

## Message to Members from Paul Robertson, President, Ontario Museum Association

24 March 2020

Dear Friends,

Hello, I'm Paul Robertson, President of the Ontario Museum Association.

Over the past weeks, COVID-19 has changed all of our lives rapidly and in unprecedented ways. My sincere wish is that you and your families are together and well. As we are learning, abiding by the guidelines set out by governments and health authorities is our best defence against the virus.

As a museum sector, we are all working together as this complex and rapidly evolving situation unfolds. Recently, when the Government of Ontario declared the mandatory closures of public facilities, museums across the province responded by closing their sites and cancelling in-person programming.

While we are doing our part to support efforts to address COVID-19, there is no question that all 700-plus museums in Ontario have been negatively affected and museum employees, sites and collections have become vulnerable. The effects of depleted revenues from admissions, programmes, sponsorships and fundraising are still being calculated.

We all recognize the burdens presented during these challenging times and appreciate the government's efforts to support the culture sector, particularly through temporary relief measures. For example, the Federal government's **Temporary Wage Subsidy for Employers** is a three-month programme that will allow eligible non-profit organizations and registered charities to reduce the amount of payroll deductions required to be remitted to the Canada Revenue Agency.

Your OMA Council has also been active on your behalf. Specifically, we have requested the Government of Ontario implement several key measures to provide essential support to the museum sector, namely:

1. A dedicated **Ontario Museums Relief Fund** to address the immediate and significant impact of loss of revenue from admissions, public programs and fundraising events.
2. A **Digital Response Fund** to assist Ontario's museums to produce engaging and accessible online content based on their existing high-quality museum work, during the pandemic and beyond.
3. An 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**).

At a recent tele-town hall meeting with members of the Ontario cultural sector we heard Lisa MacLeod, Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries speak positively about museums in Ontario and her specific interest in finding some level of financial relief for the sector.

We welcome this flexibility of government working in partnership with our sector to provide short-term solutions that will help us to recover and rebuild, both ourselves and our province's economy and community vitality. We will continue to work on your behalf across ministries, including the Ministry of Heritage, Tourism, Sport and Culture Industries, as part of culture and tourism, and with our colleagues at the Canadian Museums Association and other Provincial and Territorial Museum Associations to secure appropriate support for museums in Ontario.

I applaud the tireless efforts of OMA Executive Director Marie Lalonde and all of the OMA team to keep the museum community informed as information becomes available and to be available to receive your questions and concerns. Recently, you will have received a short OMA survey asking you to share your museum's experiences resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. I encourage you to take a few minutes to respond, before the deadline of Friday March 27. The information gathered is vital in our ongoing discussions with the government.



We all know that there are no quick or easy solutions to the current crisis, but working together we know that we will stabilize our sector and continue to serve our communities across the province. Please send us any and all questions so we can help find answers and better understand your needs.

Please consult the OMA website for updates; regular communications will be shared as information is available. A dedicated webpage on the OMA website provides an easy updated link to all the resources we have collected.

Stay well, please look after your families.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Paul Robertson', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Paul Robertson

President, Ontario Museum Association

City Curator, Cultural Services, City of Kingston

