

# Royal BC Museum Modernization

Royal British Columbia Museum  
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Museum Project

Appendix C – Royal BC Museum’s Vision

December 2021



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Outline Narrative: Vision and Content for New Museum

## **Our Present**

The Royal BC Museum strives to be a trusted source of knowledge about the people, lands and pivotal events impacting British Columbia. Our unique influence derives from extraordinary collections and archives built over 133 years, our research and the public enthusiasm for the stories we tell and the work we do.

The Royal BC Museum provides outstanding education, training and life-long learning experiences. We host school groups in ever increasing numbers and develop teaching and learning experiences to support evolving school curricula. At a more advanced level, we provide training and internship opportunities for the next generation of researchers and scientists.

The Royal BC Museum is deeply committed to the repatriation of Indigenous belongings and ancestral remains within the broader context of Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA).

## **Our Future**

The Royal BC Museum will be a world-leading museum and gathering place that invites the public to learn with their minds and their senses - not as spectators, but as full participants in the life of the museum, democratizing knowledge and the experience of discovery. The museum will continue to work with Indigenous communities on repatriation. We will ensure Indigenous voices are heard and included; and will ensure the interpretation of Indigenous cultures is led by community. We will seek out multiple perspectives on BC identity, broadening existing cultural narratives and fostering inclusivity.

Evident in everything we do, will be the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge and natural sciences. As we explore pressing global challenges from a uniquely BC perspective, topics will include the unprecedented environmental and humanitarian challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The Royal BC Museum will become a provincial network of local and global institutions including museums, archives, Indigenous cultural centres, educational institutions and government. Partners will collaborate across the network to

develop best practice, produce and share content, create programs and exhibitions, and connect with people in their homes and communities.

The Royal BC Museum will become a global digital platform - a vibrant online museum of ideas and inspiration that fosters engagement through dialogue, collaboration and play. Research and curated content will be woven together with engaging programs to encourage people everywhere to work together on global challenges.

The Royal BC Museum will ensure the collections are safeguarded for generations to come, housed in spaces that meet rigorous conservation and security requirements, in a seismically sound and environmentally sustainable manner. Public access to collections will increase from 1% to approximately 50% as a result of the modernization project.

We will offer enhanced visitor amenities, with a wider range of retail shopping and dining experiences to extend the time visitors stay on site and contribute to ongoing financial sustainability.

## **Our Narratives**

Four overarching narratives underpin how we are developing the new museum as a place of wonder and how we are shaping the research we do, the collections we care for and the stories we tell.

### **Narrative 1: Indigenous Reconciliation**

The Indigenous collections at the Royal BC Museum are immensely significant. These collections connect us with the many Indigenous peoples who shaped the land millennia before colonization.

In the spirit of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and DRIPA, the Royal BC Museum is deeply committed to advancing knowledge and understanding of Indigenous cultures through partnerships with Indigenous knowledge keepers and experts.

The Indigenous voice will be integral to every aspect of the future museum experience.

As a site of civic engagement, the future museum will work to support the sharing and broadening understanding of traditional cultures, knowledge and languages.

This includes the following physical areas:

- **Indigenous Welcome** – At the heart of the new museum will be an entrance area that provides a helpful and engaging orientation and welcome. This area acts as a gateway to the entire museum experience. It will be uniquely Indigenous in style.
- **Ritual and Ceremonial Space** – This programmatic area will engage all visitors. At times, it will be used for ceremonial purposes by Indigenous communities, at other times as areas for symposia, talks and lectures.
- **Repatriation Resource Centre** – The Repatriation Resource Centre will respond to the growing demand for repatriation and for unlocking the holdings of the archives especially around residential schools. The Centre will include an expanded and publicly accessible collections database that includes archives, objects, research, language and film resources, and photographs in the museum’s Indigenous and archival collections.

The new museum will integrate community service activities across BC, including the provision of technical assistance to Indigenous communities seeking the repatriation of their cultural belongings. We will provide training opportunities to Indigenous communities on repatriation, greatly enriching the role of the museum in TRC, DRIPA and UNDRIP.

- ***Drawing on Traditions*** – This content will reflect the public’s demands for more information on Indigenous history and life. This major exhibition will create an entirely new narrative about Indigenous peoples and cultures whose deep history goes back at least 30,000 years. In collaboration with Indigenous communities, the exhibition will reflect complex spiritual relationships with the natural world and intimate knowledge of diverse environments. It will challenge pre-existing ideas about Indigenous cultures and highlight their beauty, diversity and variety.
- **Conservation Centre** – The Royal BC Museum will provide conservation, preservation and stewardship of Indigenous collections in its care consistent with traditional care principles. The Conservation Centre will also assist Indigenous communities, museums and Aboriginal centers to address the care of their collections.
- **Mortuary House** – The Royal BC Museum will continue to play a significant role in the respectful repatriation of ancestral remains and associated sacred materials. We will also continue to support communities in caring for those ancestors being prepared for repatriation from outside of BC.
- ***Our Living Languages* exhibition** – A partnership exhibition that supports the revitalization and preservation of Indigenous languages.

- **Our Living Artists Studio** – Hosting Indigenous artists to revitalize living cultures.

## **Narrative 2: Community at the Centre**

Our stories are the product of different communities and cultures joining Indigenous peoples and adding to the complexity of the land that is today British Columbia. These communities have interacted and worked to create the British Columbia we know today.

There is considerable diversity in how individuals and groups understand, experience, and express themselves. Everyone has multiple identity factors that intersect to make them who they are. Gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, race, age, language, socio-economic status, mental and physical ability, education, language, and geography all play a role.

The museum will recognize and value diversity and equity and making a concerted effort to ensure the inclusion of diverse and underrepresented populations, meaning that individuals must be and feel valued, respected and equally supported.

The modernized Royal BC Museum will be better able to fulfill its mission by protecting the collections for future generations, by engaging communities across BC and by increasing access on a wider and richer variety of future technology platforms, while supporting opportunities for long-term financial sustainability.

- **Core Galleries** will take visitors on a journey through the diversity of living landscapes, cultures and communities (traditional and self-identified) around British Columbia (e.g.: featuring the museum’s Indigenous and marine collections, Japanese tsunami debris research, South Asian Canadian Legacy project, Chinese Canadian stories, BC Black History Awareness Society project, Landscapes of Injustice, etc.).

## **Narrative 3: Building a Sustainable World**

Using collections, research and a deep understanding of the past, we look to explain the direction and impact of future changes. Our scientists explore patterns of BC biodiversity across eco-systems, communities, wildlife habitats and species. Our collections related to at-risk habitats put us at the forefront of efforts to track the effects of climate change on the flora and fauna of the province.

*“British Columbia is already experiencing the impacts of climate change: average temperatures are increasing, sea levels are rising and variable and extreme weather is becoming more frequent. Managing these risks now is essential to*

*protect our well-being, improve our prosperity, and lower costs for generations to come.” - Province of British Columbia*

By integrating other ways of knowing including traditional Indigenous knowledge and natural sciences, the museum is uniquely positioned to broaden the public's understanding of climate change, history and living cultures.

As noted in narrative two, the museum will develop narratives responding to global issues such as migration, discrimination and intercultural dialogue. This focus on *Living Cultures* responds to UNESCO's acknowledgement that "cultural diversity is the very substratum of all human activities, which derive their meaning and value from it. Diversity must be the starting point, rather than an obstacle to be overcome. Cultural diversity invites us to think in terms of plural humanity, embodying a creative potential that precludes any prescribed model of developments."

The architecture of the new museum will provide an extraordinary starting point to engage audiences with the natural world and contemporary environmental sustainability issues. Some examples could include:

- **Restless Earth: BC's Geological Time** (featuring the museum's geological and mineral collections, incorporating current issues such as natural disasters and emergency preparedness) will be an area of wonder and inspiration.
- **Mass Extinctions** (featuring the museum's paleontology, invertebrate and insect species collections to explore the impact of human activities in the anthropocene age) will enable visitors to engage in a dialogue about the future.
- **Environmental Sustainability** will explore how we use our natural resources (featuring the museum's herbarium and keystone species collections to look at current issues of sustainable agriculture, food security and green technologies).
- **Digital / experiences** will integrate on site engagement with outreach programs to provide new ways for visitors to interact, engage their senses and discover.

#### **Narrative 4: Opening the collections for Learning and taking BC out to the World**

The museum's mandate focuses on making collections available in a number of ways for learning and outreach. Learning will be at the heart of the new museum

and will be embedded into every aspect of our practice. We will provide culturally safe spaces for communities to engage with collections in meaningful ways.

Learning is life-enhancing and an essential part of every visitor's experience. It brings pleasure, participation, self-expression and key skills into the lives of adults and children. Through our expanded learning programs, we will provide greater access to quality cultural education to people across British Columbia. This includes:

- **Museum Learning and Outreach Centre** – The Centre includes a series of flexible areas where different types of learning can take place, catering for the widest possible variety of audiences, including those visitors with additional needs. These spaces are characterized by natural daylight and good acoustics to improve the experience of learners. Storage areas allow hand-on collections to be readily available. Spaces for adults and children encourage inter-generational learning.

Through a digital interface with collections catalogues, visitors are invited to make their own annotations in collection records, to contribute to the ongoing discourse. Digital classrooms enhance the museum's ability to reach students in all part of the province in an accessible, cost effective way.

- **Digital Media and IT Studio** – This future-proofed studio will provide a creative environment, emphasising the sharing information and ideas in both digital and physical forms, including 3D scanning and composite photography.
- **Performance Area and Auditorium** – This multi-use, flexible space will house symposia, talks, lectures and arts performances encouraging participation by communities from around the province.
- **Community Program Offices** – To support our provincial partnership network, the museum will include flexible, onsite work spaces for network members to facilitate collaboration and sharing of best practice.
- **Outdoor Learning Spaces** – Holistic learning includes engaging with the natural environment. The new museum will incorporate a variety of outdoor learning spaces to broaden the impacts of our programs.

Dr. Daniel Muzyka,  
A/Chief Executive Officer and Board Chair