

Ontario Museum Association

2020 Budget Submission

Growing Ontario's Rural Communities by Investing in Museums

Museums, galleries, and heritage sites are vital cultural and tourism infrastructure in every community in Ontario. These institutions are essential to supporting Ontario's growing Culture and Tourism GDPs: across the province, in-person museum visits have grown 15% over five years to 19.4 million a year.¹ In their communities, museums contribute to lifelong learning and to creating distinct and vibrant places to **live, work, visit, and invest**.

With new and exciting exhibits, experiences, and community programs, Ontario's 700 museums are key assets for cities, towns, rural and Northern places across the province.

The Ontario Museum Association acknowledges and supports policies that will build infrastructure in Ontario to achieve digital, educational and cultural aims.

The Ontario Museum Association is pleased to bring forward two recommendations for funding to build on the potential of Ontario's museums and announced government initiatives, such as the *Rural Economic Development program* and the *Cellular & Broadband Action Plan*.

Recommendations for Funding

A. Create Jobs for Young People in Growing Sectors

B. Develop Digital Access & Engagement for Rural Communities

Recommendation A: Create Jobs for Young People in Growing Sectors

Launch careers in Ontario's vital heritage & cultural tourism markets

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce has reported that increasing numbers of tourism jobs are remaining unfilled and that there is not sufficient workforce to support the growth of Ontario's tourism sector.² Similarly, Ontario museums have expressed difficulty finding post-secondary students to fill internship positions, especially in rural areas. Building a tourism workforce can start earlier with specific programs for young people in heritage and cultural tourism.

The Ontario Museum Association is recommending a \$3 million fund to support experiential learning in early career and entry-level positions for young people in Ontario museums, in order to showcase and develop careers in tourism and culture.

In Ontario, the tourism and culture sectors are both growing, contributing more to our province's GDP and offering more jobs. The province's museum visits are increasing as well, to more than 19 million a year.³ With early-career experiential learning, Ontario's young people will see the potential of a career in tourism and culture. Focused workforce development based on experiential learning is a recommended approach to addressing the known labour shortage.⁴

In these early-career positions, participants will cultivate in-demand communication and presentation skills, develop transferable customer service and guest relation skills, and build knowledge of the local area. The skills learned in a visitor-focused position in a museum can jumpstart a career in the tourism and culture sectors.

These positions can help reduce rural, Northern, and First Nations outmigration by connecting young people to the places they live and showcasing viable options for careers in their local area, and help to address recruitment and retention challenges expressed by the tourism and museum sectors.

This funding aligns with the goals of the *Rural Economic Development program* to "better position rural communities to attract and retain jobs and investment, and enhance economic growth" (Section 1).⁵

Increasing the number of young people employed in their local area will improve the quality of the tourism offer through more visitor-centred positions in small-town, rural, and Northern places across Ontario. Trained and welcoming tourism employees are essential to building tourism in these places and for the province as a whole.

Summary of Recommended Funding

- **\$3 million fund to support early career employment across the province in the heritage and cultural tourism sector**

Recommendation B: Develop Digital Access & Engagement for Rural Communities

Connecting communities to Ontario's history and culture

Up to Speed: Ontario's Broadband and Cellular Action Plan recognised the challenges for rural, remote, and First Nations communities to connect to increasingly-important digital resources.⁶ Like public libraries, museums are hubs to connect their communities to the world. Ontario museum websites are visited three times per second,⁷ providing key access to public collections and encouraging visitors. Increasing digital access in rural areas brings museum content and lifelong learning to rural communities, and helps rural museums attract wider audiences of tourists.

The Ontario Museum Association recommends \$2.8 million in a special fund to develop internet connectivity, web presence, and digital tools for Ontario's museums. This investment will mobilize the educational and community-building value of museum collections, especially in rural, remote, and First Nations communities.

Museums, as tourism assets, can utilize digital connectivity to increase their marketing, communications, online presence, and ultimately grow their visitor numbers. *Up to Speed: Ontario's Broadband and Cellular Action Plan* confirmed that "expanding broadband and cellular access puts visitors first" (Section 6).⁸ Rural museums are vital parts of the tourism landscape in rural Ontario, and improved web resources would allow them to connect to their visitors and support community capacity and economic development.

Summary of Recommended Funding

- **\$2.8 million in a special fund to develop internet connectivity, web presence and digital tools for Ontario's museums**

About the Ontario Museum Association

The Ontario Museum Association is the leading professional organization representing 700 Ontario museums, galleries, and historic sites, 11 000 museum professionals, and 35 000 museum volunteers who hold the collections of the province in trust for the people of Ontario.

Our Mission

The Ontario Museum Association strengthens capacity among institutions and individuals active in Ontario's museum sector, facilitates excellence and best practices, and improves the communication and collaboration of its membership. The Association advocates for the important role of Ontario's museums to society, working with all stakeholders, related sectors and industries, and other professional organizations.

Sources:

¹ [Government of Canada Survey of Heritage Institutions, 2017](#). Department of Canadian Heritage, 2018.

² [Closing the Tourism Gap: Creating a Long-Term Advantage for Ontario](#). Ontario Chamber of Commerce, 2016.

³ [Government of Canada Survey of Heritage Institutions, 2017](#). Department of Canadian Heritage, 2018.

⁴ [Closing the Tourism Gap: Creating a Long-Term Advantage for Ontario](#). Ontario Chamber of Commerce, 2016.

⁵ [Rural Economic Development Program](#). Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, 2020.

⁶ [Up to Speed: Ontario's Broadband and Cellular Action Plan](#). Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure, 2019.

⁷ [Government of Canada Survey of Heritage Institutions, 2017](#). Department of Canadian Heritage, 2018.

⁸ [Up to Speed: Ontario's Broadband and Cellular Action Plan](#). Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure, 2019.