

Attachment 5 - Museums and Heritage Sector Development Program (MHSDP) Guidelines

1. Program Overview

Heritage organizations, programs and activities across Toronto are critical drivers of the city's cultural, economic, and social wellbeing, fostering social cohesion, community engagement, identity-building, and lifelong learning. Toronto's museum and heritage ecosystem is largely sustained by small and community-based organizations and organizers deeply rooted in local neighbourhoods across the city and committed to culturally relevant, community-responsive practices that conserve, interpret, and share diverse histories.

The MHSDP addresses a longstanding gap in Toronto's cultural funding landscape: Heritage Toronto does not administer grants, and the Toronto Arts Council, the City's primary arts funding body, focuses primarily on arts activities and artistic disciplines rather than museum and heritage specific activities. As a result, many smaller and community-based heritage organizations lack access to dedicated municipal funding and often do not have the capacity to compete for larger-scale programs. This program helps close this gap by improving equity and access and ensuring municipal funding, and its public benefits, is distributed more broadly across the city.

The Museums and Heritage Sector Development Program (MHSDP) will provide microgrants of \$7,000–\$15,000 to support time-limited projects that conserve, interpret, exhibit, activate, or share Toronto's diverse histories, with a focus on public engagement and helping residents and visitors build a stronger sense of belonging and connection to the land, the people, and the histories that define Toronto. This program will prioritize activities outside the downtown core, particularly wards with historically low per capita municipal culture funding. This program is aligned with *Culture Connects: An Action Plan for Culture in Toronto (2025–2035)* by advancing equity and access, strengthening local cultural infrastructure, and fostering community participation.

1. Funding Eligibility

To be eligible, applicants must:

- Be individuals, not-for-profit organizations, unincorporated organizations operating on a not-for-profit basis, or registered charities based in Toronto; or be Indigenous-led organizations serving Toronto communities. Individual applicants must be residents of the City of Toronto.
- A local band council, a local tribal council, or other local Indigenous government (First Nations, Inuit, or Métis) or equivalent authority.
- Be in good standing with the City of Toronto (no debts or defaults) and comply with the City's anti-discrimination and harassment policies.
- Deliver grant funded activities within the City of Toronto; Indigenous-led organizations may deliver culturally based programming outside city boundaries where appropriate.
- Demonstrate financial need (the project cannot proceed as proposed without this grant).

Not eligible: For profit entities; public sector agencies (except as co-applicants or venue partners); City of Toronto agencies, boards, or commissions; school boards; public libraries; unions; organizations in default with the City.

Note: Only one application for MHSDP per applicant, per intake cycle is accepted.

2. Eligible Activities

Projects that conserve, interpret, exhibit, activate, or share Toronto's heritage including:

- Community driven exhibitions, pop-up exhibits, or tours (e.g., neighbourhood oral histories; walking tours; fixed or mobile displays).
- Collections conservation and stewardship (community archiving, digitization pilots, basic preventive conservation) tied to public access.
- Public programs and events (talks, workshops, living history demonstrations) with documented learning and community outcomes.
- Interpretive planning, content development, and accessibility enhancements (e.g., multilingual or ASL interpretation, tactile models).
- Capacity building (volunteer training, governance, program evaluation, data management) directly enabling heritage delivery.
- Partnerships & networks (cross neighbourhood collaborations, mentorships, shared services pilots).

Please note that all projects must be time limited- (up to 12 months), beginning and ending within the funding year (calendar year). Additionally, to be eligible for funding, initiatives must support one or more of the following outcomes:

1. **Equitable Access & Participation:** Increase opportunities for Toronto residents in underserved wards to engage with local histories and heritage.
2. **Sector Capacity & Sustainability:** Build skills, partnerships, or resources that enhance organizational capacity (e.g., collections care, interpretation, volunteer development).
3. **Cultural Infrastructure & Place based Activation:** Animate community spaces and heritage sites; strengthen neighbourhood cultural ecosystems.
4. **Indigenous heritage:** Advance Indigenous led initiatives celebrating diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis knowledges and knowing and cultures.
5. **Inclusion:** Support culturally relevant, community responsive practices.

There will be priority consideration for:

- Projects in City of Toronto wards with low historic per capita municipal funding;
- Indigenous-led initiatives and equity-deserving communities, including Black, racialized, newcomers, 2SLGBTQ+, people living with disabilities, women, low-income individuals, as well as other groups the City identifies as historically underrepresented).

3. Ineligible Activities/Costs

- Capital construction; major building repairs.
- Regular operating deficits; debt retirement.
- Projects primarily serving duplicating business as usual programming without equity, community or place-based impact.
- Fundraising campaigns, endowments, prizes.
- Hospitality beyond reasonable refreshments for program participants
- Staff gifts.
- Travel outside the Greater Toronto Area, unless essential to Toronto serving Indigenous programming.

- Activities that contravene City policies or laws.

4. Funding Amount and Term

- Grant size: \$7,000–\$15,000 per project; single-year (no multi-year commitments).
- Total annual envelope (2027): \$100,000.
- Organizations/applicants may submit one application per intake.

5. Application Process and Outreach

- The application form will be made available online via the City of Toronto’s website.
- The outreach strategy will include one or more Program Information Sessions to held online to provide support for applicants. The Program will also be posted to relevant City social media accounts and the opportunity shared via unpaid and paid targeted sector communications.
- Deadlines for applications are set on an annual basis and will remain publicly available.
- After the application is submitted, the applicant may be contacted by the related sector office if further clarification or additional information is desired.
- Any inaccurate or incomplete information could result in the application being removed from consideration for funding.

6. Application Assessment and Funding Allocation

- Applications will be reviewed and assessed by relevant sector office staff and an annual jury of 3 community members.
- **Conflict of interest** procedures are enforced; staff with conflicts will recuse themselves from assessment.
- Decisions will typically be communicated within six to eight weeks of the application deadline. Funding decisions are final.
- Successful applicants will be invited to enter into a formal funding agreement with the City of Toronto, with specific terms and conditions, accountability criteria, and reporting requirements, including roles and responsibilities; deliverables and timelines.
- Funding will be issued in two installments 1) upon execution of an agreement satisfactory to the City of Toronto, and 2) upon approval of a final report from the recipient on the impact of the grant upon completion of the project.
- The names of grants recipients will be made publicly available for transparency purposes and in accordance with the Community Grants Policy.

7. Accountability Criteria

Accountability criteria will be included in the funding agreement for each successful grant applicant. The criteria must be tracked throughout the funded activities and reported at its conclusion via a Project Completion Report for the release of the final installment of the grant payment. Criteria include, for example:

- Outputs: (participants served, events/programs delivered, locations/wards, objects documented/conserved) and equity-related metrics;
- Outcomes vs plan; participant feedback, learnings, documentation;

- Alignment with corporate and divisional strategies;
- Engagement with/growth of sector through placements, employment, or other metrics relevant to the goals of the program;
- Final report against approved budget.

Further metrics may be developed on a case-by-case basis or to measure grant impact over time. Non-compliance may affect current or future funding.

8. Definitions

This program aligns with local, national, and internationally researched and recognized definitions.

Museum

A museum a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.¹

Heritage

Heritage refers to the places, objects, stories, traditions, and knowledge that communities value and pass from one generation to the next. It includes both tangible heritage—such as buildings, landscapes, artifacts, and archival records—and intangible heritage, like languages, memories, cultural practices, oral histories, creative expressions, and lived experiences.²

Heritage helps people understand who they are and where they come from, shaping identity, belonging, and community well-being. It captures the diverse histories of individuals and groups, reflects the cultural, architectural, archaeological, and natural environments they create, and deepens public understanding of the values and experiences that define a place.³

Heritage is not limited to historic sites or museum collections – it also includes everyday places, stories, and practices that hold meaning for communities across Toronto and this land now known as Canada. It is both a record of the past and a resource for the future, helping guide stewardship, learning, cultural continuity, and shared civic life.⁴

Equity-deserving Groups

Equity-deserving groups include Black and racialized groups, people with disabilities, newcomers, 2SLGBTQ+, women, people of low income and other groups the City identifies as historically underrepresented.

Indigenous-led Organizations

¹ [International Council of Museums](#)

² [International Council of Museums](#); [Canadian Heritage](#).

³ [Heritage Toronto](#) and [Cultural Heritage Fact Sheet](#), Simon Fraser University.

⁴ [Intangible Heritage](#), International Council of Museums; and [Conserving our Cultural Heritage](#), National Capital Commission.

Indigenous-led organizations are broadly defined as organizations with a mandate to serve Indigenous communities, that operate under Indigenous governance models, have executive and senior management who identify as Indigenous, are primarily staffed by Indigenous community members, and/or follow an Indigenous service model.

Accessibility

Accessibility is defined as the practice of making information, activities, and/or environments sensible, meaningful, and usable for as many people as possible. An accessibility policy helps organizations set goals to make themselves more accessible by identifying barriers that prevent people with disabilities from accessing the organization's goods, services, or facilities and to determine how those barriers can be prevented or removed

Downtown Core

The City of Toronto's Downtown Core is defined by City Planning as the area between Bathurst Street, the Rail Corridor and Rosedale Valley Road, the Don Valley Parkway, and the Waterfront. Research conducted by the City's Economic Development and Culture Division in 2025 confirmed that the City's culture sector funding is concentrated within four downtown wards: Ward 10 (Spadina-Fort York, \$133.05 per capita); Ward 11 (University-Rosedale, \$52.94 per capita); Ward 13 (Toronto Centre, \$47.90 per capita) and Ward 9 (Davenport, \$32.77 per capita). All other City wards receive fewer than \$10.00 per capita, with Ward 2 (Etobicoke Centre, \$0.83 per capita) and Ward 22 (Scarborough-Agincourt, \$0.88 per capita) receiving the fewest funds.