

Strengthening Rural Vitality through Arts and Culture

January 18th, 2026 – 1:00 – 2:15 pm

Civic Ballroom North, 2nd floor



Ontario's Arts, Culture, and Creative Industries - Strengthening Competitiveness and Communities

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Overview

In March, the OCC released the policy brief *Ontario's Arts, Culture, and Creative Industries: Strengthening Competitiveness and Communities*.

Project partners on the culture sector initiative were OCAD University, City of Toronto, Ontario Arts Council, Toronto Arts Council, and Ontario Creates.

The initiative explored the economic significance of Ontario's culture sector, spotlighted opportunity gaps, and showcased several innovative partnerships and approaches underway across the province to strengthen competitiveness and communities.

Overview

Ontario's culture sector is an economic powerhouse.

The sector has proven to be resilient, a driver for economic growth, supporting national and global competitiveness, but often overlooked in economic plans.

Government, industry, and academia all have a role to play:

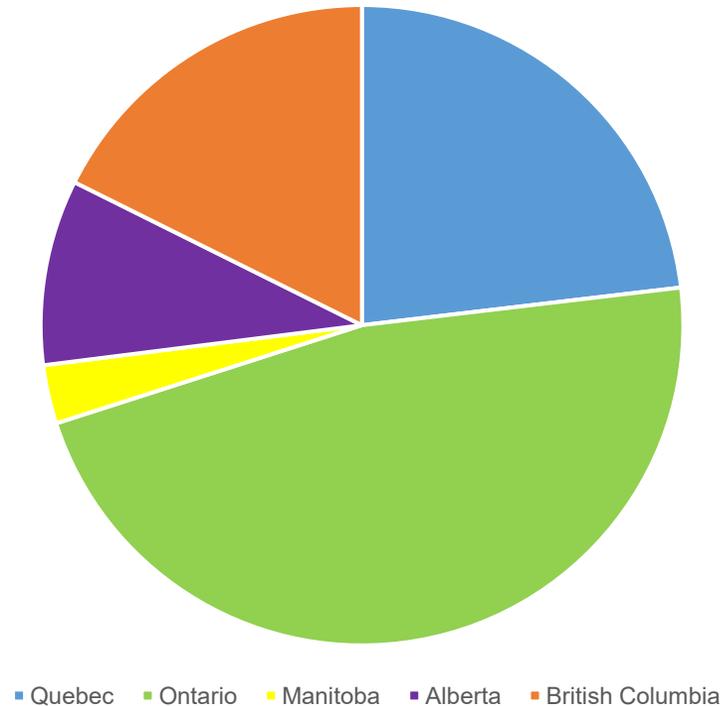
- Foster an inclusive workforce
- Support Ontario's cultural exports on the global stage
- Build capacity for regional cultural economic development



Ontario - The Cultural Capital of Canada - Fueling Productivity and Competitiveness on a Global Scale

In 2022, Ontario's culture sector contributed over **\$26 billion** to the provincial (GDP), accounting for nearly **45 per cent** of Canada's total GDP growth in the sector.

Culture GDP in 2022

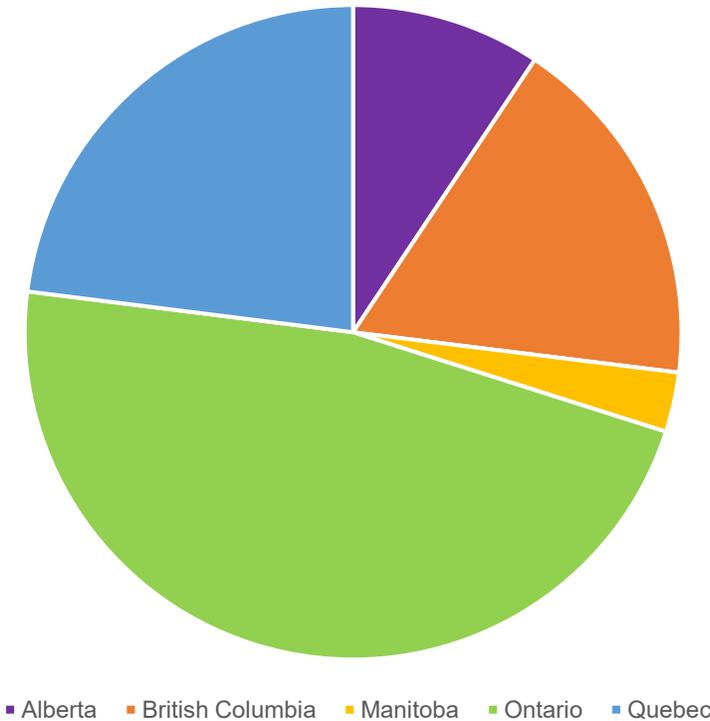


Source: Government of Canada. "Culture Satellite Account." Canada.ca, July 5, 2024.

Ontario - The Cultural Capital of Canada - Fueling Productivity and Competitiveness on a Global Scale

In 2023, Ontario's culture sector grew by **5.4 per cent**, contributing almost **\$28 billion** to the provincial (GDP).

Culture GDP in 2023

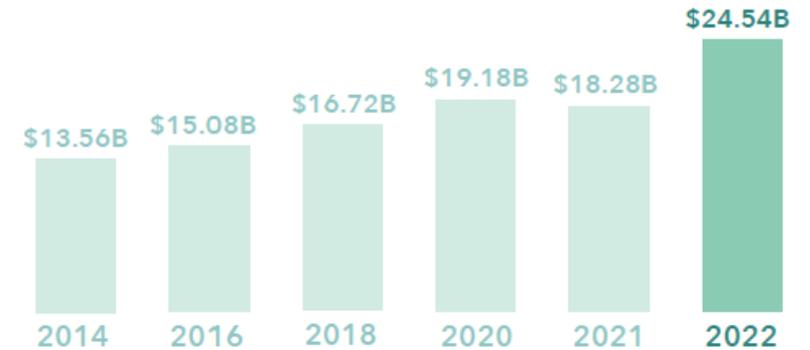


Statistics Canada, Provincial and Territorial Culture Indicators, 2010 to 2023, June 2, 2025

Ontario - The Cultural Capital of Canada - Fueling Productivity and Competitiveness on a Global Scale

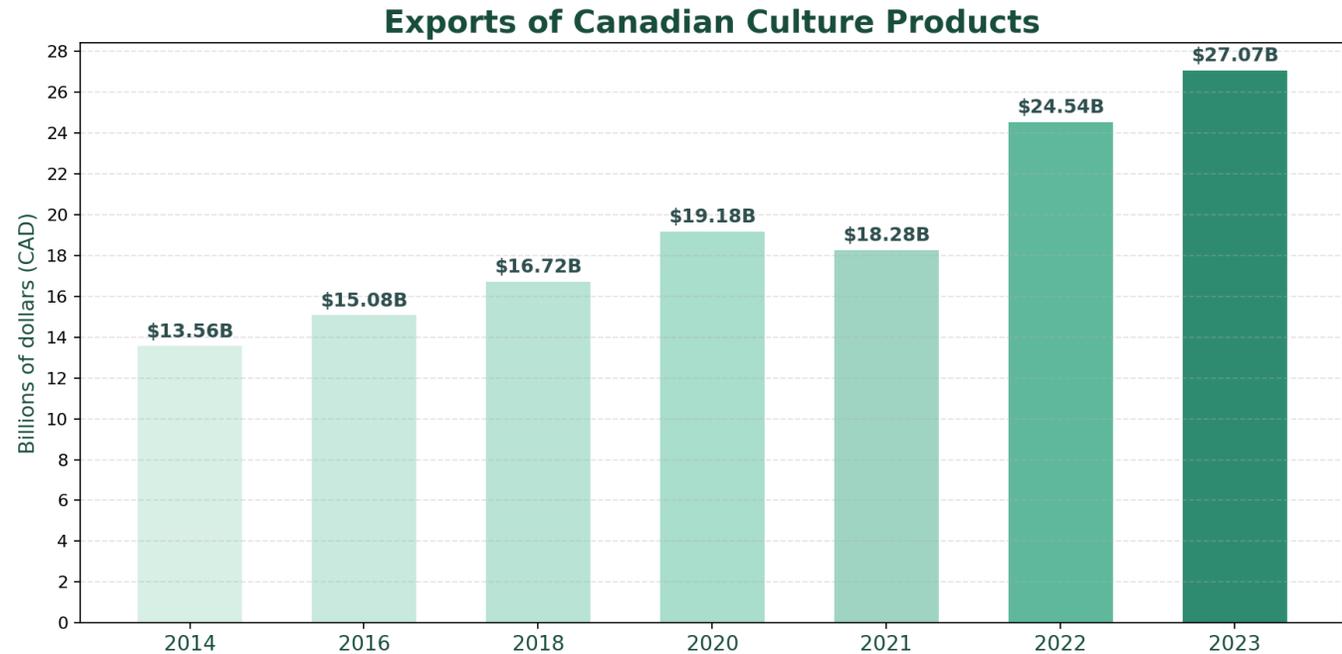
With Canada's lagging productivity amid growing economic uncertainty, Ontario's culture sector plays a pivotal role in cementing the nation's trade position and influence on the world stage.

In 2022, exports of Canadian culture products totaled **\$24.54 billion**



Ontario - The Cultural Capital of Canada - Fueling Productivity and Competitiveness on a Global Scale

In 2023, exports of Canadian cultural exports grew to **over \$27 billion**, a **10.3 per cent** increase from 2022.



Source: Canadian Culture Export Data

Recommendations

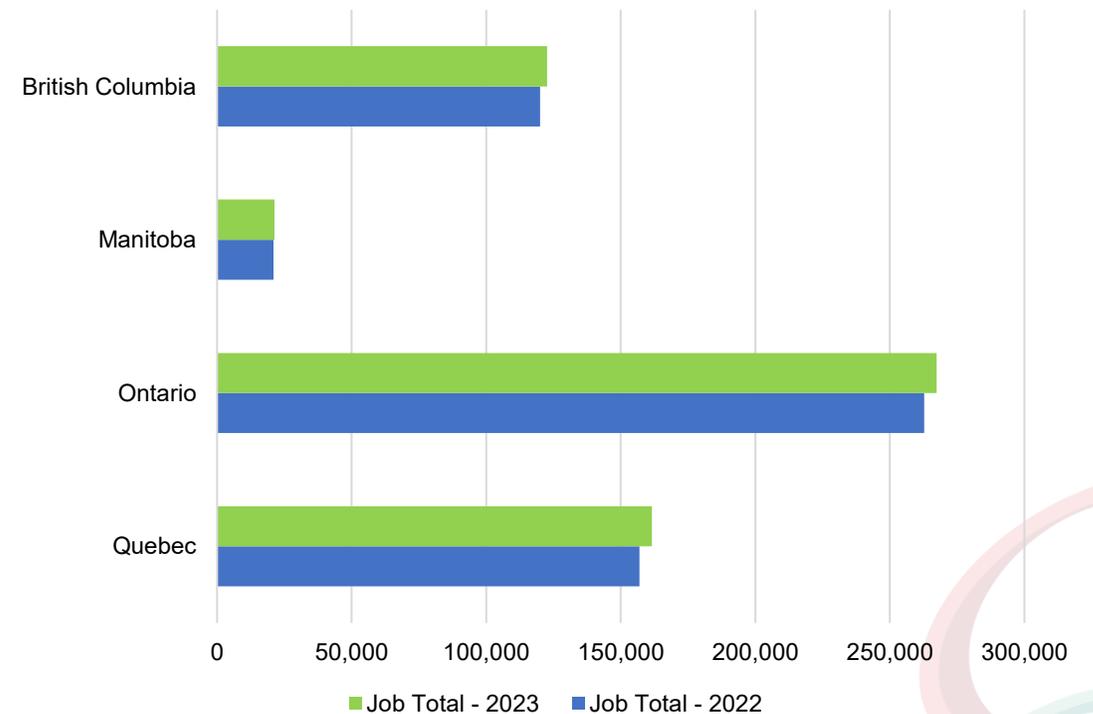
- Develop a comprehensive Culture Sector Strategy that prioritizes and ensures the sector's inclusion in economic action plans.
- Collaborate across all levels of government to enhance Ontario's global competitiveness and attract international investment in the sector.
- Expand existing funding mechanisms to support cultural exports, including dedicated streams to strengthen marketing, national and international touring, circulation, partnerships, and market development.



Unlocking Potential - Workforce Resilience in Ontario's Culture Sector

Ontario's culture sector workforce is the largest in Canada, with just over **270,000** direct jobs recorded in 2022.

Culture Sector Workforce Totals



Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0201-01 Employment by industry, monthly, unadjusted for seasonality
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25318/1410020101-eng>

Unlocking Potential - Workforce Resilience in Ontario's Culture Sector

North Bay hosted **94 film productions** over 10 years, generating **\$167 million**, hiring local talent, directly supporting workforce development, and filling labour gaps in the region.



Unlocking Potential - Workforce Resilience in Ontario's Culture Sector

At a hyper-local level, the Nottawasaga Futures Film Liaison Office, which oversees the region of the Township of Adjala-Tosorontio, and Essa, and the Towns of Bradford West Gwillimbury, Innisfil, and New Tecumseth, supported **92 film and television productions** over a decade, contributing **\$3 million** in economic impact across its municipalities.



Source: Attracting Film Production to Small Town Ontario. Christmas movie "Christmas with a Prince" shot in New Tecumseth.

Unlocking Potential - Workforce Resilience in Ontario's Culture Sector

While labour shortages have improved since 2024, they remain a pressing issue in Ontario, with **28 per cent** of arts, entertainment, and recreation businesses and **17 per cent** of information and cultural industries facing challenges.

**The OCC's 2026 Ontario Economic Report will release on February 19. You can view our 2025 Report [here](#).*



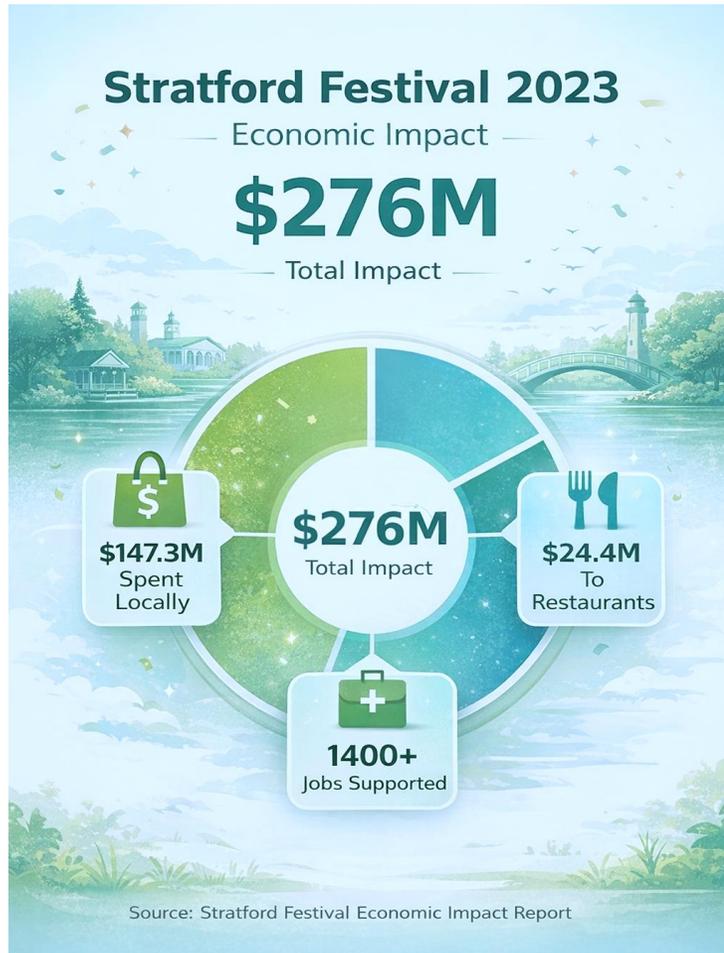
Source: Toronto Life. On set of the Amazon Primer series “Reacher” in Downtown Port Perry.

Recommendations

- Expand and strengthen local workforce and skills development programs, mentorship, placement, and experiential learning opportunities. focusing on high-demand positions and cross-sectoral, transferable skills.
- Promote careers in the culture sector as viable employment options through intentional outreach to underrepresented communities.
- Leverage and fund third-party expertise and resources (e.g., employment services organizations, business associations, and community groups) to help address labour gaps.



From the Stage to the Streets - Culture's Role in Regional Economic Development



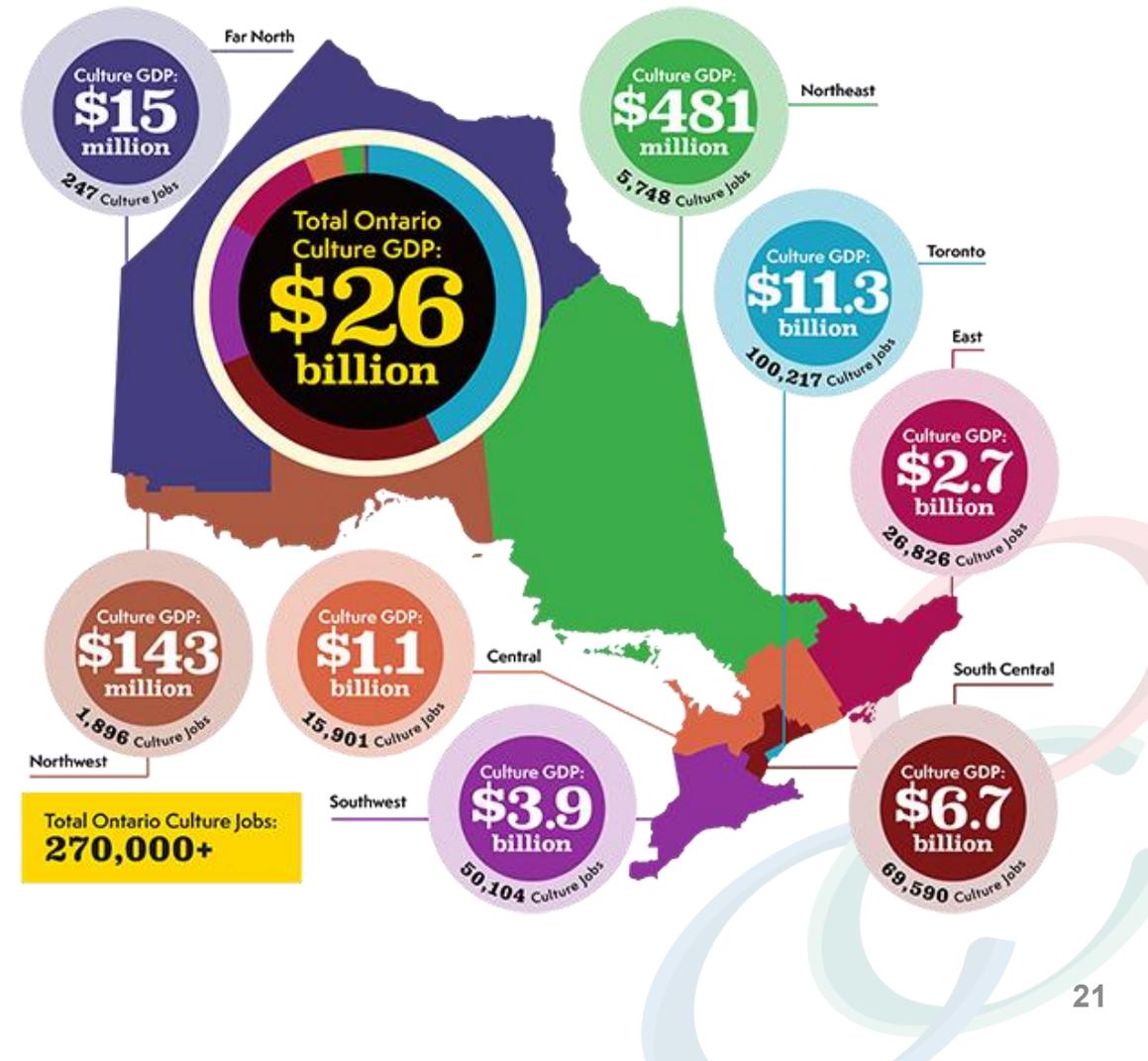
Source: Stratford Festival

Examples of Municipal Culture Plans

- City of Chatham-Kent's **Cultural Plan** is being updated to focus on celebrating local heritage, supporting arts and creative industries, and fostering cultural participation as a key driver of economic growth and quality of life.
- City of Hanover's **Cultural Plan** is a community-driven strategy that aims to strengthen local identity, enhance cultural participation, and integrate arts, heritage, and creative industries into economic development and quality of life initiatives.
- Township of Central Wellington's **Culture Matters Plan** is a strategic framework designed to strengthen local arts, heritage, and cultural assets, foster community engagement, and integrate culture into economic development and quality of life initiatives.

Spotlight: Ontario Arts Council *Arts Across Ontario* Report

Ontario Arts Council's report *Arts Across Ontario* provides evidence of the sector's impact at various geographies and the role of public investment in sustaining and growing Ontario's culture sector in communities across the province.



Recommendations

- Diversify investments and funding through regional strategies, including local economic development corporations, regional cultural offices, cultural organizations, and business associations.
- Invest in new and existing purpose-built cultural infrastructure, while addressing gaps in public transportation to enhance accessibility and support capacity-building projects in regional communities.
- Incentivize local travel and tourism by reintroducing and developing targeted initiatives.

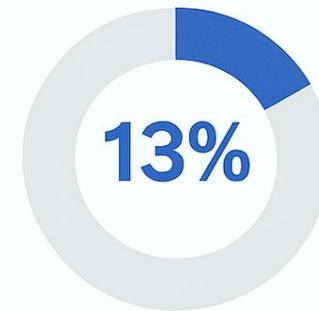


Cultural Pathways - A Cross-Sectoral Accelerator for Economic Growth

Ontario's tourism industry contributed **\$36 billion** to the province's GDP in 2022.

In 2023, the sector generated **\$33 billion in spending**, with approximately **\$6 billion** in annual provincial tax revenues.

ARTS AND CULTURE TOURISTS



of all visitors
Arts and culture
tourists in Ontario
account for 30%
of total tourist
spending

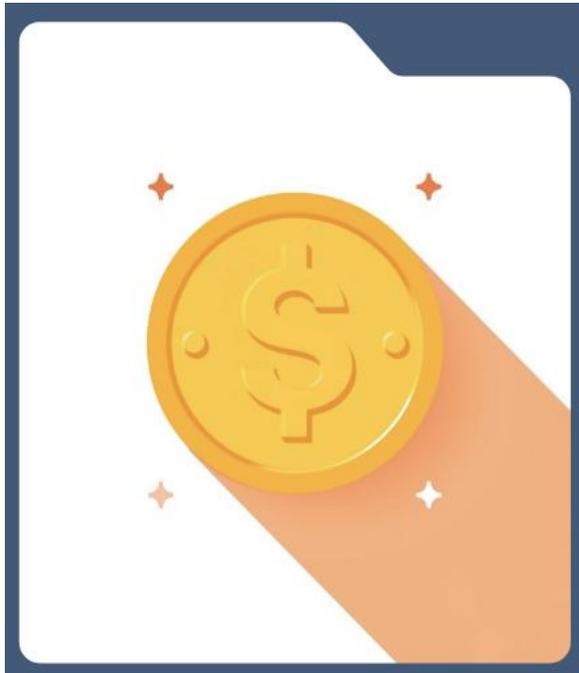


40%

of these tourists
stay three days
or more
(compared to only
13% of non-culture
visitors)

Source: Ontario Arts Council. *Arts Across Ontario* Report.
2025

Spotlight: Niagara-On-The-Lake's Shaw Theatre Festival



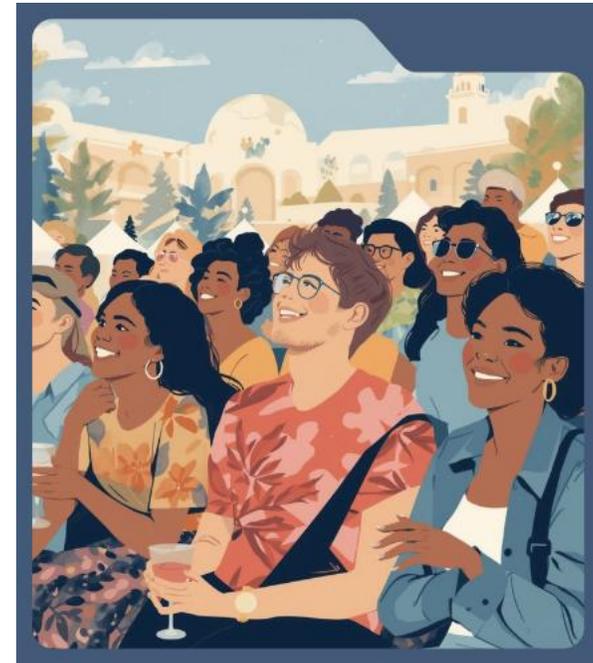
\$1 Spent

Direct spending at the Festival



\$7+

Generated by patrons



\$240M

**Annual economic activity
generated**

Recommendations

- Work with Tourism Industry Association of Ontario (TIAO) and Regional Tourism Organizations (RTOs) to expand regional culture sector development and other culture-based tourism activities.
- Modernize data collection methods for more accurate and actionable insights, and emerging trends.
- Explore emerging markets and support the growth of promising new cultural and tourism products and production areas, including intercultural exchanges with Indigenous and francophone culture sectors.



Connected Communities - Cultivating Belonging through Culture

79% of Ontarians say the arts support their mental health, fostering self-expression, social cohesion, and a better quality of life.

In a recent Business/Arts Survey, the biggest impact culture-goers feel that arts and cultural organizations have on their community is **uplifting people and adding to the quality of life (23%, up from 9% in 2023)**.



Source: Community Arts Council Canada

Connected Communities - Cultivating Belonging through Culture

In Northern Ontario, Sudbury's Up Here Festival has generated over **\$5 million** in economic impact, revitalized the city's downtown core with **73+ public art pieces**, and connected communities by supporting local artists, creating **100+ paid jobs**, and attracting **75,000+** festivalgoers.



Source: Community Arts Council Canada. Artist: Fatspatrol Location: 100 Elm Street, Sudbury

Arts and Culture Fostering Healthy & Sustainable Communities

Non-pharmacological therapies such as art therapy have been shown to be effective in managing behaviour in people with **dementia** and **Alzheimer's Disease**.

Art therapy can be used as a tool for communication, help meet the emotional and psychological needs of patients, retain skills, and encourage the process of reminiscence.



Source: The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA "Meet Me at MoMA" program)

Spotlight: The Art Gallery of Hamilton (AGH)

AGH offers programs that support people living with dementia and their loved ones, including *Artful Moments: Memory Care*, a weekly program of conversation and hands-on activity, and *Dementia Friendly Days*, which provide a sensory-reduced environment.



Source: Art Gallery of Hamilton

Recommendations

- Incorporate culture sector activities, products, and events into economic development plans, and Main Street infrastructure projects.
- Allocate funding from existing housing funds for the development of housing options along the continuum for artists and studio spaces, to meet diverse housing needs throughout the province.
- Build stronger relationships and funding pathways with newcomer and immigration programs and relevant ministries to bolster community-building.



Catalyzing Funding and Investments for Inclusive Growth

In 2022, Ontario Creates-supported industries contributed over **\$3.6 billion** to Ontario's GDP, generated over **44,000 jobs**, and exported over **\$3.8 billion** in products and services internationally.

Ontario Arts Council supported organizations generated **\$1 billion annually** for the province's GDP in 2022. For every dollar the OAC invests, **\$25 is generated from other revenue sources.**



Source: Ontario Creates. 2022 Ontario Trillium Book Awards

Catalyzing Funding and Investments for Inclusive Growth

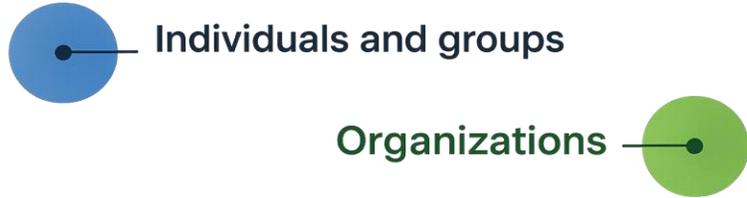
Historic **high inflation** and **interest rates** and **rising costs of living**, stall economic growth in the sector.

In the Ontario Non-Profit Network's 2024 Report, **30 per cent** of non-profit arts organizations forecast being at high risk of **closing within three years**, with nearly half unable to sustain operations for more than **12 months**.

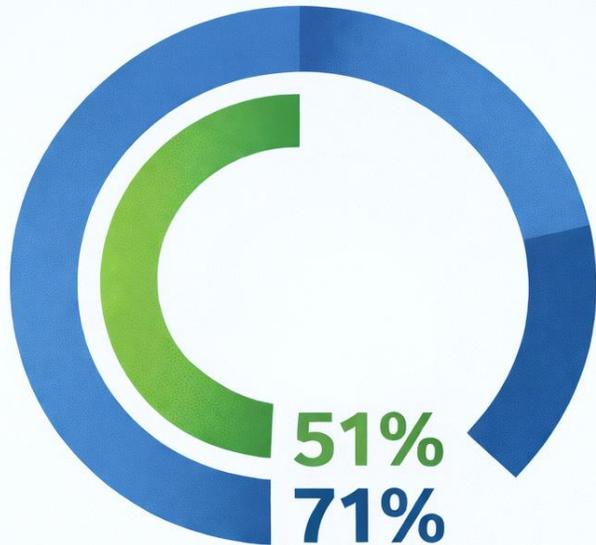


Source: City of Windsor

Catalyzing Funding and Investments for Inclusive Growth



FINANCIAL INSECURITY



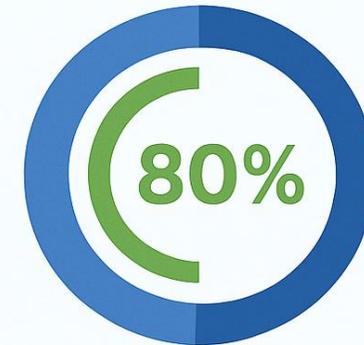
Experiencing **financial insecurity** over the past two years

ARTISTIC PRACTICE AND WORKFORCE CHALLENGES



Challenging to continue working in the arts

89%
Mental health challenges



Staff recruitment and retention struggles

84%
Well-being challenges

Recommendations

- Improve access to private capital and credit for small- and medium-sized culture sector businesses through a combination of tax policies, capital market reforms, and loan guarantees.
- Streamline and simplify application processes for funding and grants.
- Build development programs that target key decision-making roles where equity-deserving and Indigenous professionals are most significantly underrepresented.



Questions & Contact

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COMING IN 2026

OCC Arts, Culture & Tourism (ACT) Policy Council

Reach out to learn more.

Arts & Culture Drive Economic Development in Rural Communities



Flight Festival Kristen Foote

A photograph of two men performing a backflip on a stage. The man in the foreground is wearing a black t-shirt and dark pants, with his arms extended forward. The man behind him is wearing a patterned shirt and dark pants, with his arms extended forward. They are standing on a metal railing. In the background, there is a large, rounded structure, possibly a dome or a stage set, and several stage lights. The scene is lit with warm, golden light, suggesting sunset or sunrise.

Why Arts & Culture Matter in Rural Communities

Jennifer Harrison and David Hudson - Hamilton



Arts & Culture as Economic Drivers

Marc Fornes Photo by Jack Landau

The background image shows two men in an art gallery. They are looking at several framed artworks on a dark wall. One artwork features two white swans forming a heart shape. Another is a framed oval with a classical-style scene. There are also abstract and anatomical drawings. The men are smiling and engaged in conversation.

The Social Return on Investment (ROI)

PC Curtis Perry LUCK 2023

Arts Across Ontario: Economic ROI



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO
an Ontario government agency
un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario

A person is performing with large red hula hoops in a wooden structure. The person is wearing a grey shirt and a red and white patterned vest. They are holding several hoops, some of which are stacked on their arms. The background is a wooden wall with a black doorway. Above the person, there are several red stage lights and a string of small white lights. The overall scene is lit with warm, orange light.

Arts Across Ontario: Rural Insights (OAC)

Beany John Flight Festival of Contemporary Dance



AACO Mentorship Program

Tyendinaga Traditional Pow Wow PC Don Carr

A stone sculpture in a forest. The sculpture is a vertical stack of four stones. The top stone is a bird with spread wings. The second stone is a rounded, textured shape. The third stone is a rounded, textured shape. The bottom stone is a rounded, textured shape. The sculpture is set on a stone base. The background is a dense forest with green trees and sunlight filtering through the leaves.

On-the-Ground Rural Experiences

Haliburton Highlands Sculpture Forest Guo Qing Fan



Key Takeaways for Rural Leaders

Atelier Sisu's "Evanescent" Luminato Festival 2024



Economic Impact in Rural Communities

Mandala Spotlight Artist Jacquie Du Toit

Association
des musées
de l'Ontario



Ontario
Museum
Association

Pathways to the Past: Why Community Museums Matter

Jamie McKenzie-Naish
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Strengthening Rural Vitality through Arts and Culture

ROMA 2026 - Ontario's Rural Leaders Conference

January 18th, 2026

The OMA – who we are



The **Ontario Museum Association**, established in 1972, is a not-for-profit member organization that represents more than 700 museums, galleries, historic sites, and Indigenous cultural centers, 9,000 museum professionals, and 35,000 museum volunteers across Ontario.

We strive to be the leading professional organization advancing a strong, collaborative and inclusive museum sector, that is vital to community life and the well-being of Ontarians.



The OMA – what we do



1. **Advocacy** for the Ontario museum sector (funders, policy-makers, etc.)
2. **Professional Development & Training** for museum workers, including:
 - Certificate in Museum Studies program - the only museum studies training program in Ontario offered on a part-time basis for paid and volunteer museum workers
 - Key training to support the 10 museum standards recognized by the province through the Community Museum Operating Grant program.
 - Resources and best practices for priority issues (digital training, toolkits, tourism support)
3. **Public Engagement** – championing the value and public visibility of museums to both Ontarians and visitors (e.g. May is Museum Month Campaign)
4. **Strategic & Collaborative Partnerships** – identify alignments for capacity-building, skill-development and resource-collaboration to strengthen the impact & sustainability of museums in their communities.



SNAPSHOT: Galleries, Libraries, Archives & Museums (GLAMs) in Canada



- 1661 museums were identified in the first half of 2024 by StatsCAN
- Economic activity in the heritage and libraries domain, which includes museums, has surpassed \$230 million for five consecutive quarters, peaking at \$242 million in the second quarter of 2024.

-The Business of Museums (2024), StatsCAN

- Not-for-profit heritage institutions in Canada generated over \$2.6 billion in revenue in 2017 with Ontario contributing the percentage at 34% or \$890.4 million.
 - The heritage sector employed over 37,200 people in 2017 (54% P/T; 35% F/T; 11% Contract).
 - Continues to rely heavily on volunteers – over 114,400 volunteers in 2017
- Volunteers outnumber paid employees in the heritage workforce by 3 to 1 (75% of workforce); for museums specifically – this ratio is 4 to 1, or 79% of the workforce (\$68.5 million value)

-Government of Canada, Survey of Heritage Institutions 2019



SNAPSHOT: Galleries, Libraries, Archives & Museums (GLAMs) in Canada



- an estimated 150 million visits are made to GLAMs by members of the public each year.
- Total gross value of GLAMs to Canada is \$11.7 billion a year (2019 prices), while annual operational costs are approximately \$3.0 billion – indicating a benefit-cost ratio (BCR) of 3.9.
- This means that for every \$1 invested in non-profit GLAMs, society gets nearly \$4 in return, with an estimated society gain of \$8.6 billion from GLAM's every year.
- Annual value to an average GLAM use is equivalent to \$1,440 in improved wellbeing (as measured through health effects).
 - In other words, visiting GLAMs has the same wellbeing effect of receiving a monetary bonus of \$1440 a year

-The Value Study of GLAMs in Canada (2019)



Value of Community Museums



- **IDENTITY**: museums are community hubs for gathering & having open dialogue about the past, present & future, enhancing both community cohesion & diversity.
 - **CULTURAL & HERITAGE PRESERVATION**: help communities understand their own heritage and foster appreciation for diverse cultures, building bridges between individuals and communities.
 - **EDUCATION, INNOVATION & LIFELONG LEARNING**: hubs for creativity, imagination, innovation, skill-development, life-long and intergenerational learning.
-
- **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**: museums become cultural anchors that help attract skilled workers and visitors, supporting economic & social regeneration, and enhancing quality of life.
 - In 2017, 88% of Ontarians saw arts and culture as important to local economies, and 86% attended arts and culture events every year, and 35,000 volunteers contributed 2.3 million hours to the work of museums.
 - **TOURISM**: museums are economic multipliers that attract people who want to live in Ontario and tourist who want to visit. They are critical assets within tourism development strategies.

SNAPSHOT: Ontario Domestic Tourism 2024



Nearly 120 million visits, mostly for pleasure and shorter in duration

- 119.6 million visits in Ontario
 - 93.5% of these were made by Ontarians
 - 44.6%: Family/Friends; 37.2%: Leisure, recreation, holidays

Main trip purpose, location and cost are possible factors in visit

- 66.1%: same-day; 12.2%: 1-night; 11.5%: 2-nights

Majority of visits in Toronto and surrounding tourism regions

- 4 of 5 visits were to GTA & 8 nearby tourism regions

Most travel by car or truck

- 90% by personal vehicle

24.8 billion spent during Ontario Visits

- 8.7 billion: transportation; 6.6 billion: food & beverages; 4.9 billion: accommodations; 1.2 billion recreation; 1.2 billion: entertainment

-Canadians Visiting Ontario 2024, StatsCAN



Pathways to the Past (P2P): Preparing Museums for Tourism Success



Objective: Support rural GLAM sites to become more market-ready and play a stronger role in Ontario's visitor/tourism economy.

- Building practical tourism skills: digital, data, audiences, partnerships
- Expanding practical market-readiness tools for rural sites
- Facilitating site connection with regional tourism strategies in their region
- Showcasing the value of GLAM sites in rural communities

Ontario's rural museums are under-used tourism assets. This project responds to the growing need across the cultural heritage sector for practical and fit-for-purpose tools and skills to better engage with and benefit from Ontario's tourism economy.



Pathways to the Past (P2P): Preparing Museums for Tourism Success



Project Partners: Ontario Museum Association + Ontario Tourism Education Corporation (OTEC)+ 11 representatives from across 2 Regional Museum Associations (RMA).

Project Funder: This project was funded by Government of Canada through the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario (FedDev Ontario).



Pathways to the Past (P2P): Preparing Museums for Tourism Success



Project Components:

1. Design and deliver a **Professional Skills Training Course** for GLAM professionals in Ontario (with OTEC)
2. Develop and launch an **Interactive Digital (Geospatial) Map** showcasing the Regional Museum Network (RMN) regions, layered with Regional Tourism Organizations (RTOs), cultural heritage sites, and other relevant information to help identify opportunities for relationship-building.



P2P: Professional Skills Training



What is it?

- A mixture of independent, guided & facilitated learning experiences designed to support professional practice

What it includes:

- Market Readiness audit & customized guidance
- Training in digital presence, audience development, data use + partnership-building
- Practical tools to support engaging more effectively with DMOs, RTOs + tourism partners

Vision: to create a dynamic, fit-for-purpose training experience that supports sustainable capacity-building & demonstrated outcomes.

Market Readiness Assessment for Ontario Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums (GLAM)

Market readiness is the degree your museum is prepared to attract and engage visitors, partner within the cultural and tourism sectors, and generate sustainable revenue. It involves several key factors, including:

 Marketing and Outreach – Effectively promoting the museum to target audiences through digital and traditional marketing strategies.	 Exhibitions and Visitor Experience – Delivering relevant, engaging content and accessible, high-quality experiences that align with audience interests and encourage meaningful engagement.	 Operational Capacity – Having the necessary infrastructure, staffing, and financial resources to support long-term sustainability.	 Stakeholder Engagement – Building partnerships with local communities, educational institutions, and tourism organizations to increase visibility, overcome barriers (e.g. Infrastructure) and drive impact.
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Using this Assessment
Museums that achieve market readiness are well-positioned to attract visitors, secure funding, and contribute meaningfully to cultural and educational landscapes. Use this self-assessment and corresponding guide to identify where your museum is strongest—and where small, strategic changes could help you grow your reach, engagement, and partnerships.

Score each item in the assessment by circling or recording 1–5 for each statement.	Total the scores for each section to see which areas are strongest and weakest.	Use the "Next Step" prompts to plan what to prioritize in the coming season.
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P2P: Geospatial Map



What is it?

- Visual representations of data linked to a geographic areas

What it includes:

- Regional Museum Associations
- Regional Tourism Organizations (RTOs)
- Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs)
- Culture & heritage sites

Vision: Support collaboration, visibility, and tourism planning. Demonstrate existing relationships within regions & across province, highlight tourism organizations and opportunities for relationship-building.



Association
des musées
de l'Ontario



Ontario
Museum
Association



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