

Edmonton Heritage Council - 2024 Connections & Exchanges Update

2024 Implementation Summary

Since the implementation of Connections & Exchanges, the Edmonton Heritage Council has worked to make heritage a living and growing part of daily life in our city, through partnerships, programming, and operational efforts.

Working broadly, we have helped raise Edmonton's heritage stories from its neighborhoods, amplified diverse voices, connected communities through storytelling, integrated heritage into city planning, expanded Indigenous programming, and fostered collaboration amongst heritage practitioners. Further, Edmonton Heritage Council has strengthened its operations by ensuring adaptable and sustainable funding, building sector capacity, engaging in Equity Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) workshops, incorporating Indigenous protocols into our grants process and community engagement, and driving innovation to build on each year's successes.

Edmonton Heritage Council's work ensures that Edmonton's heritage is not only preserved and supported but actively shaping our future and strengthening our connections to one another.

2024 IMPLEMENTATION HIGHLIGHTS

Ambition 1: Alive With Arts and Heritage

Neighborhood Engagement: Commonwealth Walkway digital map expanded with 46 Indigenous stories, increasing spatial distribution of heritage assets across Edmonton

Cultural Connection: 79 per cent increase in Funding Indigenous Resurgence in Edmonton (FIRE) grant applications, demonstrating successful creation of accessible processes for Indigenous heritage practitioners

Civic Planning: Strengthened advocacy through community convening with the 30-member Save the Old Royal Alberta Museum (RAM) Task Force and Public Realm Strategy engagement

Barrier Removal: Expanded access for equity-seeking groups, with increased participation in the Iskwehew and Ihwehew Kamik ceremony (10 more participants than previous year)

Ambition 2: Hub For Extraordinary Creation and Reputation

Global Exchange: Connected Edmonton to national initiatives through the Black Heritage Roundtable with the National Trust of Canada, establishing the city as a key partner in representing Black heritage

Collaborative Platforms: Combined attendance of over 1,140 participants at Edmonton City as Museum Project (ECAMP) events showed strong community interest in diverse cultural heritage stories

Public Engagement: 8,970 interactions recorded at K-Days Heritage Hall, serving as a successful testing ground for new Edmonton City as Museum Project (ECAMP) exhibits

Ambition 3: Thriving and Well-Funded Arts and Heritage Ecosystem

Economic Resilience: Distributed nearly \$950,000 to 65 projects, individuals, and organizations, with 50-67 per cent of project funding directed to equity-deserving communities

Capacity Building: Youth Writers workshop participants reported increased skills and understanding of research methodologies, contributing to sector development

Sustainable Support: Implemented rolling intake for Career Development funding, removing timing barriers for 10 diverse heritage practitioners

2024 Implementation & Measurements

Ambition 1: Alive With Arts and Heritage

Aim 1: Edmonton's neighborhoods come alive with meaningful and relevant opportunities for participation and engagement

Edmonton Heritage Council has focused on bringing heritage experiences directly into neighborhoods through community-based programming, pop-ups, and digital initiatives. The work emphasizes making heritage accessible where people live.

Action 1.1: *Nurture cultural curiosity through planned and spontaneous heritage encounters that are personal and experiential.*

- **Edmonton Commonwealth Walkway** digital story map was updated with attention to Indigenous heritage and land-based memory. This project broadened methodological practices of story gathering with the use of the nehiyaw (Cree) word *keeoukaywin* or "visiting way" that engaged 14 storytellers and knowledge keepers in Edmonton, resulting in 46 additional Indigenous stories linked to the walkway. Publicly, Edmonton Commonwealth Walkway had a total of 574 app downloads and 5,377 desktop viewers.

Action 1.2: *Inventory and develop heritage interpretive experiences to increase visibility, access, and engagement.*

- **Edmonton City as Museum Project (ECAMP)'s YEG Trivia Night Series** features neighbourhood and thematic trivia with community co-hosts and artifact displays. Edmontonians get a chance to learn, connect with the community, and encounter history in new corners of the city. 41 participants attended the first event.

Measurement: These initiatives have increased the spatial distribution of arts, heritage, and cultural assets across the city; revitalized the quality of heritage experiences; and utilized new spaces for cultural purposes. The Commonwealth Walkway digital platform allows Edmontonians to explore heritage spaces around their neighborhoods and brings Indigenous stories directly to the public.

Aim 2: Edmontonians feel a sense of belonging and connectedness to peoples, places and stories.

Through documentation and storytelling initiatives, Edmonton Heritage Council has helped diverse communities connect with and share their heritage, building bridges between different cultural groups and deepening people's connections to place.

Action 2.1: *Create and support opportunities for cultural connection and understanding between people, communities, and places.*

- **Edmonton Living Rooms** virtual exhibit featured the stories of 7 intergenerational newcomer communities (Bhutanese, Eritrean, Iraqi, Kurdish, Sierra Leone, South Sudanese, and Syrian) centered on celebrations and grief through culture. Approximately 115 community members from ages 4 to 80 participated, with 16 youth facilitators. bringing unique and diverse themes to explore throughout the project.

Measurement: By providing a platform and space to explore Edmonton's newcomer heritage experiences and meaningful cultural artifacts, Edmonton Heritage Council

expanded Edmontonians' intrinsic emotional/intellectual connection to art, heritage, and cultural assets in their city.

Action 2.5: *Support Indigenous peoples in revitalizing and participating locally in traditions that reflect their connections to ancestors, and the land.*

- **The Funding Indigenous Resurgence in Edmonton (FIRE) grant program** saw the most applicants in the program's history with 69 applications (79 per cent increase from 2023; \$190,452 to 20 projects). Recipients included: book projects, an Elders artist show, cultural gatherings, an Indigenous choir, workshops, culture camps, hide tanning camp, a round dance, and a three-day gathering for Indigenous Deaf individuals and families from across Canada.

Measurement: The 79 per cent increase of applications in a year is attributed to an accessible and adaptable granting process for Indigenous heritage practitioners/people seeking to explore heritage resurgence in their communities. As an organization, Edmonton Heritage Council continues to listen and incorporate changes to how it funds Indigenous revitalization in Treaty 6 territory.

Aim 3: Arts and Heritage leaders are actively engaged in civic planning and implementation.

Edmonton Heritage Council has taken an adaptive, expanding, and active role in policy development and civic planning processes, ensuring heritage perspectives are integrated into city-building conversations and decisions.

Action 3.2: *Work with City Administration to incorporate heritage into city strategies and planning, such as neighbourhood revitalization initiatives, per centage for heritage interpretation/conservation policy, and special projects.*

- **Public Realm Strategy Engagement:** Edmonton Heritage Council staff have attended engagement sessions such as the Old Strathcona Public Realm Strategy, advocating for the inclusion of more heritage interpretation, Indigenous heritage perspectives in green space development, and cultural heritage space for Indigenous peoples within the Connaught Armoury.
- Edmonton Heritage Council staff continue to build relationships and expand levels of engagement with the City Administration and community projects.

Action 3.3: *Encourage active civic engagement and participation in cultural activities.*

- **Save the Old Royal Alberta Museum (RAM) Task Force** formed last year after Edmonton Heritage Council convened Edmontonians interested in saving the old

Royal Alberta Museum building. The taskforce consists of 30 individuals with backgrounds in architecture, history, civic engagement, and development.

Measurement: Strengthened approach to advocacy rooted in convening community, providing national data on inclusionary heritage preservation. This also informs Edmonton Heritage Council's work in supporting the development of the new Heritage Place Strategy as an effective pathway for Edmontonians and City Administration.

Aim 4: Conditions are in place to remove barriers for all Edmontonians to participate in cultural experiences.

The focus has been on making heritage more accessible through reduced barriers, increased inclusivity, and support for diverse heritage voices and stories.

Action 4.1: *Create learning opportunities to build heritage sector capacity and remove barriers to participation.*

- **Career Development stream in HCIP** provides up to \$4,000 for professional development opportunities to individuals with the goal of enriching Edmonton's heritage sector. The rolling intake structure removes the barrier of timing. In 2024 we funded 10 diverse heritage practitioners.

Measurement: By providing the financial resources to directly to Edmontonians to improve their skills in the heritage sector, Edmonton Heritage Council has seen a decrease in barriers of discrimination such as social status (-6 per cent), income level (-5 per cent), gender identity (-5 per cent), and race/ethnicity (-7 per cent). Some grant recipients who received this funding were able to bring back knowledge to their respective heritage communities in Edmonton (LGBTQIA+ community, African Caribbean and Black community, the Arab Canadian community).

Action 4.4: *Resource Indigenous-led activities that support reclamation of Indigeneity.*

- **Iskwehew and Ihwehew Kamik ceremony** (A partnership with the Indigenous Relations Office and Edmonton Public Library since 2022) brought 50 women and queer Indigenous Peoples to participate in this ceremony at the Northeast River Valley Park. The ceremony guided urban Indigenous individuals through rites of passage, imparted knowledge about the Cree creation story, rights and responsibilities, and land-based wisdom from Elders Jerry and Jo-Ann Saddleback.

Measurement: The increase of 10 new participants to this urban ceremony site is significant to how Edmonton Heritage Council can support Indigenous resurgence in Edmonton. By continuing to resource activities such as Iskwehew Kamik, barriers to access Indigenous ceremonies in our city will begin to decrease.

Ambition 2: A Hub For Extraordinary Creation and Reputation

Aim 5: *Dynamic exchanges of ideas and expertise occur between Edmonton's arts and heritage sector and the world*

Edmonton Heritage Council has fostered connections beyond Edmonton, sharing local heritage stories more broadly, while bringing external perspectives and expertise into local conversations.

Action(s) 5.3: *Work with public and private partners to celebrate and promote Edmonton's historic urban landscapes, including sites of conscience.*

- **Funding Indigenous Resurgence in Edmonton (FIRE) Spotlight Series** brought Edmontonians closer to Indigenous revitalization work happening in the country and our city. Edmontonians received land-based teachings at Elk Island on prescribed burning and its importance in Indigenous resurgence. Additionally, an Indigitization workshop brought expertise from a British Columbia-based collaborative initiative to facilitate archival digital preservation for Indigenous communities.
- **Black Heritage Roundtable with National Trust of Canada**, connected Edmonton to the national TIDE (Together for Intergenerational Diaspora Empowerment) initiative, which advances Black heritage representation through collaboration between the African diaspora and allies. This networking event, co-led by Edmonton Heritage Council, brought together Black historians, heritage professionals, and community leaders from across Canada and the US, creating sustainable partnerships that amplify Black voices in Edmonton and beyond. Participants engaged in cultural competency training and collaborative planning to authentically incorporate Black narratives into mainstream heritage spaces, establishing Edmonton as a key partner in national efforts to represent Black heritage.
- **K-Days Heritage Hall/Memory Lane** partnership has grown over multiple years with the display space expanding, showcasing Edmonton Living Rooms and Black Presence in Alberta initiatives. In 2024, we recorded 8,970 interactions at our table, using the event as a testing ground for new Edmonton City as Museum Project (ECAMP) exhibits

Measurement: Edmonton Heritage Council has been evaluating this aim primarily through steadily increasing the number of opportunities for civic dialogue within the

heritage sector, using this indicator to guide programming that promotes Edmonton's historic urban landscapes and sites of consciousness.

Aim 6: Diverse platforms for collaboration exist within Edmonton that allow artistic and heritage communities to connect, create and collaborate

Edmonton Heritage Council continues to grow its role as a hub for heritage practitioners to work together, share resources, and develop new collaborative approaches to heritage work, strengthening the sector and the value it can provide to Edmontonians.

Action(s) 6.1: *Broaden the Edmonton City as Museum Project initiative to include public art, neighborhood and cultural heritage to create a significant platform for cultural discovery and building sources of knowledge.*

- **Edmonton City as Museum Project (ECAMP) growth** has helped Edmontonians connect to diverse cultural heritage stories, built heritage, and spaces of self-exploration. The Imrie and Wallbridge Garden Court Tour engaged over 251 Edmontonians in architectural heritage and its intersections with Queer women's perspectives, while pop-up exhibitions at the Royal Alberta Museum, K-Days, and Art Gallery of Alberta engaged over 890 Edmontonians. 24 new stories were commissioned.
- **Community Engagement and Accessibility:** Edmonton Heritage Council prioritized supporting the telling of diverse and underrepresented stories in Edmonton, capturing and showcasing impactful stories that expand "what Edmonton's heritage is." The increased number of Edmontonians engaging in Edmonton City as Museum Project (ECAMP) initiatives demonstrates successful progress in broadening the platform.

Measurement: The combined attendance of over 1,140 participants at Edmonton City as Museum Project (ECAMP) events shows strong community interest and engagement with diverse cultural heritage stories, while the prioritization of underrepresented narratives has expanded Edmonton's conception of heritage.

Ambition 3: A Thriving and Well-Funded Arts and Heritage Ecosystem

Aim 7: *Arts and heritage practitioners are economically resilient*

Support has focused on providing sustainable funding and building capacity for heritage work through grants, professional development, and organizational support.

Action 7.1: *Increase investment in Edmonton's heritage through the Edmonton Heritage Council's Community Investment Program (HCIP)*

- **Heritage Community Investment Program (HCIP)** funded 26 projects, 10 Career Development applications, and provided operating funds to 9 organizations (just under \$700,000). Although the amount our applicants requested exceeds our funding capacity, we awarded 25-45 per cent of the total requests for project grants. 50-67 per cent of our project funding is awarded to equity deserving communities.
- **Fair Compensation Practices** are prioritized by providing protocol to Elders and helpers, supporting local artists and practitioners, and advocating for better compensation in the heritage sector. We pay Edmonton City as Museum Project (ECAMP) contributors, tour developers/guides, juries/review panels, and ensure our own staff are paid equitably. In 2024, work commenced to develop a heritage practitioners pay scale.

Measurement: Success is measured through the continued support for heritage projects that enrich Edmonton's stories, connect the world to our unique narratives, and provide economic opportunities for heritage practitioners.

Aim 8: *New and existing arts and heritage organizational capacity enables innovation and builds resilience in the sector*

Edmonton Heritage Council has worked to strengthen the overall heritage sector through organizational support, innovative approaches, and capacity building.

Action(s) 8.1: *Increase heritage sector capacity through training and mentorship*

- **Edmonton City as Museum Project (ECAMP) Youth Writer Workshop** was launched to increase younger heritage practitioners' skills in heritage writing and working with archives. One participant shared that "the program exceeded my expectations... a chance to make connections and discuss research methodology and the ethics of writing and research." Edmonton Heritage Council will continue to create high-quality skill development programs in the future.
- **Change Capital Grants** funding stream helps organizations develop sustainability and resilience. In 2024, support was provided for strategic planning and website projects. Edmonton Heritage Council will review this granting program in 2025 to ensure it delivers on the sector's actual needs for long-term stability.

Measurement: The success of the Youth Writers workshop is demonstrated through participant feedback indicating increased skills and understanding of research

methodologies. The organization's capacity-building approach is measured through the development of new funding streams and professional development opportunities.

2025 Edmonton Heritage Council Strategic Priorities

The Edmonton Heritage Council board of directors has established key priorities for 2025 based on an October 2024 strategic session. Their highest priority aims include strengthening heritage leaders' involvement in civic planning processes, enhancing economic resilience for heritage practitioners through sustainable funding and fair compensation standards, building organizational capacity to support innovation in the sector, and fostering a sense of belonging through expanded storytelling initiatives that connect Edmontonians to their heritage. Additional priorities focus on removing barriers to participation in cultural experiences, fostering global exchange of heritage ideas, and bringing heritage experiences directly into neighborhoods.

Other Updates

Beyond these existing aims from the Connections & Exchanges framework, the Edmonton Heritage Council has identified new strategic directions including developing a formal government relations strategy, creating better alignment between heritage organizations, clarifying roles with the Edmonton Historical Board (potentially exploring merger options), establishing a fund development strategy to augment public funding, implementing relationship-based consultation with stakeholders, and providing targeted support for heritage practitioners to identify new opportunities throughout Edmonton. These priorities reflect both the organization's ongoing commitment to their established framework and their adaptation to changing political and operational realities.