

Aug 19, 2021

Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services
% Parliamentary Committees Office
Room 224, Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4
Canada

Dear Members of the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services,

We would like to thank the Province of British Columbia for its support and leadership during a year filled with unprecedented challenges and difficult conversations. Your support of BC's arts, culture, and heritage sector has been an essential lifeline and has saved organizations from having to close their doors.

The BC Museums Association (BCMA) and Heritage BC represent more than 650 members including museums, art galleries, science centres, Indigenous cultural centres, historic sites, heritage organizations, heritage professionals, and volunteers in communities, large and small, across the province.

The past 16 months have arguably been among the most challenging times the museum and heritage sector have ever encountered - from the pandemic, to economic downturns, to wildfires, to the horrifying confirmations of the deadly legacy of residential schools, our sector has been forced to quickly and repeatedly pivot, adapt, and grow in order to respond to the ever-evolving needs of our communities.

To ensure that BC's museums and heritage organizations can continue to steward our communities' shared heritage, function as trusted public educators, and act as vital components of our province's healthy economy, the BCMA and Heritage BC recommend that the Standing Committee take the following actions:

- **Invest in green infrastructure and emergency preparedness**
- **Commit to stable, operating funds for museums & cultural heritage organizations**
- **Continue to prioritize funding for reconciliation and repatriation**
- **Work with the arts, culture, and heritage sector to promote the vital role that cultural organizations play in strengthening local economies**

The COVID-19 pandemic gives us a chance to reassess the status quo and work towards building a brighter future. By taking the following steps, the Province of BC ensures all British Columbians can experience, enjoy, and learn from our shared history, heritage, and culture, now and in the future.

Investing in Green Infrastructure and Emergency Preparedness

Museums and heritage organizations have a critical role to play in building greener communities and in helping British Columbians better understand the urgent need to take action to prevent catastrophic climate change.

The recent destruction of the Lytton Museum and Archives, Lytton Chinese History Museum, and other irreplaceable heritage sites in the Lytton area show the danger that climate emergencies pose to BC's heritage. To ensure that museums and heritage organizations are able to safeguard their collections and heritage sites from harm, investments in infrastructure and sustainability upgrades are needed. As the recent oversubscription of the Community Economic Recovery Infrastructure Program (CERIP) shows, museums and heritage organizations across the province have shovel-ready projects at hand if funding is made available. These projects will create jobs, stimulate economic growth & recovery, and will help ensure that BC's heritage is preserved as we face an uncertain future.

Museums, galleries, heritage sites, and science centres are among the most trusted institutions in our society. People trust museums more than newspapers, more than governments, and even more than schools. And critically, nearly 75% of people want museums to recommend action. We urge the Province of BC to see our sector as a valuable ally in the fight against climate change, one that can use our high levels of public trust to help overcome misinformation, build consensus, and help British Columbians understand the critical importance of climate action.

Stable Operating Funding for Museums & Heritage Organizations

In its June 29, 2021 *Report to British Columbians*, the Royal BC Museum states that,

“The Museum is under-resourced given the requirements of the Museum Act (2003), the mandate from the BC Government and management’s stated goals. This mismatch between resourcing levels, and goals and service ambitions that exceed the organization’s capacity, has made matters worse.”

While we applaud the Royal BC Museum and the Province of BC for investigating and taking steps to remedy long-standing, systemic inequalities and abuses, few organizations can access the resources and support required to approach this critical work with the gravity it deserves. Museums and heritage organizations have been chronically underfunded and resource scarcity magnifies systemic inequalities and impedes long overdue change.

Even small amounts of operational funding can be transformative for organizations, allowing institutions to create new jobs to focus on long-delayed priorities, invest in infrastructure upgrades and equipment renewal, allocate funding for emergency preparedness, and explore

new community partnerships. In order to become more just, equitable, and inclusive spaces, museums and heritage organizations need stable funding to create transformational change.

To achieve this, we encourage the Province to make BC Arts Council Operating Assistance funding available to more qualifying organizations today and to work with BCAC to make this essential funding program more widely available in the future. We stand with our peer Arts Service Organizations (ASOs) in urging the Province to maintain its commitment to doubling the budget of the BC Arts Council to \$48M.

Continue to Prioritize Funding for Reconciliation and Repatriation

We commend the Province of BC for taking action in 2020 to support the repatriation of Indigenous cultural patrimony and ancestral remains by funding the 2020 Repatriation Grants. This funding has helped nearly 50 Indigenous communities across the province build capacity, conduct research, and bring their communities' cultural heritage home. For the 2020 Repatriation Grants, the BCMA received more than \$1.1 million in requests for the available \$450,000 in funding - this shows the need for ongoing funding for repatriation in BC.

Heritage activities will be more important than ever as Indigenous communities process recent traumatic confirmations. We urge the Province to prioritize funding for Indigenous arts and language through the First Peoples' Cultural Council, funding for archival support and documentation through the BC Archives, and ongoing funding for repatriation.

Work with the Arts, Culture, and Heritage Sector to Promote the Vital Role that Cultural Organizations Play in Strengthening Local Economies

As demonstrated in the BCMA's and Heritage BC's joint [*Stories of Economic Impact & Resilience in the Cultural Sector*](#) study, museums and heritage organizations have diverse and transformative impacts on local economies. As our nation looks towards recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, museums and heritage organizations have a vital role to play in building a strong and inclusive economy.

Museums attract 8.6 million annual visitors and generate approximately \$213 million in annual revenue. Heritage-related tourism is estimated to bring the province nearly \$32 million each year. This, in turn, generates nearly \$57 million in further spending and contributions, including \$27 million to B.C.'s GDP. Museums and heritage organizations create jobs in communities large and small, enrich tourism experiences, and make our communities more engaging places to live, work, and play.

A survey of cultural and heritage institutions in British Columbia conducted by Heritage BC and the BCMA found that nearly 1 in 3 (32.5%) organizations "may never fully recover" from the financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. This result is similar to surveys conducted in other provinces and in the United States.

More than 3,000 people are employed in the museum sector in British Columbia. A loss of 1 in 3 museums means a likely loss of nearly 1,000 jobs that offer meaningful and rewarding employment for British Columbians. Moreover, museums are critical community centres, many of which offer summer camp programs, field trips, and other educational and employment opportunities for young people in the province. The loss of these jobs will reverberate through our economy, from education, to tourism, to even the childcare sectors.

For decades, museums and heritage organizations have excelled at “doing more with less,” but to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and to truly respond to the needs of our communities, we are calling on the Province to continue to demonstrate its cultural leadership and provide our sector with the support it needs to not just survive, but thrive.

We ask the provincial government to expand its funding mandate to meet these recommendations and to work with us to strengthen our communities’ social, economic and cultural fabric. We call upon the provincial government to be a visible, active contributor to the heritage sector - to support British Columbians as they conserve and preserve our history and heritage.

We thank you for this opportunity to participate in the Budget 2021 consultation.

Most sincerely,

Ryan Hunt



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Paul Gravett



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