

Ontario Museum Association Comments on Ontario's draft Culture Strategy

May 2016

On behalf of our members and Ontario's museum sector, thank you for the opportunity to comment on the core elements of the draft Culture Strategy.

Ontario's museums have been actively engaged in a conversation on their role in creating and strengthening dynamic communities and a prosperous knowledge-based economy. With *Ontario's Museums 2025: Strategic Vision & Action Plan*, a sector-led initiative informed by museums across the province, the museums of Ontario have identified a transformative vision and future actions to ensure that museums play a central role in an innovative, relevant cultural sector. Building public value for all Ontarians, museums provide opportunities for cultural participation, to address the rich diversity of our population. They allow for citizen participation and engagement and recognize the diversity of Ontarians' stories. These themes are woven throughout *Ontario's Museums 2025* and align to the goals of the draft Culture Strategy.



These comments relate to the draft Culture Strategy document, and are closely aligned with *Ontario's Museums 2025: Strategic Vision & Action Plan*. They also build on the key messages shared with Minister Michael Coteau and MPPs as part of *Ontario Museums at Queen's Park Day*, held May 17, 2016. (Two documents are appended, the final report *Ontario's Museums 2025: Strategic Vision & Action Plan*, and the one page document of *Ontario's Museums 2025 Recommendations* presented to MPPs at Queen's Park)

The OMA comments are as follows:

Principles

Informed by the full sector consultation carried out around *Ontario's Museums 2025*, the OMA supports the principles proposed to guide government support for culture. Throughout *Ontario's Museums 2025*, the forward looking vision put forward embraces concepts of innovation, diversity, respect, collaboration and partnership. These principles are at the center of our sector-led efforts to help museums realize their full potential in the service of our province; they are vital principles to provide all Ontarians with an opportunity for full cultural participation and engagement, where museums' contributions to education, social wellbeing and the economy are strengthened. The creation of vibrant and vital museums, a strong and successful sector, an effective and collaborative workforce and the development and promotion of relevant and meaningful collections are key to building and strengthening museum contributions through renewal and excellence with new ways of working, enhancing greater relevancy, creating positive impacts for Ontarians. The inclusion of all Ontarians' cultural heritage, including intangible heritage, must be considered, valued and fostered to create thriving communities across the province.

- Overall, we encourage that the principle of collaboration and partnerships between different levels of government and between ministries be strengthened throughout the goals and actions of the Culture Strategy.
- The full spectrum of museums as art, history, heritage and science is not recognized in the draft Culture strategy. As knowledge and collecting institutions, we not only preserve and interpret collections, museums advance knowledge, spark innovation, and create meaning, all in the service of Ontarians,
- Understanding and strengthening the interplay between the various parts of the whole of the cultural sector would be helpful.

Comments on goals, strategies and actions

Strengthen Culture in Communities, with a focus on strengthening community-based arts, culture and heritage.

Strong community based organizations

- ***Funding model***

The OMA welcomes the proposal to review provincial museum and heritage funding programs. The renewal of the funding model and recommendation of a funding strategy to strengthen the museums

sector and its important contribution to the province is an important action identified in *Ontario's Museums 2025*. Action is needed to support leadership, innovation, diversity, and build museums' capacity, while addressing the range of organizations — from art gallery to science centre, from volunteer-run organizations to municipally operated ones.

It is important that the review of funding programs for community museums and heritage organizations results in adequate, transparent and responsive funding for all museums in Ontario including community museums.

Municipal governments play a key role providing 84% of government revenue to Ontario museums other than provincial agencies. It is important to optimize the impact of investment and its consistency at all levels of government.

The OMA recommends that the connection and engagement with municipal governments be strengthened in this goal.

- ***Community hubs***

Museums are key to place making, providing a sense of belonging and continuity. In our view, this is not reflected in the draft Culture Strategy, as released.

Museums are at the centre of their communities, working with libraries and other cultural organizations.

We recommend strengthening the language in and spirit of the draft Culture Strategy to reflect the inclusion and recognition of museums and their unique contributions in the development of community hubs to ensure:

- Increased collaborations and partnerships
- Greater access for citizens, fostering community engagement.

These recommendations are directly drawn from the concept of shared spaces, shared delivery and shared resource models explored in *Ontario's Museums 2025*.

- ***Collections framework***

The draft Culture Strategy calls for a "framework to improve conservation of archaeological artifacts."

The OMA suggests that there needs to be a broader conversation on the range of Ontario's heritage collections, which includes museum collections and their use. We believe that museum collections must be relevant and accessible for our communities and diverse audiences, maximizing impact and resources.

Ontario's *Ontario's Museums 2025* calls for a province-wide coordinated approach to collecting to ensure collections reflect the diversity of Ontario. We recommend that it:

- Recognize the diversity of Ontario and reflects changing demographics
- Maximize impact through improved public access and use
- Optimize efforts through technology and digitization
- Create efficiencies through new partnerships and collaborations

Fuel the Creative Economy, with a focus on maximizing the contributions of culture and creativity to a strong and competitive knowledge economy.

Make Ontario a leader at home and internationally

Museums are an important part of a multi-faceted economy, creating jobs and opportunities for Ontarians.

The OMA recommends that the contribution of museums be reflected in this goal. Moreover, actions to identify more opportunities for cultural tourism across Ontario would benefit from engaging the museum sector.

We already know that visiting a museum is a common activity for tourists, with 45% visitors coming from outside the local area (*Ontario's Museums 2014 Profile: Highlights*). To fully exploit the goal of increased tourism and economic activity will require more and better research.

The OMA recommends that the Culture Strategy make the case for expanded and more comprehensive research capacity.

Build the talent and skills of Ontario's cultural workforce

In building an innovative, knowledge-based economy, we welcome the Government's goal to help ensure the cultural workforce is positioned to succeed in this knowledge economy. So too does the OMA welcome strategies to facilitate skills acquisition and transfer and especially to improve the socio-economic status of cultural workers.

Our recommended actions around an Effective and Collaborative workforce, contained in *Ontario's Museums 2025*, speak to this area.

Thus, the OMA recommends that the Culture Strategy more fully flesh out its actions to develop meaningful labour strategies that address all parts of the cultural sector, including museums.

Further, the goal of improving socio-economic conditions for artists should be expanded to include all cultural workers, including those in museums.

Promote Cultural Engagement and Inclusion, with the focus being on removing barriers and increasing opportunities for cultural participation.

Inspire the next generation and help youth build careers in the culture sector

The OMA welcomes the actions to promote youth engagement.

The OMA recommends that the role of and opportunity to work with the Ministry of Education and educators be strengthened in this area.

We support the collaboration afforded by stronger inter-ministerial and cultural cross sectoral relationships, for example Ministries of Training, Colleges and Universities, and Labour.

Reduce barriers and allow for greater participation

The OMA strongly supports this action. To be vibrant and vital in Ontario requires nothing less.

The OMA recommends that this area of the draft Culture Strategy be strengthened to more clearly articulate the responsibility of all parts of the culture sector including museums.

Areas to address and strengthen

- Ontario's museums have a key role in increasing public awareness and understanding of Indigenous histories and contributions to arts and culture. Museums recognize that important work is needed in this regard and are well positioned to connect and engage with aboriginal heritage and culture including intangible heritage.
- Increased collaboration and partnerships throughout the heritage sector, cultural sector and beyond, need to be more thoroughly and thoughtfully explored. Existing efforts need to be built on. For example, the draft proposes to provide free online access to information about Ontario's cultural heritage. Work is already underway in this area. How can we work together? (*Please see Ontario's Museums 2025: Relevant & Meaningful Collections*)
- We suggest that the role and potential contribution of Ontario's cultural agencies be more integrated, including how they might play a stronger role in the health and support of Ontario's museum sector.

Arts Policy Framework

The draft Arts Policy Framework says that it will increase awareness within government of the size, scope and diversity of the arts sector, and help to integrate the arts into other policy and program areas.



The OMA requests that the Culture Strategy provide a policy framework that requires and supports all parts of government to consider the culture sector. Ontario's Museums 2025 identifies the need for increased collaboration and participation, including the engagement of key ministries.

Conclusion

Ontario's Museums 2025 aligns with many of the goals of the Culture Strategy. We encourage MTCS to consider and incorporate the themes and actions identified in it, building on a substantive body of sector-wide work undertaken over the past 18 months.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft Culture Strategy.

Attachments

- *About the OMA*
- *Ontario's Museums 2025: Strategic Vision & Action Plan (Advance copy)*
- *Ontario's Museums 2025 Recommendations - 1 pager presented to MPPs at event Ontario's Museums at Queen's Park*