

Regional Cultural Plan 2023-2027

Final Report

September 13th, 2022

Prepared for

Regional District of Fraser-Fort George

Prepared by

Nordicity



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1. Background

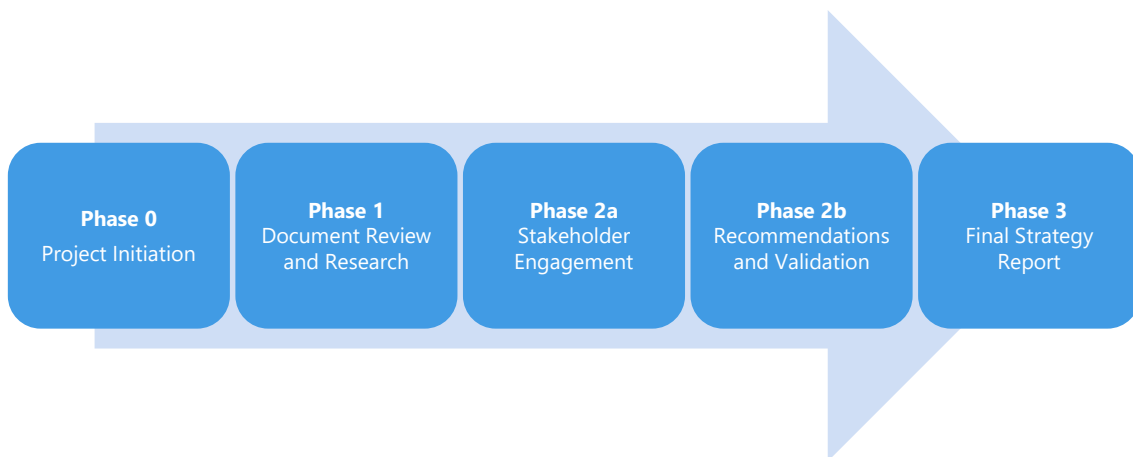
The Regional District of Fraser-Fort George (RDFFG) enlisted Nordicity to develop a **Regional Cultural Plan for the period 2023-2027**. This plan succeeds the two-year Cultural Plan 2021-2022 which addressed the unique consequences of COVID-19 on the arts, culture, and heritage sector. The Regional Cultural Plan 2023-2027 also follows five-year Cultural Plans which have been developed for the District since 2006. These strategic documents provide direction to eight of the District's cultural sites and specify their funding allocations from RDFFG. The eight cultural organizations funded by the RDFFG are:

- The Exploration Place Museum & Science Centre (The Exploration Place)
- Two Rivers Gallery
- Central BC Railway & Forestry Museum
- Huble Homestead Historic Site (Huble Homestead)
- Mackenzie & District Museum
- Valley Museum & Archives
- Whistlestop Gallery
- Valemount & Area Museum & Archives

The aim of this plan is to guide the Regional District's continuous support of cultural sites in the region, and to promote collaboration and mentorship between them.

1.1 Approach

Nordicity's Project Team followed a three-phase process between July and August 2022, as illustrated:



In **Phase 1**, the Project Team conducted a thorough literature review. This review included the current and previous RDFFG Regional Cultural Plans, strategic plans from the RDFFG-funded cultural sites, municipal plans, and existing regional studies, policies, and strategies relevant to arts, culture, and heritage. See the bibliography in Appendix A for a complete list of documentation reviewed.

The purpose of the literature review was to place the Regional Cultural Plan into context and to ensure its alignment with the RDFFG’s vision for arts, culture, and heritage in the region, as well as other initiatives in progress or in development.

During **Phase 2**, the Project Team consulted with the eight cultural sites mentioned above, visiting each site in person, and conducting interviews with executive directors/curators. Additionally, the Team conducted online interviews with 10 further participants, including municipal partners and external stakeholders:

- **Municipal:** City of Prince George, Tourism Prince George, District of Mackenzie, Village of McBride, and Village of Valemount
- **Regional:** Cultural Services Advisory Committee (CSAC) Chair and Vice Chair
- **Provincial:** BC Arts Council, BC Museums Association, Heritage BC, Northern BC Tourism Association

The Project Team also contacted Lheidli T’enneh First Nation, Simpcw First Nation, and McLeod Lake Indian Band. The team did not receive a response given the short timeframe for the project. In consultation with the RDFFG, it was agreed that the focus should be on relationship building over time between the CSAC and the First Nations (see Section 6).

The Project Team used findings from the literature review and interviews to develop preliminary priority areas and recommendations. The Team then hosted a virtual Validation Session with CSAC members to agree on the priorities included in this plan, before progressing to Phase 3, reporting.

2. Context

This section includes a review of the RDFFG’s cultural landscape and highlights defining features of the region. First, it describes local contextual features and significant global trends. Then, it highlights common goals across the RDFFG and notes potential areas where the Regional Cultural Plan could contribute to these objectives. In conclusion, this section explains how funding for arts, culture, and heritage has evolved over time and points towards key examples of local government support and funding models for the sector.

2.1 Local Context

The RDFFG extends from the Rocky Mountains in the East to beyond the Fraser River in the West, covering a land mass of over 50,500 km.² It encompasses four municipalities – the City of Prince George (Prince George), the District of Mackenzie (Mackenzie), the Village of McBride (McBride), the Village of Valemount (Valemount) – and seven electoral areas – Electoral Areas A, C, D, E, F, G, and H. It is situated on the traditional territories of the Lheidli T’enneh, McLeod Lake Indian Band, and the Simpcw First Nation. Approximately 100,000 residents call the region their home.¹

¹ Statistics Canada. (2021). Census Profile, 2021 Census.

Through this diverse landscape run many common threads. Communities within the RDFFG boast strong community pride, a wealth of nature, outdoor, and recreation opportunities, and unique touristic offers. They face certain collective challenges, notably declining industry that leads to decreasing population levels in the smaller municipalities, and difficulties drawing visitors due to the remote geographic location. The following sections examine each of these factors in turn.

Community Pride

Throughout the RDFFG, there is a strong sense of community pride. Residents of Prince George celebrate their “**resourceful, inventive, and open**”² nature and individuals from Valemount are proud to have an **entrepreneurial spirit**. In McBride, the Revitalization Plan draws on the village’s **strong railway heritage**. Residents of Mackenzie as well as of the other three municipalities see **high quality of life** as one of their greatest assets.

Quality of life in the region relates to ease of access to the outdoors, and affordability. Prince George, for instance, offers a cost of living that is much lower than localities of similar sizes elsewhere in the province.³ Situated at the crossings of rivers, highways, and railways, Prince George is a natural transportation hub and central node in the region. The City views its role as a “**catalyst of the modern Canadian North.**”⁴

Within the RDFFG, cultural sites are understood to be a source of community pride, providing opportunities for shared identity building, and contributing to the uniqueness of each municipality.⁵ In line with the RDFFG’s strategic priority of promoting community livability and longevity, the Regional Cultural Plan can enhance quality of life by providing improving community health and wellbeing, fostering social cohesion, and supporting economic growth. Furthermore, cultural planning presents an opportunity to establish a common narrative spanning the district. Building a strong shared narrative builds on recommendations documented in the 2016-2020 Regional Cultural Plan, which called for an authentic and inclusive regional story.

Nature, Outdoors, and Recreation

The natural beauty of the RDFFG is one of its greatest strengths. The region is home to waterways, parks, mountains, and trails, all of which contribute to resident quality of life and draw tourists. Across the District, individuals view the natural environment as **a source of**

² British Columbia Heritage Branch. (2010). Prince George Heritage Context Study: A Report to Guide the Development of the Community’s Heritage Planning Program. 30.

³ British Columbia Heritage Branch. (2010). Prince George Heritage Context Study: A Report to Guide the Development of the Community’s Heritage Planning Program. 24.

⁴ Radloff, B., & Adamson, D. (2020). City of Prince George Downtown Arts Strategy. 54.

⁵ Millier Dickinson Blais. (2015). Taking it to the Next Level: Regional District of Fraser-Fort George Cultural Plan 2016-2020.

community pride and a unique strength.⁶ McBride is known as the “Gateway to the Ancient Forest,”⁷ and the wealth of outdoor activities on offer are “at the heart of why people call Valemount home.”⁸ In summer and winter alike, individuals can **escape into the mountains and enjoy the peaceful environment.**

Easy access to the outdoors also contributes to **better health outcomes, and social and educational goals.** Indeed, the 2021-22 Regional Cultural Plan identified the positive health, social, and educational impacts of arts and culture. The benefits of both outdoor recreation and arts and culture are well-aligned. The region’s spectacular natural landscape and wealth of outdoor activities beg the question of how outdoor recreation and the arts, culture, and heritage sector can complement each other.

Unique Tourism

Along with the draw of outdoor activities, the regional tourism industry also boasts unique offers. In 2020, there were 17,863 visitors to the four major communities of Mackenzie, McBride, Prince George, and Valemount. However, 2019 saw close to four times more visitors to the four regions (68,347). This higher figure is primarily due to the non-pandemic time.⁹

Local food and Indigenous tourism draw visitors to the region, and eco-tourism, agri-tourism, and sport are being developed and promoted. For example, the District of Mackenzie is actively supporting its **local food economy** and sees it as a contributor to economic development.¹⁰

In Northeastern BC, the southern planning area is focused on attracting tourists who are interested in **sports, events, adventure, and eco-tourism.** This area is more easily accessible than the northern portion of Northeastern BC, as flights are frequent, rail access exists, and the area is in proximity to BC’s southern population centres. McBride, for example, is well known for its **wilderness and outdoor tourism** activities – suggesting an opportunity to capitalize on this further, expanding outdoor trails and growing the tourism sector. **Indigenous tourism** is a growing highlight for domestic and international travelers alike. For Indigenous tourism, the proposed plan to build a hotel resort in Valemount Area with an Indigenous visitor information centre would allow visitors to come to the village and **learn and experience Indigenous cultures** of the Simpcw First Nation.

Through promotion of the region’s unique touristic offers, visitors may be curious about the region and discover the numerous cultural sites while researching and visiting. The **Northern Routes marketing strategy** is a key way that they learn and discover more. The strategy was developed originally in 2008 by the RDFFG as a print-based marketing strategy called Golden

⁶ For example, District of Mackenzie, By-law No. 1304, District of Mackenzie: Official Community Plan, (2014). and Expedition Management Consulting. (2020). McBride Tourism Master Plan.

⁷ Lions Gate Consulting. (2018). Village of McBride Economic Development Action Plan. 2.

⁸ Village of Valemount, By-law No. 843-2021, Valemount: Official Community Plan (2021).

⁹ Regional District of Fraser-Fort George. (2020a). 2020 Annual Cultural Report.

¹⁰ District of Mackenzie. (2021). Mackenzie 2.0: Community Economic Development Strategy.

Raven. In 2018, it was rebranded as an online marketing focused program known as the Northern Routes Cultural Experience. This strategy has allowed RDFFG-funded cultural sites to promote their events and engage audiences on a wider spectrum through social media, e-newsletters, and major publications like The Milepost.¹¹

Declining Industry, Declining Population

Historically, the region has been dependent on the forestry sector. **Downturns in forestry have negatively impacted economies across the RDFFG, causing individuals to relocate elsewhere.** Valemound's mill closed permanently in 2006, and Mackenzie's shut down operations in 2009. In both cases, significant layoffs followed, and the populations dropped as families moved away. McBride equally felt the impacts of a declining forestry industry, and today, **vacant lots dot the village's main street.**

Due to the declining population, it is difficult to maintain community infrastructure and support amenities. For example, the District of Mackenzie's population is an aging one, and amenities to support the elderly are called for. Mackenzie notes a need for multiple-family dwellings where seniors and their families can live together.¹²

Keeping residents and tourists within the smaller municipalities is a further challenge.

Mackenzie's residents tend to travel to Prince George for retail, rather than supporting local shops, and tourists are more likely to visit Valemound than McBride.

The RDFFG recognizes the economic challenges in the region and prioritizes contributing to the region's economic strength. The Regional Cultural Plan is thus an opportunity to contribute the attractiveness and desirability of the region, to draw in visitors and long-term residents, and support a vibrant and healthy economy.

Remote Location

The remote location of the RDFFG presents challenges along multiple dimensions. Visitors to the region must **travel long distances and pay high costs for transportation.** Even within the District, the distance from Mackenzie to Valemound is about a five-hour drive. The distances can make coordination between organizations and individuals in different municipalities challenging.

There is a **lack of effective transport links** between localities, for instance to access Vancouver, Prince George, industrial areas, and resource sites. The proximity of Valemound and McBride to Jasper could be leveraged, however, as tourists to Jasper National Park may add Mt. Robson to their itineraries.

In rural areas across Canada, **connectivity is weak.** The RDFFG is no exception. In McBride, for instance, there exists a need for updated broadband infrastructure, and Mackenzie faces connectivity issues too. The RDFFG addresses this challenge in the 2021 Regional Broadband Strategy.

¹¹ Regional District of Fraser-Fort George. (2020a). 2020 Annual Cultural Report.

¹² District of Mackenzie, By-law No. 1304, District of Mackenzie: Official Community Plan, (2014).

The remote location may also contribute to a **lack of awareness among tourists**. A lack of awareness, in turn, leads to an inability to attract investment and insufficient resources to build infrastructure. By fostering collaboration across the region, a Cultural Plan could contribute to putting the region on tourist agendas and **identify key gaps in transportation, connectivity, and marketing campaigns**.

2.2 Global Context

In addition to the local contextual factors, the RDFFG is impacted by broader global events. At the time of writing, COVID-19 and climate change have critically impacted the way cultural sites and the region as a whole carry out their initiatives. Below, we elaborate on these two global issues and their significance in the RDFFG.

COVID-19

The RDFFG's 2021-22 Cultural Report was developed during the first year of the pandemic and it sought to address the overwhelming uncertainty. **For the arts, culture, and heritage sector, this meant coping with a drastic decline in tourism and consequential decline in revenue**. The most pressing concern among the District's eight funded cultural sites was to establish and secure reliable funding for the coming years. For the smaller facilities, some wondered whether they would survive in the long term.

According to the District's 2020 Annual Report, **the pandemic caused tourism to drop by almost 75% across the region**.¹³ Cultural sites necessarily reduced their staffing numbers while enhancing their digital offers. The Exploration Place, for instance, started providing online workshops, while the Whistlestop Gallery increased its social media presence, and the Mackenzie & District Museum expanded its gift store offers.

The **Northern Routes** marketing initiative equally adapted to the COVID-19 environment and began sending online newsletters with content submitted by the cultural sites. Since all eight RDFFG-funded cultural sites closed at the height of COVID-19, the focus was on supporting cultural sites' online activities and promoting their online posts.¹⁴

Climate Change

Across the province, the impacts of climate change are evident and province-wide goals for tourism recognize this fact. **BC's priorities include supporting clean and sustainable growth and including considerations for environmental impact**. From drought to wildfires, residents live within a changing environment.

Given Valemount's location in a wildfire risk zone, for instance, the municipality **promotes structural wildfire resistance**. Prince George further indicates that **climate change is a major challenge that will need to be tackled as part of its strategic goals**. This focus includes having a storm water management system designed for future weather predictions, adapting to

¹³ Regional District of Fraser-Fort George. (2020a). 2020 Annual Cultural Report.

¹⁴ Regional District of Fraser-Fort George. (2020a). 2020 Annual Cultural Report.

climate change, protection of sensitive areas, and much more.¹⁵ In its response to this significant challenge, the RDFFG **prioritizes taking climate action and supporting mitigation and adaptation efforts** among its strategic objectives.

2.3 Common Goals

To leverage regional strengths and address common challenges, communities across the RDFFG have adopted many similar objectives. Furthermore, Nordicity saw a number of common goals between the eight cultural sites in RDFFG. As explored below, an important goal in the region is to help contribute to reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. The municipalities within the Regional District have also prioritized economic diversification to address the declining industry, as well as revitalizing their downtown cores to draw in new residents.

Truth and Reconciliation

Across the country, reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities is an urgent and significant priority. The provincial, regional, and local documents reviewed address this theme. The RDFFG and the funded cultural sites also recognize reconciliation as an important priority. Please refer to Section 3.1 for an expanded discussion on regional cultural contributions to reconciliation.

Reconciliation is especially important in the RDFFG given the high Indigenous population. **The population of Prince George is 14.9% Indigenous** – over twice the province-wide representation of 5.9%.¹⁶ First Nations heritage is the “foundation for understanding subsequent development”¹⁷ and is a key component of an updated Regional Cultural Plan. By integrating reconciliation into the Plan, the RDFFG aligns with strategic priorities on all levels.

The first Regional Cultural Plan (2006-2010) noted that First Nations culture was not well represented in the regional arts, culture, and heritage sector. From then until present day, changes have occurred. The 2016-2020 Cultural Plan addressed reconciliation as a top priority, and **the 2021-2022 Cultural Plan reports successes in Indigenous programming.**

The Exploration Place has been working towards decolonization since the early 1990s and continues to make progress towards this goal in partnership with the Lheidli T’enneh First Nation. **In 2017, The Exploration Place and the Lheidli T’enneh signed a Memorandum of Understanding** to establish the museum as steward over Lheidli cultural objects, with the Lheidli T’enneh as owners. Further reconciliation efforts include digitizing oral histories and providing a permanent position on the Board for an appointment from the Lheidli T’enneh First Nation’s Chief and Council.

¹⁵ Village of Valemout, By-law No. 843-2021, Valemout: Official Community Plan (2021).

¹⁶ Statistics Canada. (2016). Census Profile, 2016 Census.

¹⁷ British Columbia Heritage Branch. (2010). Prince George Heritage Context Study: A Report to Guide the Development of the Community’s Heritage Planning Program. 8.

Two Rivers Gallery's strong focus on truth and reconciliation has included **recruiting Indigenous staff, exhibiting the work of Indigenous artists, and hosting cultural programs**. For example, Beads and Bannock invites participants to learn traditional Indigenous arts through social gathering.

Economic Diversification via Tourism

To address the volatility and uncertainty of the forestry sector, the region has prioritized economic diversification. Tourism is a key component of this goal.

Valemount's Resort Municipality Initiative recommends **investing in tourism infrastructure**, organizing local tourism events, and improving overall tourism services. McBride, in the Economic Development Action Plan, aims to have a diverse economic base, and a "connected, collaborative, confident community with a strong sense of place."¹⁸ Tourism contributes greatly to these objectives. For Mackenzie, developing **tourism represents a fresh opportunity and a chance to test new ideas**. However, this comes with associated risks. Developing the local tourism economy will require concentrated efforts, as the needed infrastructure and tourism packages will not be acquired without significant financial and personnel investments.

The RDFFG 2019 Annual Report notes that the **low Canadian dollar presents a competitive advantage** for the region. Both US and international tourists from further abroad may find a visit to the region to be a relatively affordable option. As the world readjusts to international travel in a post-COVID environment, travellers may seek out new destinations. The RDFFG and its unique arts, culture, and heritage, could be added to tourist itineraries and contribute to the pressing need for economic diversification.

Downtown Revitalization

Common across the municipalities is a recognition that downtown areas are struggling, and revitalization is a top priority. **To draw residents and tourists to the region, the four municipalities have prioritized enhancing their downtowns.**

Prince George, for example, calls for a downtown hub, better parking, and a theatre or performance space. Valemount envisages establishing a creative hub near the Railtown area, developing vacant lots, and creating a village square where community events could take place. The District of Mackenzie, as well, plans to make use of vacant lots and build a tourism district. Meanwhile, McBride wishes to revitalize the main street and build upon its railway history, for instance by improving the historic station.

As **many of the cultural sites are located in downtown locations**, the RDFFG contributes to local revitalization by continuing support for the sites. Future cultural planning could further identify how each site fits within the revitalization plans and how they can collaborate with local businesses, organizations, and other stakeholders.

2.4 Funding Landscape

¹⁸ Lions Gate Consulting. (2018). Village of McBride Economic Development Action Plan. 5.

Over the last 15 years, funding for arts, culture, and heritage has much evolved. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the **critical need for cultural sites to secure stable sources of adequate income**. As tourism and onsite visits declined, consistent revenue streams disappeared.

According to the 2021-22 Regional Cultural Plan, securing stable funding ranked as a top priority for cultural sites both before and during the pandemic. Contracts with the RDFFG that commit funding for a five-year period are thus essential to the stability and long-term viability of the cultural sites. Throughout the research for this plan, cultural site representatives noted that the RDFFG has provided them with stability. The stable funding envelopes allow for a steady and reliable source of income that can support ongoing operations. Table 1 indicates RDFFG funding to the cultural sites from 2016 to 2021. Of note, funding levels from did not increase from 2020 to 2021.

Table 1. RDFFG Cultural Site Funding from 2016 to 2021

Cultural Site	Funding Allotment Received (\$)					
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
The Exploration Place	750,000	770,000	780,000	780,000	800,000	800,000
Huble Homestead Historic Site	190,000	190,000	195,000	195,000	205,000	205,000
Mackenzie & District Museum	32,000	35,000	35,000	37,000	39,000	39,000
Central BC Railway & Forestry Museum	190,000	190,000	195,000	195,000	205,000	205,000
Two Rivers Gallery	490,000	500,000	500,000	510,000	520,000	520,000 ¹⁹
Valemount & Area Museum & Archives	36,000	38,000	38,000	40,000	43,000	43,000
Valley Museum & Archives	32,000	35,000	35,000	37,000	39,000	39,000
Whistlestop Gallery	38,000	40,000	40,000	42,000	44,000	44,000

This funding model and arts and culture support is relatively unique to the RDFFG. Across the province of BC, the RDFFG, the Capital Regional District (CRD), and the Regional District of North Okanagan (RDNO) appear to be the only three regional districts with clear responsibility for the regional arts and culture sector.²⁰ CRD and RDNO take different approaches to the RDFFG. The CRD, for example, provides grants to non-profit organizations via its Arts & Culture

¹⁹ Two Rivers Gallery funding was shared between a General Grant with a value of \$461,000 and an Outreach Program Grant with a value of \$59,000.

²⁰ Radloff, B., & Adamson, D. (2020). City of Prince George Downtown Arts Strategy. 21.

Support Service to support operations, projects, equity initiatives, among other areas.²¹ In the RDNO, the regional district offers financial support in the form of operating grants, grants-in-aid, and project grants.²² It is notable that these municipal bodies do not provide five-year operational funding envelopes as the RDFFG does. See Appendix B for some further examples of regional approaches to funding arts, culture, and heritage.

Arts organizations across the province are reliant on numerous sources to finance their activities. Province-wide organizations such as the BC Arts Council, BC Museums Association, and Heritage BC provide funding via a range of channels. BC Arts Council, for example, provides project and operations assistance based on artistic discipline (e.g., performing arts, literary arts, etc.),²³ and the BC Museums Association provides grants for cultural institutions engaging in repatriation of Indigenous artifacts.²⁴ Along with its in-house grants, Heritage BC lists numerous external funding opportunities to support heritage activities across the province.²⁵

In addition to these provincial sources of funding, numerous funding opportunities exist from the federal government, local organizations, and other institutions. The above examples provide only a brief snapshot of the numerous funding sources available across the province. Note, cultural sites within the RDFFG have expanded their funding support base and identified relevant opportunities at the local, provincial, and national levels. Over the past two years, they have acquired financial support beyond the RDFFG, including:

- BC Gaming
- British Columbia Arts Council (BCAC)
- Canada Council for the Arts (CAC)
- Canada Summer Student Grants
- Canadian Emergency Wage Subsidies (CEWS)
- Local community foundations
- Local municipalities/districts
- Canadian Heritage Museums Assistance Program (PCH MAP) – Digital Access to Heritage
- RBC Foundation
- The Vancouver Foundation

²¹ Capital Regional District (n.d.). Arts Funding | CRD. Retrieved from <https://www.crd.bc.ca/service/arts-funding>

²² Regional District of North Okanagan (2016). Greater Vernon Cultural Plan.

²³ BC Arts Council (n.d.). Grant Programs. Retrieved from <https://www.bcartscouncil.ca/program/>

²⁴ BCMA (n.d.). BCMA Grants. Retrieved from <https://museum.bc.ca/funding-opportunities/bcma-grants/>

²⁵ Heritage BC (n.d.). Funding Opportunities | Grants for Heritage and Cultural Projects in BC. Retrieved from <https://heritagebc.ca/resources/funding-opportunities/>

Of note, all eight sites have sought Canada Summer Student Grants to support internships and summer students.

As the cultural sites and other arts, culture, and heritage organizations in the RDFFG look to support their activities financially, the above list provides an entry point for identifying new areas for financial support. We return to some of the associated challenges and solutions related to funding in later sections of this report – see Section 5.4 (Shared Challenges) and Section 6 (Priorities).

3. Progress to Date: Key Highlights

Since the first Regional Cultural Plan was adopted in 2006, the arts, culture, and heritage sector of the RDFFG has evolved greatly. Recently, the Regional Cultural Plan for 2021-2022 and the Annual Cultural Report for 2020 highlighted progress made towards diversifying revenue streams, securing staff and summer students, and successes with the Northern Routes Cultural Experiences marketing initiative.

However, information collected over 2021 shows that activities in the RDFFG that year had not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels (see Table 2). Visitor numbers in 2021, for instance, were at less than half (-58%) of what they had been in 2019. Other outreach contacts had fallen by more than a quarter (-27%), and summer students by a comparable amount (-30%). Memberships had dropped by almost two-thirds (-65%), and school visits were also down by a large share (-62%). The number of volunteers had decreased by more than half (-56%), and volunteer hours were therefore down. On the other hand, jobs at the cultural sites were back up to 2019 levels, and the number of artifacts donated had only fallen by 10%.

Table 2. Combined Statistics for the RDFFG’s Eight Funded Sites

Indicator	2021	2019	Change
Visitors	74,920	178,561	-58%
Outreach Contacts	27,773	38,231	-27%
Memberships	683	1,957	-65%
Jobs	65	66	-2%
Summer Students	32	46	-30%
School Visits	3,958	10,532	-62%
Volunteers	141	323	-56%
Volunteer Hours	4,618	10,969	-58%
Artifacts donated	477	531	-10%

At the time of this report, complete data from 2022 remains to be collected, but preliminary evidence suggests that visitor numbers, school visits, and other indicators are gradually shifting towards 2019 levels. That is, activities at the cultural sites are returning, and they are again actively engaging with the public.

The impact of travel restrictions, facility closures, and other COVID-19 induced changes cannot be overstated. Despite the many challenges, the arts, culture, and heritage sector of the RDFFG has proved resilient and documents successes across multiple areas.

3.1 Progress towards the Regional Cultural Plan 2021-2022

This section presents progress made towards implementing the 2021-22 Cultural Plan, followed by other key highlights.

The previous Regional Cultural Plan was designed to respond to the COVID-19 induced uncertainty. Rather than cover a five-year period as had been the case with earlier RDFFG cultural plans, it spanned only two years – 2021 to 2022. This Cultural Plan recognized the unpredictability of these years with regards to the arts, culture, and heritage sector. When designing the plan, it was unclear what restrictions would remain in place and whether tourism to the region would be possible. Through an extensive research process, the 2021-2022 Cultural Plan identified four priority areas:

- Collaboration;
- In-Person Experience;
- Virtual Experience and Technology; and,
- Operations.

Despite the unprecedented times, the RDFFG and its local cultural organizations document progress in each of the four priority areas over the past two years.

Collaboration

Although the eight specific actions identified in the previous Regional Cultural Plan have not been implemented, cross-site collaboration remains nonetheless a notable strength and achievement in the region. There is a clear desire to continue current collaborative activities and to find more ways to work together. We return to this in Section 4 (Shared Strengths) and again in Section 6 (Priorities).

In-Person Experience

The previous Regional Cultural Plan listed two actions that respond to the need to maintain in-person activities at the cultural sites. Action 10 has been successfully implemented:

- **Action 10:** Share information about what is working for in-person events and promote other cultural sites' events on social media.

To advance Action 10, cultural sites celebrated each other's successes by cross promoting their activities. They embraced the spirit of collaboration that has grown in the RDFFG and organically shared materials on social media.

Virtual Experience and Technology

Cultural sites felt the need to enhance their virtual offers and technology, for which six actions were identified. Of these, two actions have been successfully implemented:

- **Action 11:** Complete an Online Content Audit and Strategy for all eight cultural sites to identify gaps in online platforms and recommend actions to improve digital infrastructure, reach, and quality of online content.
- **Action 14:** Develop a revised strategy for increasing brand awareness and online traction for Northern Routes and align Northern Routes with other regional tourism and marketing initiatives.

The RDFFG directed an Online Content Audit for the websites of all eight cultural sites to make progress on Action 11. The RDFFG also connected the sites with a program that could further support web development, the DER3 program run through Hubspace. Certain organizations, such as the Huble Homestead and the Exploration Place, were able to leverage the DER3 program and improve their online presence, whereas other sites had limited capacity to continue work in this area.

In terms of Action 14, the Cultural Coordinator developed a revised strategy for the Northern Routes marketing initiative. There is broad agreement that Northern Routes has been a success.

In addition to these two actions, the “transition to the centralized enhanced database shared by all eight cultural sites (to be led by the Exploration Place),” was identified within the Cultural Plan. The Exploration Place has since set up a centralized enhanced database using the Argus collections management system, which hosts the museum’s own digital collection as well as those from most of the other sites. Two Rivers Gallery and Valley Museum and Archives are using their own systems.

Operations

Under the priority area “Operations,” the 2021-2022 Cultural Plan identified six actions related to mental health and staff well-being, strategic and succession planning, and capital improvements and renovations. The latter remains a critical theme for cultural sites and is to be carried over to the updated 2022-2027 Cultural Plan.

Specifically, “Aging infrastructure and building costs” was one of the top three most frequently mentioned themes identified when cultural site representatives were asked about pre-COVID challenges. They desired clarity from the RDFFG on how major infrastructure replacements were to be managed and paid for, as well as expressed concerns around who is responsible for financing major repairs and replacements associated with aging infrastructure. Research findings conclude that this remains a priority for the upcoming period and is discussed further in Section 6 (Priorities).

3.2 Contributions to Reconciliation Efforts

Beyond the priority areas included in the 2021-2022 Cultural Plan, reconciliation is an increasingly important focus for the RDFFG and the cultural sites alike.

The 2021-2022 Cultural Plan provided limited content related to reconciliation.

Reconciliation is first identified in the “Pre-covid Context, Growth, and Achievements,” section of the Plan, outlining one of the major achievements since the 2006 introduction of five-year cultural plans as, “Cultural sites have partnered with local First Nations to share Indigenous histories and advance reconciliation in their communities.” Reconciliation is then identified within the Cultural Plan priority area of “Collaboration,” and subtheme of “collaboration with

organizations outside of the RDFFG Cultural Plan,” to, “Use the CSAC galleries and museums as a venue for reconciliation dialogue by hosting First Nations exhibits, programs, and community conversations (virtual during COVID).” Notably, there is no mention on repatriation in the 2021-2022 Cultural Plan.

Actions identified in the 2021-2022 Cultural Plan included having the cultural sites lead reconciliation for their own sites. Interview findings suggested that some cultural sites need greater support and direction. Furthermore, keeping the “status quo” for funding could affect cultural sites’ capacity to pursue relationship building with Indigenous communities.

Although there is still much work to be done, it is worthwhile highlighting key actions that have been taken to advance reconciliation efforts. From hiring Indigenous staff members to programming Indigenous activities and featuring Indigenous exhibits, cultural sites have been active in this area. Table 3 details reconciliation efforts in the RDFFG.

Table 3. Reconciliation Efforts in the RDFFG

Category	Cultural Site	Highlights
Repatriation	The Exploration Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Repatriation of objects which have not been identified as belonging to the local First Nation communities
	The Exploration Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hired an Indigenous Curator and Archaeologist Hired a local Indigenous Educator and Councillor to develop Indigenous Programming for the Museum
Staffing	Two Rivers Gallery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hired an Indigenous Programmer Working with Indigenous guest curators
	The Exploration Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lheidli T’enneh member on museum board
Board	Central BC Railway & Forestry Museum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Indigenous leader on museum board
	Two Rivers Gallery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Gallery’s board matrix requires that there are at least two members who self-identify as Indigenous
	The Exploration Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborating with Lheidli T’enneh, who are developing an Indigenous daycare near the museum that will feature Indigenous programming
Programming	Central BC Railway & Forestry Museum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offers elementary school programming
	Two Rivers Gallery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed Beads and Bannock Program Weaving Words Celebration workshop series
	Valley Museum & Archives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offers elementary school programming
	Whistlestop Gallery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offers Arts in the Park programming Offers some school programming
	The Exploration Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offers some school programming

Category	Cultural Site	Highlights
	Huble Homestead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publishing a children’s book with Lheidli T’enneh about an Indigenous child’s experience at a fish camp
Exhibits	The Exploration Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exhibits include the Lheidli T’enneh Indigenous Collection
	Huble Homestead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exhibits include the Fish Camp with the Lheidli T’enneh
	Two Rivers Gallery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has exhibited many Indigenous-focused exhibits over the years Example: “Lheidli: Where Two Rivers Meet – Decolonizing Cultural Safety Education Through Cultural Connections” in collaboration with Emily Carr University (ECUAD), the Executive Director Marlene Erikson of Aboriginal Education at the College of New Caledonia (CNC) and the Vancouver Foundation
	Valemount & Area Museum & Archives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Museum displays a Simpcw exhibit Exhibits a small collection of Indigenous artifacts
	Whistlestop Gallery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sells artwork by local Indigenous artists
Other Activities	Mackenzie & District Museum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building friendships with members of McLeod Lake Indian Band
	Huble Homestead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revamping language on homestead’s signage to include First Nation interpretation following best practices and Indigenous style guides (i.e., ‘settler’ versus ‘pioneer’)
	Central BC Rail & Forestry Museum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pursuing incorporating Indigenous plants into the site’s forest gardening/landscaping

4. Shared Strengths

Conversations with cultural sites, municipalities, and other stakeholders alike celebrated the shared strengths of the region’s arts, culture, and heritage sector. The most prominent strengths are:

- Spirit of collaboration and camaraderie felt among cultural sites
- Diversity of cultural site offers
- Contributions to the region’s identity and narrative

4.1 Spirit of Collaboration and Camaraderie Felt Among Cultural Sites

Participants expressed that relations between the cultural sites have moved from what once was “a spirit of competition”, to “a spirit of collaboration”. For example, the Northern Routes Cultural Experience has brought cultural sites together to share their events and exhibits collectively to a broader audience, bolstering each cultural site’s existing advertising through a collaborative effort. There is a willingness to continue collaborating between the sites and to seek new opportunities where possible.

“Northern Routes is one of the most tangible aspects – besides funding – of the relationship with RDFFG and other cultural sites, and we are very grateful for the support.”

– Cultural Site Representative

4.2 Diversity of Cultural Site Offers

The cultural sites are places that preserve the heritage and history of their communities. They offer an extensive range of experiences for locals and visitors alike, relating (but not limited) to nature and the environment, traditions, art, and anthropology. Their cultural offers include permanent exhibits, rotating or seasonal exhibits, programming, and special events. The rich array of cultural offerings attract individuals with different interests and backgrounds to engage with culture in diverse ways. The cultural sites are also recognized as having a larger role in the community by leading advocacy, education, and contributing to tourism efforts.

“Museums now have such a larger more holistic role to play for a community than traditional purposes such as leading advocacy, education and knowledge sharing.”

– Interview Participant

4.3 Contributions to the Region’s Identity and Narrative

Strongly related to the theme above, the cultural sites play a rich role in contributing to the region’s narrative. For example, many of the cultural sites house artifacts that are uniquely from the area, and interpret regional stories from local people via exhibits and programming. The cultural sites are uniquely placed to tell the story of the region, and to paint a picture of its history.

Additionally, the cultural sites create impact that extends beyond their physical spaces. Many cultural site facilities host programming and initiatives that are community-oriented and give back to the region. While this can include recreational programming, cultural sites are also well placed to encourage important and difficult conversations, building new bridges of understanding. For example, many of the cultural sites are working (or starting to work) with local First Nations to create exhibits or programming to advance truth and reconciliation. One representative of a cultural site described a program, for example, where school groups have the opportunity to listen to a local Elder describe the historic injustices which occurred alongside the railway industry.

"Our museum has its own book which highlights several artifacts and photos unique to the area. It was originally produced in the 1980s, and 1,500 copies were made. Community members contributed to sections of the book. Since, we've had grants to continue the reproduction of this book. This is an example of the museum and local community to come together, contributing to the regional narrative."

– Cultural Site Representative

5. Shared Challenges

Cultural sites also share several common challenges. The most prominent themes that emerged were:

- **Insufficient staff training and skills development** in a range of areas
- **Lack of capacity for organizations to pursue initiatives** beyond core responsibilities
- **Ageing infrastructure** in need of maintenance and repair
- **Challenges accessing adequate funding**
- **Lack of clear steps to support reconciliation with Indigenous communities**

5.1 Insufficient Training and Skills Development Opportunities

Several participants noted a need for more staff training and skills development opportunities. Some individuals desired training on the preservation of museum artifacts and archives, grant writing, and social media skills. Others felt that training on non-profit governance and reconciliation with Indigenous communities would be helpful. The need for training was especially felt in the smaller cultural sites, as staff tend to be generalists working across all areas of the institution and may lack specialized knowledge or formal training (e.g., museums management).

"A long time ago, we talked about having someone come into our site to help provide training on managing archives – this has not happened."

– Cultural Site Representative

Overall, there were gaps in the knowledge and skills of staff in the different cultural sites. Participants clearly expressed the desire for the RDFFG to support staff learning. That said, many individuals noted barriers that have made it challenging for them to access training in the past, including:

- **Centralization in Prince George:** In-person training sessions tend to take place in Prince George. Some participants from the other municipalities expressed feeling that they receive less attention from the RDFFG. They would like to see greater support throughout the region.
- **Financial cost:** The location of training sessions presents a financial barrier to organizations located in other municipalities. In some cases, their staff would need to cover accommodation costs to participate (e.g., to stay overnight in Prince George).
- **Scheduling challenges:** For smaller sites with fewer staff, participating in training sessions can present scheduling challenges. Organizations may not have the staffing capacity to cover absences. Many opportunities thus remain inaccessible to them.

5.2 Lack of Capacity to Pursue Initiatives Beyond Core Responsibilities

For smaller cultural sites with limited staff capacity, activities tend to focus on day-to-day operations. This often makes sites unable to expand to new activities, such as writing grant applications, contributing to initiatives that advance truth and reconciliation, or developing projects to support equity, diversity, and inclusion.

"We have struggled with the continuity of staff, so pursuing initiatives beyond our core responsibilities can be challenging."

– Cultural Site Representative

5.3 Ageing Infrastructure

Most of the cultural sites work out of and/or maintain significant cultural and/or heritage infrastructure and buildings. These buildings require continual maintenance.

Additionally, some interview participants described challenges in accessing consistent funding or skilled labour. Infrastructure planning is necessary for cultural sites to maintain the range of cultural and historical capital in the region. However, stretched budgets and lack of clarity around asset management responsibilities (e.g., owner versus operator responsibilities) pose a challenge when planning capital upgrades and repairs. Two participants described having been able to complete repairs in recent years (such as repainting a building or repairing a roof) but that they cannot finance major upgrades that are needed. For example, a barn roof needs to be fixed at Huble Homestead, but it requires specialized labour, and therefore a significant budget.

"There are organizations that have buildings that need huge repairs, but we haven't done asset management, so we don't know what's down the road."

– Interview Participant

Finding skilled labour in the region is also a challenge. There are limited contractors within the region who can do specialized work in historic and heritage restoration. For some of the smaller sites such as the Mackenzie and District Museum and Archives, even if there are trained workers in the region, it is very costly to bring them to town.

5.4 Challenges Accessing Adequate Funding

Most cultural sites face challenges accessing adequate funding, particularly operational funding. While the five-year funding envelopes provided by the RDFFG are highly valued, covering operational expenses is very difficult. At current funding levels, sites cannot recruit additional staff. The lack of staff, in turn, creates the lack of capacity to pursue new initiatives described above.

Beyond funding from the RDFFG, available funding sources mainly focus on project-specific grants. Such funding does not support fundamental needs of the cultural sites, such as paying staff salaries, heating costs, and maintenance. Additionally, certain participants felt that external grants and funding opportunities were inaccessible to them due to detailed and time-consuming application processes.

"If you want to follow Canadian Museum Standards, materials can be expensive to get."

– Cultural Site Representative

Additionally, covering material costs is an issue that many cultural stakeholders are experiencing post-COVID. Examples included specialist materials needed to preserve artifacts (e.g. gloves, folders, archival paper) and print cartridges, which are very costly.

5.5 Lack of Clear Steps to Support Reconciliation with Indigenous Communities

It is clear that RDFFG cultural stakeholders are at very different stages in advancing truth and reconciliation. While all participants recognized the importance, some described being unsure where to begin.

Overall, the larger cultural sites such as the Exploration Place and Two Rivers Gallery are at more advanced stages of work than the smaller regional cultural sites. For example, over the course of 20 years, The Exploration Place and the Lheidli T'enneh have worked together to preserve and showcase the living culture of the Lheidli T'enneh, resulting in the permanent home for the exhibit "Hodul'eh-a: A Place of Learning." Several interview participants noted that they look up to these larger sites for the progress they have made in advancing reconciliation.

"Museums are like the kitchen table of the community. Everyone that comes to the table doesn't necessarily get along, however, the table is where you keep coming back to talk, convene, and have difficult conversations."

– Cultural Site Representative

Several cultural sites appear to be in the early stages of relationship building. One participant described how "non-Indigenous groups are scared, and Indigenous groups don't know where to start", making it challenging to move forward. Participants recognized that the First Nations are busy working on their own priorities, and often do not have the capacity to take on more work.

Another significant challenge highlighted by interview participants in the Robson Valley (Valley District and Museum, Whistlestop Gallery, and Valemount Museum and Gallery) was that the lines between different First Nations are disputed. Given this context, the two museums in the Robson Valley expressed the desire for guidance on how to advance reconciliation efforts given the context of the area.

There is a strong desire to build relationships with local First Nations and expand knowledge of what cultural sites can do to support reconciliation work. Steps suggested by participants include forming and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships for both parties on sharing the use of cultural sites, learning about and incorporating Indigenous practices, and including Indigenous members in cultural site decision making. However, further guidance is desired to push forward with reconciliation efforts.

"Until there are Indigenous leaders working on the Cultural Plan, I do not feel I can follow it. It seems backwards to be talking about reconciliation without their involvement."

– Cultural Site Representative

6. Priorities

Taking into account the context of communities within the RDFFG and the diverse needs of the eight cultural sites, **five priority areas** emerged. They draw on the shared strengths of regional cultural actors, and they address challenges felt by local cultural organizations. Although not an exhaustive list, these five priorities stand out as the most critical areas to address for the period 2023 to 2027:

- **Collaboration**
- **Training and Knowledge-Building**
- **Reconciliation with Indigenous Communities**
- **Conserving Tangible Heritage**
- **Capital Upgrades**

The following sections examine each priority in turn, highlighting key actions to be undertaken in the short, medium, and long term. Actions are designed to be **realistic and achievable** to ensure implementation of the updated Regional Cultural Plan. The action plan also identifies quick wins and activities that can be undertaken with little additional time or financial cost. A total of 32 actions are listed, of which nine are identified as high priority actions (indicated with a star ★).



Collaboration

Collaboration is a theme running throughout previous editions of the RDFFG's Regional Cultural Plans. From providing curatorial expertise to sharing information on COVID-19 responses, staff at the cultural sites are proud of their collaborative spirit. As described in Section 4, this mutually beneficial atmosphere celebrated in the RDFFG is one of the greatest strengths of the region's arts, culture, and heritage sector.

Building on the progress made, we recommend continuing current cross-organizational projects and establishing certain new initiatives. Collaboration supports knowledge transfer and increases organizational efficiencies. Key areas of consideration include:

- **'Internal' collaboration and planning** within CSAC to take a coordinated approach to addressing shared challenges;
- **Knowledge sharing around promising funding streams**, and joint grant applications;
- **Continuing Northern Routes** marketing strategy and building on its strengths; and,
- **'External' collaboration** with others in the region, to boost visitation and increase diversity and inclusion.

Short-term actions (2022 to early 2023)

- ★ **Planning:** Organize a CSAC planning session to discuss the priorities identified in this plan, who could/should provide support in that area, how, and when.
 - Aim to set specific goals and dates for key priority actions. Agree the roles and responsibilities of organizations and individuals to help ensure that the priority is actioned.

- **Compile a list of grants.** Task one (or more) parties to compile a list of relevant granting streams in a cloud document that can be accessed by CSAC members (e.g., a Google Sheet). Ask CSAC members to share information on grants that they have found beneficial, to be added to this list. Look especially for collaborative funding opportunities, and grants for capital upgrades and conservation of tangible heritage.

Medium-term actions (2023 to 2024)

- ★ **Nominate one party to provide guidance on funding beyond RDFFG support.** Organize a CSAC planning session to discuss the priorities identified in this plan, who could/should provide support in that area, how, and when. Guidance could include directing cultural sites to promising grant streams and possibly providing advice on grant writing (but not writing the grant application). The organization responsible for providing guidance could also maintain and update the list of grants described above. This support could be offered by the RDFFG. An alternative path forward could be to work this responsibility into the Exploration Place or Two Rivers Gallery's contracts, but only if these sites were provided adequate funding to cover this additional responsibility.
- **Collaborate on joint fundraising activities.** Possible avenues to explore include submitting group funding applications, collaborating on grant writing, sharing knowledge of relevant granting streams ongoing (to be added to the shared list), and advocating at the regional or provincial level for increased funding.
- **Identify cost efficiencies across sites.** Financial strain was a common challenge felt across the cultural sites. Many of the sites purchase similar products, such as materials to preserve and store archival collections. Purchasing such products in bulk could allow for cost savings across the organizations.
- **Increase the frequency of Northern Routes social media posts.** Some participants noted that it would be beneficial for the Northern Routes' social media channels to be more active. More frequent posts could increase engagement and to deepen storytelling about the region. However, there is also a need for cultural sites to share more content. One approach could be for cultural site directors/curators to look at what content is gaining most engagement on their respective social media channels, and discuss with the Cultural Coordinator how it could be shared via Northern Routes in line with the regional narrative.

Longer-term actions (2025 to 2027)

- **Grow collaboration between Northern Routes and municipalities to boost visitation,** building on the [Route 16](#) tourism initiative and existing collaboration with Tourism Prince George. It may be beneficial to identify additional, complementary initiatives between municipal and regional tourism campaigns – which often focus on nature and outdoor recreation – to break down siloes. Northern Routes could also collaborate with municipalities on marketing tactics to encourage visitors to Prince George to explore further afield.
- **Consider partnerships with organizations that welcome newcomers,** such as the Immigrant & Multicultural Services Society of Prince George, Connect PG, and Robson Valley Community Services. Building such partnerships could help to boost inclusion

and diversity. Offering volunteer opportunities to newcomers presents an opportunity for immigrants to gain valuable Canadian work experience while also helping to address the labour shortage.

- **Explore how IT support could be provided to cultural sites** by their local municipal IT departments/providers. Several cultural sites lack access to sufficient IT support. Learning about digital systems or software can present an additional burden to stretched staff. If support from municipalities is unviable, the CSAC group could consider enlisting an IT consultant to offer support to the sites on a retainer basis.



Training and Knowledge-Building

To further support cross-organizational activities, we recommend an **increased focus on providing training opportunities** to the cultural sites. Participants noted the need to develop capacities in a range of areas: governance of boards and committees, anti-bias training, repatriation of Indigenous artifacts, intersectional accessibility, and archive digitization, to name a few. This list is non-exhaustive and will certainly change over the course of time. Actions to formalize feedback will ensure that training programs remain relevant to and useful for the cultural sites and their staff.

Beyond developing individual capacities, training can help attract and retain staff at cultural organizations. Continued learning opportunities contribute to personal development. Additionally, in-person workshops and sessions increase the interaction between cultural sites, allowing for improved communication and leading to new collaborative initiatives. To build staff skills and knowledge, we recommend a series of actions to formalize training activities.

Short-term actions (2022 to early 2023)

- ★ **Agree on the highest priority training topics** and preferred delivery methods. This discussion could be part of the CSAC planning meeting, recommended above (under Collaboration). There is a need to agree whether the training budget should be predominantly used towards funding travel to the BC Museums Association, and/or for training workshops specifically for the CSAC group.
- ★ **Review the dedicated training budget** and increase where possible to cover training opportunities and associated travel costs (e.g., to cover hotels in Prince George for the more remote sites). By building upon the current training budget and including travel costs, the RDDFG could make it more feasible for smaller sites to participate.

Medium-term actions (2023 to 2024)

- **Organize day-long in-person training session in 2023**, if agreed in the CSAC planning session. Most CSAC members outside of Prince George expressed wanting more opportunities to meet in person, but some find it difficult to justify a trip to Prince George unless it is for a full day. Having a CSAC meeting in the morning, followed by a workshop in the afternoon, would be desirable to some parties. The session would likely need to be held in the off-season when schedule conflicts are less likely.
- **Compile a list of relevant training resources from provincial arts, culture, and heritage organizations.** Organizations consulted in the research process, namely the BC Arts Council, BC Museums Association, Destination BC, and Heritage BC, each

highlighted a range of resources targeted specifically at regional communities. These range from reports and webinars to online courses and in-person training sessions. A CSAC member, such as the Cultural Coordinator, could draw on the challenges indicated in this Regional Cultural Plan to identify helpful resources. CSAC members could also share useful resources, to be added to a collaborative document such as a Google Doc.

- **Organize bi-annual in-person training sessions**, if agreed in the CSAC planning session. If costs allow, the RDFFG could consider holding training sessions in each of the four municipalities, as well as inviting professionals from outside the RDFFG to deliver workshops or presentations. For example, representatives from the BC Arts Council, BC Museums Association, Destination BC, or Heritage BC could present material.

Longer-term actions (2025 to 2027)

- **Arrange for delegation of CSAC members to attend conferences together annually.** For example, in previous years, the group has attended the BC Museums Association conference together – most recently hosting in Prince George in 2019, and attending the Kelowna conference in 2018. While each site has different priorities, being at the same event at the same time allows for increased discussion, networking, and collaboration.



Reconciliation with Indigenous Communities

Across the RDFFG, reconciliation was recognized as a critical priority. However, several participants were unsure how to approach this topic. Some cultural sites, for instance, desired guidance on how to approach First Nations partners and how to represent Indigenous perspectives within the sites' offers.

The Exploration Place and Two Rivers Gallery are already leaders in prioritizing reconciliation. For example, a BC Museums Association praised the Exploration Place for showing "great leadership for repatriation and forming partnerships with local Indigenous groups to create mutually consensual management plans." Such expertise could be further leveraged within the RDFFG to promote efforts towards reconciliation with the Lheidli T'enneh, Simpcw, and McLeod Lake First Nations, and support of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Short-term actions (2022 to early 2023)

- **Start each CSAC meeting with a thoughtful land acknowledgement.** Beginning meetings by acknowledging the land is an important expression of recognition and respect towards the Indigenous communities who currently and historically reside in the region. CSAC could consider inviting a different attendee to lead the land acknowledgement each time.
- **RDFFG to reach out to Lheidli T'enneh, Simpcw, and McLeod Lake First Nations,** seeking to learn more about each community's priorities. The RDFFG could let them know about the Regional Cultural Plan, but should seek to ensure that the conversation is not perceived as an "ask". Instead, the meeting could seek "to put a face to a name" and make a connection, so that RDFFG is increasingly aware of each community's

priorities. The RDFFG can consider if it is appropriate to offer an honorarium for each nation's representative's time.

- **Consider having CSAC members enroll individually in an online reconciliation course.** Online courses are offered by institutions such as the First Nations University ([4 Seasons of Reconciliation](#)) or the University of Alberta ([Indigenous Canada](#)). Such programs explore the histories of Indigenous peoples within Canada, providing students with an understanding of how historical events continue to impact Indigenous communities in the present day.

Medium-term actions (2023 to 2024)

- ★ **Start building stronger relationships** with local First Nations at an individual level by learning about each community's priorities and attending ceremonies that are open to visitors.
- ★ **Work together to develop a Repatriation Policy** to facilitate the return of Indigenous ancestral remains, burial items, and artifacts from museums to their home communities. While each museum is likely to require its own policy, it could be helpful to create an adaptable framework or template that different organizations can customize. Creating a Repatriation Policy would align the RDFFG with the BCMA's Call to Action, as well as objectives outlined in UNDRIP and the TRC Call to Action 67. It must be recognized that currently this is unfunded work, and the financial burden must not rest with the Indigenous communities.
- **Offer free membership of cultural sites to Indigenous individuals.** CSAC member sites could consider offering free entry to all Indigenous peoples. Two Rivers Gallery has already undertaken this action and provides complimentary membership to all Indigenous peoples.

Longer-term actions (2025 to 2027)

- ★ **Continue to build relations and foster ongoing dialogue** between CSAC and local First Nations representatives. Fostering communication channels between individual organizations and local First Nations representatives presents an opportunity to address the issue of turnover at the highest levels of governance. For instance, new relationships between municipal Mayors and First Nations Chiefs are continuously needed following election cycles. CSAC members, on the other hand, retain their positions and could work towards building long-standing, trust-based relationships with Indigenous partners.
- **Actively pursue the repatriation of artifacts and objects to affirm cultural sites' commitment to advancing reconciliation.** Repatriation was recognized as a long-term objective for cultural sites to advance reconciliation efforts. The Exploration Place noted that they could support smaller cultural sites with repatriation in the future. However, RDFFG support would be needed to help the Exploration Place carry this out.
- **Consider inviting First Nations representatives to join CSAC and partner on future Regional Cultural Plans, if appropriate.** This action must be led by the priorities of the Lheidli T'enneh, Simpcw First Nation, and McLeod Lake Indian Band rather than

CSAC priorities. Participating individuals should be remunerated for their time with honoraria.



Conserving Tangible Heritage

Physical maintenance is needed at the heritage sites to restore and conserve tangible heritage assets, such as rolling stock and heritage buildings. Currently, it is unclear which regional assets are in most urgent need of restoration. The following recommended actions seek to create more clarity, to help cultural sites to plan conservation activities.

Short-term actions (2022 to early 2023)

- ★ **Create a tangible heritage asset inventory.** The CSAC group could consider enlisting a specialist heritage consultant to conduct an asset inventory of major tangible heritage assets in need of repair across cultural sites, such as heritage buildings and rolling stock. This inventory would describe the condition of tangible and built heritage and identify required conservation activities.

Medium-term actions (2023 to 2024)

- **Use the asset inventory to help identify urgent needs and to advocate for funding.** Cultural sites could use the findings on the assets in need of urgent repair to seek funding, for example from local municipalities, and/or provincial or federal funding streams.

Longer-term actions (2025 to 2027)

- **Review and update the asset inventory ongoing,** provisionally every five years.



Capital Upgrades

Almost every one of the RDFFG's cultural sites is pursuing, or looking to pursue, capital upgrades to their buildings. Capital upgrade projects can be complicated, and fundraising can be challenging. The following points seek to address these challenges.

Short-term actions (2022 to early 2023)

- ★ **Consider ways that the CSAC can support Mackenzie Museum** as it plans next steps for a future building. For example, could some CSAC members become part of a Working Group to help the Museum plan next steps?
- **Conduct an informal review of cultural site buildings in need of upgrades or repair** and compile a list of which are most urgent. This list could be used by cultural sites to help advocate for support from their respective municipalities.

Medium-term actions (2023 to 2024)

- **RDFFG to incorporate provision for capital repairs and upgrades** into contracts with cultural sites where the RDFFG owns the building. Sites with buildings owned by other municipalities could also consider what provision is included within their contracts, and potentially seek to renegotiate terms.








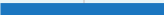


- **Identify sources of professional support or guidance in relation to capital developments.** For example, Heritage BC welcomes questions from municipalities and cultural sites on heritage conversation questions such as how to interpret the Local Government Act. Additionally, could a cultural site's local municipality provide guidance on topics such as the process for conducting a feasibility study?




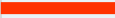





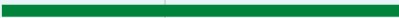



Longer-term actions (2025 to 2027)








- **Consider fund development strategy training** for capital asset fundraising campaigns.

7. Implementation Plan

The table below outlines a provisional implementation plan for priority actions. The highest priority actions are indicated **in bold**.

Action	Short term (2022-early 2023)	Medium term (2023-2024)	Longer term (2025-2027)
Collaboration: Organize a CSAC planning session to discuss the priorities identified in this plan and who will lead.			
Training & Knowledge: Agree highest priority topics, and how they should be addressed (e.g., conference vs. CSAC workshop).			
Reconciliation: Start each CSAC meeting with a thoughtful land acknowledgement.			
Reconciliation: Enroll individually in an online reconciliation course.			
Capital Upgrades: Consider how CSAC can support Mackenzie Museum to find new building.			
Training & Knowledge: Review training budget.			
Collaboration: Compile shared list of relevant granting streams.			
Reconciliation: RDFFG to reach out to Lheidli T'enneh, Simpcw, and McLeod Lake First Nations.			
Capital Upgrades: Conduct informal review of cultural site buildings in need of upgrades or repair.			
Conserving Tangible Heritage: Create an asset inventory.			
Collaboration: Identify cost efficiencies across sites, such as for purchasing goods.			
Training & Knowledge: Organize day-long in-person training session.			

Action	Short term (2022-early 2023)	Medium term (2023-2024)	Longer term (2025-2027)
Training & Knowledge: Compile a list of relevant training resources.			
Capital Upgrades: RDFFG to incorporate capital repairs/ upgrade provision into contracts with cultural sites where the RDFFG owns building.			
Capital Upgrades: Identify sources of professional support or guidance in relation to capital developments.			
Reconciliation: CSAC members to work together on Repatriation Policy.			
Reconciliation: Start building stronger relationships with local First Nations at an individual level.			
Reconciliation: Offer free membership of cultural sites to Indigenous individuals.			
Collaboration: One party to provide guidance on funding.			
Collaboration: Collaborate on joint fundraising activities, such as joint grant applications.			
Collaboration: Increase the frequency of Northern Routes social media posts.			
Training & Knowledge: Organize bi-annual in-person training sessions.			
Conserving Tangible Heritage: Use the asset inventory to help identify urgent needs and to advocate for funding.			
Collaboration: Explore how IT support could be provided to cultural sites.			
Training & Knowledge: Arrange for a delegation of			

Action	Short term (2022-early 2023)	Medium term (2023-2024)	Longer term (2025-2027)
CSAC members to attend conferences together annually.			
Capital Upgrades: Consider fund development strategy training.			
Collaboration: Grow collaboration between Northern Routes and municipalities to boost visitation.			
Collaboration: Consider partnerships with organizations that welcome newcomers.			
Conserving Tangible Heritage: Review and update the asset inventory ongoing.			
Reconciliation: Continue to build relations and foster ongoing dialogue between CSAC and First Nations representatives.			
Reconciliation: Actively pursue the repatriation efforts.			
Reconciliation: If appropriate, consider inviting First Nations representatives to join CSAC and partner on future Cultural Plans.			

Appendix A. Bibliography

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Appendix B. Regional Arts and Culture Funding Case Studies

This section introduces some case studies of how other municipalities are approaching funding for regional arts, culture, and heritage.

7.1 Case Study: Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, AB

The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB) provides grants to support the prosperity of residents in the Wood Buffalo region. Grants include support for social, cultural, and recreational programs as well as amateur sport, artist development and strategic priorities of the RMWB's Strategic Plan.

Currently, RMWB offers "Sustaining Funding" (i.e., operational funding) to several arts and culture organizations. Recipients include Keyano Theatre & Art Centre, which receives approximately \$560,000 annually, Fort Chipewyan Historical Society, which receives approximately \$150,000 annually, Fort McMurray Heritage Society, which receives approximately \$460,000 annually, and Arts Council Wood Buffalo, which receives approximately \$653,000 annually.

Furthermore, an important grant to highlight is the [Arts, Culture and Heritage Pilot Grant](#), which provides funding to individuals or groups to support arts, culture and heritage projects which contribute to realizing the priorities of the [Wood Buffalo Culture Plan](#). This pilot funding initiative has a total value of \$50,000 to respond to identified needs from the Wood Buffalo Culture Plan in order to support the Plan's vision of RMWB as a place of culturally diverse and socially inclusive municipality where arts, culture and heritage are essential part of its social, economic and environmental well-being. Applicants are required to describe how their activities align with one or more priorities from the Wood Buffalo Culture Plan including: 1) foster healthy environment for culture: arts and culture, 2) further develop cultural facilities and resources, 3) support collaboration and innovation, 4) encourage diversity, inclusivity, and accessibility, and 5) improve awareness of the value of culture. Successful individuals or groups will receive a maximum of \$5,000. Other funding streams available to non-profits (including arts and culture organizations) include [Community Impact Grant](#), [Community Capital Grant](#), and [Games Legacy Grant](#).

RMWB projects that may be of interest to CSAC for reference:

Heritage Resources Management Plan:

The [Heritage Resources Management Plan](#) (HRMP) is a plan for preserving and protecting local historical resources. The aim is to provide a framework to support heritage conservation activities in Wood Buffalo and guide future initiatives to identify, stewardship, and manage heritage resources. The management plan is a three-phased process: 1) Identify what resources are here, 2) evaluate what is important and why, and 3) manage discoveries by deciding what we do with findings. Developing this plan required the involvement and participation of the community in Wood Buffalo. The plan is still in development and is now (as of August 2022) completing phase 2 of engagement.

Cultural Infrastructure Needs Assessment:

The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo is presently conducting a [Cultural Infrastructure Needs Assessment](#) to know more about the current status of cultural facility provision in each

community and recognize the enhancements needed for the future. The aim is to inform future planning, resource allocations, and partnership discussions with relation to cultural infrastructure. Assessing existing spaces and engaging with the community in Wood Buffalo will help identify possible future opportunities which will enhance cultural spaces. RMWB completed consultations on this project in March 2022 and the feedback from the community can be found in the [What We Heard Report](#).

7.2 Case Study: Cowichan Valley Regional District, Vancouver Island, BC

The **Cowichan Valley Regional District** (CVRD) plays a crucial role in enhancing the arts and culture scene of the Cowichan Region. The CVRD's Arts and Culture Division service function was established to provide annual funding for sub-regional arts councils, give opportunities to arts organizations through grants, and increase collaboration and partnerships between arts and cultural organizations on regional, provincial, and national initiatives.

The CVRD's biggest expenditure is providing operational funding for the [Cowichan Performing Arts Centre](#) which is a function of the Arts & Culture Division of the Cowichan Valley Regional District's Recreation & Culture Department. Funding for the Cowichan Performing Arts Centre comes from throughout the Cowichan Region with a value of approximately \$2,320,000 in 2021 and approximately \$2,340,000 in 2022 for operational costs. Furthermore, the CVRD offers annual funding to five sub-regional arts councils and grants in aid for non-profit arts and culture organizations at the value of \$130,000 annually.

The CVRD also provides regional [Arts and Culture Grants](#) for arts and culture organizations with the aim of assisting community groups within CVRD to provide artistic programs for residents, build community and organizational capacity to deliver artistic programs, and promote partnerships and sharing of financial costs in CVRD. Arts & Culture organizations will need to meet the criteria listed within the [Arts & Culture Disbursement Policy](#). The grants provided can be used for annual operational funding or special one-time project funding for organizations. In 2022, the total value of the Arts & Culture Grants was approximately \$39,000 and was awarded to a number of [recipients](#) including Chemainus Theatre Festival Society (\$5,000), Cowichan Valley Public Art Gallery Society (\$2,000), and Ladysmith Little Theatre Society (\$4,200).

7.3 Case Study: Strathcona County, AB

Strathcona County is a specialized municipality located between Edmonton and Elk Island National Park in central Alberta. The County comprises the urban area of Sherwood Park and a large adjacent rural area of eight hamlets and farms, with a total population of 98,000 residents (2016 Census).

Arts and culture services at Strathcona County Council are managed by the Recreation, Parks and Culture department in the Community Services Division. The Department's a budget is approved by the County Council for the delivery the services to both a rural and urban population. The cultural team includes the department Director, a Community Liaison Officer for Culture and a Public Art Coordinator, supported by an Art Collection Advisory Committee to guide the County Council on matters relating to public art.

In July 2019, the County Council launched a [Recreation and Culture Strategy](#) outlining plans for the next 12 years. The Strategy's priorities are aligned with the County's overall strategic goal "to become Canada's most livable community." A [Recreation and Culture Strategy Advisory](#)

[Committee](#) was established at the outset to guide the develop of the strategy, comprising 11 community members, five agency members and the strategy's Executive and Project Sponsors.

The Recreation and Culture Strategy is designed to be delivered through combined efforts and investment by local government, non-profit organizations and community groups, as well as private businesses. Strathcona County Council issues \$100,000 in grants each year to the local museum and other arts, culture, and heritage groups and organizations. The Community Liaison Officer for Culture supports this annual grants program, as well as dialogue between the Council and local arts, culture and heritage organizations.

Strathcona County also owns and operates three arts and culture facilities: Festival Place for performing arts, Gallery@501 and Smeltzer House Visual Arts Centre. However, information on municipal spending on these institutions does not appear to be publicly available.