



Canadian Association for
Conservation of Cultural Property
Association canadienne pour la
conservation et la restauration
des biens culturels

Canadian Museum Policy Review

Key Advocacy Points

Funding and Access to Conservation

The CAC / CAPC *Canadian Collection Care Survey*¹ showed the need for conservation, with 89% of respondents (377 responses) indicating that part of their collections needed conservation treatment to be used (for research, access, loan, exhibition, etc.). However, 74% of respondents (379 responses) do not have a conservation professional on staff, and 53% of respondents (389 responses) do not hire conservation professionals on contract, mainly because they cannot afford to do so (72% of respondents, 259 responses).

The Federal Government provides funding for conservation services specifically through the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI), which provides professional conservation services as one of the three core areas of activity comprising their mission and mandate. CCI accepts applicants based upon both meeting the requirement of “the significance of the object/collection/facility to the country, region or community”, and based upon institutional capacity. The CCI does not have the capacity to accept all service requests that meet its assessment criteria. As a result, annual public calls for applications only include CCI conservation labs that have the resources to provide services. For instance, in 2022, only the Paper, Book and Photographs Lab services were advertised; and from the applications received between 2013 and 2018, CCI refused 43% of conservation treatment requests, and only accepted 48% of facility assessments requests and 56% of regional workshops requests. Finally, part of CCI’s services cost is at the charge of the beneficiary institution, which can be a barrier for small to medium sized institutions.

Access to conservation services is disparate throughout the country. A problem which has recently been aggravated by the closure of Parks Canada Regional Labs, executed in an effort to centralize all storage and conservation services in the National Capital Region. Consequently, many Canadian regions and national heritage sites outside of major metropolitan areas have limited access to

¹ Canadian Association for Conservation of Cultural Property and Canadian Association of Professional Conservators, *Canadian Collection Care Survey*, 2018, [Available online](#).

conservation services, and many conservation professionals previously employed in the Parks Canada Regional Labs had to leave the region to find work, augmenting the lack of access to conservation services in these areas and exacerbating existing challenges museums are facing to preserve their collections.

Recommendations:

- Allocate conservation specific funding to cultural heritage institutions in order to mitigate risks to collections, thereby preventing damage from occurring, and ensuring the preservation of collections.
- Pool conservation resources regionally/provincially, as suggested in Recommendation #14 of the 2018 Report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.² A regional/provincial conservation staff could manage preservation and conservation projects for several small to medium sized cultural institutions.

Inclusion, Diversity and Equity

The Ministry of Heritage has noted a lack of diversity in the field of cultural heritage, with 4% visible minorities workers in heritage compared to 22% in the general population.³

This low diversity in the heritage sector can be partially attributed to the field's employment environment, which has many conservation professionals working in unstable contract work, low-paid or unpaid positions that do not account for the length and cost of studies required to work in conservation, nor for the cost of living in metropolitan centres where cultural institutions are located. As a result, conservation professionals require a strong financial support system to stay in the field.

In this regard, the Young Canada Works (YCW) Program, through the Summer Jobs and Building Careers in Heritage programs, is crucial in the heritage sector to help fund positions for emerging conservation professionals, which provides opportunities to gain experience during or after their

² Recommendation #14: "The Committee recommends that the Department of Canadian Heritage create an incentive to encourage museums to pool resources and physical infrastructure, in areas such as storage facilities, marketing plans, insurance policies and other expenses", from Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, *Moving Forward - Towards a Stronger Canadian Museum Sector*, Report 12, 2018, [Available online](#).

³ Ministry of Canadian Heritage, Canadian Museum Policy Review Information Session, October 18, 2022.

studies. It is also very valuable for the institutions hiring the emerging professional who can then access qualified workers. However, the feedback that CAC has gotten from its membership, conservation professionals in Canada, as well as other professionals in the heritage sector is that it is hard to find applicants for YCW positions and one of the main reasons is because of the age limit.⁴ To apply for a YCW position, candidates must be between the ages of 16 and 30, which does not acknowledge the time required to complete specialized studies in heritage (two to six or more years post-secondary education). As a result, many heritage and conservation professionals graduate after 30. Furthermore, the YCW Program requires applicants to be full-time students, limiting part-time students - due to disabilities or other unfavorable life circumstances - from accessing the program altogether. Lastly, the YCW Program requires emerging conservation professionals to be supervised by qualified conservation professionals which many small to medium sized cultural institutions do not have access to.

Recommendations:

- Provide livable wages and benefits, based on location, for all conservation positions, including internships and entry level positions.
- Remove the current age requirement for the YCW Program. Alternatively, the program could be open to people currently enrolled in school, intending to return to school, or with less than 3 years post-grad for the student program and 5 years post-grad for graduate program.

Reconciliation

The Canadian Museums Association's (CMA) recent report, *Moved to Action*,⁵ describes the Museums Assistance Program, the Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN), and the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI) - products of the *Federal Museums Policy* - as being the foundation of the conservation field in Canada. Fifty years ago, rather than turning to Indigenous views and perspectives in the shaping of the conservation field, "[t]he priority was with recruiting foreign conservators from abroad, especially from the United Kingdom, who arrived here with their colonial mindsets as part of their conservation practice" (p. 18).

⁴ Museum Labour, *Young Canada Works Survey*, Unpublished data, January 2023.

⁵ Canadian Museum Association, *Moved to Action: Activating UNDRIP in Canadian Museums*, 2022, [Available online](#).

It is no surprise that the exclusion of Indigenous voices from Canada’s national narrative has extended materially to the way in which Indigenous belongings and ancestral Indigenous human remains are cared for and preserved. Conservation practices have developed in response to how museums have traditionally interpreted material culture and as a result, have aimed to keep objects static, privileging material aspects over intangible qualities. This exclusionary, settler-colonial bias has and may continue to lead to incorrect documentation of Indigenous belongings, unintentional damage to culturally specific elements of an object, loss of intangible cultural material, and handling practices that are culturally disrespectful and considered spiritually harmful. It can also create significant barriers in the community’s or rights holder’s ability to access their belongings, many of which were taken from them under duress.

Fifty-years later, we find ourselves in a position where a deep and widespread unsettling of settler-colonial practice within the Canadian conservation field is needed in order to respect the distinct rights of Indigenous Peoples. The conservation profession is actively shifting in recognition of this but support is required for further guidance by Indigenous Peoples. The CAC established a (Re)conciliation Working Group (RWG) to advocate for change and to develop resources so that conservators can act upon the recommendations made by Indigenous-led organizations, developing conservation theory, and the CMA’s report. Fundamentally, conservators need to relinquish control over the preservation of Indigenous belongings and defer to the authority and expertise of Indigenous rights holders. This is especially crucial given that the suggested standard of practice for museums is to “move forward as though all [Indigenous] belongings are to be returned to Indigenous Nations until determined otherwise through community consent” (p. 41). Increasing Indigenous control of the conservation process requires meaningful relationship building and compensation.

Recommendations:

- Develop a Partnership Development funding program through Canadian Heritage, whereby Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultural heritage organizations can explore the development of collaborative preservation projects. The focus would be on relationship-building.
- Prioritize the hiring of Indigenous conservators and/or knowledge-holders who could support conservation in leadership positions at all the museums and the CCI.
- Decentralize Canadian Heritage funding for conservation. Provide funding to regional/provincial institutions for the hiring of conservation staff.⁶ Regional/provincial

⁶ See “Funding and Access to Conservation” section of this document.

conservation staff can respond better to the needs of local Indigenous communities, and could provide capacity building and training opportunities.

- Develop a dedicated funding initiative for post-secondary training, specifically for Indigenous students, to pursue conservation and conservation science.⁷ This could be a joint initiative between Canadian Heritage, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council.
- Provide funding for the development of training designed and led by Indigenous cultural heritage professionals, such as the Indigenous Heritage Circle (IHC), that would teach conservators and conservation scientists about Indigenous cultural heritage and preservation practices. This training should be developed as a professional development tool for conservators and conservation scientists who need to unsettle their practice, and also be used by the conservation training programs in Canada.
- Fund the creation of a fully independent Indigenous-led national cultural museum/facility with a conservation function including traditional care.

Specific to Repatriation:

- Develop a federal act and funding stream which supports community-led repatriation of ancestral Indigenous human remains and cultural objects and respects Indigenous rights and sovereignty. With the understanding that repatriation means to fully give back with no strings attached, Indigenous communities should have access to a conservator (if they so choose) to help provide information and compile documentation about their belongings while they were held at an institution, as well as to facilitate pesticide testing if it is required.

⁷ There are already some established pre-program internships for Indigenous peoples interested in pursuing studies in conservation and other museum professions. For example, the Canadian Museum of History's [Indigenous Internship Program](#) and the [Indigenous Internship Program](#) co-developed by the Musqueam Indian Band, the Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre, the Haida Gwaii Museum, the U'mista Cultural Society, the Nlaka'pamux Nation, the Coqualeetza Cultural Society, and the Museum of Anthropology at UBC. Sustained funding is crucial for these initiatives. However, funding should be made available for Indigenous students who choose to pursue conservation and conservation science training, which is often at the graduate level.

- Fund and establish a program for pesticide⁸ analysis for Indigenous belongings in museums that is entirely free for Indigenous communities. The program should follow the principles of free, prior, and informed consent.
- Mandate that all non-Indigenous museums provide an open-access list of Indigenous belongings in their collection to the IHC and CHIN prior to being considered for federal funding.⁹ The IHC administration should be fully funded.
- Fund community-led preservation projects post-repatriation. Projects could include, for example, facilities upgrades, preventive conservation training, and other outreach opportunities.

⁸ Historically, museums often used organic (e.g., naphthalene and DDT) and inorganic (e.g., heavy metals such as mercury, lead, and arsenic) pesticides to mitigate pest infestation within their collections. Pesticide residues can be toxic and cause serious health issues. Indigenous communities should be informed of these hazards, and as such, pesticide analysis has become a common step within the repatriation process. The identification of pesticides requires chemical analysis, which can be very costly. As outlined in the CCI's policy on cost recovery, the CCI currently charges all clients, including Indigenous clients, a minimum of \$1,000 per staff member for on-site pesticide analysis. CCI does analyze pesticide residue swabs that fall within its mandate free-of-charge, but there is limited capacity to run these samples. CCI commissioned guidelines in 2021 that were developed for human health impact of pesticide residues on objects, which are relevant for handling objects outside of museum settings, with an emphasis on repatriated objects. These guidelines do not fix the problem of a funding gap for analysis of pesticide residues on Indigenous objects. For more information on pesticide residues see "Pesticides", National Museum of the American Indian, <<https://americanindian.si.edu/explore/collections/conservation/pesticides>>, Accessed February 7, 2023.

⁹ This would create incentive for non-Indigenous museums to do the work that needs to be done so that Indigenous communities can know where their belongings are. A centralized system could allow communities to wait until they are ready to take on the immense task of returning belongings and ancestors when the time is right for them. The [Reciprocal Research Network](#) is a great example of a centralized system for locating First Nations items from the Northwest Coast.