

**Written Submission for the Pre-Budget
Consultations in Advance of the Upcoming
Federal Budget**

Time for Change; Time for Action

Canadian Museums Association

October 8, 2022

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: That the Government of Canada establish a funding component within the Museums Assistance Program (MAP) to support repatriation of Indigenous Belongings

Recommendation 2: That the Government of Canada establish a funding component within the MAP to support capacity-building for Indigenous cultural centres and Indigenous-led heritage organizations.

Recommendation 3: That funding for the recommended dedicated MAP components be incremental to current 2022 MAP allocations.

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Indigenous peoples have the right to manifest, practise, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies; the right to maintain, protect, and have access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites; the right to the use and control of their ceremonial objects; and the right to the repatriation of their human remains.

States shall seek to enable the access and/or repatriation of ceremonial objects and human remains in their possession through fair, transparent and effective mechanisms developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples concerned.

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), Article 12

TIME FOR CHANGE; TIME FOR ACTION

Saying that Canada is at a crossroads may sound alarmist, but there is little doubt that the stress and trauma of the last two years has laid bare deep fissures in Canadian society (the same is true for many other Western societies). It has brought in sharp relief historical inequities and grievances, and exacerbated divisions within our civil society.

Addressing these issues is imperative if social cohesion and democratic norms are to be safeguarded.

As some of the most trusted and respected public institutions in the country, museums can provide Canadians with solid ground on which to pause and reflect on a way forward out of the uncertainty of today.

Museums can be safe spaces for dialogue and understanding at a time when a cacophony of seemingly irreconcilable points of view dominates our daily lives.

But if museums are to play their unique role in healing our society and in helping Canadians imagine a better future together, the issues and challenges they face must be acknowledged and acted on immediately.

This submission spells out immediate actions the Government of Canada can take to this end.

The National Museums Policy of 1972: Activating change

Today, the advantages of a vibrant museum and heritage sector are well understood. In Canada in addition to employing over 35,000 people, the museum and heritage sector generates close to \$9 B in direct and indirect economic benefits every year.

These benefits are not just economic in nature, and studies have shown that museums and heritage institutions can contribute to the development of more creative, inclusive, and healthy places.

But in 1972 - the year the Government of Canada announced the creation of a National Museum Policy - the role of museums in society was viewed through a narrower lens. At the time, museums in Canada were seen primarily as guardians of objects and much of their work centered on protection and conservation.

The National Museums Policy aimed to change that.

Launched on the heels of the report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, the National Museums Policy was one of several federal cultural initiatives in response to the cultural and political tensions of the day.

Framed under the policy objective of “democratization” the government’s strategy was to nudge museums away from strict conservation to embrace a more activist societal role in helping heal the stresses and fractures that, at the time, characterized Canadian society.

Today, the parallels with 1972 are legion. The last few years have laid bare fissures in our society that are deeper and more complex than those that were prevalent in Canada 50 years ago.

It should follow that -- just as it was 50 years ago -- Canada’s museum and heritage sector would be engaged in bringing people together, healing and exploring a common future.

Just as in 1972, today museums can be safe spaces for reflection about our society, for telling the stories that speak about common values and about celebrating diversity and real inclusion. They can be safe spaces for dialogue and healing.

For many however, they are not.

For many, a visit to a museum can be a triggering, traumatic experience, and the same often holds true for those who work within its walls. The reason is that the foundations of many museums and heritage institutions are rooted in Canada’s colonial history and so too are the stories they tell.

Museums are keepers of history, but many have not told all of the Truth.

The first step in addressing the inequities inherent in the structures and roles of many of these institutions is to name it. Truth telling is a cleansing act that must precede healing, transformation and Reconciliation.

UNDRIP: Moved to Action

On September 27, 2022, the CMA spoke the Truth about Canada’s museum sector and of the policies that support it when it released its report, *Moved to Action: Activating UNDRIP in Canadian Museums*. The report, five years in the making, responds to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s Call to Action #67.

Call to Action #67 tasked the CMA “to undertake, in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, a national review of museum policies and best practices to determine the level of compliance with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and to make recommendations.”

The report makes 10 recommendations for action and change aimed at governments and the museum sector.

Among these recommendations is the call for a revised National Museum Policy that would align with and support UNDRIP implementation.

Heritage Minister Rodriguez and his Department recognize that Canada’s museum policies are artefacts of a bygone era, maladapted to today’s realities, and simply not up to the task. We welcome and applaud the minister’s commitment to pan-Canadian consultations on a new museum policy.

However, we also recognize that implementation of a comprehensive National Museums Policy will require extensive consultations; policy development and, likely, will require a legislative framework to support it. While the modernization of Canada's museum policy is long overdue, we know that it will take time to get it done right, and the challenges and obligation we face today **require immediate action**.

Recommendations

A more immediate area of policy focus for the Government is the Report's call for dedicated financial support for the repatriation of Indigenous belongings, as well as for Indigenous cultural centres and Indigenous-led national heritage organizations.

Recommendation 1: That the Government of Canada establish a funding component within the Museum Assistance Program (MAP) to support repatriation of Indigenous Belongings

Recommendation 2: That the Government of Canada establish a funding component within the MAP to support capacity-building for Indigenous cultural centres and Indigenous-led heritage organizations.

Recommendation 3: That funding for the recommended dedicated MAP components be incremental to current 2022 MAP allocations.

Action on these recommendations would be simple.

The existing Museum Assistance Program (MAP) provides a program and policy framework that could be readily expanded to accommodate new, UNDRIP-related funding support.

And while funding would need to be incremental to current MAP funding (robbing Peter to pay Paul would only shift the burden elsewhere in the sector), it could be provided for in the 2023 Budget¹.

CONCLUSION

Too often when considering spending or other budget-related proposals, one is tempted to frame the issues involved as a zero-sum game or a matter of political choice. In the case of repatriation, it is neither of those things. Our legal frameworks governing Canada/Indigenous relations -- treaties and the recently adopted UNDRIP Act -- tell us that this is not a matter of diversity and inclusion; these are legal obligations that Canada must uphold.

Immediate action in these areas would represent an important first step toward implementation of UNDRIP in the museum and heritage sector.

¹ Note that total MAP program spending in 2022 was \$15.7 M (grants and contributions).

ANNEX

Museums Assistance Program

The Museums Assistance Program (MAP) supports heritage institutions and workers in the preservation and presentation of heritage collections. The program fosters the preservation of Indigenous culture and facilitates access to heritage collections for all Canadians. It also promotes professional knowledge, skills and practices related to key museum functions.

The MAP provides funding to Canadian museums and related institutions through several components, and each has its own eligibility criteria.

Digital Access to Heritage

The [Digital Access to Heritage](#) component fosters improved access to heritage collections through collections digitization and digital content development, as well as activities that build capacity in these areas. The component also supports the development and delivery of related training, resources and services that benefit multiple museums.

Recovery Fund for Heritage Organizations (New)

As announced, Canadian Heritage released details of the new [Canada Arts and Culture Recovery Program \(CACRP\)](#) which continues the Department's targeted support for organizations that are still facing significant financial challenges in the third year of the pandemic.

The [Recovery Fund for Heritage Organizations](#) provides financial assistance to help heritage institutions, as they seek to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. These funds will help compensate for lost revenues due to public health restrictions and capacity limits that were put in place.

Access to Heritage

The [Access to Heritage](#) component promotes access to heritage across different geographic regions of Canada. Eligible projects are related to travelling exhibitions, to assist heritage organizations in reaching new audiences.

Exhibition Circulation Fund

The [Exhibition Circulation Fund](#) component assists museums with the costs of hosting travelling exhibitions originating from another museum or from a federal heritage institution and borrowing artefacts for exhibition from one of the national museums of Canada.

Indigenous Heritage

The [Indigenous Heritage](#) component supports the preservation, presentation and management of Indigenous cultural heritage in Canada. It also promotes public awareness and understanding of the diverse cultures of Indigenous Peoples.

Collections Management

The [Collections Management](#) component aims to improve professional knowledge, skills and practices to strengthen professional standards related to key museum functions for collections management in Canada. It also supports the development and delivery of resources or services that will benefit multiple museums.

Canada-France Agreement

The [Canada-France Agreement](#) component aims to develop special, lasting ties between museums in Canada and France, as well as enhancing the skills and competencies of museum professionals. It also assists Canadian organizations in developing new international partnerships and in reaching new potential audiences for Canadian heritage collections.