

Ottawa, February 19, 2021

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance
Department of Finance Canada
90 Elgin Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0G5

**British Columbia Museums Association and Yukon Historical and Museums Association
Written Submission to the Department of Finance, Pre-Budget Consultations, *Let's Talk
Budget 2021***

Dear Minister,

The British Columbia Museums Association (BCMA) and the Yukon Historical and Museums Association (YHMA) are pleased to submit this letter to the Government of Canada to be considered during its 2021 pre-budget consultations. The BCMA and the YHMA support museums, galleries, and cultural institutions across British Columbia and Yukon, respectively, through networking, advocacy, and professional development.

Introduction: A critical crossroads for Canada's heritage sector

Canada's heritage sector stands at a critical crossroads, one that may determine its very future and forever alter our country's cultural landscape. On one hand, calls for equity and social justice from Canadian Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour (IBPOC) have confronted the heritage sector with its legacy of colonialism and oppression, demanding that museums, galleries, and cultural institutions create real, meaningful, and lasting change. On the other hand, the COVID-19 pandemic has stretched Canada's heritage sector to the point of breaking, decimating budgets, cutting institutions off from their communities, and causing every single cultural organization in the country to quickly pivot and innovate or risk disappearing.

But with these crossroads comes the opportunity for a reinvention of Canada's cultural sector: becoming stronger, more diverse, and an essential contributor to building a brighter future for all Canadians.

Through this letter, we hope to show the potential that our nation's museums, galleries, and cultural organizations can play in creating this brighter future and we respectfully ask that funding for the heritage sector is prioritized in the upcoming 2021 Federal Budget.

COVID-19's Impact on the Heritage Sector: An existential threat

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused immeasurable damage to Canada's heritage sector, the long-term effects of which may be catastrophic. Canada's heritage institutions hold items, artefacts, records, and specimens in the public trust, housing more than 70 million objects, 113 million photographs, 41 million scientific specimens, and 7.7 million linear meters of textual records. In addition to these moveable objects, Canada's heritage sector cares for and preserves thousands of unique heritage buildings and spaces across the country. A recent 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.

Because cultural and heritage organizations hold collections in the public trust, 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 Canada’s heritage. If one in three museums were forced to close, 21 million objects would be at risk. With limited collections storage space across the country, the heritage sector has little to no ability to safely re-house even a fraction of these tens of millions of objects. This will undoubtedly lead to irreplaceable pieces of Canada’s heritage being destroyed, lost, or moved into private collections.

While this would be a tremendous loss for Canadians as a whole, the impact would be truly devastating for Indigenous communities. Since before the founding of Canada, Indigenous communities have had their culture, heritage, and even the bodies of their ancestors stolen and moved into museum, gallery, and university collections across the country. Many Indigenous communities have spent decades researching and locating their cultural patrimony and working to repatriate it back home. If tens of millions of heritage objects are moved, let alone lost, due to the widespread closure of museums, this would set back the repatriation work of Indigenous communities by decades.

It is critical not only to ensure that these collections remain in the public trust, but also that they are accessible to the public, in accordance with best practices and protocols, through interpretation, community engagement, research, and other activities. A continued reduction in staffing in cultural and heritage institutions represents a significant threat to accessibility, in addition to loss of livelihoods.

To avert these potential cultural disasters and to help save thousands of jobs in heritage organizations across the country, we recommend that the 2021 Federal Budget includes sufficient funding to:

- Provide additional pandemic relief funding for the heritage sector until more significant recovery has been achieved in Canada’s economy.
- Increase federal funding for the Museums Assistance Program (MAP) to at least \$60 million annually.
- Increase federal funding for repatriation of Indigenous cultural objects and remains.

Supporting a More Inclusive Heritage Sector: Policies to promote Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

In the past year, there have been calls from traditionally marginalized groups that Canada’s heritage sector must become more diverse and inclusive. By supporting the creation of a new national museum policy, the Federal Government can directly contribute to supporting justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in the heritage sector. Canada’s national museum policy was last updated in the early 1990s. The renewal of this policy was included in the 2019 mandate letter of the Minister of Canadian Heritage and this work remains an essential part of strengthening Canada’s heritage sector.

Canada needs a new national museum policy for two critical reasons. First, the world has undeniably changed since the early 1990s. Second, a new museum policy that establishes clear guidelines and expectations for the repatriation of Indigenous cultural patrimony would be a significant step forward in

supporting reconciliation and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

The last iteration of the national museum policy is more than 30 years old and neither reflects the innovative and transformative progress made by heritage and cultural organizations in that time nor does it reflect the diversity of Canada in the 21st Century. At the time the current policy was drafted, only 0.4% of Canadians had internet access in their homes, same-sex marriages were not legal in any province, and residential schools were still open in Canada. Our nation has changed, and it is time that its national museum policy reflects the changes made and supports the changes that still need to come. A new federal policy is critical to informing a long-term strategic vision for Canada's heritage sector and this cannot be accomplished with a 30-year-old policy.

A new museum policy also has tremendous potential to furthering reconciliation and supporting UNDRIP. Over the past year, the BCMA worked with the Province of British Columbia to administer a new, one-time grant to fund repatriation research and projects. The BCMA received nearly \$1.1 million in requests from more than 50 Indigenous communities for \$450,000 in available funding. These applications ranged from early-stage research from communities who have never engaged in repatriation work before, to an application to repatriate 200 ancestors as part of work that has been years in the making. By working with Indigenous partners to establish a new national museum policy, Canada can continue its journey to supporting reconciliation.

We recommend the following actions:

- Allocate funding to create a modern national museum policy.
- Increase federal funding and support available to Indigenous communities to repatriate their cultural patrimony.
- Ensure that small and medium-sized museums, heritage organizations, and Indigenous cultural centres are actively involved in the creation of a new museum policy.
- Ensure the new national museum policy complies with UNDRIP.

Economic Recovery and the Heritage Sector: Shovel-ready projects from coast, to coast, to coast

Shovel-ready projects in the heritage sector exist in communities large and small across the country. We join Heritage BC, the National Trust for Canada, and colleagues across Canada in recommending the Federal Government allocate at least \$200 million to support the renewal, retrofitting, and adaptive use of revenue-generating space, the creation of affordable housing; and help not-for-profits, charities, and heritage organizations renew cultural infrastructure and social purpose real estate.

This critically-needed funding would both serve to stimulate Canada's economy during the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and would be a massive reinvestment in the nation's infrastructure and heritage spaces that is long overdue.

The Province of British Columbia recently established \$15.52M in funding for Unique Heritage Infrastructure as part of the Community Economic Recovery Infrastructure Program, one of the government's economic recovery programs that provides grants to support economic resilience, tourism, heritage, and urban and rural economic development projects in communities impacted by COVID-19.

With this investment, the Province recognized the important contribution of heritage infrastructure. This funding will result in total spending of almost \$25M, an overall GDP contribution to BC of \$14.3M, and employment opportunities for 4,329 British Columbians. Heritage infrastructure has a demonstrated and powerful impact on BC's economic outlook and its importance and influence cannot be denied.

Investment in heritage infrastructure has exceptional economic, environmental, and social benefits. These are proven and we urge the Government of Canada to take advantage of these benefits with an investment of at least \$200 million to supporting shovel-ready infrastructure projects.

We recommend the following actions:

- Allocate at least \$200 million to support the renewal, retrofitting, and adaptive use of revenue-generating space, the creation of affordable housing; and help not-for-profits, charities, and heritage organizations renew cultural infrastructure and social purpose real estate.
- Prioritize funding and support for reinvesting in heritage spaces and properties.

Conclusion: Investing today for a brighter tomorrow

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an immeasurable impact on Canadians and in order to rebuild from the devastation of the past year, it is critical that the Government of Canada needs to continue to invest today in building a brighter future for tomorrow.

Museums, galleries, science centres, and heritage organizations have a critical role to play in supporting this brighter future. Canadians overwhelmingly agree (96% of survey respondents) that heritage organizations contribute to our overall quality of life. Museums and heritage organizations also provide Canadians with \$1.2 billion each year in educational benefits and accordingly are viewed by 89% of Canadians as trusted sources of information. With the proper support, our sector can use this trust and educational capacity to create a more inclusive, better-informed, and more empathetic society, pushing back against the forces of disharmony and misinformation that threaten the very fabric of Canadian identity.

We respectfully urge the Government of Canada to prioritize increased recovery funding for the heritage sector, the creation of an innovative new national museum policy, and investing in infrastructure. By supporting heritage, you are helping to create a brighter, more inclusive future for all Canadians.

Yours sincerely,



Ryan Hunt

BCMA Executive Director



Lianne Maitland

YHMA Executive Director