

The Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy
Minister of Finance
c/o Budget Secretariat
Frost Building North, 3rd Floor
95 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1Z1

February 9, 2021

Dear Minister Bethlenfalvy,

The Ontario Museum Association (OMA) thanks the government of Ontario for their leadership during the pandemic. In particular, timely release of heritage and museum funding grants was welcomed.

We strongly encourage the government to implement the *Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs'* recommendation to "Bolster the Community Museum Operating Grant Program Funding."

On behalf of Ontario's museum sector, the OMA brings forward three budget recommendations to address the impact of the pandemic; aligned with the government's efforts towards recovery as outlined in the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries' white paper, *Reconnecting Ontarians*.

With months of closure, increased costs, and decreased ability to generate revenue, Ontario's museums—vital assets in every town across the province—are at risk of closure. To protect irreplaceable collections held in the public trust for the people of Ontario, museums need support to survive and contribute to the province's recovery: re-opening safely to serve the public and their communities.

During the pandemic, museums can contribute to rebuilding tourism, offering safe, hyperlocal experiences—"staycations"; they can also support the Ontario education curriculum with quality learning experiences linked to digitized collections.

Museums have a high ROI; offering \$3.70 in benefits for every dollar invested.² An immediate public investment will ensure greater museum contributions to Ontario.

The Ontario Museum Association has Three Key Recommendations for Ontario's 2021 Budget:

- 1. An Ontario Museum Relief Fund of \$8.5million**
- 2. A Digital Response Fund of \$10million over three years, and a**
- 3. A Renewed Museum Funding Model of operating funding to a total of \$15million annually**

1. An Ontario Museum Relief Fund

To support museum contributions to the province's recovery, the OMA recommends the province provide relief funding of 10% of museum annual operating expenses—matching the federal "COVID-19 Emergency Support Fund for Heritage Organizations – Museums Assistance Program" at \$8.5million.

This Ontario Museum Relief Fund can address the immediate and significant impact of loss of revenue from admissions, public programs and fundraising events, and increased costs to operate safely.

2. A Digital Response Fund

Digitalized museums can support Ontario government priorities in pandemic response and recovery through significant contributions to online education, safe, local tourism planning and community engagement.

A \$10million investment over three years in digital transformation for Ontario museums is essential to enhance access to the programs, experiences, and resources that benefit Ontarians. Pre-pandemic, museums attracted 112.8 million online visits annually, nearly 4 per second: this funding will support the transition to recovery with safe experiences and will enable museums' digitalization by building digital skills, increasing resources, and expanding digital infrastructure.

3. A Renewed Museum Funding Model

"Bolster the Community Museum Operating Grant Program Funding"
 – Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs³

In October 2020, the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs recommended that Ontario "Bolster the Community Museum Operating Grant Program Funding."⁴ We ask the government to carry out the Committee's recommendation. Ontario needs a modern and effective museum funding model to ensure the significant contribution and ROI of museums to the province and all communities; as an integral part of the province's \$34billion tourism GDP.

The OMA recommends an initial increase in operating funding for **community museums** to a total of \$15million annually, reaching beyond urban centres to more than 300 communities, especially rural and Northern regions across Ontario. This increase, towards an average of 15% of their operating budget, will open the Community Museum Operating Grant program to more of Ontario's achieving and eligible community museums, foster success through strong support mechanisms, and increase the number of Ontarians that museums can serve. This investment recognizes that the average 50% operating funding provided to provincial museums and agencies has been key to their success.

The Ontario Museum Association stands ready to work in partnership with the Government of Ontario to implement these recommendations.

We thank the Ministry for its work and consideration of the Ontario Museum Association's submission.

Sincerely,



Paul Robertson
 President
 (City Curator, Cultural Strategies, City of Kingston)

Cc: The Honourable Lisa MacLeod, Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries
 Vincent Ke, Parliamentary Assistant (Culture and Sport)
 Billy Pang, Parliamentary Assistant (Tourism)
 Stan Cho, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Finance

Marie Lalonde, Executive Director, Ontario Museum Association

¹ Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs Final Report: Study of the Recommendations Relating to the Economic and Fiscal Update Act, 2020 and the Impacts of the COVID-19 Crisis on Certain Sectors of the Economy, October 2020, Appendix 3: Third Interim Report: Economic Impact of COVID-19 on Culture and Heritage, pp. 24 -25 [pp.132-133 of full report].

² Value Study of GLAMs in Canada, Oxford Economics, 2019.

³ Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs Final Report, pp. 24 -25 [pp.132-133 of full report].

⁴ Ibid.

