

To the Honourable Ministers:

Melanie Mark, Minister of Tourism Arts, Culture, and Sport;
Katrine Conroy, Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations, and Rural
Development;
Nathan Cullen, Minister of State for Lands and Natural Resource Operations

The BC Museums Association and Heritage BC commend the Province of British Columbia for prioritizing tourism recovery through earmarking \$120 million in the 2021 budget and announcing the Major Anchor Attractions Program to support the sector. The Major Anchor Attractions Program will be essential in supporting large tourism organizations during this unprecedented pandemic.

Museums, galleries, and heritage organizations are crucial contributors to BC's rich tourism sector, and we urge the Province to include museums and heritage organizations, especially smaller organizations, in any COVID-19 relief or tourism stimulus programs that result from this funding.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating for the tourism sector, and museums and heritage organizations are among the most imperiled members of this industry. A survey of cultural and heritage institutions in British Columbia conducted by Heritage BC and the BCMA found that nearly one in three (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. While the United Nations found that COVID-19 may result in one in eight museums closing worldwide, in North America the damage could be much greater.

Unlike other not-for-profits or businesses in the tourism sector, museums and cultural organizations have the added responsibility of holding collections in the public trust. Therefore, the risk of wide-spread closures goes beyond the economic and social impact of jobs lost - it is a threat to the very fabric of our shared heritage. BC's museums and heritage organizations hold nearly 12 million objects in the public trust. If one in three organizations were forced to close, 3.6 million objects would be at risk. With limited collections storage space across the province, the museum and heritage sector has little to no ability to safely re-house even a fraction of these objects. This will undoubtedly lead to irreplaceable pieces of Canada's heritage being destroyed, lost, or moved into private collections.

While larger institutions have been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and are in need of relief funding, medium and small organizations make up the majority of museums and heritage organizations in the province and are in desperate need of support. The Major Anchor Attractions Program is reported to reach around 70 tourism sites across the province, and this



support is critical, but there are more than 400 museums and heritage sites in BC alone, many of which are in need of financial support in order to ensure the overall health of the tourism sector.

While medium and small organizations may not attract large numbers of tourists as individual organizations, collectively they enrich and diversify BC's tourism experiences. As the pandemic fades and domestic and global tourism begins to resume, competition for tourists is going to be higher than ever. In order to compete in this more competitive global market, BC needs to ensure that it offers diverse tourism experiences that provide engaging experiences for every interest - smaller museums and heritage sites play an important role in this.

"COVID-19 has made the funding issues at our small museum even more acute. It's the limited support for our operations - paying staff and keeping the lights on - that is desperately needed at this time. When a small museum receives a grant for its operations, there are immediate benefits to the community through employment and engagement. We need this support for our operations to continue to play vital roles in both supporting our communities and in strengthening BC's tourism sector," said Kelly Black, Executive Director of Victoria's Point Ellice House Museums & Gardens.

Small and medium museums and heritage sites are often the economic engines of their local communities and contribute to ensuring that communities large and small have a diverse and vibrant tourism sector. From providing seasonal jobs for youth, to building a shared sense of community, to working with local businesses to put communities on the map, to attracting cultural tourism from across the world, museums and heritage organizations are an integral part of BC's tourism ecosystem. If any one part of a healthy ecosystem is left to wither, it threatens the health of the whole.

We thank the Province of BC for its continued support of the tourism sector and recognize that the road to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic will be long, but with the Province's support and leadership, our sector can look forward to a brighter future.

Sincerely,

Ryan Hunt
Executive Director, BC Museums Association

Paul Gravett
Executive Director, Heritage BC