

Considerations When Closing Your Site During COVID-19

Links, suggestions, and resources to support museums, galleries, heritage sites, and cultural organizations temporarily close their sites during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Guidelines for Closing Your Site During COVID-19

Until a vaccine or treatment for COVID-19 is developed, it is likely that museums, galleries, and cultural organizations may be required to close and reopen to support public health and safety. This document contains links, suggestions, and resources to help your organization prepare to shut down. For reopening suggestions and links, please consult the BCMA's [Reopening Guidelines for BC Museums, Galleries, and Cultural Organizations](#).

This is a living document that will be updated as our understanding of the COVID-19 virus, best practices, government guidelines, and guidance from medical professionals evolves. While BCMA makes every effort to present accurate and reliable information, the information provided in this document is “as is” without any warranty of accuracy, reliability, or otherwise, either express or implied. Users of this document should not in any manner rely upon or construe the information or resource materials in this plan as legal, or other.

Only your organization can decide the best path forward. The resources provided are intended to empower you to make the best-informed possible decisions as we approach an uncertain future.

Preparing to Close

The [American Alliance of Museums](#) recommends that as museums prepare to close, they keep the following priorities in mind:

- **Develop a communications plan to inform your community/stakeholders about the closure**
 - Checklist:
 - ☐ Have you updated your website?
 - ☐ Have you updated your Google My Business listing?
 - ☐ Have you posted to social media?
 - ☐ Do you have a way to update your website and social media without access to your site?

- ☐ Do you want to put out a media advisory?
- ☐ Have you informed your staff/volunteers/contractors?
- ☐ Do you have any upcoming events or programs that need to be cancelled?
- ☐ Have you communicated with funders that some projects may be impacted by closure?

- **Ensure that collections are in stable condition and can be left unattended**

- Checklist:

- ☐ Turn off or block light in collection spaces, except for security lighting, to limit the effects of light and UV light on your collection
 - ☐ Decreasing the air exchange rate (minimum outside air) when no people are on site can provide a more stable, less dusty environment
 - ☐ If portable equipment, such as humidifiers, is used to maintain environmental conditions, provide ongoing maintenance, or consider shutting it down, particularly if it is prone to malfunction or leaks
 - ☐ Consider dropping the temperature set point a few degrees if this can be done without increasing the risk of mould: lower temperature slows degradation rates, reduces pest activity, and saves on heating costs
 - ☐ Remove food from gift shops, cafés and offices unless it is stored in reliable refrigeration or freezer units to curb rodents
 - ☐ Replace sticky traps prior to closing and monthly thereafter, if site inspections are possible to remove dead insects that can attract certain museum pests
 - ☐ Keep drains from drying out to prevent sewer fly and cockroach infestations as well as to suppress sewer gas ingress
 - ☐ Cover collections with plastic sheeting in areas prone to leaks

- ☐ Drain plumbing if there is a risk of freezing
- ☐ Consider moving collections potentially at risk to higher ground prior to indefinite closure

- **Prepare your site to ensure its environmental conditions are stable**

- Checklist:

- Is the building secure?
 - ☐ Check doors, windows, and alarm systems to make sure they are working correctly and inspect facilities regularly during closure so that other emergencies are detected early
 - ☐ All doors are locked
 - ☐ All windows are locked
 - ☐ Security alarm is functioning
 - ☐ Fire protection systems are functioning
 - Are valuables secure?
 - ☐ Important documents are stored in a safe location and, ideally, backed up digitally
 - ☐ Valuable items such as cash boxes, computer equipment, and electronics are secure and not visible through windows
 - ☐ Desks are clean and free of valuable personal belongings
 - Maintain a presence on site
 - ☐ Establish a routine for checking in on the site
 - ☐ Ensure that key paths and walkways are regularly cleared of snow
 - ☐ Consider having lights set to come on at a regular schedule
 - Establish an emergency management plan
 - ☐ Decide who will respond to emergencies (i.e. floods, fallen trees, break-ins) while your site is closed

- ☐ Decide who will respond to emergencies if the primary contact is unavailable
- Are you prepared for seasonal weather?
 - ☐ Do you have a snow removal plan?
 - ☐ Do you have a Spring flood plan?
 - ☐ Do you have a Summer heat plan?

Each of the above recommendations is complex and requires significant planning and coordination, we recommend museums develop a plan for re-closing now to avoid rushed decision making if subsequent waves of COVID-19 transmission arise.

For a more in-depth checklist, we recommend reviewing Blue Shield Australia's [Closed by COVID-19 – Checklist for GLAMs and Historical and Heritage Sites](#).

Tips for Ensuring the Safety of your Collections

Canadian Heritage Resources

- [Caring for Heritage Collections During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- [Tom Strang – Caring for Collections During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Focus on Reopening \(video\)](#)
- [Irene Karsten – Caring for Heritage Collections During the COVID-19 Pandemic \(video\)](#)

International Resources

- National Heritage Responders, [Sheltering Collections in Place: What You Should Know](#)
- Blue Shield Australia, [Closed by COVID-19 – Checklist for GLAMs and Historical and Heritage Sites](#)
- American Alliance of Museums, [Preparing for Closures or Re-Closures](#)

Tips for Preparing your Site for Closure

The Government of Canada and the Canadian Conservation Institute have an excellent checklist to help museums and collections-based organizations prepare to close their sites



for the winter ([Closing a Museum for the Winter](#)). This checklist offers practical steps to ensure the safety of your site and collection during an extended closure.

Since re-closures may occur during the Fall and Winter, make sure you prepare your site (including your plumbing) for colder temperatures and snow. Depending on the severity of a second wave of COVID-19 transmission, snow removal services may be more difficult to access than normal.

Tips for Leading in Times of Crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic takes a toll on everyone. From disrupting routines, to creating economic anxiety, to threatening the health of loved ones, as a leader you must consider the mental health of your team and your community. Even if you are the only staff person at your organization, museums, galleries, and heritage sites are often looked at as community leaders and you can play an important role in supporting your community through this difficult time. Here are some resources to help you lead during a time of crisis.

Tips for maintaining your own mental health and wellness during a crisis: As a leader, maintaining your mental health is extremely important. While it may be tempting to focus on everything that you need to do to support your team and organization, it is equally important that you take steps to support yourself during this challenging time.

- Keep a regular schedule
 - Working from home can lead to overwork or difficulty in separating work life from home life, a schedule will help with this
- Stay connected
 - Stay connected with your team using tools like Slack, Zoom, or Microsoft Teams, but also make sure that you are staying connected with friends and family as best as you can
- Keep your immune system strong
 - Wash your hands regularly for at least 20 seconds
 - Cough or sneeze into a tissue or your elbow
 - Disinfect your home work station regularly
 - Avoid touching your face, eyes, nose, and mouth



- Stay home and rest if you are feeling unwell
- Exercise and stay active
- Get fresh air
 - When possible make sure you leave the house and get sun and fresh air while making sure that you avoid crowds and maintain social distancing
- Stay informed...
 - Stay informed by following official news sources like the [BC Centre for Disease Control](#)
- ...but be aware that too much news can also be stressful
 - If following current events is not helping your mental health, take a break from social media and news websites. Too much information can be just as draining as not enough
- Focus on something that brings you joy
 - Now is a great time to focus on a hobby or learn a new skill, however, it is also totally normal to not feel like taking on extra tasks. Find something that brings you joy, even if that something is doing nothing

Tips for supporting the mental health of your staff and volunteers: Humans typically do not enjoy dealing with disruptions and uncertainty – during this challenging time, your team will likely be facing increased levels of stress and anxiety. Here are some tips to help support your team to the best of your abilities.

The [Canadian Mental Health Association](#) recommends 6 tips for responding to staff anxiety about COVID-19:

- Have a plan
 - Think ahead and make sure you have answers for your staff's questions: What happens if someone gets sick? Can they take time off if a loved one becomes sick? Do they have to inform you if they get sick? How will their roles change during the closure? How secure are their jobs?
 - Communicate, share, and be open
 - Let your team know how regularly you will communicate with them. Regular, and open, communication is key to maintaining team morale
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during remote work. And remember, if you do not know the answer to a question, don't be afraid to say so.

- Empathize
 - Recognize that this is a stressful time for everyone. Recommend online resources (for example, this resource exploring tips for [Working Remotely During COVID-19](#)) to help equip team members with self-care strategies.
- Reassure as best as you can
 - Remember, if you're reading this document, you are making a plan to close and reopen. Remind your team of your plan and reassure them that you are all working together to get through this. Be careful, however, that you don't overpromise if you are unsure of what the future holds.
- Understand
 - Everyone responds to stressful situations differently. Understand if normally productive team members are less productive. Encourage team members to take time off or work more flexible hours if it supports their mental health. At the same time, some team members may prefer to focus on work during stressful times, so not everyone may appreciate extra time off.
- Recognize that this is not "business as usual"
 - Know that work will likely be impacted — work will slow down and necessary travel may be cancelled. Reassure staff that expectations will shift accordingly.

A note on not-for-profit boards: While your board of directors is responsible for supporting the strategic priorities and governance of your organization, they are also people dealing with their own professional and personal challenges. If you need input from your board of directors, make sure to give them additional time to respond to email and meeting requests. Also consider explicitly communicating if a request is urgent or time dependent since your board members are likely balancing numerous responsibilities.



Additional Links

Canadian Mental Health Association, [6 Tips to Respond to Employee Anxiety About COVID-19](#)

Centre for Workplace Mental Health, [Working Remotely During COVID-19](#)

Provincial Health Services Authority, [Workplace Wellness: Coping During COVID-19](#)

American Alliance of Museums, [Leading in Times of Crisis](#)

