

Ottawa, December 16th, 2020

Written brief to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage in support of its Study of the Challenges to Art, Culture, Heritage and Sport Sectors caused by COVID-19

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Introduction

The Canadian Museums Association (CMA) is pleased to submit the following brief to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage in support of its *Study of the Challenges to Art, Culture, Heritage and Sport Sectors caused by COVID-19*.

Museums are at the heart of a just and knowledgeable society. They educate and inspire. They house our culture and history. They create a sense of community and belonging. They allow us to better understand our past, our present and shape our future. They spark conversations and reflection. They build empathy and understanding for each other and remind us how diversity makes us stronger.

Canada boasts some 2700 museums, cultural heritage and science centres. These museums, large and small and in all regions, have been terribly hard hit by the pandemic and they require greater resilience to survive. Meanwhile, the tremendous benefits of museums to Canadian citizens, our society and the economy illustrate the importance of ensuring Canada's museums not only survive, but that they thrive.

Overview of pandemic impact on museums

There are deep concerns about the ability of museums to weather the impacts of the pandemic. Some international studies suggest at least 1/8 museums may close permanently. It is difficult to say what the impact in Canada will be as the effects are ongoing and we estimate the impacts will be longer-term.

We know many museums had to do layoffs. Several were not able to open this past summer – the most important period for generating revenue. Those that did reopen have been dealing with decreased visitors, reduced tourism, the impact on fundraising and other events, as well as the costs involved with implementing the necessary health and safety measures. We know that museum closures and the financial impact of the pandemic on museums has increased risks to the collections and belongings

museums hold. Some museums have experienced thefts due to reduced security. Despite all this, museums have shown an incredible dedication to serving the community — including parents, educators, and children — during this time. Canadian museums have looked for ways to reach their communities online, although unfortunately not all have the capacity or the resources to deliver these online programs, so this remains a great challenge.

Summary of recommendations

- Prioritize the renewal of the national museum policy
- Provide additional pandemic relief to the sector
- Increase federal funding to museums
- Recognize the tremendous benefits to the economy and society

Renewal of the national museum policy

The renewal of the national museum policy was in the 2019 mandate letter of the Minister of Canadian Heritage. As a result of the pandemic, however, the initiative has yet to be advanced. The CMA has been urging the government to recommit to updating Canada's over 30-year-old national museum policy. The current national museum policy is woefully out-of-date and simply doesn't reflect a modern Canada — nor the Canadian museum sector. We believe an updated policy is vital to pandemic recovery and to establishing greater long-term resilience for the sector.

A national museum policy sets out a strategic vision for all types of museums as social institutions that provides direction to increase the impact and sustainability of the museum sector. A strong, refreshed national museum policy would:

- Aim to preserve and maximize the content of collections to tell the story of Canada, inclusive of its many cultures
- Allow for the further digitization of collections to empower greater collaboration and sharing of Canada's cultural heritage
- Ensure a sustainable, inclusive future by addressing key societal issues including environmental sustainability, truth and reconciliation and social cohesion
- Enhance public participation, as museums help educate all Canadians, including young people and families, while also encouraging a culture of innovation through research and collaboration
- Help guide the workforce toward the development and implementation of best-practices
- Help ensure the financial sustainability of the sector, and increase its resiliency to meet future challenges, expected and unexpected
- Position the museum sector for success by directly aligning our work with the priorities, challenges and opportunities of the Canadian society as put forth in government policies and initiatives

The CMA has offered to lead this initiative with — or on behalf of — the Department of Canadian Heritage and museums across Canada and in collaboration with our provincial and territorial partners. This policy renewal must be prioritized.

Continue to provide financial support to museums through the pandemic

As part of its pandemic response the Government announced \$500M in one-time emergency funding for the broader sector (arts, culture, sports), with \$53M for museums.

While we are grateful for the support, we note that not all of the \$53M emergency funding that was dedicated to museums was allocated. The CMA, our Board and provincial and territorial museums associations have asked the government not to reprofile the remaining emergency funds. We have asked that the remaining funding that was earmarked for our sector go toward museums — and the associations that must support them.

We recognize that in its Fall Economic Update, the government announced a series of measures, some of which may benefit the museums sector.

Until the national museum policy is updated and until there is a more sustainable funding model established, museums' access to continued and sufficient emergency support is critical to their survival.

Increase federal funding to Canada's museums to at least \$60M annually.

Greater financial support of Canada's museums is urgently and desperately needed. The CMA views such an investment as smart and prudent - and a direct benefit of Canadian society and our economy. The Museums Assistance Program (MAP), a main funding source for Canada's museums, has seen a consistent decline in funding since being introduced in 1972.

We must fully recognize that the sector feeds the economy and innovation, and that it forms an integral part of the fabric of our nation, benefiting Canadians of all ages, backgrounds and regions.

The CMA has been urging the government to increase its investment in museums to at least \$60M annually. More sustainable funding would result in less reliance on emergency support.

Recognize the tremendous benefits of museums to society

A recent study conducted by Oxford Economics, commissioned by the Ottawa Declaration Working Group, co-led by Library and Archives Canada and the CMA, found that museums contribute significantly to the Canadian economy and societal well-being, including:

- For every dollar invested in museums, Canadian society gets \$4 in benefits.
- 96% of respondents surveyed for the study said that museums contribute to our overall quality of life in Canada.

- Museums across Canada welcome an estimated 30M annual visitors, that's over five million more than the entire National Hockey League did during the 2018-19 season. (30M vs. 22M)
- Museums provide \$2.9B/year in economic benefits.
- Museums provide a value of \$1.2B/year in educational benefits and \$277M /year in value of online visits.

The museum sector has, historically, not made a very strong case in explaining its value in our society. This has no doubt been one reason it remains under-funded. Now, more than ever, is a critical time to emphasize the sector's economic and societal impacts, and to demonstrate why a greater investment in museums is a smart investment.

Now, more than ever, is a critical time to ensure that museums have a modern policy and adequate funding to ensure not only their survival but their critical role in our society and economy.

About the Canadian Museums Association

The Canadian Museum Association (CMA) is the voice for Canada's vibrant museum community, from small, volunteer-driven organizations to cherished national institutions, and for the millions of Canadians whose lives are enriched by museums. We advocate for public policies and support, we build skills across the profession, and we establish and inspire connections to strengthen and sustain museums. Our vision: Stronger museums. Engaged citizens. A better Canada. Our mission: We champion, support, connect and elevate the museum sector.

www.museums.ca