

The Honourable Lisa MacLeod
Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries

March 19, 2020

The Honourable Rod Phillips
Minister of Finance

The Honourable Monte McNaughton
Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development

Legislative Assembly of Ontario
111 Wellesley Street West
Queen's Park

Dear Ministers MacLeod, Phillips, and McNaughton

On behalf of the Ontario Museum Association (OMA), I would like to express our sincere appreciation for the work and leadership provided by the Ontario government during this unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic.

The OMA is the sector association representing and supporting the more than 700 museums in Ontario. Minister MacLeod, I am writing to you to offer the OMA's advisory expertise to the Ontario government's leadership committees, and in particular, to the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries to provide informed input in addressing the impacts of COVID-19 on the culture and tourism sector. We stand ready to provide advice on the development of strategies for mitigation and relief from the consequences of the pandemic.

I am writing to request serious consideration and support of museums during this critical time in response to COVID-19.

While doing their part to support all efforts to address COVID-19, all 700-plus museums in Ontario are seeing negative impacts. Museums are key parts of the broader educational system, provide employment, and are vital tourism and community assets and infrastructure in all communities across Ontario. In response to the current health crisis and Government of Ontario's mandatory closures of public facilities, museums across the province are working together to stop the spread of the virus by closing their sites and cancelling programs during the busy March Break season and beyond. As a result of these essential measures to ensure public health and keep Ontarians safe, one negative outcome is that museum employees, sites and collections have become vulnerable. We are learning from our membership that these necessary public health safety measures are adversely affecting museums in every community across Ontario, creating unanticipated strains on already limited budgets and depleting resources of our member museums.

In light of this complex and evolving situation, the Ontario Museum Association makes the following recommendation to the Ontario government:

COVID19 Support Measures for Ontario's Museums

1. Ontario Museums Relief Fund

A dedicated museum relief fund to address the immediate and significant impact of loss of revenue from admissions, public programs and fundraising events. This funding will help museums already under financial stress to mitigate financial losses from closures, cancelled March break camps, programming and fundraising activities. We need a dedicated fund to support museums as they care for their people, their resources and their collections and sites. This financial relief will enable museums to continue to support their communities without placing any delicate infrastructure at risk.

2. Digital Response Fund

During the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, Ontario's museum professionals can be supported to produce engaging and accessible online content based on their existing high-quality museum work. In particular, digital exhibitions, programs and other initiatives connected to the province's educational curriculum can be vital resources for parents and caregivers while Ontario's schools are closed.

3. Early (first quarter) distribution of Ontario funding for museums and heritage organizations (Community Museum Operating Grants, Heritage Organization Development Grants, and Provincial Heritage Organization Grants) .

As positive reinforcement of museum budgets affected by reduced revenue during the 2020-2021 granting cycle and as an immediate and straightforward step to address COVID-19 impact on museums, an early (first quarter) release of 2020-2021 CMOG funding amounts for the 166 museums in the program waiving all additional application requirements, thus reducing red tape and stress. This early distribution of funds can also be implemented for the HODG and PHO recipients,. This flexibility in grant dispersal, based on 2019-approved assessment levels, will be a simple and effective way to help mitigate the impaired capacity of Ontario's museums and heritage organizations as they recover from COVID-19. This flexibility of government working with recognized clients and partners in re-building Ontario's economy and community vitality will help us all to recover more rapidly and move forward.



4. Expanded employment program and income support measures, and facilitated access to these programs are top concerns for all Ontarians, including Ontario's museums.

As a longstanding partner with the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, the Ontario Museum Association stands ready to work with government to deliver programs to support Ontario's museums, granting programs, advisory services and other museum sector-specific initiatives to help museums deal with the impact of the COVID19 pandemic. The OMA can offer the government the benefits of direct and effective communications channels to an extensive network of museums across the province in addition to toolkits, webinars and other practical sector support.

As the Ontario government responds to COVID-19, the OMA has been communicating the important work of the government to the museum sector. We all recognize the burdens presented during these challenging times and appreciate all of the government's efforts to support the culture sector.

The OMA looks forward to continuing discussions with the Government of Ontario to help with the essential stabilization of Ontario museums so they can continue to serve their communities across the province.

Sincerely,



Paul Robertson

President

cc: Marie Lalonde

Executive Director

