia archives
- partnerships with academic institutions

The resulting archive could form the basis of a **London Music Heritage Platform** celebrating the city's musical legacy.

3.4 London Music Marketing Strategy

Despite its strong musical culture, London's music scene is not always fully visible to residents or visitors.

A coordinated marketing strategy could help promote:

- local artists
- music venues
- festivals and events
- music education programs
- London's UNESCO City of Music identity

This strategy could involve partnerships with tourism organizations, media outlets, and digital platforms to increase awareness of London's musical activity.

3.5 Artist Development Network

Many organizations in London already provide artist development opportunities through performances, recording, mentorship, and education.

A collaborative **Artist Development Network** could connect these initiatives and provide coordinated support for emerging artists.

Potential supports could include:

- mentorship programs
- micro-grants for recording and touring
- professional development workshops
- collaborative performance opportunities

This network model would strengthen existing organizations rather than concentrating resources in a single facility.

4. Community Governance and Participation

To ensure that the music community remains actively involved in shaping London's music strategy, a **London Music Community Advisory Council** could be established.

This council could include representatives from:

- artists and musicians
- venues and presenters
- recording studios
- educators and academic institutions
- festivals and event organizers
- community music organizations
- Indigenous and culturally diverse music leaders
- youth representatives

The council would provide guidance on strategic initiatives and help ensure that policy decisions reflect the needs of the music community.

5. Community Consultation Process

A structured consultation process should accompany the development of future initiatives.

Phase 1 – Sector Engagement

Roundtable discussions with key stakeholders to identify opportunities and priorities.

Phase 2 – Public Consultation

Public forums and online engagement to gather input from musicians, educators, students, and audiences.

Phase 3 – Strategic Alignment

Working groups develop proposals based on community input.

Phase 4 – Implementation Planning

Creation of a five-year roadmap for priority initiatives.

6. Expected Outcomes

Implementing these initiatives would provide significant benefits to London’s music ecosystem.

These include:

- stronger collaboration across the music sector
- improved visibility for local artists and organizations
- increased access to music education
- enhanced cultural tourism
- stronger community engagement in cultural planning
- more informed policy and investment decisions

7. Conclusion

London’s music community represents a remarkable cultural asset that has been built through decades of creativity, collaboration, and leadership.

The UNESCO City of Music designation provides an opportunity to strengthen and celebrate this ecosystem while supporting future growth.

By focusing first on **community engagement, research, and collaboration**, London can ensure that future initiatives are grounded in the strengths of the existing music community and supported by those who contribute to it.

Through a community-led approach, London can become a leading example of how cities can nurture vibrant and sustainable music ecosystems.

Opinion: Building London's Music Future Requires a Community Approach

London, Ontario has a remarkable musical identity.

From concert halls and recording studios to classrooms and community programs, music is woven into the fabric of this city. London has produced internationally recognized artists, nurtured generations of young musicians, and built a vibrant network of venues, educators, and creative organizations.

That is why London's designation as Canada's first UNESCO City of Music was so significant. It recognized not just individual achievements, but an entire ecosystem of people and institutions working together to sustain a culture of music.

Recently, discussion has emerged around the possibility of creating a music incubator or hub in London. The idea of supporting artists and creative entrepreneurship is certainly a positive one. Cities around the world are searching for ways to help musicians thrive in a rapidly changing cultural economy.

But an important question needs to be asked before moving forward with any major new initiative: **What already exists in London's music ecosystem, and how can it be strengthened?**

London already has a remarkable network of music infrastructure.

There are performance venues that present hundreds of concerts each year. Independent recording studios help artists create and release new work. Academic institutions provide world-class training. Community organizations introduce young people to music for the first time. Festivals bring audiences together and showcase local talent.

These organizations did not appear overnight. They represent decades of dedication by musicians, educators, volunteers, and cultural leaders who have invested enormous energy in building London's music culture.

For that reason, the most important next step for London may not be constructing new infrastructure, but **understanding and connecting the infrastructure that already exists.**

Many successful music cities around the world have begun their strategies with a comprehensive mapping of their music ecosystems. Nashville, Austin, and Melbourne, for example, have invested heavily in documenting their music sectors and engaging artists and organizations in shaping long-term cultural policy.

This kind of foundational work can reveal surprising insights. It can identify gaps in support for artists, opportunities for collaboration between organizations, and ways to increase the visibility of local music.

London could benefit enormously from a similar approach.

One important initiative would be the creation of a **London Music Ecosystem Inventory**—a comprehensive map of the city’s music assets, including venues, studios, educators, festivals, and community programs. Such a project would provide valuable information for policymakers while also helping organizations connect with one another.

Another opportunity would be the development of a **public directory of music education programs** across the city. London has an extraordinary range of opportunities for people to learn music, from private teachers to university programs and community initiatives. Making these resources visible and accessible would strengthen participation in the arts and reinforce London’s reputation as a music city.

There is also an important story to tell about London’s musical history. Generations of artists have contributed to the city’s cultural life, yet much of that history remains undocumented. A project dedicated to preserving and sharing London’s musical heritage could become a powerful resource for education, tourism, and community pride.

These kinds of initiatives share a common goal: strengthening the connections between the people and organizations that make London’s music scene possible.

Ultimately, the strength of a music city is not defined by a single building or program. It is defined by the relationships between artists, audiences, educators, and cultural institutions.

London has an opportunity to become a global model for how a mid-sized city can nurture a vibrant music ecosystem. But that success will depend on collaboration, transparency, and meaningful engagement with the music community.

The foundation already exists. The next step is to bring the community together and build on the strengths that have made London a music city in the first place.