

HeritageBC



# THE STATE OF HERITAGE

**SUMMARY REPORT OF THE  
PROVINCIAL ROUNDTABLES**

# ABOUT THE PROJECT

## **Vision**

To bring people together in their communities to share ideas, situations, challenges, successes, relationships, and aspirations related to heritage and other disciplines such as museums, archives, archaeology, and arts and culture.

## **Purpose**

To assess the state of the heritage sector in the province, and to identify new trends, challenges and opportunities.

## **Goals**

To inform Heritage BC's and the Heritage Branch's strategic planning and influence program and policy development. To facilitate the best possible alignment between Heritage BC's and Government's mandates and collective efforts to support heritage conservation in BC.



## Expected Outcomes

To increase knowledge, appreciation, understanding, retention, and management of BC's cultural history and heritage;

To increase organizational and individual capacities;

To increase community engagement and awareness;

To increase awareness of differing perspectives, approaches, and worldviews;

To increase recognition of and participation from Indigenous and distinct communities;

To increase awareness and implementation of better practices;

To develop an expanded vision and new characterizations of heritage, as it relates to associated disciplines, leading to a revitalization of conservation, protection, and interpretation of BC's heritage and history;

To develop a vision and calls-to-action for the sector.

# ABOUT THE MEETINGS

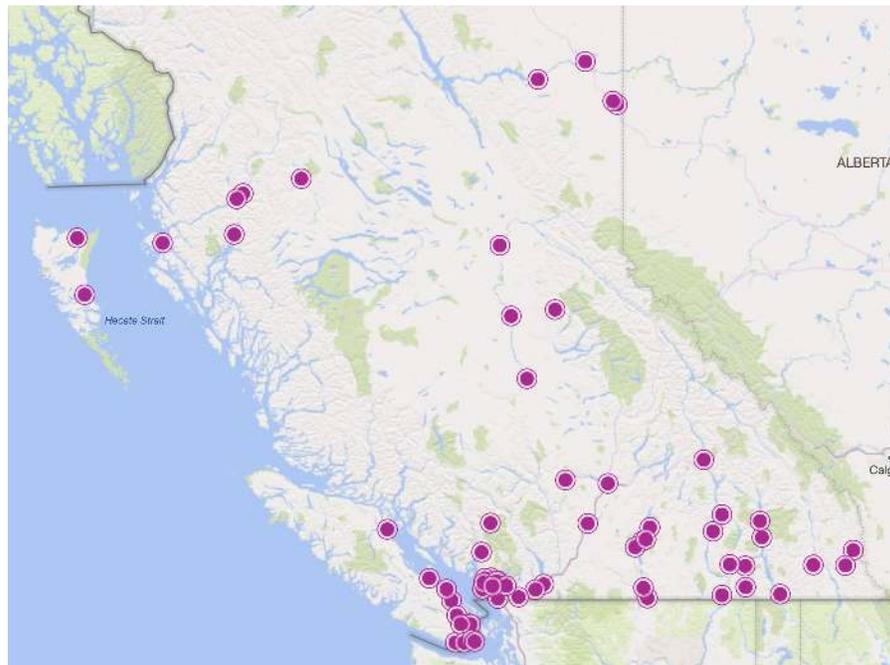
## *Meetings were held in:*

New Westminster  
Kelowna  
Kamloops  
Squamish  
Quesnel  
Prince George  
Fort St. John  
Terrace  
Prince Rupert  
Skidegate  
Masset  
Creston  
Ferne  
Trail  
Nakusp  
Maple Ridge  
Vancouver  
Burnaby  
North Vancouver  
Surrey  
Metchosin  
Victoria  
Nanaimo  
Campbell River

The first meeting was held at the Heritage BC conference in New Westminster, May 2018. The final meeting was held in Campbell River in February 2019 and an overview of the project was presented at the Heritage BC conference in May 2019.

500 people participated in the 26 meetings and online survey.

The meetings attracted people from beyond the specific meeting locations, which expanded the geographic reach of the project.



# ABOUT THE CONVERSATIONS

**Each meeting explored eight topics, which allowed participants to broadly explore their challenges and aspirations. Some of the topics were drawn from the Province's strategic priorities for heritage, which gave participants the opportunity to explore their connections to and understanding of these priorities.**

The discussion topics were:

- **Defining Heritage in BC**
- **Collaboration in Conservation**
- **The Vision and Values of Heritage**
- **Evolving the Practice of Heritage**
- **Future Opportunities for Heritage**
- **British Columbia's identity is strengthened and renewed through heritage conservation.**
- **Environmental stewardship through heritage conservation**
- **Economic diversity and durability through heritage conservation**

# WHAT WE HEARD

## DEFINING HERITAGE

The first topic of each meeting —defining heritage — turned out to be a very necessary conversation. Participants dwelled on the understanding and practice of heritage, and it was not unusual for them to return to this topic when addressing other topics.

**“Heritage is the tangible and intangible record of human imprint on the world.”**

Participants consistently described heritage in inclusive and expansive terms that focused on social or humanistic qualities. There is strong agreement that heritage is about human interaction with each other and the surrounding environment.

Participants felt it was time we changed our outlooks and they emphasized the need to include all people and cultures in heritage.

Participants also said heritage needs to be understood in order to develop programs and services that are truly beneficial to the sector.

*“The focus on definitions reflects the development of the sector.”*

*“Defining is complex and necessary. It informs everything that follows.”*

*“Not understanding heritage risks further fragmentation of the sector and increased irrelevancy in communities.”*

*“Heritage is the tangible and intangible record of human imprint on the world.”*

*“Heritage is the active recognition of the human story. The definition is evolving, it needs dynamism that moves through time. Heritage is a verb, not a noun.”*

## INDIGENOUS PEOPLES EXPRESSED

*“Our heritage is our environment. Culture is part of our environment; we need our culture to take care of our environment. If we don't take care of the land, we lose our culture.”*

## YOUNG PEOPLE EXPRESSED

*“Stories of the past are our stories... to tell, sing, draw, write and record... Everyone's stories are important, and their contributions should be equally valued. For this to happen, everyone needs to be given a voice.”*

## INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Indigenous participants asked that their words be heard as they were spoken:

*"We need to reframe as we talk about heritage."*

*"We need to understand heritage so that we can be a part of it."*

*"We are still here, and we are still practicing our culture and our connection with the land."*

*"We have been practicing our heritage forever. It is not something that you start."*

*"Heritage is our culture."*

*"The sector has a responsibility to do that work."*

*"The heritage sector has real potential to advance reconciliation, but decisive steps are required."*

*"The heritage sector has the ability to support reconciliation by developing more understanding of truth and beliefs."*

*"To change the way we operate is a really big challenge and we often feel powerless. How do we affect change when we do not have the power to make that change?"*

*"It is a difficult conversation, but we need to encourage organizations to open up and examine the legacy of policies. We need to deal with relationships in BC."*

*"We need to reframe as we talk about heritage... We need to understand heritage so that we [Indigenous peoples] can be a part of it."*

## CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Placing a strong emphasis on the recognition of all communities and people, participants acknowledged heritage has long been told from the point-of-view of the 'victor'. It is important that heritage includes all stories, both good and bad, and from all perspectives.

It is important that heritage includes all stories, both good and bad, and from all perspectives.

Interestingly, there was not a lot of diversity among the roundtable participants. The heritage sector may want to consider... "is there a conflict when the sector has a vision of diversity and inclusion, yet the sector itself does not appear to be diverse?"

*"The reconciliation conversation is super important, but not at the expense of other communities such as the Chinese community. Reconciliation is highly politicized and by providing information without judgement and baggage, we can help move it forward. We need to become better aware of our biases and stop them."*

## ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE CONSERVATION

The topic of "environment and heritage conservation" was not defined so that participants could explore their own ideas and priorities.

As it turns out, the word "environment" is used in a variety of ways and one overriding definition did not come out of the meetings. Concepts of "green buildings", "resilience", and "environmental sustainability" in the context of heritage conservation are not commonly known or practiced.

With the rising threat of climate change, which is imperiling every type of cultural heritage, we might want to ask the question: "Is this not the time for the sector to examine its role in finding solutions?"

*"I think an entire lifetime of a conversation around environmental stewardship is necessary just to understand what that means to the average citizen of BC. I do not feel I have a grasp of this concept."*

## LANGUAGE

This topic raises the question: if we do not understand each other, how can we expect the outside world to understand what we are talking about?

“Environment” is a common word, but not one that is not commonly understood.

“Conservation” is a word that cannot be avoided in this sector, yet it is not a word with a single definition.

## CAPACITIES

Capacities can be described as knowledge, expertise, funding, people, and spaces.

For a lot of the province, these are in short supply, which means many organizations struggle to reach their goals and to move forward.

*“Experience, knowledge and capacity are missing.”*

*“There are so many things people want to improve, but groups struggle due to lack of capacities and personnel. Smaller groups have to compete against organizations with much more capacity. Educating groups in capacity building is an important part of the process.”*

*“They are the real limitations faced by organizations wanting to embrace reconciliation.”*

*“Stewardship may be beyond our capacity if we cannot even survive.”*

## FUNDING

Of the lack of capacities, funding was the one that was most frequently discussed.

Funding programs are not always well aligned with the sector’s needs: application requirements are too onerous and sometimes the terminology is not understood; matching funds are too challenging to secure; grant requirements are often too great in comparison to potential funding; and many grant programs are not actually well-aligned with the work of the heritage sector.

*“The province has a very narrow focus which means they aren’t really helping a lot of heritage in the province.”*

*“We need funding.”*

## LEADERSHIP AND CATALYSTS

Leadership can be included among the missing capacities.

This is not to say leadership is lacking within organizations. What is missing are the catalysts to take organizations to higher levels, to bring people together to collaborate, and to break down silos.

The State of Heritage project turned out to be a good example of a catalyst that brought people together to have deep conversations about their work and passions.

*“There needs to be an external catalyst — either from local governments, organizations or individuals. The catalyst of positive change requires resources, such as planning, money, and expertise.”*

## COLLABORATION

Collaboration is considered to be important, but there isn’t a lot of evidence that suggests collaboration is happening on a large, impactful scale that is equally beneficial to two or more organizations.

*“Collaboration is a means of survival in small communities. Sometimes, heritage places can survive only when organizations work together for a win-win solution.”*

*“I would like to see more collaboration and sharing of information.”*

*“We need to help each other. People are doing the same things but in different capacities. There is a lot of good work going on, but we aren’t talking to each other.”*

The third quote says, “there is a lot of good work going on, but we aren’t talking to each other.” This is a theme that repeated throughout the conversations: a lot of work is happening throughout the province but the successes, impacts, and lessons-learned are not understood or shared. It is as if every organization is essentially reinventing the wheel.



## STORIES AND STORYTELLING

Stories are synonymous with heritage. Participants said we must listen to stories as they are told. Richness is found from the details and depth of layered stories.

*“Stories need to be what they have always been. They should not be sanitized, translated or changed for convenience. Just because a story is told does not mean it is understood, this is why we are told our stories time and again, with new details each time, until we are ready to understand.”*

*“These stories that we recognize as our [Indigenous] heritage need to be told by our own people. Each community has the ownership of its own stories. There are property rights to stories.”*

*“We need to look at the ephemeral aspects of stories and move away from the old focus of built history. We can talk about the church down the street and describe the stained-glass windows, but what were the people thinking and feeling at the time the building was built? This new knowledge needs to include how people lived their day-to-day lives, their culture, entertainment, and self-sufficiency.”*

*“Our nation and people will tell our own story and that is the heart of what we are talking about, that is what heritage is, telling our own stories. My words and my voice.”*

## ECONOMY AND HERITAGE CONSERVATION

The topic of the economy and heritage conservation did not resonate with the participants. Organizations described their struggle to survive and they may not be concerned with or aware of their impact on the local economy.

Participants are good at describing their intangible values, such as social well-being and local storytelling, but few spoke about the specifics of the economy, such as hiring and buying locally and their contribution to the tourism industry.

While there is considerable statistical evidence that the cultural sector makes significant contributions to society, a question worth considering is “if we cannot describe our outputs and impacts, are we not undervaluing our work and the sector itself?”

*What does heritage not include? “The economy.”*

## BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The built environment did not receive the same emphasis that was given to storytelling.

**“There is a crisis with the protection of heritage buildings in Canada. “**

Of course, no one said built heritage is no longer needed or it is any less important, but participants pointed to other ways to talk about built heritage and to describe its value.

Already, we are seeing Statements of Significance increasingly emphasizing the tangible and intangible values of human interaction on the structure itself and the land it occupies, with longer timespans and richer stories.

With the strong emphasis on storytelling, we are seeing a shift away from the traditional practices of heritage to the rising priorities in their communities. Participants said heritage must be relatable, useful, and socially relevant.

*“There is a crisis with the protection of heritage buildings in Canada. How will the building be maintained and kept up? If it is just about the story, it is easy to say we do not need the building anymore. The reality is buildings are coming down, even those with the protection.”*

# TAKING ACTION

## UNDERSTANDING AND DEFINING HERITAGE

A strong message is that all disciplines are working in the same field and a common understanding of heritage can break down silos.

Understanding this approach to heritage brings together archaeology, museology, indigenous culture, cultural landscapes, a diversity of cultural voices — and the built environment. Participants expressed a hope that, with a better understanding of heritage, programs and services can be better aligned with the sector's work.

## INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

The heritage sector is keenly interested in acknowledging past wrongs and in developing bridges leading to positive, mutually-beneficial relationships.

### **Calls to action include:**

- Advocating for a broader definition of heritage and inclusivity and updating legislation and policies
- Creating inventories of activities that have already taken place throughout the province to develop case studies and best practices.
- Developing accessibility and flexibility to funding programs.
- Providing funding that brings together non-Indigenous and Indigenous organizations.



## CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

This is a period of change, new understandings, and new relationships; leadership and capacity building are required to guide and direct the sector so that advancement can be realized more quickly.

### **Calls to action include:**

- Supporting inclusivity and diversity through the definition of heritage, education toolkits, etc.;
- Providing funding specific to inclusivity and diversity and support collaboration;
- Diversifying organizations and including Indigenous people and people of diverse communities in program development and implementation.

## OUR CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

Around the world, there is increasing alarm for climate change and for the threat it poses to cultural heritage. Leadership and capacity building are needed to move the heritage sector beyond crisis management.

### **Calls to action include:**

- Building awareness of the anticipated effects of climate change on landscapes and tangible and intangible heritage.
- Providing mentorship, encouraging collaboration, and providing regular learning opportunities
- And Developing best practices and activities that can be easily and effectively implemented.

## HERITAGE CONSERVATION ACT: DECOLONIZATION

Systems and legislation that are not consistent with the current values and perspectives will perpetuate fragmentation of the sector and divisions of people and communities. If legislation reflects the communities it aims to serve, it will become increasingly relevant.

### **Calls to action include:**

- Reviewing the Heritage Conservation Act and related policies so that it recognizes an Indigenous perspective of heritage.
- Revising and developing new heritage tools to support the broad understanding and practice of heritage;

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT: TOOLKIT

If heritage conservation tools are more widely implemented, heritage conservation and retention will increase, and we will see a reduction of risk.

### **Calls to action include:**

- Developing a comprehensive, easy-to-use, and affordable resource, including case studies and best practices, to encourage the adoption and successful implementation of heritage conservation tools.

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT: MODERNIZATION

If the Local Government Act is to gain greater relevance, it must reflect priorities and values that are important to local governments and to the heritage sector.

### **Calls to action include:**

- Reviewing and expanding legislation and policies so that the broader understanding of cultural heritage is recognized.
- Incentivizing the adoption of the heritage conservation tools, and improving relevance, so that the legislation reflects broader interests, priorities, and values.

## CAPACITIES

The heritage sector is faced with many stressors, which are noticeably affecting stability and growth. Long-term resourcing will lead to a stronger sector that is more impactful on BC's heritage.

### **Calls to action include:**

- Developing programs that imbed a catalyst or leader to spark projects or collaborative efforts and that are supported with funds.
- Redeveloping existing funding programs and developing new programs that recognize organizational needs and improve capacities, especially for rural communities.

## FUNDING

Funding is needed.

### **Calls to action include:**

- Investing in the Heritage Legacy Fund.
- Assessing existing fund programs for alignment with heritage sector.
- Providing museum grant programs to support their core missions (e.g. collecting, interpreting, exhibiting, educating through artefacts).
- Providing funding for archiving projects and programs.

## ECONOMY

For sustainability, survival, and growth, the heritage sector must be able to describe its relevance to the larger context

### **Calls to action include:**

- Continuing provincial economic and capacity surveys, which provide the only economic picture;
- Developing resources to support revenue generation and diversification for organizations and economic impact for local governments;
- Developing stronger support from tourism agencies.

## KNOWLEDGE

BC's education system does not include local and provincial heritage. Yet, with a relatively new curriculum, there are opportunities for communications and collaborations.

### **Calls to action include:**

- Documenting currently available education programming to learn best practices and successes;
- Developing communications toolkit to bring together the heritage and education sectors;
- Supporting the transmission of traditional knowledge;

## TAKING ACTION

We need to take action.

We need leadership at all levels.

We need to learn from one another, we need to share information and we need to work together.

We need to break down the silos and work to solve the problems. We need to measure results, and to learn from the successes.

We need to build bridges to connect with other sectors, including education, tourism, arts and culture, and health, and to include all people and cultures.

We heard a lot and learned a lot. We need to get started. And in a few years, we need to do this work again.



*“This meeting is one of the most exciting things to come along and there is a great opportunity...”*

*“Will people be heard? Will something happen?  
Will something come back?  
We hope this meeting really goes somewhere.”*

*“Words need to be turned to action.  
Without hope, there will be no legacy or heritage.”*

HeritageBC



[heritagebc.ca](http://heritagebc.ca)

May 2019