

A Municipal Election Primer

Making the Case for Culture: How to Position your Museum, Gallery, or Cultural Centre in the Upcoming Municipal Elections

**BCMA Advocacy Committee, 2018
(Revised from 2017 Provincial Primer)**

The Advocacy Committee is committed to increasing awareness of the BCMA and British Columbia's rich and diverse cultural sector.

The October 20, 2018 municipal elections are an excellent opportunity to generate awareness and support for our cultural facilities, programs, and conservation efforts. Municipal politics are, arguably, the most important elections in Canada for our sector as local politicians directly intercede on behalf of the citizens they serve. Additionally, local politicians are often the ones you can create the strongest relationships with.

This article is meant to provide BCMA members with facts and strategies to make arts, culture and heritage a central municipal election issue. The BCMA is committed to advocate for our sector during the election, and we

invite members to help ensure that meaningful support for cultural infrastructure is an ongoing priority for elected officials. If members across the province engage their local municipal politicians, we have an opportunity to bring culture front and centre in our cities, townships, towns, and villages.

Increasing awareness about the value and impact of culture and heritage among local decision-makers is critical to the growth and development of our sector. It is critical that we be strong advocates for the economic, social, and cultural impacts of our work – from generating economic returns and tourism revenue to building community connections, meeting the needs of Indigenous and multicultural communities and providing welcoming and accessible opportunities to the cultural sector for all. We hope you find the information included here useful and motivating.

BCMA Backgrounder

The B.C. Museums Association, founded in 1957, represents over 400 institutional and individual members across British Columbia, including museums, art galleries, archives, historic sites, Indigenous cultural centres, science centres, botanical gardens and related organizations. We are a provincially incorporated non-profit society and a registered charitable organization that works to create a bright future for B.C.'s museum, gallery and heritage sector. The BCMA represents a vibrant community of professionals across the province who work diligently to provide welcoming, inclusive community spaces for all, and who serve as the keepers of our cultural, natural and historic heritage and legacy. Working under an agreement with our GLAM (galleries, libraries, archives and museums) partners, we advocate as a strong block with the B.C. Libraries Association and the Archives Association of B.C. to influence all levels of government to promote culture.

Facts Supporting Museums, Art Galleries and Cultural Centres as a Vital Sector

Economic Impact

- The culture sector is one of the fastest growing sectors in British Columbia's economy, generating a wealth of new revenue both inside the province and externally.
- According to the most recent report by Statistics Canada (2015), culture's contribution to Gross Domestic Product or GDP in B.C. is \$5.7 billion, making up 3% of the total provincial GDP, and 12% of culture GDP in Canada.
- There are 88,000 culture jobs in B.C., which is equal to 3.8% of all jobs in the province.
- Culture GDP in British Columbia is 6.33 times that of sport, and culture creates 4.31 times more jobs than sport (Statistics Canada 2015). The GDP contributed by culture is greater than agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting industries.
- Through creative innovation, the culture sector is able to diversify B.C.'s predominantly resource-based economy.

- A strong culture sector gives British Columbian communities a brand, or "attraction factor," for new workers, residents and tourists, spurring and supporting a vibrant cultural tourism industry and encouraging work in the knowledge sector in the new economy.
- Culture contributes to urban and rural development and revitalization, enhancing communities and providing further opportunities for economic and social growth.

Social and Cultural Impacts

- British Columbians are "avid cultural participants," engaging in arts and culture activities more than other Canadians.
- Cultural spaces in municipalities build civic pride and promote a strong sense of place. More than eight in ten Canadians feel that these spaces foster a sense of community pride and contribute to quality of life in their community.
- Cultural spaces and programming build communities and knit neighbourhoods together, which fosters safety and community wellbeing.
- Culture sparks reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. When we share the stories of our history, cultural programming promotes understanding, respect and meaningful relationships.
- Arts and Heritage have been shown to empower youth, especially at-risk youth, to succeed in school, in work and in later life.
- 85% of Canadians believe that arts education assists in the emotional and intellectual development of children and consider it is a good reason to support the arts.
- Attending arts activities has been positively correlated with physical and mental wellbeing.

What Museums Need: Points for BCMA Members & Politicians in their Communities

We need increased and consistent annual investment in our sector for facilities and programs. Core, operational funding is the key for the base survival of a cultural institution. Consistency provides certainty, particularly for human resources, and increases the economic and social impact of our institutions in communities. Here are some talking points for speaking with your local politicians and advocates:

- Advocate for increased annual funding for core operations and programming.
- Advocate for more funding for capital projects and/or facility improvements.
- Advocate for increases in grant opportunities for our sector.
- Increase public connection with museums, art galleries, cultural centres and historic sites in B.C..
- Promote collaboration across multiple levels of government in supporting our sector.
- Support the leading role of museums, art galleries, cultural centres and historic sites in strengthening B.C.'s national and international profile.
- Adopt a "percent for art" program that increases the presence of art in public spaces for all capital development projects.
- Double the B.C. Arts Council budget over the next three years, and provide an immediate investment of \$8.1 million to bring the provincial funding level on par with the other Canadian provinces.
- Increased funding for artistic research and development in the arts and culture sector.
- The establishment of a stable fund dedicated to repatriation and worthy projects associated with reconciliation, both for museums and Indigenous centres.

B.C. has not kept pace with cultural sector funding as in other provinces. Compared to other provinces, B.C. has more artists, but some of the lowest funding for the arts per capita in Canada.

What Can You Do?

The most important thing is get to know your municipal candidates. For municipal politicians, cultural spaces such as community museums, historic sites and galleries are the perfect place to meet potential voters. Invite them in and show them how great your facility, program, or event is - how integral it is for the community and how important it is that it be sustained into the future.

- Find out who is running for elected office in your community.
- Contact municipal politicians, regardless of political leaning, and invite them to your special events and programs. Also, invite local media, and let the candidates know that media will be on hand.
- Ask them for their support. Do they support safe, connected, and happy communities? If elected what would they do to support the museums, art galleries, cultural centres and historic sites in your municipality/township?
- Attend municipal candidates' meetings and ask questions that relate directly to the importance of the cultural sector.
- Follow candidates in the news and on social media to keep in touch with what they are up to. Connect with candidates and make the case for arts and culture at any opportunity that arises. Let them know why they should care about our sector.
- Make sure support for museums, art galleries and cultural centres is an election topic in your community.
- Identify their understanding and commitment to Indigenous centres and the process of reconciliation within the lens of arts and culture.
- Ensure candidates understand how the cultural sector can be a catalyst for reconciliation with local Indigenous Nations.

How will Your Candidates Support Culture?

Once you know who is running for your municipality, it is easiest to simply search for their contact information online. Phone their office, email them. Municipal politicians often respond quite quickly, especially during election time!

Get the conversation started:

- “What is your vision for arts, culture and heritage in our riding?”
- “What role do you see arts and culture playing in our municipality?”
- Learn about their plan for supporting the sector: What specific things will they do in council to improve the capacity for our industry to serve the public?

After the Election

- Build stronger relationships with municipal, provincial, and federal elected officials and policymakers.
- Remind councillors of their promises as they relate to culture. Connect with local media if needed.
- Continue to lobby all levels of government to increase funding to our sector. Often, local government will provide funding if other levels are also contributing.
- Work with governments on policy and legislative changes to help strengthen the sector.
- Work with governments and stakeholders to increase training and professional development opportunities for the sector.
- Build coalitions with other organizations (GLAM, other BCMA members, arts, culture and heritage stakeholders) to advocate together on shared issues and operating funding.
- Although capital project funding is very helpful, consistent operating funding can provide the best result as it increases stability and viability.

Good luck and thanks for helping promote museums, art galleries, cultural centres and historic sites in B.C.!

Statistics for this article were sourced in the following reports:

Susan Brinton, From the Margins to the Mainstream: Moving B.C.'s Creative Industries Forward, 2012.

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Statistics Canada, 2013 and 2015.

Hill Strategies 2012, 2014, 2016.

Rowland Lorimer, Dreamcatcher: Towards a Creativity/ Innovation Strategic Plan for British Columbia, 2013.

National Aboriginal Tourism Project-Economic Impact of Aboriginal Tourism in Canada, 2015.

EKOS Research Associates, 2012.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015.

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Canadian Arts Coalition, 2016.