



# CITY OF KELOWNA CULTURAL PLAN UPDATE

## Context Report

PREPARED BY  
Patricia Huntsman Culture + Communication  
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# Executive Summary

The *City of Kelowna Cultural Plan Update Context Report (Context Report)* serves as a snapshot of local community dynamics, growth patterns, trends in the cultural sector and cultural development, as well as a summary and analysis of early engagement findings. By presenting engagement findings alongside sector and community context, the *Context Report* is a reference document for the public, Council, and staff to help inform future decision-making related to the forthcoming *Cultural Plan*.

Arts and culture are a key driver of economic growth and quality of life. Canada's arts and culture sector contributed \$65 billion in direct gross domestic product (GDP) to the Canadian economy in 2024<sup>1</sup>, outpacing other key sectors like oil and gas, manufacturing or agriculture, and growing almost 8% since 2021 while Canada's overall economic growth was 4%. Economic impact has been highest in British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec.

Trends and events highlighted in the *Context Report* that will continue to have a significant influence on Canada's cultural sector include:

- Festival Landscape Shifts
- Changes in how Canadians are participating in arts and culture
- Accessible Arts for the Inclusion of People with Disabilities
- Affordability Crisis
- Artificial Intelligence
- Calls to Action of Truth and Reconciliation Commission
- COVID-19
- Economic and Political Instability

These trends and events act as a reminder that arts, culture, and heritage do not exist in a vacuum, but affect and are affected by broader social, economic and environmental challenges in the world.

Placing Kelowna within the national context, Kelowna ranked second in Canada in the 2026 Canadian Chamber of Commerce and Business for the Arts' *Arts Vibrancy Index*, a measure of the economic impact of arts and creative industries on communities. However, it must be understood that the Canadian cultural sector is facing recent dramatic shifts in governance, funding, and service delivery models amid changing public expectations and financial

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<sup>1</sup> <https://chamber.ca/news/arts-and-culture-sector-contributes-131-billion-to-canadas-economy/>

pressures. These pressures are forcing the cultural sector and governments across Canada to examine ways to effectively realign resources and prioritize resiliency and relevancy in order to better support and protect the sector's positive economic and social benefits.

Governance models increasingly emphasize inclusivity, accountability, and community representation, with some organizations incorporating Indigenous and community-led structures. In some cases, in order to protect the cultural life of a community, what was once community-delivered becomes temporarily City-delivered in order to safeguard cultural vibrancy (e.g. a community non-profit society museum coming under the operations and ownership of a City, or a theatre becoming City-run). Funding remains a mix of public, earned, and philanthropic sources, with growing emphasis on flexible, multi-year, and equity-focused models that enable innovation and sustainability. Service delivery is becoming more adaptive and community-centered, integrating digital tools, co-creation, and cross-sector collaboration to expand access and relevance. Partnerships across sectors are strengthening the social and economic impact of the arts, reinforcing their essential role in resilient and inclusive communities. Municipalities are shifting from directly delivering cultural services to facilitating and partnering with community organizations, fostering a more decentralized and collaborative approach.

Kelowna's rapid growth to a younger, more diverse population and expansion of urban centres are shaping the city's cultural life. The local creative industry is growing, generating jobs, economic impact, and strong community participation – with the Cultural District being a key cultural hub. Housing, transportation, and cultural sector sustainability remain challenges, which highlights the need for more integrative planning. These trends point to opportunities for better cultural access that can address challenges, inequities, infrastructure and planning needs across neighbourhoods, support cross-sector collaborations, and strengthen connections across Kelowna's communities.

The findings from engagement activities<sup>2</sup> highlight a strong appetite for collaboration and a recognition that arts, culture, and heritage are central to Kelowna's identity, quality of life, and long-term sustainability. An analysis of engagement findings to date identify emerging themes including an interest in re-framing arts and culture as core services, increasing cultural opportunities at the neighbourhood level, enhancing affordability and accessibility of arts and culture programming, and improving representation of heritage and culture within the public realm. A list of emerging themes is found in Section 4 of the *Context Report*.

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<sup>2</sup> See Table One

Further engagement and analysis will occur during upcoming phases of the project and will be summarized in a *What We Heard Report*. A draft version of the *Cultural Plan* will be presented to Council in late summer 2026 prior to seeking endorsement of the final plan in September 2026.

## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Project Background

Kelowna's first *Cultural Plan* (2012–2017) was launched in 2012 to foster and integrate local culture across all neighbourhoods. Building on that foundation, the City approved its second *Cultural Plan* in 2019, which has guided the community's arts, culture, and heritage development from 2020 to today.

The City of Kelowna is now entering its next stage of cultural development with an updated *Cultural Plan* that will build off the success of the previous plan's planning and engagement process. Adapting to the social, economic, demographic, and environmental shifts that Kelowna is experiencing, the process for the *Cultural Plan Update* will evaluate what needs to be updated to respond to challenges amid changing landscapes and reflect what is resonating with the community. Aligning with the goals and strategies from both the *2040 Official Community Plan* and *Imagine Kelowna*, the updated Plan will help to guide investments in cultural infrastructure, programming, and organizational support for the future.

Throughout the process, the City will prioritize updating the Plan *with* community, as these relationships are the foundation to a successful Plan, to establish how arts and culture can adapt in order to meet their needs, and understand the overall impact of culture on the local economy, community health, and tourism.

The purpose of this Context Report is to develop a snapshot of local community dynamics, growth patterns, and cultural development trends, as well as broader trends in the Sector at large, allowing the process to remain responsive and flexible in the development of a highly relevant *Cultural Plan* for Kelowna.

Also included is research on best practices in governance, funding, service delivery, and partnerships in municipal cultural planning in Canada, a Cultural Scorecard assessment of how cultural development is received/prioritized at a strategic level in City planning, an

inventory and map of Kelowna’s cultural resources, and a summary of the findings from early engagement activities.

## 1.2 Approach and Timeline

The City of Kelowna *Cultural Plan* development will involve a mix of desk research, significant interest holder and community engagement, strategy development, implementation planning, and knowledge transfer.

Unfolding through five phases, the planning process is co-led by a team of consultants and the City of Kelowna staff team to meet the City’s goal for the plan’s adoption for September 2026.

Phase	Activities and Deliverables
<p><b>Phase 1: Project Initiation, Pre-Planning and Communications</b></p> <p><i>Spring 2025</i></p>	<p><b>Activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Project initiation session</li> <li>● Engagement and Communications Plan development</li> <li>● Interest holder mapping</li> </ul> <p><b>Deliverables:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Process Map</li> <li>● Interest Holder Map</li> <li>● Engagement and Communications Plan</li> </ul>
<p><b>Phase 2: Background Research and Review</b></p> <p><i>Summer/Fall 2025</i></p>	<p><b>Activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Engagement Plan approved by Council</li> <li>● Landscape review</li> <li>● Cultural assets and spaces inventory</li> <li>● Cultural scorecard</li> <li>● Sounding Boards at Kelowna community events</li> <li>● Interdepartmental Staff Session #1</li> <li>● Community Working Group Session #1</li> </ul> <p><b>Deliverables:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Context Report</li> </ul>
<p><b>Phase 3: Interest Holder Engagement and Data Collection</b></p> <p><i>Fall 2025 and Winter 2026</i></p>	<p><b>Activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● One-On-One In-depth Interviews</li> <li>● Online Questionnaire</li> <li>● Digital Engagement</li> <li>● Community Working Group Session #2</li> <li>● Ideas Exchange Roundtables</li> <li>● Living Lab at Innovation Centre</li> </ul>

Phase	Activities and Deliverables
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Host Your Own Engagement sessions</li> </ul> <p><b>Deliverables:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Engagement Summary</li> <li>● Context Report</li> </ul>
<p><b>Phase 4: Plan Development and Content Creation</b></p> <p><i>Winter and Spring 2026</i></p>	<p><b>Activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Engagement data analysis and synthesis</li> <li>● Validation and Synthesis Workshops</li> <li>● Draft Plan and Roadmap development</li> </ul> <p><b>Deliverables:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Updated Context Report, including Engagement Summary (this document)</li> <li>● Presentation to Council</li> </ul>
<p><b>Phase 5: Review and Refinement</b></p> <p><i>Summer 2026</i></p>	<p><b>Activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Community Open House(s) and Feedback Forms</li> <li>● Validation and Synthesis Workshops</li> <li>● Implementation Roadmap Workshop</li> <li>● Revisions</li> </ul> <p><b>Deliverables:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Draft of the updated <i>Cultural Plan</i></li> <li>● Draft Implementation Roadmap</li> <li>● Updated What We Heard Report (Engagement Summary)</li> <li>● Council Presentation</li> </ul>
<p><b>Phase 6: Reporting, Documentation and Implementation Support</b></p> <p><i>Summer-Fall 2026</i></p>	<p><b>Activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Final Plan development</li> <li>● Final follow up and staff knowledge transfer</li> <li>● Cultural Champions Summit (optional)</li> </ul> <p><b>Deliverables:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Updated <i>Cultural Plan</i> and Implementation Roadmap</li> <li>● Council Presentation</li> </ul>

### 1.3 Community Profile

#### Community & Economy

Kelowna is the sixth largest city in BC and is rapidly urbanizing to become one of the fastest-growing mid-size cities in the country. Located in the Central Okanagan Valley on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the Syilx/Okanagan people, the city is surrounded by mountains, lakes, and vineyards. This unique setting and climate supports a lifestyle rooted in year-round outdoor recreation and participation in cultural activities<sup>3</sup>.

Kelowna's economy is diverse, balancing longstanding sectors with emerging industries. Top economic sectors include manufacturing, tourism, aviation, agriculture, construction, food and drink, and health care<sup>4</sup>.

Just this past fall, Kelowna was designated as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy (the only city in Canada with this designation!), recognizing the city for its championing in agriculture, culinary arts, and beverages<sup>5</sup>. As a well established economic driver, the food and drink sector attracts more than two million visitors yearly, generating over \$1.17 billion in revenue.

The technology sector in the Central Okanagan region where Kelowna is located contributed over \$3 billion in economic impact in 2023 to the regional economy<sup>6</sup>, establishing Kelowna as the largest technology hub between Vancouver and Calgary. The city also benefits from a strong education and research base, with Okanagan College and the University of British Columbia Okanagan driving workforce development, innovation, and partnerships across disciplines.

Kelowna's cultural sector generated over \$381.7 million in direct economic output in 2024 and provided more than 3,500 full-time jobs – complementing the city's broader economic base<sup>7</sup>.

Kelowna's diverse economy offers opportunities for cross-sector partnerships by linking culture with technology, education, and established industries to drive innovation and opportunities for artists and for the benefit of Kelowna's communities.

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<sup>3</sup> City of Kelowna (2025). City profile. *City of Kelowna*. Available online: <https://www.kelowna.ca/our-community/about-kelowna/city-profile>

<sup>4</sup> City of Kelowna (2025). Economic development. *City of Kelowna*. Available online: <https://www.kelowna.ca/business-services/business-city/economic-development>

<sup>5</sup> Crawford, Emma (2025). B.C. city named as Canada's first UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy. *City News Vancouver*. Available online: <https://vancouver.citynews.ca/2025/11/01/kelowna-bc-unesco-creative-city-gastronomy/>

<sup>6</sup> Accelerate Okanagan (2023). *Okanagan Tech Sector Report*.

<sup>7</sup> City of Kelowna (2025). *Creative Sector Economic Impact Assessment*.

## Demographic Shifts<sup>8910</sup>

Kelowna's population has experienced rapid growth and diversification over the years. Its population rose 13.5% to 144,576 residents in 2021. This growth is accompanied by a rise in cultural diversity, with visible minorities comprising about 14% of the population as of 2021. There has also been a surge of younger, more diverse residents, particularly recent immigrants, which is an important consideration for cultural participation and planning.

### Key Insights

- Kelowna's growing fast and getting younger. The Indigenous population in Kelowna is growing even faster.
- With a younger population, more work is needed to understand specific needs (including cultural needs).
- The 20–34 age cohort has grown faster in Kelowna than nationally; urban centres are especially attractive to this demographic.
- The immigrant population grew nearly 70% from 2001 to 2021, outpacing provincial and national growth.
- Visible minorities make up 14% of Kelowna's population.
- More than half of new arrivals have Asian origins: Philippines (14%), India (13%), followed by the UK (7%), US (7%), and China (6%).

## Kelowna's 2024 Citizen Survey<sup>11</sup>

This survey highlights a strong overall quality of life and a sense of belonging, which provide a strong base for cultural engagement. At the same time, residents raise concerns around homelessness, transportation, and affordability – issues that can shape how people connect to community spaces and cultural life.

### Key Insights

- 86% rate their quality of life as good; the same percentage are satisfied with city services.

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<sup>8</sup> City of Kelowna (2022). *Community Trends 2022*.

<sup>9</sup> City of Kelowna (2025). How Immigration & Migration are Shaping our City. *City of Kelowna*. Available online: <https://www.kelowna.ca/our-community/community-stories/growing-kelowna/how-immigration-migration-are-shaping-our-city>

<sup>10</sup> Statistics Canada. 2023. (table). Census Profile. 2021 Census of Population. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001. Ottawa. Released November 15, 2023.

<sup>11</sup> City of Kelowna (2024). *2024 Citizen Survey*.

- 89% agree Kelowna is inclusive and accepting.
- 81% feel safe in the community.
- 71% support investment in diverse, affordable housing options.
- Top issues: homelessness (41%), transportation (26%), and crime (12%).

## Urban Growth<sup>12</sup>

Kelowna has five rapidly growing Urban Centres (Downtown, Pandosy, Capri-Landmark, Midtown, Rutland) with each centre being unique and requiring tailored planning. Nearly half of residential development is concentrated in Kelowna’s urban centres which act as anchors for cultural, social, and economic activity.

### Key Insights

- 47% of residential building permits (2021–2024) are located in urban centres.
- Urban Centres that are vibrant, walkable, nature-adjacent neighbourhoods (such as Downtown, Pandosy, and Rutland) are favoured by young, dynamic newcomers.
- Over 40% of daytime jobs are in the Urban Centre.
- Gaps exist in some of the Urban Centres that make a complete neighbourhood (schools, grocery).
- Indoor public space options are limited in all Urban Centres except Downtown.

## 1.4 Successes and Cultural Plan Progress Report Card

### Successes

The implementation of the *Cultural Plan* has been a success. Kelowna’s creative industries are growing, and it is enjoying a rising profile within Canada and internationally.

- In 2026, Kelowna was ranked #2 Overall in the Arts Vibrancy Index, ranking #1 in arts and culture revenue per capita; #2 in arts and culture jobs per capita; and #4 in all industries revenue per capita.<sup>13</sup>
- In 2025, Kelowna was designated as Canada’s first UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy - recognizing the city as a world-class centre for agriculture, culinary arts, and beverages.

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<sup>12</sup> City of Kelowna (2024). *Thriving Urban Centres: 2024 Trends Report on Kelowna’s Urban Centres*.

<sup>13</sup> Canadian Chamber of Commerce Business Data Lab. (2026). Arts Vibrancy Index.

<https://www.businessandarts.org/blog/art-vibrancy-index/>

- In September of 2025, Kelowna was the site of the Canadian Country Music Association Awards, an event with over 27,500 attendees and a direct economic impact of \$11.7 million.<sup>14</sup>
- In 2023, annual music festival and industry development conference Break Out West was held in Kelowna, with the city hosting four days of music industry events, a three-night music festival, and the Western Canadian Music Awards.

These successes, as well as the progress outlined in the following section, occurred in spite of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing climate-related events such as heat, wildfires, smoke, and flooding, as well as broader social and political unrest, rising crime and homelessness.

### 2020-2025 Cultural Plan Progress Report Card

The *Cultural Plan Progress Report Card* reviewed the progress made toward strategic outcomes in the *2020-2025 Cultural Plan*. Across all five themes, Kelowna achieved measurable progress in sustaining and growing its cultural ecosystem despite the challenges listed above. The City maintained stable funding, improved infrastructure and accessibility, strengthened sector capacity, advanced reconciliation, and fostered new partnerships and community connections.

A summary of the key accomplishments listed in the Report Card broken down by theme are listed in the table below.

Report Card Summary	
Theme	Key Accomplishments (2020–2025)
<b>Strategic Investments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Increased cultural investment per capita (\$23.75 → \$28.29).</li> <li>● Over \$1.4M allocated annually through leasehold operating support.</li> <li>● Increased funding awarded to organizations through general operating grants, project grants, and professional operating grants by \$95,154 between 2020 and 2025.</li> <li>● \$70K Recovery &amp; Sustainability Program strengthened 10 organizations impacted by COVID-19.</li> </ul>

<sup>14</sup> City of Kelowna (2026). Canadian Country Music Association Awards. <https://www.kelowna.ca/parks-recreation/event-tournament-planning/major-events/canadian-country-music-association-awards>

Report Card Summary	
Theme	Key Accomplishments (2020–2025)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteers provided more than \$600 million worth of support to local cultural organizations each year.</li> <li>• Increased permissive tax exemptions by \$224,056 between 2020 and 2025.</li> </ul>
<b>Spaces</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Laurel Square Park and outdoor classroom opened, blending culture and heritage interpretation.</li> <li>• Kelowna Community Theatre upgraded sound and hearing loop system for accessibility.</li> <li>• Heritage Grants Program provided almost \$185,000 in project grants between 2020 and 2025.</li> <li>• Outdoor Banner Exhibition Program showcased student artwork in public spaces.</li> <li>• Accessibility renovations for the Okanagan Heritage Museum occurred in 2024.</li> <li>• <i>Cultural Facilities Master Plan</i> guided future facility development and investment prioritization.</li> <li>• The Waterfront Park Stage was replaced with upgraded electrical systems and event lighting and improved accessibility and capacity for events.</li> <li>• On December 1, 2025, Council endorsed the Community Task Force on Performing Arts recommendations that the existing Kelowna Community Theatre Facility remain in place and be renovated, and that a new Performing Arts Centre should be constructed at a site to be determined.</li> <li>• The Creative Okanagan Music Venue Database was created in 2023.</li> <li>• In 2020, the City launched its Artist in Residence program to broaden the community’s experience with arts and culture.</li> </ul>
<b>Vitality</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kelowna Museums signed the <i>BC Repatriation and Heritage &amp; Reconciliation Pledges</i> – the first in BC to do so!</li> <li>• 450+ visitors attended the first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation events.</li> <li>• Tmix<sup>w</sup> by the Okanagan Symphony Orchestra showcased Indigenous stories through music and education.</li> <li>• Meet Me on Bernard transformed downtown into a pedestrian cultural corridor with murals, art, and live performances.</li> </ul>

Report Card Summary	
Theme	Key Accomplishments (2020–2025)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Uptown Mural Project and muralmap.ca increased visibility of public art across neighbourhoods.</li> <li>● <i>Central Okanagan Music Strategy</i> launched to strengthen the regional music ecosystem.</li> <li>● 600+ attendees participated in the Neighbourhood Pulse Pop-Ups between 2024 and 2025.</li> <li>● 1200+ attendees participated in the Okanagan Asian Cultural Festival, hosted by the Kelowna Taiwanese Cultural Society.</li> </ul>
<b>Capacity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● BESTi Program built governance and management capacity in six non-profits, including two arts groups.</li> <li>● The City created the <i>ROAR Card Toolkit</i> to support reflection and resilience in cultural organizations.</li> <li>● The City of Kelowna held The Inspired City Summit in 2023 to bring non-profit leaders together in the spirit of learning, collaboration, and growth. It has become an annual event.</li> <li>● In 2024, the City of Kelowna provided \$66,400 in organization Development grants to assist non-profit organizations in undertaking activities or initiatives to develop their capacity and sustainability.</li> </ul>
<b>Connections</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● ARTSCO’s “Art is What YOU Make of It” video series showcased local artists safely during the pandemic.</li> <li>● The City’s Arts &amp; Culture newsletter grew to 5,000+ subscribers, showing renewed engagement.</li> <li>● Culture was embedded in the <i>2040 Official Community Plan</i> across neighbourhood and land-use policies.</li> <li>● With leadership from the Alternator Centre for Contemporary Art, Creative Okanagan, and By Jove Co., and with input from over 20 organizations, <i>Heard About Harold</i> was launched in 2024. Its current focus is ‘The Weekly Harold,’ a digital newsletter that provides subscribers with a comprehensive list of the Central Okanagan’s upcoming arts and culture events. As of late 2025, an average of 86 event listings are delivered to more than 1,600 people every Tuesday.</li> <li>● The City of Kelowna assembled a panel of five young people, ages 15 to 21, to serve on the All Youth Artist-in-Residence Adjudication Panel. The youth panel has played a crucial role in selecting Kelowna’s Artist-in-Residence in 2024 and 2025.</li> </ul>

Report Card Summary	
Theme	Key Accomplishments (2020–2025)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Kelowna Event Strategy was developed, and provides a clear, long-term vision for events in Kelowna, including key focus areas and strategic goals.</li> <li>• In 2024, Pacific Contact (BC Live’s annual showcase conference for the performing arts) was held in Kelowna.</li> </ul>

### 1.5 Summary

This section identifies community trends that can influence the City’s cultural development, establishes Kelowna’s rising profile, and highlights the *2020-2025 Cultural Plan* key accomplishments. Kelowna’s rapid growth to a younger, more diverse population and expansion of urban centres are shaping the city’s cultural life. The cultural sector is growing, generating jobs, economic impact, and strong community participation – with Downtown being a key cultural hub. Housing, transportation, and cultural sector sustainability remain as challenges, which highlight the need for more integrative planning. These trends point to opportunities for better cultural access that can address challenges, inequities, infrastructure and planning needs across neighbourhoods, support cross-sector collaborations, and strengthen connections across Kelowna’s communities.

## 2.0 Current Trends and Best Practices in Arts and Culture in Canada

### 2.1 Major Trends Affecting the Sector

In the broader context of cultural planning, important events and trends will continue to have a significant influence on development of Canada’s \$65 billion cultural sector<sup>15</sup> for the foreseeable future.

#### **Accessible Arts for the Inclusion of People with Disabilities**

In 2021, BC enacted its first provincial legislation on compliance with accessibility requirements to remove barriers for people with disabilities. The *Accessible British Columbia Act (2021)* sets a provincial precedent for all local governments to create their own accessibility plans for the inclusion of people with disabilities in civic life.

Compliance with accessibility legislation alone does not create truly inclusive spaces, especially in the arts, culture, and heritage context. In a cultural space, accessibility for people with disabilities does not just apply to the infrastructure, or the physical accessibility, but also to the artistic programming, and the mission and vision of the institution. Taking a more multi-dimensional approach to accessibility demonstrates to people with disabilities that they are desired in a space. Investing in accessibility, therefore, offers cultural spaces new ways to expand their viewership<sup>16</sup>.

People with disabilities are not just audiences – they are artists and creators, too! Too many disabled artists and arts workers are still only included as a way to achieve diversity metrics or to fulfill funding requirements. “Interest in accessibility is surging”, says Eliza Chandler, artistic director of the non-profit Tangled Art + Disability, “but there’s still a long way to go”<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Hill, Kelly (2025). Canadian cultural products generate over \$130 billion in revenues. *Statistical Insights on the arts*. Available online: <https://statsinsights.hillstrategies.com/p/cultural-economy-canada-2024>

<sup>16</sup> Lazard, Carolyn. “Accessibility in the Arts: A Promise and a Practice”. *Recess New York*. 2019. Available online: <https://promiseandpractice.art/>

<sup>17</sup> Sandals, Leah. “8 Things Everyone Needs to Know About Art and Disability”. *Canadian Art*. March 13, 2016. Available online: <http://canadianart.ca/features/7-things-everyone-needs-to-know-about-art-disability/>

## Affordability Crisis

Living and working as an artist and arts worker in Canada's cities is getting harder. According to a study commissioned by the Canada Council for the Arts, the lead reasons for why artists move away from the city<sup>18</sup> include:

- Cost of living is too high
- Access to both affordable housing and creative space is a struggle
- Renovictions (when a tenant is unwilling evicted so a property owner can make renovations) apply to both housing and creative spaces
- Allowable subsistence levels in grants are inadequate and do not reflect increases in cost of living or inflation
- Education is needed on tenant rights and CRA rules for grants
- Corporate cultures of cities impact the aesthetics of the kinds of arts that are considered valuable
- Racism and intersecting forms of discrimination persist in the sector

In a recent study commissioned by the Cultural Human Resources Council, it was revealed that affordability and working conditions for Canada's artists are worse than Canadians in other professions<sup>19</sup>. Only 3 out of every 10 artists are satisfied with the affordability of their dwelling, even though over half work from home. According to the report, challenges intensify at the intersections of identity, as BIPOC artists, artists who are D/deaf and/or disabled, gender diverse and women artists, and younger artists reported lower personal incomes and less satisfaction with the affordability of their dwellings.

## Artificial Intelligence

A recent report by UNESCO highlights how Artificial Intelligence (AI) is drastically impacting the creative industries. By 2028, it is anticipated that Generative AI outputs will result in global revenue losses of 24% for music creators and 21% of audiovisual creators. There are growing concerns about artistic freedom, creator safety, and representation of lesser known or more diverse creatives as AI becomes increasingly popular. The report concluded that the policy and grant systems supporting the cultural sector are already fragile, and will need to adapt in the face of AI.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Canada Council for the Arts (2023). *Concentration of Artists in Canada*. Available online: <https://canadacouncil.ca/research/research-library/2023/11/concentration-of-artists-in-canada>

<sup>19</sup> Hill, Kelly. (2024). How are Canada's artists doing? Analysis of a survey of affordability and working conditions in early 2024. *Cultural Human Resources Council & Hill Strategies*. Available online: <https://hillstrategies.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/chrc-kellyhill-artists-analysis-2024.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> UNESCO. (2026). *Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity: we share, we act, we build*. Available online: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000397330>

Now more than ever, governments are scrambling to institute Artificial Intelligence (AI) policies and frameworks, as the systems become more powerful and evolve quickly. In the arts and culture sector, concerns over intellectual property, loss of value for human labour, and the spreading of misinformation are widely discussed topics<sup>21</sup>.

There are also discussions, especially in arts spaces, on how AI can be used within artistic and creative work, and how policy may stifle the creative and innovative potential of the technology. Canadian policymakers also have to be aware of the wholly negative assumptions that Canadians have about AI and “innovation” in general; according to Imagine Canada, only 31% of Canadians “trust AI”, which is 19% lower than the global average<sup>22</sup>. Policymakers must strike a balance between the opportunities of AI and the risks it may pose to economic, social, and cultural well-being<sup>23</sup>.

### **Calls to Action of Truth and Reconciliation Commission<sup>24</sup>**

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established to acknowledge and provide a witness to Residential School experiences hearing from over 6,500 witnesses and survivors. As part of its comprehensive final report released in 2015, 94 Calls to Action were issued to further the aims of reconciliation.

Arts, culture, and heritage institutions are called to transform from within to break down the colonial systems that create deeper barriers in the efforts to heal from collective trauma, and this begins by building relationships with Indigenous communities, art-makers, and cultural producers.

The Calls to Action directly name several institutions complicit in the colonial project, including the Canadian Museums Association (CMA), Library and Archives Canada, Canadian

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<sup>21</sup> Canadian Heritage (2024). Government of Canada partners with Mila to guide the development of a cultural data strategy for artificial intelligence. *Canadian Heritage*. Available online: <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/news/2024/09/government-of-canada-partners-with-mila-to-guide-the-development-of-a-cultural-data-strategy-for-artificial-intelligence.html>

<sup>22</sup> Jensen, Emily (2024). What trends will impact charities and nonprofits in the third quarter of 2024? *Imagine Canada*. Available online: <https://imaginecanada.ca/en/360/what-trends-will-impact-charities-and-nonprofits-in-the-third-quarter-of-2024>

<sup>23</sup> Wilhelm, Kelly (2024). Social and cultural impacts of AI: A seat at the policy table. *Cultural Policy Hub, OCAD*. Available online: <https://culturalpolicyhub.ocadu.ca/news/social-cultural-impacts-of-ai>

<sup>24</sup> Government of Canada (2025). Delivering on Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action. *Government of Canada*. Available online: <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1524494530110/1557511412801>

Association of Archivists, and Canada Council for the Arts, to undertake the necessary steps towards reconciliation.

In response, Canadian Museums Association released *Moved to Action: Activating UNDRIP in Canadian Museums* in 2022, outlining recommendations and new museum standards for implementing UNDRIP and supporting Indigenous self-determination in museums<sup>25</sup>. Further, the Government of Canada has been working to renew the National Museum Policy, which was last updated in 1990. Through consultations, five key themes emerged: the role of heritage institutions in society; financial sustainability and resilience; advancing reconciliation with First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples; embracing equity, diversity and inclusion; and preservation and access as core functions<sup>26</sup>.

## Climate Change

British Columbia has seen significant changes to climate and weather, prompting the need for positive environmental practices. This is especially necessary due to the direct impacts the climate crisis and associated increase in extreme weather have had on the event sector.

In a recent study published in the *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, researchers found that 57% of the reported disrupted or cancelled events were from extreme weather events caused by climate change<sup>27</sup>.

Due to the financial cost of creating new safety strategies, especially for events typically held outdoors, “arts, cultural and sports events are particularly vulnerable.”<sup>28</sup>

Nearly two-thirds (63%) of arts, entertainment, and recreation organizations and businesses have some type of environmental practice or policy<sup>29</sup>. The most common environmental practices include:

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<sup>25</sup> Canadian Museums Association. *Moved to Action: Activating UNDRIP in Canadian Museums*. 2022. Available online: [https://museums.ca/uploaded/web/TRC\\_2022/Report-CMA-MovedToAction.pdf](https://museums.ca/uploaded/web/TRC_2022/Report-CMA-MovedToAction.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> Government of Canada. “What we heard: 2022-2023 consultations on the renewal of the Canadian Museum Policy”. *Canadian Heritage*. Available online: <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/renewal-museum-policy/what-we-heard.html>

<sup>27</sup> Baker, Rafferty. “Extreme weather caused by climate change increasingly cancelling major events: study”. *CBC*, August 2, 2025. Available online: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/extreme-weather-climate-change-leading-to-more-cancelled-events-1.7599194>

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Hill, Kelly. “Greener Arts?”. *Hill Strategies Statistical Insights on the Arts*. January 21, 2022. Available online: <https://hillstrategies.com/2022/01/12/greener-arts>

- Encouraging employees to adopt environmentally friendly practices: 43%
- Reducing waste: 39%
- Reducing energy or water consumption: 30%
- Choosing suppliers based on their environmentally responsible practices or products: 26%

The cultural sector also holds a unique position in society, in that it can be a voice for radical change. In the introduction to *The Green Sessions: A Day of Learning*, a series of recorded talks and panels organized by Soulpepper Theatre Company, the organizers write: “We believe that artists have an essential part to play in the climate battle. We know that our role as storytellers and communicators can be instrumental in delivering a societal shift”<sup>30</sup>. The ability to raise awareness and be leaders in climate activism is one of the sector’s strongest tools for improving environmental impact.

## COVID-19

The impacts of COVID-19 on the Arts, Culture, and Heritage sector are still being felt today. It was one of the first sectors to close in 2020, and the economic recovery has been piecemeal by sub-sector<sup>31</sup> (if they have been able to recover at all). The performing arts, festivals, and celebrations were especially affected, as their work relies on large gatherings and interpersonal connections between artists, arts workers, and audiences – all of which were disrupted by lockdown measures, travel, and gathering restrictions. In the live music sector, many beloved venues have shuttered their doors for good.

After the pandemic, British Columbia had been providing up to \$34.5 million in one-time pandemic-era recovery and resilience funding to arts and culture organizations to support the uneven recovery within the sector<sup>32</sup>. Meanwhile, the 2024 provincial budget did not include significant pandemic-era funds, which may result in more organizations relying on the limited funding from the BC Arts Council.

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<sup>30</sup> Soulpepper Theatre Company. “The Green Sessions: Day of Learning”. June 23, 2021. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLCLYxw6-iwZtoa22qExiRwjyR1mgMA9fi>

<sup>31</sup> Canadian Heritage. “Arts, Culture and Heritage Sectors During the Covid-19 Pandemic”. June 16, 2022. Available online: <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/corporate/transparency/open-government/standing-committee/rodriguez-canadian-heritage/arts-culture-heritage-covid.html>

<sup>32</sup> BC Museums Association (2024). Key Takeaways from Budget 2024 for Arts, Culture and Heritage Organizations. *BC Museums Association*. Available online: <https://museum.bc.ca/key-takeaways-for-arts-culture-and-heritage-organizations-from-budget-2024/>

## Economic and Political Instability

With the uncertainty of international trade agreements and political relationships between Canada and the US, the cultural sector is poised for market changes and general instability in the economy in the upcoming years. Though the extent of impact is unknown, tariffs will have profound impacts on the arts and culture sector – they will almost immediately decrease the value of Canadian cultural exports and increase the cost of creating and producing in Canada<sup>33</sup>. According to Statistics Canada, \$8.2 billion, or 33% of Canada’s exported cultural goods and services were visual and applied arts exported to the United States in 2022<sup>34</sup>. Canadian artists, creatives and cultural workers who import their materials and infrastructures from US suppliers will pay a significantly higher price, or else find new Canadian or other international suppliers with whom they may not have a relationship with.

Further, artists’ work travel abilities have been disrupted, with concerns rising in regards to US border security measures and personal safety. Trans and gender non-conforming artists are especially vulnerable with new policies that require work visas to reflect their gender assigned at birth<sup>35</sup>. Fears of detainment are also a concern for those who have publicly expressed solidarity with Palestine and/or criticism of the Donald Trump presidency<sup>36</sup>.

Taken together, these pressures underscore the growing precarity of cross-border cultural exchange and the urgent need for protections that safeguard the mobility, livelihoods, and creative expression of Canadian artists and cultural workers.

More recently, Canada’s Federal Budget<sup>37</sup>, released in early November 2025, shows that there is Federal-level commitment to investing in Canada’s cultural sector. The highlights of cultural sector investments over three years, starting in 2026-27 include:

- \$6 million for the Canada Council for the Arts to support professional artists and arts organizations

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<sup>33</sup> Wilhelm, K., Kramer, M. (February 10, 2025). Trump, tariffs and trade: What’s at stake for the arts and creative industries? *Cultural Policy Hub*. Available online:

<https://culturalpolicyhub.ocadu.ca/news/Trump-tariffs-and-trade>

<sup>34</sup> CARFAC. “CARFAC’s submission on Canada’s response to United States tariffs on Canadian goods”. March 27, 2025. Available online:

<https://www.carfac.ca/carfac-submission-on-canadas-response-to-united-states-tariffs-on-canadian-goods/>

<sup>35</sup> Gordon, Holly. “Canadian trans musicians cancel U.S. shows citing fear and policies targeting gender identity”. *CBC*. April 11, 2025. Available online:

<https://www.cbc.ca/music/canadian-trans-musicians-cancel-american-shows-policies-targeting-trans-artists-1.7508169>

<sup>36</sup> Stechyson, Natalie. “A wave of artists are reconsidering tours over U.S. border detention fears”. *CBC*. April 3, 2025. Available online: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/entertainment/musicians-authors-cancel-tours-u-s-1.7500267>

<sup>37</sup> Government of Canada. *Canada Strong Budget 2025*.

- \$48 million for the Canadian Music Fund to strengthen the music industry and support musical artists and organizations
- \$46.5 million for the Canada Arts Presentation Fund, for arts festivals and performing arts
- \$21 million for the Building Communities through Arts & Heritage Program, for community festivals and celebrations.
- \$450 million to cultural institutions including Telefilm Canada, the National Film Board, Canadian Media Fund and CBC/Radio-Canada
- Amendment of the Copyright Act to create an Artist's Resale Right

## **Festival Landscape Shifts**

There is a noticeable shift in the festival landscape, moving away from large, one-off events toward more immersive, distributed cultural experiences. Audiences are increasingly drawn to fluid, interactive events that extend beyond traditional one-day formats, with technology such as VR, apps, and AI-enhanced experiences playing a larger role in engagement.

Following the pandemic, some festivals are struggling to rebuild audiences, while established festivals continue to see strong attendance—established festivals navigating the challenges more effectively than newer events. Efforts to attract younger and more diverse attendees are ongoing, while funding relies heavily on earned revenue, modest government support, and pandemic-related federal funding. To address rising costs and volunteer limitations, many events are adopting smaller, more efficient "plug and play" market models.

Similarly, with wildfires and extreme heat beginning earlier and having more drastic effects, organizers that rely on signature all-in-one-weekend festivals in the summer, have had to take precautionary measures to protect their patrons<sup>38</sup>. Primarily outdoor event organizers are experimenting with moving shows indoors and are developing relationships with emergency personnel in order to be better prepared in emergency situations.

Safety requirements have also increased due to growing instances of hate and intolerance, while leadership challenges persist in organizing successful events. After several tragedies at

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<sup>38</sup> Kshatri, S. K. (2024). Drought, wildfire concerns impact B.C. summer events. *CBC News*. Available online: [cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/bc-wildfire-impacts-tourism-industry-1.7110777](https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/bc-wildfire-impacts-tourism-industry-1.7110777)

public events, the Government of BC has released a report<sup>39</sup> on how to improve public safety at events with six key recommendations:

- Risk assessments
- Clarify jurisdictional roles (providing tools and expertise to help communities and local governments across the province coordinate)
- Establish a centralized training and support hub
- Boost local event delivery capacity
- Foster local collaboration
- Promote learning through evaluation

With these recommendations in mind, moving away from large, one-off events to smaller, community-focused and community-led events is proving to be a popular trend amongst Canadian municipalities.

## Summary

The trends and events highlighted in this section that will continue to have a significant influence on Canada’s cultural sector include:

- Accessible Arts for the Inclusion of People with Disabilities
- Affordability Crisis
- Artificial Intelligence
- Calls to Action of Truth and Reconciliation Commission
- COVID-19
- Economic and Political Instability
- Festival Landscape Shifts

These trends and events act as a reminder that arts, culture, and heritage do not exist in a vacuum, but affect and are affected by broader social, economic and environmental challenges in the world.

## 2.2 Governance, Funding, Service Delivery and Partnership Trends

The Canadian cultural sector is adapting to dynamic challenges, including shifting funding models, governance expectations, and cross-sector collaboration. Municipal cultural planning

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<sup>39</sup> Schuermann, Jan (July 2025). “B.C. releases safety report, including 6 recommendations, after Lapu-Lapu Day festival attack”. *CityNews Vancouver*. Available online: <https://vancouver.citynews.ca/2025/07/09/bc-to-release-public-safety-report-lapu-lapu-day/>

is an inclusive process, requiring involvement from both local governments and the community. Municipal cultural service delivery approaches range from in-house delivery, to contracted services, to a hybrid of the two. Municipalities are increasingly shifting away from the responsibility of acting solely as the direct supplier of in-house cultural services, to a more strategic and decentralized role, leveraging the community's existing assets through fee-for-service, operating and partnership contracts, including critical input from arts and culture organizations<sup>40</sup>.

Municipalities often rely on partnerships with non-profit organizations, cultural institutions, artists, and businesses to co-deliver services and amplify impact. As public accountability increases and traditional revenue sources evolve, arts organizations must adopt innovative governance, funding, and partnership approaches.

To thrive, Canadian arts organizations must adopt governance structures that are participatory and adaptive, secure flexible funding that enables innovation, and pursue partnerships that expand reach and deepen community impact. Embracing these best practices will help ensure the sector's resilience and cultural vitality.

The following review identifies key trends and best practices within a Canadian context, informed by recent global and local research. As organizations navigate digital transformation and societal shifts, there is a growing need to rethink the structures that govern creativity, inclusion, and financial resilience. This review aims to provide decision-makers with an overview of how Canadian arts organizations can evolve to meet these complex demands.

## **Governance Models**

Arts governance in Canada reflects a hybrid of nonprofit, public, and corporate governance traditions. As in other jurisdictions, Canadian boards must balance financial accountability with support for artistic excellence. Collaborative governance—emphasizing stakeholder inclusion and strategic alignment—is increasingly seen as best practice. Boards are expected to engage with artistic leadership while maintaining trust and mission alignment<sup>41 42</sup>. In

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<sup>40</sup> Dick, B., Jeannotte, S. & Hill, K. (2019). Positioning Culture within Canadian Municipalities. *Culture and Local Governance / Culture et gouvernance locale*, 6(1), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.18192/clg-cgl.v6i1.4550>

<sup>41</sup> Reid, W., Turbide, J., & Rentschler, R. (2021). Theorizing arts governance: Mapping the influence of context, creativity and funding paradigms for future research prospects. *International Journal of Arts Management*, 23(4), 45–60. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/355840745>

<sup>42</sup> Rentschler, R. (2015). Governance in the arts and culture nonprofit sector: Vigilance or indifference? *Management and the arts* (Chapter 7). [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/307643526\\_Governance\\_in\\_the\\_Arts\\_and\\_Culture\\_Nonprofit\\_Sector\\_Vigilance\\_or\\_Indifference](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/307643526_Governance_in_the_Arts_and_Culture_Nonprofit_Sector_Vigilance_or_Indifference)

Canada, many arts boards are volunteer-based and often composed of individuals from diverse professional backgrounds. This diversity can enhance governance, but it also presents challenges in aligning artistic vision with fiduciary duties. An increasing number of organizations are incorporating Indigenous governance principles and community-led advisory bodies to reflect Canada's evolving cultural landscape and promote reconciliation.

## **Funding Models**

Canadian arts organizations rely on a mix of public funding (via Canada Council for the Arts and provincial arts councils), earned revenue, and philanthropic donations. However, donor-imposed restrictions—especially on permanently restricted gifts—can limit program flexibility and impact<sup>43</sup>. Flexible, multi-year funding is increasingly recognized as critical to support innovation and long-term planning. Recent efforts by Canadian Heritage and private foundations emphasize capacity building and sustainable funding for smaller and rural arts organizations. There is also an emerging interest in equity-focused funding models that address systemic barriers faced by BIPOC artists and communities. The Canada Council's Explore and Create program is one example of supporting artistic innovation while recognizing the need for equitable access to resources.

## **Service Delivery Models**

Financial constraints challenge service delivery. Arts organizations in Canada are exploring co-creation with communities, audience engagement strategies, and digital innovation to sustain relevance. Collaborations with health, education, and municipal partners are enabling broader impact and access<sup>44 45</sup>. The pandemic highlighted the fragility of many service delivery models, pushing organizations to explore digital platforms and outdoor public programming. These adaptations are expected to remain important components of service models, offering new opportunities to engage broader and more diverse audiences, particularly in underserved regions.

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<sup>43</sup> Jegers, M., Grossi, G., & Reichard, C. (2022). Service delivery under pressure: The effect of donor-imposed financial restrictions. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*. Advance online publication. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/365171422>

<sup>44</sup> GCDN. (2018). Governance models for cultural districts. Global Cultural Districts Network. <https://gcdn.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/GCDN-Governance-Models-for-Cultural-Districts-2018.pdf>

<sup>45</sup> Teissl, V., Mayerhofer, E., & Reid, W. (2021). Intermediary dynamics in cultural governance: Film festivals in Vienna. In W. Reid, J. Turbide, & R. Rentschler (Eds.), *Theorizing arts governance* (Special issue). *International Journal of Arts Management*, 23(4), 76–89. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/355840745>

## Partnership and Collaboration

Cross-sector partnerships have become a strategic necessity. In Canada, models that unite municipalities, BIPOC communities, and private stakeholders offer pathways to sustainable arts ecosystems. Intermediary organizations—such as arts service organizations—play a vital role in advocating, coordinating, and building sector capacity<sup>46</sup>. Collaborative frameworks, such as those supporting community-engaged art and place-based initiatives, show promise for creating locally relevant cultural programming. Partnerships with public health and social services are also proving instrumental in demonstrating the social value of the arts, thereby attracting new sources of funding and political support.

## Summary

The Canadian cultural sector is adapting to evolving governance, funding, and service delivery models amid changing public expectations and financial pressures. Governance models increasingly emphasize inclusivity, accountability, and community representation, with some organizations incorporating Indigenous and community-led structures. Funding remains a mix of public, earned, and philanthropic sources, with growing emphasis on flexible, multi-year, and equity-focused models that enable innovation and sustainability. Service delivery is becoming more adaptive and community-centered, integrating digital tools, co-creation, and cross-sector collaboration to expand access and relevance. Partnerships across sectors are strengthening the social and economic impact of the arts, reinforcing their essential role in resilient and inclusive communities. Municipalities are shifting from directly delivering cultural services to facilitating and partnering with community organizations, fostering a more decentralized and collaborative approach.

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<sup>46</sup> Donelli, C. C., Fanelli, S., & Zangrandi, A. (2021). Collaborative governance in Italian theatre: Drivers of value creation. In W. Reid, J. Turbide, & R. Rentschler (Eds.), *Theorizing arts governance* (Special issue). *International Journal of Arts Management*, 23(4), 61–75. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/355840745>

## 3.0 Cultural Development in Kelowna

### 3.1 Overview of Cultural Development

Kelowna's cultural sector is growing rapidly, complemented by strong community participation and generating significant economic impact. The City dedicates approximately \$3.4 million to arts and culture annually and approximately a \$24.43 investment per capita<sup>47</sup>.

Since 2009, the sector has expanded in employment, businesses, incomes, and volunteer engagement, which highlight the central role arts and culture have in city life. Guided by the *2020-2025 Cultural Plan* and *Cultural Policy*, the City is rich in arts, culture, and heritage opportunities, along with major civic-led and grassroots community events, with services facilitated by partner agencies, non-profit community groups, and through direct provision by the City.

Within a municipality, arts, culture, events, and heritage services and infrastructure all fall under the wider umbrella of cultural development. Cultural development is the planning and implementation of strategies that leverage a community's unique cultural resources and assets for the social, economic and environmental benefit of a community.

Strategies may include, but are not limited to:

- Investing in arts, culture, and heritage facilities (art galleries, museums, theatres, concert halls etc.)
- Producing public festivals and events
- Coordinating and funding programming for arts, culture and heritage activities
- Implementing public art and creative placemaking initiatives (transformed underused public spaces for creative or playful uses)
- Attracting and supporting creative industries (e.g. film, television, publishing, design, fashion, music)

There are numerous direct and indirect social and livability benefits resulting from cultural development, such as improved quality of life, which leads to attraction of skilled workers, tourism, and businesses, etc. These benefits have supported an understanding that cultural resources and delivery are no longer a 'nice to have' or a 'frill' in local government.

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<sup>47</sup> City of Kelowna. *2025 Financial Plan*.

Increasingly, cultural development is included in the core suite of municipal services offered to strengthen a community's cultural identity and grow its creative economy. Research shows that cultural development has its greatest impacts when it is positioned at a strategic level within municipal organizational structures, integrating and aligning cultural planning with economic development and other influential policy areas such as tourism, housing affordability, and transportation<sup>48</sup>. Both *Imagine Kelowna: The Community's Vision* and the *2040 Official Community Plan* deeply integrate culture into their Goals and Objectives, which articulates how cultural development supports a functioning and thriving community (for a more detailed analysis of these two plans, see [Section 3.3 Planning Linkages and Cultural Scorecard](#)).

## Active Living and Culture

At the City of Kelowna, cultural development falls into the portfolios of the Cultural Services Division and the Sport & Event Services Department, both based in the Active Living and Culture Division. Public Art is managed by the Parks Planning Department.

As previously mentioned, Municipal cultural service delivery approaches tend to range from in-house delivery, to contracted services, to a hybrid of the two. To deliver their services and amplify impact, Kelowna currently operates under a hybrid model, leveraging their partnerships with non-profit organizations, cultural institutions, artists, and businesses for contracted services. Most arts and culture services are not directly delivered by the City, but are primarily facilitated through grants and support for not-for-profit organizations.

The **Cultural Services Department** oversees cultural policies and plans, partners with cultural facility operators and community organizations, administers grant programs and owns and operates the Kelowna Community Theatre. They also oversee the Community Ticketing program that supports ticketing for both city-run and third-party events and venues.

The following **Cultural Facilities** are owned by the City and operated by non-profit organizations on behalf of the City pursuant to Lease & Operating Agreements, or other arrangements<sup>49</sup>:

- **Guisachan Heritage Site** which includes: the site grounds, Guisachan House, the Milk Shed, and other accessory buildings

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<sup>48</sup>Dick, B., Jeannotte, S. & Hill, K. (2019). Positioning Culture within Canadian Municipalities. *Culture and Local Governance / Culture et gouvernance locale*, 6(1), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.18192/clg-cgl.v6i1.4550>

<sup>49</sup> City of Kelowna. (2010). *Council Policy 274: Cultural Policy*.

- **Kelowna Art Gallery**
- **Museums** all operated by the Kelowna Museums Society
- **Okanagan Regional Library Downtown Branch**
- **Prospera Place**
- **Rotary Centre for the Arts**

Cultural Services maintains multiple partnerships with a variety of educational institutions, businesses, organizations and artists.

The Cultural Services Branch also administers all the City’s **Cultural Grant Programs** – a granting framework which appears to take a balanced approach – with a mix of core, project, and artist grants that may help sustain both stability and creativity. Cultural Services has six grant streams<sup>50</sup> totaling over \$380,000 a year including:

- Advancing Equity Microgrant
- Community Arts Grants
- Core Operating Grants
- General Operating Grants
- Project Grants
- Organization Development Grants
- Heritage Grants (administered by Central Okanagan Heritage Society on behalf of City of Kelowna)

The **Sport & Event Services Division** spearheads a variety of sport and special event initiatives. Focuses on promotion and implementation, event permitting, development and procurement, organizational development and facility operations support. Most events in Kelowna are produced on three different sites: City Park, Stuart Park and Waterfront Park – all located in the downtown core of Kelowna<sup>51</sup>.

Sport & Event Services maintains partnerships with Festivals Kelowna, Tourism Kelowna, and the Downtown Kelowna Association to attract, host, and promote major events, while also supporting community-run festivals. These partnerships form a key part of the *Event Strategy*, a guide for how the City can support and deliver all classifications of events and film productions shot on City property that may have an impact on the public<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>50</sup> Cultural Services Delivery and Governance Review Stage 4: Final Review, April 2025, City of Abbotsford (Note: City of Kelowna investment is detailed as a comparator in this report).

<sup>51</sup> City of Kelowna (2022). *Kelowna Event Strategy*.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

## Cultural Resources

As outlined in the 2025 *Creative Sector Economic Impact Assessment*, when benchmarked against other cities in BC, Kelowna residents demonstrate higher-than-average participation in a wide range of arts and culture activities<sup>53</sup>. With such strong participation rates, it is essential for the municipality to identify, preserve, and manage where and what services are delivered.

Cultural resource mapping is a systematic approach to identifying, recording, and classifying a community's cultural resources in order to describe and visualize them. It is an important point-of-time capture that local governments use to establish baseline data on cultural production, presentation, and participation spaces. The resulting inventory and map are then replicated every two to three years to determine whether cultural spaces are being displaced in the local real estate market. It is an important tool to determine ongoing cultural space use, needs, and challenges.

Cultural resource mapping is currently in progress and will inform the final *Cultural Plan*. The mapping will include arts, culture, and heritage services, facilities, and programs in Kelowna, organized by City-Owned and Community-Based, into the following categories, which align with Figure 1 on the next page:

- Creative Cultural Enterprises and Services
- Public Institutions
- Visual Arts
- Education
- Built Heritage
- Festivals and Events
- Community Cultural Organizations
- Spaces and Facilities
- Natural Heritage
- Performing Arts
- Public Art & Installations

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<sup>53</sup> City of Kelowna (2025). *Creative Creative Sector Economic Impact Assessment*



Figure 1 above: Cultural Resources Framework, adapted from MDB Insights and Statistics Canada Cultural Resources Framework

## Cultural District<sup>5455</sup>

Kelowna’s Cultural District was established in the 1990s and contains the majority of the City’s cultural facilities. The District also houses 21 pieces of public art, private galleries, restaurants, an art walk, banner program, and unique shops that contribute to the vibrancy of Downtown

<sup>54</sup> City of Kelowna (2015). *Civic Precinct Plan*.

<sup>55</sup> City of Kelowna (2025). Cultural District. *City of Kelowna*, Available online: <https://www.kelowna.ca/our-community/arts-culture-heritage/cultural-district>

Kelowna. In addition, the Cultural District is adjacent to the network of waterfront parks, which are key destinations for residents and visitors to gather and celebrate major events and engage in public life. The City has supported the development of the Cultural District through parallel investments in public spaces, transit improvements, and community events and celebrations (including Light Up Kelowna projection project, Canada Day, Parks Alive, Public Skating, etc.).

The following cultural facilities are housed in Kelowna’s Cultural District:

- Kelowna Community Theatre (including the Black Box Theatre)
- Kelowna Art Gallery
- Okanagan Heritage Museum
- Okanagan Wine and Orchard Museum
- Okanagan Military Museum
- Rotary Arts Common and Art Walk
- Rotary Centre for the Arts & the Mary Irwin Theatre
- Okanagan Regional Library (Kelowna Main Branch)
- Kasugai Gardens

## Public Art<sup>56</sup>

The City of Kelowna’s *Public Art Program*, established in 1997, aims to culturally enrich public spaces and shape the city’s identity to ensure that residents and visitors alike can engage with culture on a daily basis. At the time of writing, this program includes 89 works, ranging from sculptures and murals to civic monuments, and also supports community-driven projects that engage residents in creative processes. The Public Art Program operates through an annual City budget of \$130,000.<sup>57</sup>

Public Art is also an important component of Building a Stronger Kelowna (BSK), a group of recreational projects that work together to build deeper community connections across the city, with over \$1.3 million budgeted for public art spanning over five key projects<sup>58</sup>.

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<sup>56</sup> City of Kelowna (2025). Public art. *City of Kelowna*. Available online: <https://www.kelowna.ca/our-community/arts-culture-heritage/public-art>

<sup>57</sup> City of Kelowna (2026). Public Art - Funding. City of Kelowna. Available online: <https://www.kelowna.ca/our-community/arts-culture-heritage/public-art>

<sup>58</sup> City of Kelowna (2025). Building a Stronger Kelowna Public Art – Expression of Interest (EOI). *City of Kelowna Public Art*. Available online: [https://www.kelowna.ca/sites/files/1/docs/related/2025.07.16\\_rprc\\_eoi\\_4.3\\_f.pdf?](https://www.kelowna.ca/sites/files/1/docs/related/2025.07.16_rprc_eoi_4.3_f.pdf?)

The City is currently developing a *Public Art Plan* to set a direction for public art, create opportunities for artists, and make sure the highest standards are being followed from commissioning to conservation.

### **Creative Sector Economic Impact Assessment<sup>59</sup>**

In Fall 2025, the City completed an updated assessment of the economic and social contributions of Kelowna's cultural sector, building on earlier studies from 2010 and 2019. The 2024 Assessment highlights significant growth since 2018, using key indicators in economic impact, audience and visitor trends, employment, and social and community outcomes.

In 2024, the cultural sector generated an estimated \$381.7 million in direct economic impact, along with \$197.9 million in indirect and induced effects. Film and new media represented the largest sub-sector, contributing \$188.6 million in GDP and \$227.5 million in total output, accounting for nearly half of Kelowna's creative economy.

The sector also supported more than 3,500 full-time jobs, generating approximately \$263.2 million in labour income. Between 2018 and 2024, the number of creative establishments in Kelowna increased by nearly 50%, with a notable shift toward self-employment. The city's creative workforce is increasingly defined by independent workers, entrepreneurs, and artists pursuing flexible and project-based careers.

Noted earlier in this report, when benchmarked against the provincial average, Kelowna residents demonstrate higher-than-average participation in a wide range of arts and culture activities – including wine festivals, concerts, and community theatre. Nearly half (46.4%) of households belong to consumer groups with an elevated interest in cultural participation. Audiences span younger families drawn to cultural fairs, cinemas, and local performances, as well as older residents who have both the time and resources to support community arts and events. Together, these patterns reflect a strong local appetite for cultural experiences that are community-oriented and authentically rooted in place.

Volunteer contributions to Kelowna's cultural sector remain significant, though early signs of decline have emerged since 2023 (~23,000 hours in 2021; ~36,000 in 2022; ~38,000 in 2023; and ~33,000 in 2024). These figures highlight the growing challenge of sustaining community engagement amid rising demand and limited capacity. As cultural organizations continue to

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<sup>59</sup> City of Kelowna (2025). *Creative Sector Economic Impact Assessment*.

navigate these pressures, their ability to innovate, collaborate, and adapt will be essential to maintaining the sector’s momentum and ensuring that Kelowna’s creative community continues to thrive.

Overall, the findings reaffirm that Kelowna’s cultural sector is a dynamic and resilient driver of local prosperity – one that continues to strengthen the city’s cultural identity, economic vitality, and quality of life.

### Municipal Cultural Development Continuum

1	2	3	4	5	6
BEAUTIFICATION EFFORT	ECONOMIC DRIVER	COMMUNITY AMENITIES	CREATIVE CITY	SUSTAINABLE CITY	INTERCULTURAL CITY
Canadian municipalities became immersed in cultural planning in the 1900s	Cities made the case for the economic value of culture	Tackling urban issues and investment in community features	Integrated in urban planning Creative workers	Culture as a quality-of-life value Social cohesion Social capital	Contributing to community outcomes and cultural identity
Arts and heritage collections Buildings Monuments	Downtown revitalization Tourism	Public art, festivals and events Tangible culture, arts, and heritage infrastructure	Creative industries Cultural mapping Cultural districts	Cultural democracy Cultural vitality	Cultural democracy (Re)defining cultural meanings Intangible culture

Dr. Greg Baeker is a nationally recognized leader in municipal cultural planning. He established the Municipal Cultural Development Continuum (an adapted version is represented above), which describes the phases communities experience as they take initial steps in cultural development towards the final phase of becoming an intercultural city. The project team identified that Kelowna is currently in a transition period between Phase 3 (community amenities) and Phase 4 (creative city). Kelowna now has a Cultural District, began cultural mapping exercises in 2019, and has growing creative industries. This transition towards Phase 4 is quite recent, and continuing to integrate culture within urban planning, applying a creative lens to various projects and the economy, and further strengthening of creative industries, cultural mapping, and cultural districts would be required to firmly establish Kelowna as a creative city. Once established as a creative city, the community can look towards further cultural development, towards Phase 5 (a sustainable city) and Phase 6 (intercultural city).

## Challenges & Opportunities

Kelowna's creative and cultural sector is growing; however, several challenges may influence planning and investment. Addressing these challenges presents opportunities to strengthen inclusion, accessibility, and sustainability.

### Key Challenges<sup>60 61</sup>

- **Housing & Affordability:** Rising costs limit access to cultural spaces for residents and creative professionals.
- **Homelessness:** Social issues affect community connection and participation in cultural life.
- **Transportation & Infrastructure:** Congestion and infrastructure gaps can restrict access to cultural venues.
- **Cultural Sector Sustainability:** Limited funding and resources constrain growth and professional development.
- **Demographic Pressures:** Rapid population growth and immigration require inclusive programming.
- **Community Safety:** People may be less likely to attend events if safety concerns are present.
- **Climate Change:** Rising temperatures, floods and fires in Kelowna can affect tourism, agriculture (food/wine sector), and risk of event cancellations.

### Key Opportunities

- **New Growth:** Concentrated urban growth provides hubs for cultural infrastructure integration including public spaces.
- **Diversity:** A growing, diverse population offers new audiences and creators for cultural programs.
- **Culture for culture:** Strong municipal leadership and policy alignment — with culture embedded in *Imagine Kelowna*, the *2040 Official Community Plan*, and departmental strategies — creates a solid foundation for long-term cultural development.
- **Partnerships:** Established partnerships with organizations such as Kelowna Art Gallery Association, Ballet Kelowna, Okanagan Symphony Orchestra, and UBC Okanagan offer opportunities to expand collaboration, cross-promotion, and shared investment.

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<sup>60</sup> City of Kelowna (2022). *2040 Official Community Plan*.

<sup>61</sup> City of Kelowna (2019). *2020-2025 Cultural Plan*.

- **Growing Cultural Sector:** A growing economic footprint of the sector (nearly \$580 million in combined direct and indirect impact in 2024) strengthens the case for continued municipal and private investment in cultural industries.
- **Public Art:** Program renewal and the upcoming *Public Art Plan* offer opportunities to commission more diverse works, support local artists, and align public art with larger city-building initiatives such as Building a Stronger Kelowna.
- **Engagement:** High community participation rates and volunteer engagement reflect a strong base of cultural supporters that can be mobilized through new outreach, volunteer retention, and audience development strategies.
- **Supported Service Delivery:** Hybrid model enables the City to continue leveraging community expertise, supporting non-profit operators, and fostering innovation through contracted partnerships.

## Summary

Kelowna’s cultural sector is thriving – supported by strong community participation, a growing creative workforce, and steady municipal investment of approximately \$3.4 million annually. The City acts as a funder, facilitator, and mobilizer of cultural development by providing operating and project grants, maintaining partnerships with key cultural facilities and organizations, and convening community partners to deliver diverse programs and events. Through this hybrid model of direct service and collaboration, the City leverages its resources to amplify impact, strengthen the local creative economy, and embed culture as a core pillar of civic life, while continuing to address challenges related to affordability, sustainability, and inclusion. Kelowna is currently in a transitional period in its cultural development as it shifts from a community amenities approach towards beginning to establish itself as a creative city.

## 3.2 Cultural Plan Overview

### Kelowna’s 2020–2025 Cultural Plan

Following the success of Kelowna’s first *Cultural Plan* that was launched in 2012, Kelowna’s *2020–2025 Cultural Plan*, endorsed by Council in 2019, provided a framework for fostering an accessible and engaging arts and culture landscape, setting a shared vision, four guiding principles and ten goals broken down into five themes (the strategic outcomes of the plan).

## **The Vision:**

We see a community which..

- Embraces and celebrates diversity and is open and welcoming to all
- Fosters innovation, attracts and retains people in its workforce
- Proactively welcomes and encourages the discovery of new experiences and art forms
- Is recognized as a four-season destination with a rich variety of high-quality arts, culture and heritage experiences
- Has distinct urban centres that understand their histories and promote their uniqueness while encouraging flow between each one
- Invests in infrastructure, artists and non-profit organizations as a way to build character and identity
- Has meaningful and ongoing consultation with our First Nation hosts and provides new opportunities for Indigenous voice and expression
- Is a leader in building collaborations and increasing quality of life for future generations
- Showcases its histories through its people, activities buildings, landscapes, sites and stories
- Tackles challenges critically and creatively with an open spirit

## **Guiding Principles:**

- Accessibility, diversity & inclusion
- Accountability & fiscal responsibility
- Innovation
- Partnerships & Cooperation

## Themes and Goals:

Themes	Goals
<b>1. Strategic Investments</b>	<p><i>1. Increase contribution of resources</i> Develop a variety of approaches to increase support for the cultural sector’s spaces, capacity, vitality and connections.</p> <p><i>2. Understand our impact</i> Leverage the value that culture contributes to the community.</p>
<b>2. Spaces</b>	<p><i>3. Optimize existing spaces</i> Improve the use of existing space and allow for alternative solutions to meet community needs.</p> <p><i>4. Commit to developing new facilities</i> Actively plan and seek opportunities for the advancement of new cultural facilities.</p>
<b>3. Vitality</b>	<p><i>5. Learn from our past</i> Engage the public in the protection and preservation of Kelowna’s human and natural history and bring stories about our past to the forefront.</p> <p><i>6. Boost vitality at the street level</i> Create excitement and activity throughout Kelowna.</p>
<b>4. Capacity</b>	<p><i>7. Support a viable creative sector</i> Enhance administrative, financial, management and governance systems that create a strong foundation for the future.</p>
<b>5. Connections</b>	<p><i>8. Share our story</i> Celebrate local activities, initiatives and successes with the broader community.</p> <p><i>9. Broaden the reach</i> Incorporate culture within other sectors as an integral piece of community growth.</p> <p><i>Goal 10: Convene and connect</i> Bring the creative sector together for dialogue, exchange and action.</p>

### 3.3 Planning Linkages and Cultural Scorecard

The City of Kelowna prioritizes and supports cultural development through the strategic integration of arts and cultural considerations in higher-level planning documents. Overall, culture is implicitly valued throughout the City’s policy landscape.

The consulting team reviewed a variety of the City’s major plans, policies, and initiatives and evaluated their linkages to cultural development. A score of either Limiting, Opportunity to Improve, or Good is provided in the document’s ability to promote further cultural development in the future, and set an example for the updated *Cultural Plan*. A ‘Good’ score was provided if the documents demonstrated a strong implicit or explicit connection to culture. Lower scores were provided to documents that may not promote cultural development to its full potential in the future (‘Opportunity to Improve’) or even limit it (‘Limiting’).



Across most of the documents, arts, culture, heritage, and placemaking are treated as interconnected elements within broader goals of livability, inclusion, and sustainability. The *2040 Official Community Plan (OCP)* and *Imagine Kelowna Vision* are particularly progressive, integrating cultural development principles into nearly every chapter and theme. Several plans (such as the *Council Priorities Action Plan*, *Housing Action Plan*, and *Events Strategy*) miss

opportunities to explicitly link their actions and investments to cultural outcomes, despite clear synergies.

Additionally, diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility, and Truth and Reconciliation considerations are recognized but require stronger, measurable commitments in implementation and monitoring. The new *Cultural Plan* represents a timely opportunity to bridge these policies, align cultural priorities across departments, and define culture’s measurable contributions to community safety, climate resilience, economic diversification, and social inclusion.

Overall, Kelowna demonstrates a strong and maturing commitment to cultural development across its major plans and strategies. Culture is recognized as a core component of community well-being, economic vitality, and urban identity, even when it is not explicitly identified as a standalone pillar.

The scores and key considerations of each document are provided in the table below.

Plan Linkages		
Policy, Plan, or Practice	Key Considerations	Score
10-Year Capital Plan: Building a City of the Future 2025-2034	<p>The City is making strategic investments into their capital assets that include expansion and maintenance plans for spaces and facilities where cultural activities occur. There is a sophisticated asset management system which helps them to maintain and operate their assets to prolong their sustainability. Placemaking is considered as a strategic investment component of both buildings and parks.</p> <p>Culture is therefore understood as an important sector worthy of city investment in a growing community with diverse needs.</p> <p>As a high-level document, the Plan does not explicitly describe which assets and programs are the spaces in which cultural activities occur. It also does not explicitly publish the community engagement materials or needs assessment, which would have aided in the investment decision-making. There is no indication that new major cultural developments will be built over the next 10 years; however, renewal and improvements projects may be more reflective of the community needs.</p>	Good

Plan Linkages		
Policy, Plan, or Practice	Key Considerations	Score
Accessibility Plan (2025)	<p>As a wide-ranging document, the Accessibility Plan does a good job in considering where barriers exist for disabled people to thrive in the City (not just survive). Access to arts and cultural activities is touched upon lightly; however, the development of the new <i>Cultural Plan</i> offers a unique opportunity to increase community awareness and appreciation of people with disabilities as participants and creators/producers of arts and culture in Kelowna.</p> <p>The <i>Cultural Plan</i> should outline how arts and culture can be made inclusive for everyone who identifies as having one or more disabilities, building upon the recommendations and actions of the Accessibility Plan that do not explicitly mention arts and culture facilities/spaces or events. This may include an action related to auditing the accessibility of city-owned cultural facilities and their communications.</p>	Good
Community Safety Plan + Progress Report	<p>Kelowna is a city experiencing community-safety related concerns such as: precarious housing and homelessness, mental illness and substance abuse, domestic/intimate partner violence, and racism and discrimination. The Community Safety Plan identifies recommendations and actions focused on protecting vulnerable communities and reducing stigma.</p> <p>Though arts and culture are not explicitly cited as preventative or corrective measures for community safety, they are included implicitly as protective factors or positive influences that may counteract risk factors (e.g. accessible services, neighbourhood inclusion, opportunities to participate as a community member).</p> <p>The City may also support partners and organizations that help increase knowledge and resources for crime prevention, stigma reduction, and anti-discriminatory practices through arts initiatives and awareness campaigns.</p> <p>The <i>Cultural Plan</i> should identify the opportunities in which community safety, including crime reduction and anti-racism and discrimination, can be addressed through arts and culture initiatives.</p>	Good
Community Social	The policy demonstrates the City's willingness and ability to	Good

Plan Linkages		
Policy, Plan, or Practice	Key Considerations	Score
Development Grant Policy	support and leverage the capacity of the community to deliver key programming that benefits the community in one way or another.	
Council Priorities Action Plan	<p>While there are no explicit links to arts, culture, or heritage in the action plan, the priorities and actions identified as linkages would be strengthened with a cultural development lens.</p> <p><u>Crime and Safety</u> Placemaking and public art interventions in the public realm, for example, are key mitigation strategies for reducing property crime.</p> <p><u>Transportation</u> Access to reliable and safe transportation options can increase participation in cultural activities.</p> <p><u>Agriculture</u> The City recognizes the importance of agricultural production as integral to the identity, heritage, and culture of Kelowna.</p> <p><u>Economy</u> Diversifying the economy to include development of the culture sector helps with economic growth.</p> <p>There are opportunities to explicitly outline where investment into cultural development can strengthen the existing priorities. Alternatively, it is common for council strategic plans to reserve a priority for community well-being, inclusivity, or celebration, which necessarily includes actions that support arts, culture, events and heritage.</p>	Opportunity to Improve
Cultural Facilities Master Plan (CFMP)	The CFMP received a grade of good due to its comprehensive nature and implementation considerations. While cultural facilities are sometimes included in broader facilities planning documents, Kelowna has followed a best practice in preparing a dedicated plan with an engagement component. This Plan, which is currently being updated, will need to be considered and referenced in the <i>Cultural Plan</i> update, with care not to duplicate work. Further work, as alluded to in this plan, could include additional engagement and cultural mapping exercises to	Good

Plan Linkages		
Policy, Plan, or Practice	Key Considerations	Score
	<p>understand more about the number and state of private and non-profit cultural spaces within Kelowna.</p>	
Cultural Policy	<p>The document outlines all attributes of municipal cultural delivery; planning/policy, zoning and land-use planning, cultural and economic development strategies, facilities planning and maintenance, funding, and public art.</p> <p>The document shows a comprehensive understanding of the wide reaching attributes of municipal cultural services delivery, including the value of interdepartmental initiatives and community-led co-delivery of services. Creative placemaking and events are absent from the document.</p> <p>Upon completion of the forthcoming <i>Cultural Plan</i>, an update to this Policy is recommended to include creative placemaking and events as well as to reflect changes to Kelowna’s cultural landscape since the creation of the 2010 policy.</p>	Good
Events Strategy	<p>The strategy effectively demonstrates the importance and potential of strengthening the City's and community's events portfolio, though a connection to the City's other strategies, including the <i>Cultural Plan</i> (which includes explicit strategies to promote and support the delivery of events) is missing.</p> <p>The strategy emphasizes the importance of partnerships with the community and major event producers in order to achieve the vision of the plan, which demonstrates an understanding that the city's role is primarily to be a convener of partners, more than a producer of events.</p> <p>Critical judgement on the reality of hosting major events in today’s landscape is a gap in the strategy, since research is generally showing that major events are less and less economically viable for producers, especially for new events. With the rising costs of supplies, a growing preference for free events from audiences, safety and security concerns, and the rise of major weather events associated with climate change, there seems to be a significant gap in the strategy on how much effort the City should invest in in order to attract/develop new major</p>	Opportunity to Improve

Plan Linkages		
Policy, Plan, or Practice	Key Considerations	Score
	events.	
Heritage Building Tax Incentive Program Policy	<p>Tax exemptions for eligible heritage properties recognize the prohibitive costs associated with owning a heritage property. It provides eligibility, limitations, structure and procedures for staff and residents to follow in order to benefit.</p> <p>The document shows an educated understanding of protecting heritage buildings in order to preserve the City's built history.</p>	Good
Heritage Strategy	<p>The Heritage Strategy demonstrates clear, actionable strategies to support heritage in the community and includes integration into arts, culture, tourism, facility and recreation planning, and alignment with relevant municipal plans, community feedback and contemporary best practices. There are timelines and mechanisms for ongoing improvement (e.g. data collection, engagement, and policy refreshment), suggesting the plan is both robust and adaptable.</p> <p>Overall, heritage is recognized as a key driver of cultural tourism and community development.</p> <p>Though there is mention of First Nations history and heritage and an action within the strategy to seek participation from local First Nations, there is a lack of information regarding Truth and Reconciliation, UNDRIP or Okanagan heritage management practices.</p> <p>Considering the document is at its ten-year mark, it is advisable to undergo a review and update.</p>	Opportunity to Improve
Housing Action Plan	<p>The City is exploring innovative ways to support the community's housing needs, including providing a diversity of housing types, and using housing to address other complex urban issues. Arts, culture, and heritage are not explicitly mentioned in the actions; however, there is potential to incorporate arts, culture, and heritage service providers to act as partners for alternative governance structures or forms of tenure.</p> <p>The document does not consider how housing affordability affects artists and cultural workers to live well in their city. The</p>	Opportunity to Improve

Plan Linkages		
Policy, Plan, or Practice	Key Considerations	Score
	<p>Housing Action Plan recognizes the negative repercussions that housing costs have on the economy, but the document fails to provide solutions in the form of offering a range of housing types under the "Housing Wheelhouse" (p. 7) to include live-work spaces for artists and creatives.</p>	
<p>Imagine Kelowna: The Community's Vision</p>	<p>Arts and culture are both recognized as important opportunities to boost the local economy as well as provide inclusive opportunities for locals to develop a sense of belonging. Equity, heritage, innovation, and partnerships are all considered essential components of a thriving and healthy community.</p> <p>The City takes on the responsibility of supporter, educator and convener, relying on the expertise and resources of their community partners to co-deliver essential services (including arts and culture).</p> <p>The public realm is also recognized as a place for community gathering. The maintenance and activation of public spaces are also prioritized in the plan.</p> <p>The document sets an excellent example on how a plan can incorporate a variety of perspectives into a singular vision, including an accessibility lens, a climate lens, an equity lens, and an economic prosperity lens. The <i>Cultural Plan</i> should similarly incorporate a myriad of lenses, since arts and culture are equally affected by the local and regional context, as well as national and international trends.</p>	<p>Good</p>
<p>2040 Official Community Plan (OCP)</p>	<p>The OCP Pillars are the elements for how the city will meet the vision (set out in <i>Imagine Kelowna</i>) to guide growth and land-use planning in Kelowna. While none of the pillars are explicitly dedicated to arts and culture, culture is identified as a key lens/perspective to view sustainable growth from in every chapter focused on neighbourhoods/areas.</p> <p>Culture has been deeply integrated into almost every chapter of the OCP, demonstrating strong knowledge and understanding at the city and council level of the importance of cultural development (side by side with land-use, housing, transportation and climate action). Particularly progressive is the dedication and</p>	<p>Good</p>

Plan Linkages		
Policy, Plan, or Practice	Key Considerations	Score
	<p>intention to integrating arts and culture at the neighbourhood level, opening up new opportunities for residents to engage in arts and culture everyday.</p> <p>The objectives and policies identified as linkages adhere to cultural development principles, particularly investing in cultural facilities (within all urban centres beyond the downtown core), public art and creative placemaking for an animated, accessible and welcoming public realm, and affordable housing/work spaces for artists and creative workers. Many of the policies also include intentions to partner and collaborate with local First Nations and celebrate their culture, history and connection to place.</p> <p>Many of the policies show intentions to also collaborate with the private sector and non-profits in order to encourage the development of cultural spaces, especially outside of the downtown core and cultural district.</p> <p>Heritage is also mindfully considered, centring partnerships with the syilx/Okanagan people and the local heritage organizations as the key to success in heritage conservation in Kelowna. The chapter on Heritage builds on the intentions of the Heritage Strategy, making explicit their intentions to collaborate with and celebrate the syilx/Okanagan peoples.</p>	
Climate Resilient Kelowna Strategy	<p>The Strategy serves as the municipality's climate action plan by outlining strategies to reduce carbon emissions and create resiliency. Though the strategy recognizes there are co-benefits of climate action, such as social equity and improved liveability, it does not explicitly invoke how arts, culture, and heritage can be leveraged or are implicated in climate action.</p> <p>Several of the key drivers apply to culture and placemaking efforts within cities, especially developing and maintaining climate resilient facilities, places and spaces that are accessible by transit or active transportation modes, reducing waste, and being prepared for climate emergencies.</p> <p>This is a comprehensive strategy that takes a 360 degree view of climate action and emergency preparedness. The Equity</p>	Good

Plan Linkages		
Policy, Plan, or Practice	Key Considerations	Score
	<p>Considerations and Co-Benefits connections under each strategy are particularly progressive and act as a good model for the updated <i>Cultural Plan</i>.</p>	
<p>Transportation Master Plan (TMP)</p>	<p>The goals of the TMP align with and aim to help realize the principles of the Imagine Kelowna vision. The identified goals will also support increased cultural development within Kelowna, with increased access to arts, culture and heritage facilities and activities, a focus on both residents and visitor experiences, and an overarching goal to include as many people as possible in all activities.</p> <p>While the plan does not explicitly mention arts, culture, or heritage, the realization of the identified goals for the plan will help support cultural development in Kelowna, as reduced costs and easier travel make the arts more accessible to more people.</p>	<p>Good</p>
<p>Strategic Facilities Master Plan (SFMP)</p>	<p>The SFMP v.1 was provided with an Opportunity to Improve Score primarily because Kelowna Public Library was the only cultural facility included on a Prioritized Inventory List, and Prospera Place (another named cultural facility) was recommended for partnership opportunities rather than further direct city investment. Additionally, it is not clear how cultural services are defined and categorized for the purpose of this plan - there appears to be some overlap between recreational/sport facilities and cultural facilities. However, the processes, framework and prioritization methods presented are sound and could be beneficial to cultural facilities, once the Cultural Facility Master Plan is updated to align.</p>	<p>Opportunity to Improve</p>
<p>Central Okanagan Music Strategy (COMS)</p>	<p>A regional approach will support the realization of the music related goals set in the <i>Cultural Plan</i>, with a strong focus on developing partnerships to strengthen and address community needs for more music venues, more awareness of music events from the broader community, more funding for artists, and increasing diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility for artists and audiences.</p> <p>This document succinctly outlines how it addresses the goals of the 2020-2025 <i>Cultural Plan</i>, especially in terms of developing new facilities, supporting the professional development and</p>	<p>Good</p>

Plan Linkages		
Policy, Plan, or Practice	Key Considerations	Score
	public awareness of local artists, increasing opportunities for equity-deserving artists. The regionality of the plan makes for a more inclusive audience, as many of the strategies and actions are focused on local First Nation partnerships.	

### 3.4 Summary

Kelowna demonstrates a high degree of cultural awareness and integration at the strategic level, with room for improvement in explicit implementation, interdepartmental coordination, and measurement. The City clearly values culture as a pillar of urban life. The upcoming *Cultural Plan* should aim to consolidate this recognition into action, ensuring culture is embedded in every strategic decision—from housing and safety to climate and accessibility.

## 4.0 Early Engagement Findings

The following data has been collected as a part of the early engagement conducted in Phases 2 - 4 of the project. The early findings have been collated into emerging themes, listed in [Section 4.11 Emerging Themes](#).

### 4.1 Engagement-by-the-numbers

<b>Engagement Activity</b>	<b>Where?</b>	<b>Who was engaged?</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b># Participant/ Attendees</b>
Interdepartmental Staff Session #1	Kelowna Community Theatre Lobby, 1375 Water Street	Key City of Kelowna Staff	September 16, 2025	18
Community Working Group sessions	Kelowna Community Theatre Lobby, 1375 Water Street	Community Working Group	Session #1: September 16, 2025	20
			Session #2: November 25, 2025	
One-on-one interviews and Coffee Conversation	Virtual and In-Person	Key Interest Holders	October –December 2025	11
Ideas Exchanges	Cutters Room, Royal Anne Hotel (348 Bernard Ave)	Creative Entrepreneurs, Business Community, Tourism Sector, Arts & Culture Operating	November 26, 2025	75

		Clients, Community Cultural Groups		
Community Questionnaire	Get Involved Kelowna Website	General Public	October 21 – November 17, 2025	643 responses
Gather Tool		General Public		32 posts
Host Your Own Engagement Sessions	Various locations	General Public	December 23, 2025 - February 15, 2026	103
Pop-up Sounding Boards	Kelowna Community Events and the Innovation Centre	General Public	Community Events: July - August 2025	38 unique responses
			Innovation Centre: February - March 2026	Over 36 responses
<b>Total Points of Engagement</b>				976

## 4.2 Interdepartmental Staff Session (Sep. 16)

City of Kelowna Staff from various departments were engaged in an Interdepartmental Staff Session. Staff representing the following departments and service areas participated in the session:

- Active Living & Culture
  - Culture Services
  - Community & Neighbourhood Services
  - Sport & Event Services
  - Social Development
  - Finance & Business Services
- Corporate Services
  - Corporate Strategy & Performance
- Communications
  - Community Programs
  - Engagement & Events
- Infrastructure
  - Park Services
- People & Protective Services
  - Community Safety
- Planning, Climate Action & Development
  - Long Range Planning
  - Development Engineering
  - Development Planning
- Partnerships & Investments
  - Partnerships
  - Parks & Facilities Planning
  - Real Estate Services

### **2020 - 2025 Cultural Plan**

Staff provided various perspectives on the current Plan. Some supported the Plan and others called for refinement to remove overlapping components of the vision, guiding principles, and key themes.

### **Key Considerations for Administration and Procedures**

Transparency and the ability to track progress and support tangible deliverables were highlighted by staff.

### **Links to other City Plans and Initiatives**

Staff connected arts, culture, and heritage to the Official Community Plan, the Accessibility Plan, and the Community Safety Plan.

### **Useful information, tools, and resources for staff to support an updated Cultural Plan**

Staff asked for regular, brief updates on the Plan, opportunities for staff engagement and education. They also requested pre-meeting reminders to read relevant documents, pre-meeting surveys, as well as more broad representation from additional departments.

## What issues or challenges can arts, culture and heritage help to address?

Staff perceived that arts, culture, and heritage could help improve Kelowna's sense of place, economy, learning opportunities, and equity while helping to reduce crime.

## Delivery of Arts, Culture and Heritage Services

### Strengths

- Significant cultural grant programs
- Indigenous learning, art, and naming opportunities
- Capacity building (incl. conference)
- Supportive Senior Leadership Team
- Increased infrastructure planning funding
- Improved reporting process with partners
- Informed decision-making
- Downtown arts hub
- Support of community theatre

### Weaknesses

- High barrier of entry for some programs
- Awareness of City's role
- Competing priorities
- Council turnover/changing support
- No public art policy
- Public art administration handbook—clarity around ownership and updates
- Funding availability
- Opportunity for more engagement with local artists, diverse groups, Indigenous people, Council

### Internal Opportunities

- Align with other plans and strategies
- Involve more staff
- Room for Indigenous partnerships and engagement
- Wayfinding and language revitalization
- Potential for private investment in arts
- Collaboration and relationship building—interdepartmentally and with other municipalities
- KPI's: reporting, accountability
- Build in education of arts, culture and heritage to municipal initiatives

### Internal Challenges

- Budget constraints/buy-in
- Creating personal connection
- Friction around artistic commentary in public spaces
- Limits on what kind of art the municipality can be affiliated with
- Encouraging local arts development vs. investing in artists from elsewhere
- Politics
- "Fluff" perception - could be more planned and structured
- Viewed as an essential piece
- Clarify who is responsible for ownership and delivery

### Gaps

- Access to meeting and performance spaces
- Maintenance service levels for arts/public spaces
- Lack of grant support emerging artists

- Partial grants to many instead of fully funding a few artists
- Linking arts and sports
- Mapping economic impact
- Multiculturalism does not currently fit under a City department
- Rotating public art
- Heritage protection priorities
- Integration between heritage and syilx/Okanagan stories

### 4.3 Community Working Group Sessions

#### September 16, 2025

A Community Working Group of 20 diverse key interest-holders participated in a Roundtable session on September 16, 2025. The purpose of the session was to build knowledge of the planning context for the strategy and collect input on the vision and direction. It also was intended to build relationships and trust with the project team and position members of the working group as community liaisons for proceeding community engagement. Working group members are involved in the local cultural community, either as creators themselves or through organizations they work for.

#### 2020 - 2025 Cultural Plan

Interest-holders echoed similar feedback to staff. They indicated that the vision, guiding principles and key themes may need some revision for increased clarity. Some stated that the existing Plan was not resonating with individuals or non-profit organizations.

#### Strengths

- City events are popular
- Passionate arts community; leaders in the community
- Shift in inclusion to multicultural groups
- Growing diversity and efforts in accessibility
- Use of nature for cultural activities (parks)
- Community engagement

#### Gaps

- Nonprofit funding opportunities
- Cultural spaces for making and exhibiting
- Distribution of cultural activities (mostly downtown)
- Awareness of the benefits of a culturally-invested community

- Training/education/artists development
- Intercultural and intergenerational opportunities
- Promotion and media/content coverage of arts, culture and heritage
- Liveability for artists
- Opportunities to collaborate with others in the arts community
- Public art that reflects diversity
- Affordability

### **Priorities**

- Access to funding and resources for arts non-profits
- Communication of arts and culture activities and the benefits of arts
- Visibility of the diversity of the community
- Infrastructure for artists and arts and culture organizations (including affordable space to live and work)
- Cultural leadership within City Hall
- Art in public spaces
- Connections between artists and the community

### **How do you think arts, culture and heritage help us achieve our goals?**

- Create a strong and multicultural community identity
- Learning about cultures different from our own
- Community healing + safety
- Mental health and wellness
- Economic benefits: attracting businesses to a culturally vibrant area and enticing tourism

### **November 25, 2025**

Working with early engagement themes, during the November 25 session the Community Working Group developed the following working draft strategic priorities for the plan development. The following sequence does not indicate priority:

#### **1. Strategic Priority #1: Funding and Capacity.**

This priority could involve increased opportunities for organizations to share information and resources, and initiatives to explore and secure additional funding. It also includes initiatives to explore funding realignment and diversified funding sources.

2. **Strategic Priority #2: Awareness and Engagement.**

This priority could involve revitalized communication strategies to raise awareness about culture in Kelowna that also present culture as an essential element of community life.

3. **Strategic Priority #3: Partnerships and Collaboration.**

This priority could involve strengthening partnerships, for example between the City and community groups as well as First Nations and School District 23.

4. **Strategic Priority #4: Programming.**

This priority could encourage intergenerational cultural learning initiatives and more intercultural events.

5. **Strategic Priority #5: Spaces and Facilities.**

This priority could help maximize the utilization of existing and new multi-use spaces for arts and culture programming. It can potentially guide the development of a cultural hub - or geographically distributed hubs - for organizations.

The Community Working Group also offered draft vision statements centred around themes of participation, creative community, the broader community, belonging and inclusion. Vision statements that were popular among the group incorporated diversity, culture as a unifying tool, and the ability for arts and culture workers to live and work in the area.

## 4.4 Meetings, One-on-one Interviews and Coffee Conversations

### Meetings with Métis Community Services and Kelowna Friendship Society

On March 19 and 20, 2026, the consultant team and representatives had separate meetings with the Métis Community Services and Kelowna Friendship Society (KFS). Both societies serve a large number of people in the Kelowna area (combined, the two organizations serve approximately 10,000 people) through events, programs and services. The groups emphasized the significant Indigenous and Métis populations, including youth, within Kelowna as well as an interest in accessing space for cultural practices. Both groups identified opportunities to further strengthen relationships with the City. Training for City staff in cultural safety and trauma-informed approaches - as well as updates to policies, practices, and relevant bylaws - could help further foster collaboration between staff and local Indigenous groups.

Both groups were interested in fostering further cultural collaboration with the City and broader community.

## One-on-One Interviews and Coffee Conversations

This section presents findings from a series of in-depth one-on-one interviews and coffee conversations conducted between January and April 2026 with eleven key interest holders in Kelowna's arts and culture landscape, including executive directors of local arts and cultural institutions, partners and professors/faculty from post-secondary institutions. These conversations offered grounded, firsthand perspectives from professionals working directly within the sector, providing insight into both the day-to-day realities and longer-term structural systems shaping cultural life in Kelowna. Collectively, the interviews and coffee conversations explored perceived strengths within the local arts community, alongside key needs, gaps, challenges, and emerging opportunities identified by those who are closely engaged in the field.

### Strengths

#### Municipal Strengths

- Partners strategically aligned
  - Positive, collaborative relationships with the city
  - City's *Cultural Plan* is referenced into annual planning and decision making by partners
- Facilities/Infrastructure
  - City-owned spaces maintained
  - HVAC & capital upgrade support
- Funding
  - Operational, project, capital funding helps partners plan and sustain activities

#### Partner Strengths

- Adaptability & Innovation
  - Strong and nimble leadership enabled strategic pivots during challenging phases (ie digital initiatives, repurposing spaces, revenue)
- Partnerships across education, Indigenous groups, and arts organizations
- Strategic use of earned revenues and reserves
- High quality programming

#### General/overall

- Strong cultural district leadership

- Strong local artistic talent (from emerging to nationally recognized)
- Support for artists & professional development
- Informal collaboration amongst cultural organizations

## **Gaps**

- Capacity & compensation pressures
  - Some partners feel operational pressure from “downloaded responsibilities” or obligations placed on them without added resources
  - Sector-wide compensation pressures
- Fragmented sector coordination
  - Limited senior-level dialogue
  - Inconsistent governance & engagement across arts organizations and partners
- Instability of revenue models
  - Limited local growth in corporate & individual philanthropy; rising operating & staff costs
  - annual grants vs multi-year
- Infrastructure/facility/tech limitations
  - City-owned public spaces often lack infrastructure for contemporary art practice (ie)power, fibre, projection, performance
  - Significant maintenance and technical responsibilities, sometimes without proportional support
- Limited audience insight & engagement
  - No shared demographics & participation data
  - Challenges engaging youth, under 45’s, newcomers, diverse audiences
  - Outreach fragmented, competing for same audiences
- Municipal policy & systems gaps
  - Departmental silos limit coordination & planning
  - City support for operational and coordination costs is limited despite expectations.
  - Facility rules and funding structures often do not match operational realities (can restrict programming & flexibility)
- Artist support & stability
  - Artist retention & career pathways
  - Limited pathways from post-secondary education to careers; students lack clear routes into the local cultural workforce
  - Lack of affordable, flexible creative production space for students and emerging artists to create and experiment
  - Grants primarily support organizations (vs individual artists)

- Overemphasis on safe, conventional, tourism-driven, institutional programming; limited opportunities for experimental, independent art and cultural practices

## Summary

Overall, the interviews and coffee conversation point to creative industries with strong leadership, high-quality programming, and a collaborative spirit that continues to advance Kelowna's cultural scene. At the same time, there is a clear call for more coordinated and sustained support to match this capacity, particularly in relation to operational pressures, aligning infrastructure with contemporary creative needs, and more consistent sector-wide and cross-sector collaboration and resource-sharing. Participants also highlighted the importance of strengthening support for emerging artists and building clearer pathways from education into sustainable careers within the local cultural sector. While the foundation is strong, participants noted that addressing these gaps would significantly strengthen the sustainability, accessibility, and long-term growth of the arts and culture sector in Kelowna.

## 4.5 Ideas Exchanges

Three Ideas Exchange Roundtables were held during the morning, afternoon, and early evening on November 25, 2025 with three separate audiences:

- Creative Industries, Business and Tourism (Group 1)
- Arts & Culture Operating Clients (Group 2)
- Intercultural Community Groups (Group 3)

Each session included the same, short presentation, and discussion questions, but each audience brought a different perspective to the discussion.

### Group 1: Creative Industries, Business and Tourism

1. **Key Strengths:** Kelowna's established creative industries, collaborative climate, and mix of non-profit and entrepreneurial activity create strong conditions for cultural tourism and creative entrepreneurship.
2. **Key Gaps to Address:** The sector needs a convening body, more accessible spaces, stronger confidence in arts practice, clearer pathways for new ideas, and better support for grassroots organizations navigating City processes.

3. **Emerging Opportunities:** Over the next five years, Kelowna can leverage change management, deeper community engagement, relationship-based information sharing, improved communications platforms, and its UNESCO gastronomy status.
4. **Broad Coalition Required:** Farmers, chefs, winemakers, entrepreneurs, businesses, the City, tourism organizations, influencers, and community connectors must collaborate with shared decision-making power to drive outcomes and nurture arts entrepreneurs.
5. **Vision Keywords:**
  1. Belonging
  2. Collaboration
  3. Celebrate and encourage creative entrepreneurship
  4. Entrepreneurial spirit
  5. Tangible outcomes

## Group 2: Arts and Culture Operating Clients

1. **Key Strengths:** Kelowna benefits from a solid foundation of cultural activity—active partnerships, an established Cultural District, diverse venues, supportive media and business communities, strong government backing, a growing multicultural population, and a vibrant pool of creatives and entrepreneurs.
2. **Key Gaps to Address:** Residents identified the need for more accessible spaces (including a new performing arts centre), better transit, reduced racism and lower barriers to participation, more affordable housing, clearer City processes, neighbourhood-based cultural hubs, and more diverse, intergenerational, and culturally varied programming.
3. **Culture as a Driver of Community Goals:** Arts, culture, and heritage can strengthen youth engagement, collaboration, innovation, and community cohesion—but to do so, organizations need multi-year funding, better communication tools, shared administrative resources, affordable space, stronger volunteer coordination, and reduced burnout among artists and leaders.
4. **Key Opportunities & Challenges:** Expanding exhibition and event spaces, improving accessibility and signage, centralizing City navigation, and fostering co-promotion

between venues and performers present major opportunities. Challenges include lack of storage, fragmented identity, difficulty accessing City processes, planning constraints, and the need to elevate the perceived value of culture.

5. **Building a Stronger, Connected Sector:** A more unified sector could emerge through centralized marketing, shared promotion, intentional equity practices, City-hosted convenings, mentorship networks, professional-development support, small capacity-building grants, and deeper collaboration with schools and community partners.

### Group 3: Intercultural Community Groups

1. **Key Strengths:** Kelowna’s cultural life benefits from increasing responsiveness from the City, stronger autonomy and respect for different cultures, a flourishing mix of ethno-cultural expressions, and a Cultural District that provides visibility for monthly cultural displays and diverse creative voices.
2. **Key Gaps to Address:** Residents highlighted the need for a multicultural centre, more affordable arts experiences, clearer marketing and awareness, improved transportation and accessibility, more employment and living-wage opportunities for newcomers, and more consistent year-round cultural activity.
3. **Culture as a Pathway to Community Belonging:** Arts, culture, and heritage help residents feel rooted, create a sense of home, foster authenticity, and build safer, more connected spaces—supported by murals, heritage signage, Indigenous cultural tourism, and activities for families and visitors.
4. **Key Opportunities & Challenges:** Opportunities lie in growing collaborations, extending the season through creative events, and embedding arts presence in large city-wide celebrations. Challenges include lack of mechanisms for individual cultural contributors to participate, affordability issues, venue scarcity, cultural appropriation concerns, newcomer barriers, and the need for professional development and mentorship.
5. **Ensuring Authentic, Inclusive Representation:** A more equitable cultural environment requires reduced bureaucracy, a “yes-first” approach, transparent information-sharing, a one-stop resource or umbrella group, better media access for

smaller groups, subsidized spaces, food and cultural festivals aligned with UNESCO Gastronomy, and strengthening both large and small local events to support long-term community connection and retention.

## Summary

The different groups who participated in the Ideas Exchange highlight complementary but distinct priorities. Group 1 (Creative Industries, Business and Tourism) emphasized the biggest need in better coordination while identifying opportunities in cross-sector collaboration. Group 2 (Arts and Culture Operating Clients) focused on challenges affecting delivery such as funding and space requirements as well as equity considerations. Group 3 (Intercultural Community Groups) place the strongest emphasis on belonging, equity, and representation. Shared perspectives were that stronger collaboration, clear communication, and enhanced cultural infrastructure are essential.

## 4.6 Community Questionnaire

A community questionnaire was circulated via the Get Involved Kelowna website to gather broader resident insights on the perception of arts and culture in Kelowna today, key gaps and opportunities, and an opportunity to review and provide feedback on the key foundations of the *2020-2025 Cultural Plan*. With over 640 responses, the questionnaire demonstrates a culturally-interested and engaged general population in Kelowna.

### 2020-2025 Cultural Plan

We asked participants to rank each component (the Vision, Guiding Principles and Key Themes) of the *2020-2025 Cultural Plan* in order of importance, beginning with the Vision.

The highest ranked statements in the **Vision** included:

- Embraces and celebrates diversity and is open and welcoming to all
- Is recognized as a four-season destination with a rich variety of high-quality arts, culture and heritage experiences
- Invests in infrastructure, artists and non-profit organizations as a way to build character and identity

The highest ranked **Guiding Principles** included:

- Accessibility, diversity & inclusion
- Partnerships & Cooperation

Finally, the highest ranked **Key Themes** included:

- Spaces
- Vitality
- Capacity

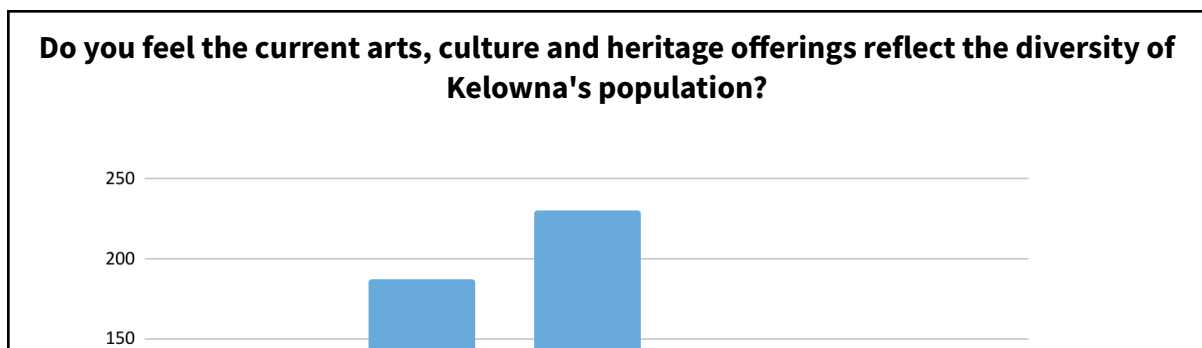
### Statements about Arts, Culture & Heritage

Enhances personal well being and enriches daily life through events, programs or volunteering	79% Strongly Agree
Provides employment and volunteer opportunities that lead to economic growth	67% Strongly Agree
Strengthens community identity and engagement through placemaking and public art	72% Strongly Agree
Supports cultural preservation and expression	71% Strongly Agree
Drives tourism and elevates the city's reputation	68% Strongly Agree
Provides creative outlets that lead to economic growth and contribute to the local economy	68% Strongly Agree

### Diversity and Inclusion

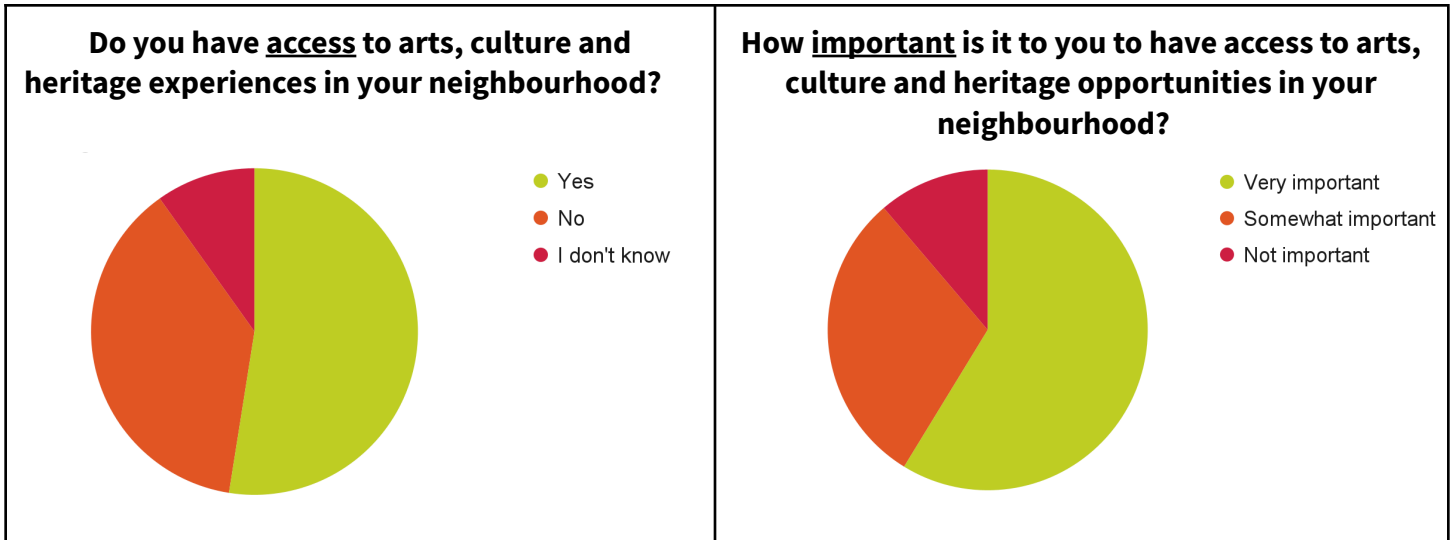
Only 15% of respondents felt current offerings reflect Kelowna’s diversity, while 29% said mostly, and 36% said somewhat, and another 15% said no.

Comments highlighted the need for more **inclusive outreach and communications**, improved **visibility of diverse cultures and abilities** beyond the dominant demographics, improved **support for arts organizations focused on multi/intercultural programming**, and an overall improved **public awareness of the cultural diversity** present in Kelowna.



## Neighbourhood-Based Cultural Experiences

52% of respondents said that they have access to arts, culture and heritage experiences in their neighbourhood, and 59% of respondents answered that it is very important to have access to these experiences at a neighbourhood level.



## Gaps and Opportunities

Several key themes were identified in the participants' contributions, listed below:

### Access, Participation & Affordability

- Provide low-cost, low-barrier access to arts and cultural programming.
- Offer a wider variety of arts and cultural experiences.
- Increase neighbourhood-based and geographically dispersed opportunities.
- Ensure affordable space for artistic creation and production.

### Spaces, Infrastructure & Public Realm

- Support creative placemaking, public art, and public history initiatives.
- Create tourism-attractive and inclusive cultural spaces and events.
- Maintain and preserve heritage sites.
- Foster a vibrant, accessible, and safe downtown and public realm.

### Cultural Sector Development & Support

- Enhance the attractiveness of Kelowna for a strong creative workforce and creative industries.

- Expand funding opportunities for arts and culture organizations and artists, including for education and professional development opportunities.
- Distribute public funding for cultural development equitably.
- Support relationship-building and collaboration within the creative ecosystem.

### **Inclusion, Equity & Community Representation**

- Desire for a more inclusive cultural identity for Kelowna.
- Improve inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA) across arts and cultural offerings, including youth, people with disabilities, 2SLGBTQIA+, IBPOC, newcomers, refugees and houseless population.
- Visibility and celebration of multicultural heritage and cultural presence.
- Prioritize resident and community needs in decision-making.

### **Policy Alignment, Planning & Governance**

- Integrate cultural development considerations into other municipal policy areas, including climate action, planning, transportation, housing, health, economic development, etc.
- Ensure transparency and accountability in cultural planning and investment.
- Develop a plan that is actionable, realistic, and reflective of current trends and local conditions.
- Embrace and plan for the realities of a changing city.

### **Communication, Information & Promotion**

- Find new and inclusive ways to engage with marginalized communities and share their stories
- Strengthen communications and promotion of cultural opportunities.
- Centralizing communication of arts and cultural offerings, such as an online event listing.

### **Summary**

The community questionnaire received over 640 responses, showing strong public interest in arts and culture and highlighting support for diversity, accessibility, and investment in spaces, vitality, and capacity. Residents expressed favourable views on the value of arts, culture, and heritage but noted gaps in inclusion, neighbourhood access, affordability, and support for the cultural sector. Across all feedback, participants emphasized the need for more diverse and culturally representative programming, improved communication and outreach, stronger creative infrastructure, and vibrant public spaces that reflect a changing Kelowna.

## 4.7 Gather Tool

We asked residents to show their love for Kelowna by telling us what they would like to see for arts and culture in their city. Participants could anonymously post a picture and caption describing their vision for a more vibrant and inclusive arts and culture scene in Kelowna.

Several key themes were identified in the participants' contributions, listed below:

### **Spaces**

- A new Arts and Culture Centre with rehearsal, performance and flexible use spaces.
- Affordable production and performance/exhibition spaces.
- Balance/complement large-scale/professional cultural spaces with smaller-scale, amateur and alternative arts-friendly spaces/venues.

### **Communication, Outreach and Engagement**

- Events/activities/programs showcasing diversity in Kelowna and encouraging intercultural exchange.
- Find new and inclusive ways to engage with marginalized communities and share their stories.
- Build a broader understanding of the connection of access to arts and wellbeing.

### **Strong Connections and Capacity Building**

- Find opportunities at City Hall to create interdepartmental collaborations, i.e. transportation and cultural services.
- More funding opportunities for arts and culture organizations & artists.
- Support building connections within the creative ecosystem and the arts community.

### **Affordability and Accessibility**

- Low-cost/low-barrier entry to arts and cultural offerings

### **Everyday Encounters with Arts and Culture**

- Desire for more outdoor arts and events.
- Support creative placemaking, art in public spaces and public history initiatives, including 1% for public art policies.
- Vibrancy in the public realm for everyday interactions with arts and culture.

## Summary

Residents used the Gather Tool to share their visions for a more vibrant and inclusive arts and culture scene in Kelowna, highlighting priorities such as new cultural spaces, diverse programming, deeper engagement with marginalized communities and more initiatives related to creative placemaking and public art. Taken together, this feedback signals a strong public desire for a cultural ecosystem that is more accessible, interconnected, and reflective of the full diversity of Kelowna—requiring the City to invest in both infrastructure and inclusive approaches to cultural development.

### 4.8 Host Your Own Engagement Sessions

Individuals, organizations, and community groups were invited to *Host Your Own* engagement as part of the *Cultural Plan Update*. Interested parties were provided with a Conversation Toolkit to help guide the conversation. *Host Your Own* engagement events took place in December, 2025 and March, 2026. Twelve expressions of interest were received – eight groups and individuals submitted post-engagement reports, including one joint report submitted by Creative Okanagan & AesthetiKs Lab. At least 103 individuals participated in the engagement sessions that provided reports, based on sign in/photo waiver sheets and images from the sessions.

#### December 23, 2025

This session engaged Black and African youth participants between the ages of 13 and 19. Participants repeatedly mentioned a desire for belonging and safe spaces, unmet need for youth-centred programming designed with youth input, and the key role that creativity, culture, and expression play in shaping their identities. Participants were interested in the intentional inclusion of underrepresented youth in cultural planning, expansion of youth-centred and culturally responsive programming, increased visibility and awareness of arts and culture opportunities, and strengthened funding and support for community-led initiatives.

Participants reviewed the current *Cultural Plan* goals and rated them based on perceived importance during a facilitated voting activities. The following list includes the goals, in order of priority:

1. Broaden the reach
2. Increase contribution of resources
3. Learn from our past

4. Optimize existing spaces
5. Boost vitality at the street level
6. Support a viable creative sector
7. Share our story
8. Understand the impact
9. Convene and connect
10. Commit to developing new facilities

### **January 11, 2026**

This engagement session recognized Japanese New Year, as participants enjoyed mochi and practiced calligraphy. Participants expressed that food and the arts enhance community vitality. They were interested in food markets and cultural festivals in their neighbourhoods.

Participants emphasized a need for accessible, low-cost or free spaces for community organizations. They cited a BC-example where an art gallery provides low-cost storage and practice space for a Japanese-Canadian group to practice taiko drumming. They were also interested in opportunities to incorporate capacity building within space-sharing and a *Cultural Plan* that supports cultural, citizen-led initiatives.

### **January 17, 2026**

The Afro Okanagan Liveband met at the Kelowna Events Centre to discuss the *Cultural Plan* update. This group identified numerous, specific potential opportunities to enhance creative life in Kelowna, including:

- More visible representation of diverse culture in public events and City programming
- Dedicated platforms for local creatives to perform, collaborate, and showcase their work (e.g., open mic nights, community concerts)
- Affordable rehearsal, recording, and performance spaces
- Stronger support for multicultural arts so residents see themselves reflected in the cultural landscape
- Outdoor music popups, jam sessions, and cultural showcases in parks and community centres
- Multicultural block parties featuring food, dance, drumming, and live music
- Artist in residence programs in neighbourhood hubs where musicians can teach, mentor, and collaborate

- An increase in grants, microfunding, and low barrier support for community-led cultural initiatives
- Increase promotion of local artists and events through city channels and partnerships
- Funding programs that support ongoing artistic development, not just one off events
- Partnerships between cultural groups, local venues, and businesses
- Highlight the contributions of Black and African artists in Kelowna

They also discussed six out of ten goals of the current *Cultural Plan* and ranked them in order of perceived importance:

### **Very Important**

Goal #1: Broaden the reach

Goal #2: Increase contribution of resources

Goal #4: Optimize existing spaces

Goal #6: Support a viable creative sector

### **Important**

Goal #3: Learn from our past

Goal #5: Boost vitality at the street level

Participants appreciated the opportunity to share their perspectives, with many expressing that this was the first time they have been asked to provide civic input.

### **January 23, 2026**

Participants at this session were engaged in open group discussion, anonymous written submissions, and an online form. They identified that the largest obstacles faced when using spaces for live events or cultural programming are infrastructure gaps, safety and perception, regulatory hurdles, cost pressures, and a need for stronger education around the economic and social value of live events. While city policies for nightlife were generally understood and supported, some participants provided feedback on processes, and were interested in clearer pricing for event permit applications, more detailed feedback when applications are denied, and professional grant-writing assistance.

Participants were interested in positioning Kelowna as a “Music City” and amplifying storytelling around creative successes, as well as the possibility of a signature Kelowna-made festival with local headline talent. Participants expressed interest in producing large-scale street festivals, pop-up events in unconventional spaces, and experimental daytime

family-oriented programming. There was general consensus that a mid-sized venue (500 - 1500 person capacity) would be impactful to cultural development in Kelowna over the next three years. The most urgent themes discussed were:

- Infrastructure gaps
- Permit streamlining
- Supporting a sustainable workforce in the industry
- Perceived safety downtown

Participants used stickers to rate the goals of the current *Cultural Plan*. The following goals received the most number of stickers over ‘very important’ or ‘important’:

Goal #1: Increase contribution of resources

Goal #3: Optimize existing spaces

Goal #7 Support a viable creative sector

The remaining goals received more stickers across the scale from not important to very important, with most stickers clustered over ‘important’ or ‘very important.’

## **February 10, 2026**

This session was a collaboration between Creative Okanagan and AesthetiKs Lab. It included a brief musical performance, during which guests signed in and rated the goals of the current *Cultural Plan*. A presentation was followed by a facilitated group discussion. Participants could also write notes or email comments. The session concluded with an informal networking opportunity. This session focused on music, and how Kelowna could become a “Music City” as defined by Music Canada. Participants identified the following opportunities:

- Further strengthen the relationship between live music stakeholders, including but not limited to musicians, and the City
- Incorporate Music City themes in branding and promotions for the City and Tourism Kelowna
- Encourage a local Kelowna Music Showcase
- Establish a live music events listing
- Work with music venues to identify needs and barriers, including a review of obstacles such as event licensing requirements (including for all-ages shows), noise bylaws, etc.
- Hold more live music events during the fall and winter
- Continue to attract events such as Break Out West

- Support the creation and maintenance of event databases, and promote existing public information sources
- Ensure learning and growth opportunities are affordable and accessible
- Foster a robust ladder of performance opportunities for all levels of musicians
- Consider establishing a dedicated position or office for Music within the City of Kelowna
- Collaborate with nearby communities to support and enhance music within the region

Participants used stickers to rate the goals of the current *Cultural Plan*. The following goals received the most number of stickers over ‘very important’ or ‘important’:

- Goal #3: Optimize existing spaces
- Goal #4: Commit to developing new facilities
- Goal #7: Support a viable creative sector

### **February 15, 2026**

This session engaged members of the local Iranian-Canadian community. Participants at this session proposed that the future *Cultural Plan* could include a greater emphasis on how arts and culture can enhance the mental health and wellbeing of the community. They proposed including a community wellbeing theme to guide goals in the updated *Cultural Plan*. They also discussed interest in an expanded public art program, more live music venues, opportunities to celebrate interculturalism, and enhanced public awareness initiatives including the establishment of cultural advocates.

### **March 20, 2026**

This session was hosted by the Ponderosa Education Community, which engaged a “Plant People Gatherings” group, which meets monthly. Participants engaged in group discussion as well as a dot exercise to rate the goals of the current *Cultural Plan*. This group identified the following, specific opportunities for the next iteration of the *Cultural Plan*:

- A desire for culture to reflect diverse perspectives, and all demographics in community
- Continue to enhance and create more public spaces (e.g., parks, beaches, libraries)
- Ensuring that Syilx people have input on the *Cultural Plan* and various projects
- Improve public transportation (consider extending existing routes)
- Protecting existing cycling infrastructure and improving cycling infrastructure throughout the city
- Prioritize local experience instead of tourist/visitor experiences

- Host art, gardening and cultural events in public spaces to help reduce ticketing costs
- Consider more educational events outlining the history of Kelowna, including an emphasis on Syilx history with consultation from knowledge keepers
- Reduce or eliminate cost barriers for cultural events, art spaces and galleries
- Consider more City-hosted events to showcase art, consider providing honorariums to artists

Participants discussed the ten goals of the current *Cultural Plan* and ranked them in order of perceived importance:

### **Very Important**

Goal #1: Broaden the reach

Goal #3: Learn from our past

Goal #4: Optimize existing spaces

Goal #5: Boost vitality at the street level

### **Important**

Goal #6: Support a viable creative sector

Goal #8: Share our story

Goal #9: Broaden the reach

Goal #10: Convene and connect

### **Somewhat Important**

Goal #2: Increase contribution of resources

Goal #4: Optimize existing spaces

Goal #7: Support a viable creative sector

### **Common Themes**

Common themes across multiple *Host Your Own* sessions included:

- A desire for more facilities and programming options
- Positive perspective of the community, local culture, and City staff
- An emphasis on local cultural creators
- Rising costs associated with space use
- Demand for free or low-cost programming and production opportunities
- Interest in pop up and temporary events

- An opportunity to increase awareness of cultural events and programming within the community
- Capacity-building for community organizations and local creatives
- Celebrating interculturalism and encouraging cultural production and participation in people with diverse backgrounds
- Demand for more robust active transportation options (e.g., transit, cycling infrastructure) to enhance mobility to participate in and produce culture across the community

## 4.9 Sounding and Innovation Centre Boards

### Sounding Boards

“**What is your vision for arts and culture in Kelowna?**” Over July and August, Sounding Boards with this question were installed at community events. The general public shared their vision for arts and culture in Kelowna using post-it notes. Key themes emerged from their feedback and are listed below:

#### 1. A Desire for More Facilities and Programming Options

- More culture-related programming, examples shared included dance lessons and talent shows.
- New facilities, such as a maker’s studio or an outdoor plaza dedicated towards arts and cultural events.
- Enhance and increase third spaces that can be activated for cultural events.
- A shipping container artist’s village with creative spaces that can provide workshops, storage, with vending opportunities.
- Recognition that food and culinary practices are an important aspect of culture, and support culinary events and initiatives.
- Programs and policies for new development could support arts and culture.

#### 2. Creative Placemaking and Tourism Opportunities

- Enhance public space through a mural program or installation of interactive musical instruments.
- Opportunities to enhance cultural tourism, such as a local makers home studio tour or a local, ‘Amazing Race’ style scavenger hunt.
- Provide discounts for locals to popular cultural tourism attractions.

### **3. Integration with the Outdoors and Nature**

- Outdoor cultural events, such as art in the garden, painting classes, music, and dances.
- Local artists incorporate local plants and animals in their work.
- Permanent space in parks for art displays that are secure and high quality.

### **4. Multiculturalism/Interculturalism**

- An opportunity to showcase and share aspects from diverse cultures that are representative of Kelowna's population.
- Consider intercultural events such as City-supported fashion shows, cultural heritage month events.
- Nurture historic and culturally relevant neighbourhoods.

### **5. Accessibility & Affordability**

- Low barrier family-friendly (including pet-friendly) activities.
- Youth and seniors are able to participate in arts and culture.
- Provide a combination of digital and analog ways to participate in culture.
- Events, such as music in the park, take place in accessible locations.

### **6. Heritage**

- Preserve cultural heritage, including homes and neighbourhoods.
- More historic walking tours help locals and tourists learn about the City's origins.

## **Innovation Centre Boards**

In February and March 2026, the Living Lab Chalk Board at Kelowna's Innovation Lab was activated with questions about culture.

### **February Activation**

In February, the following prompt was written on the board: *Culture in Kelowna happens at...Tell us about the places you go, the activities you take part in, or the events and cultural assets that matter to you!*



Local artist Laura Simpson wrote the prompt and drew designs on the chalk board. Passerbys used chalk to doodle and expressed general, positive feelings about living in Kelowna. Some listed their favourite organizations and spaces (e.g., AesthetiKsLAB, the Library) while others listed comedy nights and music festivals (e.g., Denim on the Diamond, Rosé Disco).

**March Activation**



In March, Laura Simpson updated the prompt to: *What would help Kelowna's creative entrepreneurs thrive?* Once again, passerbys doodled on the board and wrote miscellaneous phrases, including poetry and concepts like “joy.” Other input focused on services (e.g., affordable housing and childcare), spaces and programming (e.g., free programs for families, more accessible spaces and spaces for creativity). One person wrote, “promote more local artists!”

## Summary

When asked about their vision for culture in Kelowna, people expressed a desire for more facilities and programming options; creative placemaking and tourism opportunities; integration with the outdoors and nature; multiculturalism/interculturalism; accessibility and affordability; and heritage. The desire for more facilities and programming options and accessibility and affordability were also evident in the Innovation Centre Board activation responses. Input on the Innovation Centre Boards were varied. As can occur during informal forms of public participation, some input was tangential to the prompts, but expressed feelings of positivity and support within the Kelowna community.

### 4.10 Emerging Themes

The following themes have been generated through the analysis of the early engagement findings:

- Improve perception of arts and culture as a vital service at the City and within the community, in keeping with the direction of municipal cultural development trend of cultural infrastructure and services are civic infrastructure.
- Increase cultural opportunities at the neighbourhood level (i.e. outside of the Cultural District).
- Improve affordable and accessible arts and culture programming for all.
- Improve representation of heritage and culture within the public realm.
- Strengthen partnerships with Indigenous peoples within the City and within the community.
- Strengthen interdepartmental collaborations in cultural development to address community challenges.
- Leverage/enhance the creative economy and tourism opportunities for both visitors and locals.
- Improve funding for local artists and arts and culture organizations' operations,

professional development and projects.

- Continue to bring arts and culture outdoors (community and major events, arts in parks, etc.).
- Opportunity to connect arts and culture with Kelowna's sense of place by supporting and promoting local creators, history, and cultural assets.
- A strong desire for *more* – more programming and infrastructure to support it.
- Strengthen sector convening and senior-level strategic dialogue - address gaps in cultural roundtables; support sector collaboration on shared priorities and challenges.
- Support needs for organizational capacity building and stability.
- Align city-owned spaces & infrastructure planning with culture sector resource needs (culture-ready parks/public spaces, creative studios & technologies).
- Need for better audience and community insights.
- Need for better artist supports & education to career pathways. Strengthen education-to-career pipelines through mentorship, internships, and project-based collaborations.
- Opportunity to develop city and post-secondary partnerships (shared space, funding, applied projects).
- Community interest in culture as a means of creating vibrant public spaces.
- Consider taking steps to solidify Kelowna as a “Music City.”
- Current opportunity to streamline and formalize arts and culture within municipal structure – help foster a “culture for culture.”

## 5.0 Next Steps

This report has provided an overview of the current state of cultural development in Kelowna, situated within both a local and national context. By tracing cultural development in the community alongside major sectoral trends, as well as governance, funding, and partnership trends, it is clear that Kelowna is navigating a complex and evolving cultural landscape.

The evaluation of Kelowna's planning documents demonstrates that there is a high degree of cultural awareness and integration at the strategic level, which is an essential foundation for strong municipal cultural development.

The findings from early engagement activities highlight a strong appetite for collaboration and a recognition that arts, culture, and heritage are vital to Kelowna's identity, quality of life, and long-term sustainability.

At the time of report preparation, the project team was preparing for further engagement with the general public, including the Community Working Group, and City of Kelowna staff during Phase 5.

Upcoming engagement activities with staff and the public include:

- Community Working Group Session #3
- Interdepartmental Staff Session #2
- Cultural Resource Mapping
- Open House and Community Feedback form

All findings will be analyzed and summarized in an upcoming What We Heard Report. A draft version of the *Cultural Plan* will be presented to Council in late summer 2026 prior to seeking endorsement of the final plan in September 2026.