



CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION PROGRAM

PHASE 1 NATIONAL FINDINGS SUMMARY



CANADIAN ASSOCIATION
FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE
DES ORGANISMES ARTISTIQUES



The Centre for Sustainable
Practice in the Arts

Canada 

Circus Performance at the MICC. Performers: Louis-David Simoneau & Marie-Christine Fournier.
Photo by: JF Savaria

As Canadians continue to feel the intensifying effects of climate change, the performing arts is among our industries heavily impacted by wildfires, flooding, and worsening storms, among other extreme weather phenomena. While Canada has a wide variety of ecosystems and environments, communities across the country all experience the impacts of climate change, and are looking for ways to both adapt to changing conditions and look forward to a greener, more sustainable future.

To respond to this need, CAPACOA has launched a Climate Change Adaptation Program (CCAP) to support the national performing arts sector in responding to the impacts of climate change. Partnering with Ian Garrett from The Centre for Sustainable Practice in the Arts (CSPA), the program will research and build practical tools to help performing arts organizations adapt, with Erin Kennedy leading as the program manager. This project is supported by funding from Canadian Heritage.

In phase one of the CCAP we performed an environmental scan to map out the effects of climate change and vulnerabilities of each bioregion. We gathered this feedback through the following activities:

- Conducting individual and group interviews with over 50 festivals, outdoor theatre companies and leaders in the field
- Attending contact events to gather localized insights from regional presenters
- Holding virtual meetings with national and international leaders in the field of performance and climate change.

While our research illustrated the specific challenges each unique region faces, several consistent themes emerged around challenges and climate change adaptation strategies that applied to organizations across Canada.

Bioregional Climate Stressors & Industry Impact

Standard geographic classifications mask the true environmental conditions affecting presenters. By shifting to a bioregional model, the research maps specific recurring hazards that directly impact cultural operations:

- **Wildfires and Smoke (Canada-wide):** Forest fire risks are a primary concern, forcing evacuations and sudden cancellations. Presenters struggle with a total lack of standard threshold guidelines for smoke cancellation, while smoke-related warnings suppress seasonal ticket sales and disrupt travel routes.
 - This is exacerbated by a lack of clear guidelines on when to cancel shows due to heavy smoke. Interviewees identified a need for additional guidance around smoke; during the research phase, Alberta Capital Airshed and Calgary Folk Music Festival released the first edition of their festival guide to smoke (see below). Additional legislation and support could help the industry to integrate their suggestions.
- **Flooding & Severe Storms (Pacific Coast, Great Plains, Hudson's Bay Lowlands, Northeast Forests):** Sudden torrential rain, flash flooding, and mudslides block access roads, destroy outdoor structures, wash out transit routes, and render rural performance grounds completely unusable.
- **Hurricanes and Ocean Storms (Pacific Coast, Atlantic Canada):** An increase in both frequency and unpredictability of storms forces complete, at times, multi-day cancellations. High winds require complete site strikes (dismantling and re-assembling stage setups), triggering heavy emergency volunteer labor and unforeseen capital expenses.

- Similarly, for many festivals who were impacted by extreme weather events, strong communication and relationship building with their supporters and communities were extremely valuable. Communications guides around extreme weather cancellations for donors and ticket buyers could be another valuable resource for festivals around the country.

**Research Findings:
Canadian Live Music Association**



A forthcoming report by the Canadian Live Music Association (CLMA) estimates that without immediate structural support, extreme weather and unmitigated climate disruptions will place between C\$1.2 billion and C\$3.0 billion of music- event and festival economic value at risk by 2040.

As the majority of festivals and presenters currently operate on razor-thin margins, many are one bad season away from bankruptcy.

[Learn more about the CLMA's Climate Contingency Roadmap here.](#)

Other National Themes that Emerged During the Research Phase:

- Arts and culture activities can support evacuees and survivors of climate events with community healing, especially for Indigenous forest fire evacuees from the North who are sheltering in Southern regions. Many interviewees appraised the value of investing in meaningful programming through creative and community-focused initiatives during the time of displacement as very high.

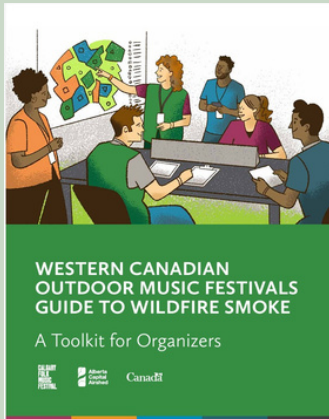


Audiences beat the heat at Perchance Theatre, in Newfoundland. Outdoor venues in the maritimes often have to contend with heat, ocean storms, and forest fires, along with other site-specific climate challenges.

Photo courtesy of Perchance Theatre.

- **Changing Seasonal Boundaries & Thawing (Tundra, Hudson's Bay Lowlands):** Warming trends alter traditional freeze-thaw timelines, rendering critical ice roads unpredictable and disrupting winter festival transportation. Additionally, permafrost thaw and rapid coastal soil erosion threaten community homes, displacing local artists and audiences.
- **Drought, Heat Waves & Water Shortages (Pacific Coast, The West, Atlantic, Boreal Forests, Great Plains):** Sustained heat waves threaten patron safety, yet many rural and off-grid presenters lack municipal water hookups. During regional droughts, local shallow wells and aquifers run dry, increasing venue expenses due to a lack of basic potable water.

Resource Highlight: Smoke Preparedness Toolkit (First Edition)



Calgary Folk Music Festival and Alberta Capital Airshed partnered to create the First Edition of The Western Canadian Outdoor Music Festivals Guide to Wildfire Smoke, a practical resource for outdoor festival and event organizers facing the growing challenge of wildfire smoke.

Designed for operational staff, volunteers, and boards, it supports informed decision-making, risk management, and organizational resilience while also helping funders, municipalities, governments, and insurers understand the impacts of smoke on outdoor events.

[The first edition of the toolkit is available in both official languages here.](#)

Common Themes Around Effective Adaptation Strategies:

- **Cancellation insurance and/or a pooled disaster relief fund** was the most common and pressing support need expressed by organizations. Cancellation insurance is currently prohibitively expensive.
- For presenters, **infrastructure investment for climate change adaptation**, and the purchasing of practical, at times relatively affordable equipment like misting stations, shade tents, emergency kits, smoke masks, and smoke monitoring equipment had the potential to greatly improve a festival's preparedness for extreme weather.



Shade sails keep the audience out of the sun at Salmon Arm Roots and Blues Festival. Jesse Roper at Salmon Arm Roots & Blues Festival 2025. Photo by: Selina Metcalfe.

- **Disaster preparedness plans** have developed significantly across the country over the course of the last decade. While there remains a quality gap between the most- and least-prepared presenters, the industry has already invested significant time and resources into creating effective disaster plans.
 - Many interviewees identified resource sharing within the industry and hiring emergency consultants to help develop and practice emergency plans as a valuable component of climate change adaptation.
- Presenters who had **relationships with their municipalities and local disaster response teams** reported that these relationships were extremely helpful in preparing for and recovering from extreme weather events. Guides and advice on establishing relationships with disaster services and local governments could be a valuable resource for festivals across the country who haven't built those relationships yet.

- Many presenters reported that having staff or volunteer meteorologists to monitor weather conditions, inform staff and make contingency plans was a significant help in being prepared for extreme weather. For festivals who are not able to afford staff meteorologists, hiring support would be a significant help.
- For camping festivals and gatherings in remote locations, evacuations are more challenging due the drug and alcohol use of attendees. Additional evacuation support (plans, training and infrastructure) for camping festivals would ensure the safety of all attendees.

Sector-Wide Adaptations & Strategic Recommendations

A coordinated response from funders, governments, and presenting networks is necessary to ensure the sector's survival. CAPACOA recommends the following tactical recommendations based on research findings:

- **Establish a Pooled Disaster Relief Fund:** With commercial insurance premiums climbing into the hundreds of thousands of dollars, performing arts networks must collaborate with government to establish a pooled sector-wide insurance program or emergency liquidity fund to prevent immediate bankruptcies.
- **Funding for Emergency Preparedness Planning:** Provide dedicated funding and hiring support for hiring expert consultants or emergency planning professionals. Presenters may possess disaster plans that have never been tested in actual crises, or need to build robust, site-specific medical and emergency preparedness protocols from the ground up.

- **Touring Artist Support:** Create dedicated artist relief mechanisms to compensate small- and medium-sized touring performers when an event is cancelled. Currently, independent artists and agents absorb travel and lodging losses during sudden climate events.
- **Flexible Grant Leniency & Safe Harbors:** Public granting bodies should establish administrative safe-harbor clauses. Presenters who are forced to cancel due to climate evacuations or hazards should not be required to return public funding after they have already spent it on pre-production costs.

- **Infrastructure & Digital Subsidies:** Provide capital grants for climate-resilient upgrades, including structural shade sails, water storage and misting stations, and robust online presentation platforms. In times of emergency, purpose-built digital stages can sustain cultural connection and community cohesion for evacuated or remote communities.



Dancers perform at the Vancouver Shipyards for Small Stage 2019 Summer Series.

Performers: Ana Sosa and Devan Genereux. Photo by: Laura Zeke. Courtesy of Small Stage.

- **National Weather Guidance Systems and Outdoor Air Quality Standards:** Implement clear, national, graduated checklists, operational weather guidance, and smoke guidelines, leveraging existing blueprints, to provide standard thresholds for safe performance, alongside subsidies for on-site local air monitors and consultation with meteorologists.

- **Municipal Integration & Service Alignment:** Bridge the gap between municipal emergency planners, arts presenters and Indigenous knowledge holders. Deepen connections between rural presenters and disaster response teams for communication and planning support, and establish community recovery support following climate events.
- **Burnout & Mental Health Support:** Presenters who have lived through climate events have endured significant periods of stress and need climate-sensitive mental health support.