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Renewal of the Canadian Museum Policy

Discussion Guide

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Table of contents

List of acronyms and abbreviations.....	iii
Introductory message	1
What are museums?	1
Why renew the policy?.....	1
Mechanisms for engaging Canadians.....	2
Canadians	2
Heritage institutions	2
Indigenous partners.....	2
Provincial and territorial governments	3
Topics targeted for discussion.....	3
Theme 1: the role of museums in society	3
Theme 2: resilience and sustainability in the museum sector	4
Theme 3: advancing reconciliation with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples	5
Theme 4: embracing equity, diversity and inclusion.....	6
Theme 5: preservation and access as core museum functions.....	7
Share your views	9
Appendix 1 - Questions	10

List of acronyms and abbreviations

Acronym or abbreviation	Definition
CMA	Canadian Museums Association
ICOM	International Council of Museums
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People

Introductory message

Welcome, everyone, to the 2022-23 museum policy consultations!

The purpose of these consultations is to solicit your views and reflections on renewing the Canadian Museum Policy. As we prepare to renew our strategy to support heritage institutions across Canada, we want to hear from you about your priorities, your ideas and any initiatives you would recommend to the Government of Canada.

The next Museum Policy, for the period beyond 2023, will set out aspirations for the future of museums and have implications on how we protect our heritage and how Canadians will be able to access it. These aspirations will be supported through a range of funding programs, legislative measures and services.

In this document, you will find a series of ideas for further consideration and discussion. They are intended to guide and stimulate dialogue during the consultations. We invite you to read this document and to contact us with any thoughts and ideas you may have on any of the themes and issues addressed. Share your views and thoughts by sending us an email, a written submission, or any other document of interest to the following email address: politiquemuseale-museumpolicy@pch.gc.ca.

What are museums?

“A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.”

International Council of Museums (ICOM), August 2022

Based on the ICOM definition, museums include a range of heritage institutions, such as art museums, archives, historic sites, botanical gardens and zoos. Many Indigenous cultural centres will also fit this definition. There are approximately 2,700 heritage institutions located in communities large and small across the country.

For the purpose of this discussion guide, the term museum and heritage institution will be used to refer to all of these types of institutions.

Why renew the policy?

Canadians enjoy visiting museums. Almost 7 in 10 (69%) visited at least one heritage institution in 2019¹ and a growing proportion of Canadians are using online resources to access heritage.

¹ Arts and Heritage Access and Availability Survey 2020-2021, Final Report, Prepared for Department of Canadian Heritage and Canada Council for the Arts by Environics Research Group (April 2021).

The Government of Canada last updated the *Canadian Museum Policy* in 1990.² The 1990 Policy encouraged the preservation of objects in our museums and sought to increase Canadians' access to those objects. The policy also set a goal of professionalizing museum activities. Since then, Canadian society has changed, and new priorities have emerged. The 1990 Policy does not take into consideration important societal shifts such as reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, addressing issues of equity, diversity and inclusion, or the ongoing digital transformation. The 1990 Policy also does not address the different needs of small, medium and large institutions and the different roles each may fulfil within their communities.

Renewing the museum policy will allow the government to better respond to the heritage sector, support the preservation of heritage in Canada, and ultimately enhance Canadians' access to their history and heritage. An updated policy could result in improvements or changes to existing federal funding programs, services and measures, or possibly identify new ones, to ensure that our cultural heritage is protected, and that heritage institutions continue to be a place where Canadians can enjoy and learn for generations to come.

Mechanisms for engaging Canadians

To better understand the challenges, realities, and priorities of heritage institutions, and what Canadians expect of them, we will be making use of 5 consultation mechanisms between now and the end of May 2023:

Canadians

Members of the general public will have the opportunity to make themselves heard directly through our online consultations. Canadians will be invited to complete an online questionnaire between January to February 2023 or to share their views and thoughts with us by sending us an email, a written submission, or any other document of interest to the following email address: politiquemuseale-museumpolicy@pch.gc.ca.

Heritage institutions

Online survey

Approximately 2,700 heritage institutions, including museums, art galleries, archives, heritage sites, botanical gardens and zoos received an online survey in October 2022. The survey was emailed directly to the institutions across Canada. Canadian universities and colleges offering museum or archival professional and academic programs were also invited to participate.

Virtual thematic dialogue sessions

The Department of Canadian Heritage expects to hold 5 or 6 virtual dialogue sessions with heritage institutions and associations based on themes raised in the sections below. Participation in these sessions will be by invitation only.

Indigenous partners

Indigenous museums, cultural centres, knowledge keepers and academics will be invited to participate in virtual discussions on the themes outlined below, although particular attention will be paid to issues related to

² *Canadian Museum Policy: Temples of the Human Spirit*, Government of Canada (1990).

reconciliation and the museum policy. National Indigenous Organizations will also be invited to share their views. Modern treaty holders will be consulted directly in writing.

Provincial and territorial governments

Opportunities for dialogue and information sharing are taking place through the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Culture and Heritage Directors Table, with the first dedicated engagement session held in November 2022. Participants included relevant provincial and territorial departmental officials.

Topics targeted for discussion

This section of the discussion and pre-consultation document is intended to flesh out certain themes to be covered by the virtual dialogue sessions.

Theme 1: the role of museums in society

Background

Museums are memory institutions. They preserve and present our natural and historical heritage and inspire us with art. They can create a sense of belonging to a community and are recognized as trusted sources of information. Some are major tourist attractions and economic drivers, some are important science and research centres, while others serve as community meeting places. They are places where Canadians can learn or simply relax and enjoy. For some they are a reminder of a difficult past, while for others they are a place to heal. 85% of Canadians feel that heritage institutions contribute to their quality of life³ and millions visit a heritage organization every year. From the largest to the smallest, museums are woven into our society.

Museums are also part of the colonial legacy that encouraged collecting and displaying all kinds of objects from every corner of the country or the globe. While this approach has educated and opened new horizons, it has also impoverished and separated people from their heritage. Museum narratives traditionally excluded the many other stories and perspectives that make our history rich and meaningful.

Museum audiences are increasingly diverse and their expectations about heritage institutions are changing. A growing number of visitors want museums to help them understand today's world and to be more inclusive and accessible, including through digital and technological advancement.⁴ In response, museums are finding more welcoming and innovative ways of sharing our history. Heritage institutions are embracing digital technologies to make their institutions more dynamic and accessible. Others are changing collecting practices, exhibition spaces and programming to tell stories from multiple perspectives. Museums large and small can be places of social inclusion, where ideas can

Did you know?

Pre-COVID-19, 70% of all museum visits were to Canada's 250 largest museums.

³ *Arts and Heritage in Canada: Access and Availability Survey, 2016-2017*, Prepared for the Department of Canadian Heritage and the Canada Council for the Arts by Environics Research Group (March 2017).

⁴ *Museums for Me: Engaging Canadians on the Future of Museums*, What We Heard Report. Prepared for the Alberta Museums Association by Hill+Knowlton Strategies (June 2021).

be exchanged, and people can feel comfortable. This is important if museums are to maintain the trust of Canadians and build strong communities.

Canadians value museums, but what is their place in today's society? Does their role and value differ between large and small institutions, or between major cities and rural communities? Are they addressing the changing expectations of museum visitors? Expressing the role that museums play in our society may be as varied as the number of museums across Canada.

Discussion questions

- What role do you think museums play in Canada's society?
- What are the key challenges museums will need to overcome if they are to play a meaningful role in society?
- What should museums continue to do to remain relevant to society?
- What could the Government of Canada do to help museums fulfil their role in society?
- What do you think museums in the future will look like?

Theme 2: resilience and sustainability in the museum sector

Background

Canada's museums are at a crossroads as they seek to change and innovate to meet the needs of Canadians in our modern society.

But there are challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the extended closure of almost every museum in the country, often more than once. The closures affected museums' financial situations, their staff, volunteers and especially visitors. Almost 3 years later, there are still concerns about whether visitors, tourists or even volunteers will return to pre-pandemic levels, while museums are also experiencing the same staffing and labour issues as many other sectors.

Financial pressures are longstanding. The vast majority of heritage institutions are not-for-profit organizations, but only some receive a portion of their funding from municipal, provincial or territorial governments. Federal funding is generally awarded to support specific projects rather than daily operations. Over half of museums in Canada operate on annual budgets of less than \$100,000, while 1/3 operate on \$40,000 or less. Only about 10% of institutions have budgets greater than \$1 million per year and only a handful of these large institutions receive sufficient monetary donations that can support some of their activities. As a result, many museums can't afford full-time staff or competitive wages.⁵

Although money will always be necessary to ensure sustainable museums, long-term sustainability may be more about what museums offer rather than what they have in their collections. Museums can contribute to

Did you know?

- 54% of heritage institutions do not charge admission fees
- 45% of full-time employees earn less than \$40,000 per year
- 20% of museums are solely volunteer run but the number of volunteers has declined by 51% since the pandemic

⁵ Government of Canada Survey of Heritage Institutions, 2019.

sustainable development by raising awareness of Canada's cultural and natural heritage values and supporting creative industries and sustainable tourism. As a trusted source of information, museums can help educate the public and encourage debate on issues such as climate change, equity, diversity and inclusion. Museums must also consider these issues in their behind-the-scenes operations. How can heritage institutions protect and preserve their collections in environmentally sustainable ways? How can museums become more inclusive places to work or volunteer? The ability of museums to adapt and change with society may ultimately determine their resilience and sustainability.

Discussion questions

- What makes a heritage institution sustainable?
- How can heritage institutions find a more stable financial footing?
- How can heritage institutions better support sustainable development and address climate change?
- Is the digital transformation part of a sustainable solution?
- What are the key challenges heritage institutions will have to overcome to become more resilient and sustainable?
- What could the Government of Canada do to help museums become more resilient and remain sustainable?
- What could sustainable organizations look like in the future?

Theme 3: advancing reconciliation with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples

Background

In 2016 the Government of Canada endorsed the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People* (UNDRIP). Implementing the *UNDRIP* principles is about creating a better future for present and future generations, breaking down barriers, creating social equality and, in relation to heritage, protecting Indigenous culture and repatriating belongings and ancestral remains.

Museums have an important role to play in advancing reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. This concept is not new. It was recognized by the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, by the 2015 *Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action* and, in their response to Call to Action 67, the report by the Canadian Museums Association (CMA) *Moved to Action: Activating UNDRIP in Canadian Museums*, published in September 2022.

Museums are colonial institutions. They collected and preserved Indigenous belongings and ancestral remains and perpetuated narratives that excluded the voices and contributions of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples. They classified and organized Indigenous belongings in ways that obscured creators and often destroyed their meaning. Museums are recognizing these problems and are taking steps to move forward towards reconciliation. Building relationships with Indigenous communities, repatriation initiatives, integrating Indigenous languages and perspectives into exhibitions and collection care are all steps on that path. However, there is still much work to be done to better align with the principles set out in *UNDRIP* and advance reconciliation in museums.

Repatriation of belongings and ancestral remains is a key aspect of reconciliation. The recent CMA report has made it clear that museums must be able to better position themselves to address repatriation issues. Collaboration with Indigenous communities and adopting appropriate terms and language to identify what is in collections are good starting points. Cultural exchanges and the development of new relationships supporting knowledge sharing are also part of the path to reconciliation.

Indigenous communities have and will continue to develop their own museums, cultural centres and spaces. Indigenous-led organizations are important community hubs, supporting cultural revitalization and providing a home for repatriated belongings. They also face many challenges, including long-term financial sustainability.

Did you know?

- 26% of heritage institutions in Canada house 6.7 million Indigenous belongings
- 90% of these belongings are found in 8 institutions
- 1.3% of heritage institutions house about 2,500 ancestral remains

Discussion questions

- What could museums do to better support reconciliation with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples?
- What are the key challenges to overcome?
- What are successful initiatives in advancing reconciliation?
- What could the Government of Canada do to facilitate reconciliation and the repatriation of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis belongings and ancestral remains?
- What could the relationship between museums and First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities be in the future?

Theme 4: embracing equity, diversity and inclusion

Background

Embracing equity, diversity and inclusion starts by understanding that museums are part of Canada's colonial legacy. For many years museums have decided what to acquire, what to exhibit and whose stories to tell. Through these actions, museums contributed to the exclusion of voices that the mainstream society of the day did not wish to acknowledge. People of colour, people with disabilities, immigrants, 2SLGBTQI+ communities, religious minorities, official language minority communities, and even people of different economic status were often marginalized or excluded from museum collections and exhibits.

People want to see themselves reflected in museums.⁶ Engaging the community and being open to different perspectives in how a story is told may help museums become more inclusive and welcoming places. Reducing barriers to access may also make museums more equitable. Steps to reduce or waive ticket prices, facilitate online access to exhibits, and introducing multiple languages are some of the ideas that museums continue to consider that can support inclusivity and more equitable access.

Museums do not have a highly diverse workforce. In 2017, the full-time and part-time workforce was, on average, 66% female with variations across the country. Nearly 1/3 of the workforce was 45 years of age or

⁶ *Museums for Me: Engaging Canadians on the Future of Museums, What We Heard Report*. Prepared for the Alberta Museums Association by Hill+Knowlton Strategies (June 2021).

older.⁷ Overall, the percentage of racialized communities in the heritage sector workforce was 4%, compared to approximately 22% of the general Canadian population.⁸ Historic sites have the highest per capita percentage of racialized communities in its workforce (approximately 6%) compared to any other type of heritage institution. The more diverse the workforce, the greater the capacity for a museum to tell the stories of Canada from multiple perspectives.

Did you know?

- Pre-COVID, 72% of new immigrants visited at least one heritage institution per year
- 74% of the 2SLGBTQI+ community visited at least one museum per year

Discussion questions

- What could museums do to better engage and reflect the diversity of their communities?
- What are the barriers to telling diverse and inclusive stories?
- What are the barriers to hiring equity-deserving individuals or involving them as volunteers?
- What is working well in the promotion of equity, diversity and inclusion?
- What could the Government of Canada do to encourage equity, diversity and inclusion in museums?
- What does a modern, inclusive heritage institution look like in 5-10 years?

Theme 5: preservation and access as core museum functions

Background

Collections are the heart of heritage institutions. Although these collections can be very diverse, ranging from documents, objects, works of art, plants, animals and even digital formats, it has long been considered that a museum isn't a museum without its collection.

Preserving collections remains a key function for most museums. Heritage institutions have been successful at building collections, which serve valuable education and research purposes. But museums are running out of space to display or store what they collect.⁹ In some museums, only a fraction of the collection is on public display, while the rest remains in storage. This raises questions about what should be kept for future generations as well as how and where it be stored as infrastructure costs continue to rise. There are also increasing concerns about what has been collected, how it has been collected and from whom. As noted above, there is an increasing focus on the repatriation of Indigenous belongings and ancestral remains, but there have also been concerns about the repatriation of Nazi-looted art, and calls from former colonies in Africa, South America and elsewhere seeking the return of their cultural heritage lost during colonial occupation or to illicit trafficking. Although these concerns may only affect a small number of heritage institutions in Canada, they raise important questions about past collecting practices and the rights of the cultures and societies who no longer have access to the objects that carry significant meaning for them.

Another important issue is climate change and its impact on both heritage sites and collections. Wildfires, floods and increasingly powerful storms pose risks to historic places and museum collections. Museums can also play

⁷ *Government of Canada Survey of Heritage Institutions*, 2017.

⁸ According to StatsCanada 2016 census data. Source: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/census-2016-immigration-1.4368970>

⁹ Canadian Association for Conservation of Cultural Property, Care of Collections Survey, 2019.

an important role in educating Canadians about climate science, using artifacts and archival collections as important research sources for establishing changing patterns over periods of time.

Museums collect and preserve objects for the purpose of making them accessible to the public. But does access always have to take place inside a heritage institution? Can museums connect with people in other ways and in other places? Digital museums, pop-up exhibits, and other innovations can bring museums into communities, greatly enhancing accessibility and removing barriers that may keep people away. Access is no longer measured simply by physical visits; it now includes virtual modalities, outreach, and community engagement.

Did you know?

- In 2017 only 16% of collections were digitized by heritage institutions
- Archival institutions lead the way in making collections accessible online

Digital transformation is changing access to heritage collections. This shift was boosted by the COVID-19 pandemic, driving the creation of new virtual exhibits and online programming. Other museums have completely embraced digital to create museums without walls. But digital transformation also comes with its own challenges. Not all Canadians have access to broadband internet, particularly in the North and rural regions. Smaller institutions need the capacity and technological know-how to create good digital content. Rapid changes in technology require that digital files be migrated or risk becoming obsolete. This comes with a financial cost and puts the data at risk.

What should be preserved in heritage institutions and how to best preserve it remain important questions in museums. Institutions face challenges in preserving, documenting, organizing, storing, and displaying their collections. They must understand decolonization and embrace technology to grow and maintain digital collections, while mitigating the threats of climate-change and natural disasters. Will these core functions evolve as museums' role in society evolves and as museums change from being object-centric to being more people-centric?

Discussion questions

- Are concepts about preserving collections and providing access changing? If so, in what ways?
- What are the key challenges when it comes to the preservation and accessibility of collections? And what is working well?
- What could the Government of Canada do to better help museums preserve and protect their collections while making them accessible to Canadians?
- How might collections be managed differently in the future to make them more accessible to Canadians?

Share your views

We are interested in your views and welcome detailed responses regarding the questions set out in this discussion guide. Send your responses, ideas and suggestions by email to politiquemuseale-museumpolicy@pch.gc.ca.

Appendix 1 - Questions

Theme 1: the role of museums in society
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ What role do you think museums play in Canada's society?▪ What are the key challenges museums will need to overcome if they are to play a meaningful role in society?▪ What should museums continue to do to remain relevant to society?▪ What could the Government of Canada do to help museums fulfil their role in society?▪ What do you think museums in the future will look like?
Theme 2: resilience and sustainability in the museum sector
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ What makes a heritage institution sustainable?▪ How can heritage institutions find a more stable financial footing?▪ How can heritage institutions better support sustainable development and address climate change?▪ Is the digital transformation part of a sustainable solution?▪ What are the key challenges heritage institutions will have to overcome to become more resilient and sustainable?▪ What could the Government of Canada do to help museums become more resilient and remain sustainable?▪ What could sustainable organizations look like in the future?
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Theme 4: embracing equity, diversity and inclusion
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ What could museums do to better engage and reflect the diversity of their communities?▪ What are the barriers to telling diverse and inclusive stories?▪ What are the barriers to hiring equity-deserving individuals or involving them as volunteers?▪ What is working well in the promotion of equity, diversity and inclusion?▪ What could the Government of Canada do to encourage equity, diversity and inclusion in museums?▪ What does a modern, inclusive heritage institution look like in 5-10 years?
Theme 5: preservation and access as core museum functions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Are concepts about preserving collections and providing access changing? If so, in what ways?▪ What are the key challenges when it comes to the preservation and accessibility of collections? And what is working well?▪ What could the Government of Canada do to better help museums preserve and protect their collections while making them accessible to Canadians?▪ How might collections be managed differently in the future to make them more accessible to Canadians?