



# Create. Connect. Grow.

A Plan for Culture in Thunder Bay

# Zhitoon. Anakoobideh. Maachiigiih.

Inakoonigehwin Bimaadiziwin Omaaw  
Anemiki Wequedong

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April 2025

Prepared by:



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# Acknowledgements

The City of Thunder Bay would like to thank the many diverse voices that contributed to the development of this Plan: *Create, Connect, Grow: A Plan for Culture in Thunder Bay*. The many insights, experiences, and feedback shared throughout the course of the culture planning process have been invaluable in shaping a direction for arts, culture, and heritage in Thunder Bay grounded in unity, collaboration, and continuous improvement. Special thanks to the Steering Committee for their dedication and input throughout this process. The City would also like to specially thank Knowledge Keeper Member, Douglas Gagnon, for providing the Anishnaabemowin and syllabic translations presented in this document.

## Land Acknowledgement

Thunder Bay is located on the traditional land of the Anishnawbe and is land where Indigenous peoples have inhabited and gathered for time immemorial. Originally known as Anemki Wequedong, Thunder Bay rests on the Treaty Territory of the Fort William First Nation, signatories to the Robinson-Superior Treaty in 1850. This land also borders on Treaty 3, Treaty 5, and Treaty 9 land, and many Indigenous peoples from these areas now also reside within the city.

It is through the contribution of many First Nations and Métis peoples that Thunder Bay has become a thriving community. The City honours the contributions First Nations and Métis peoples have made to the community and as they guide Thunder Bay towards a place of reconciliation, growth, and friendship. It is the City's hope that this Culture Plan is one that lifts up all cultures in a way that reflects unity, respect, and knowledge.

As part of this commitment, the City recognizes the vital role of Indigenous artists, creators, and cultural leaders in shaping Thunder Bay's identity. This plan seeks to enhance Indigenous cultural spaces and presence, creating an environment where Indigenous culture is celebrated, acknowledged, and integrated into the community's growth.

## Equity Statement

The City of Thunder Bay Recreation & Culture Division values the contributions of residents and visitors of all backgrounds, abilities, and diverse identities. We are committed to providing inclusive, diverse, equitable, and accessible processes, programs, and services. We strive to identify and address barriers by questioning our ideas, beliefs, and biases, and by acknowledging the historical perspectives that contribute to systemic barriers. We encourage submissions and participation from Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, racialized communities, newcomers, women, and members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. We aspire to improve access and service where needed and welcome constructive feedback.



# Executive Summary

## The Culture Plan at-a-Glance

### Vision:

In Thunder Bay, we envision culture at the core of everyday life. Our city is recognized and celebrated as an Indigenous gathering place, and a place where diverse traditions and heritage converge to bring us all together (Maamawe). With a thriving cultural landscape that proudly celebrates its exceptional talent, heritage, and programming, Thunder Bay is a dynamic, year-round destination for both residents and visitors.

The following is a summary of the key pillars and objectives identified in the Culture Plan.

### Pillar 1: Celebration & Promotion

#### Mamakadendan Dagoo Waabidehyawmin

##### Objectives

- 1.1:** Integrate arts, culture, and heritage into the narrative of Thunder Bay.
- 1.2:** Increase knowledge of and access to information about arts and culture activities locally.
- 1.3:** Promote Thunder Bay as an arts and culture destination for tourists.
- 1.4:** Showcase and celebrate the diversity of cultures in Thunder Bay.

##### Outcomes

- Increased awareness, reputation, and recognition of Thunder Bay's diverse arts, culture, and heritage.
- Increased engagement on the City's community channels.
- Increased pride in local arts, culture, and heritage among community members.
- Increased participation in events and arts, culture, and heritage programs.
- Increased number of tourists in Thunder Bay.

## Pillar 2: Spaces & Places

### Daawamagad Dagoo Achigmigad

#### Objectives

- 2.1:** Activate the Baggage Building Arts Centre (BBAC) as a centralized hub for arts, culture, and heritage and a draw for visitors to the area.
- 2.2:** Enhance public art and creative placemaking within the city.
- 2.3:** Honour and recognize Indigenous presence, history, and culture throughout the city.
- 2.4:** Support sector access to creative space and year-round opportunity.
- 2.5:** Preserve the natural and built heritage of Thunder Bay, and integrate culture and heritage into urban design.

#### Outcomes

- Increased foot-traffic in and regular use of the BBAC.
- Increased number of public art and creative placemaking activations throughout Thunder Bay, and in particular, Indigenous-led activations.
- Greater public understanding of Indigenous heritage and culture.
- Increased number of arts, culture, and heritage integrations in urban design, placemaking, and beautification projects.
- Increased awareness and use of existing spaces in Thunder Bay for arts and cultural use by both the public and the sector.

## Pillar 3: Community Connection

### Anakay Dinakii

#### Objectives

- 3.1:** Ensure a variety of year-round arts and culture programming and experiences for all.
- 3.2:** Build a more engaged and connected community through arts, culture and heritage.
- 3.3:** Strengthen partnerships to activate public spaces across the city.
- 3.4:** Address barriers to access to promote wider participation in cultural activities and running community events.

#### Outcomes

- Improved well-being, quality of life, and civic pride among Thunder Bay residents.
- Greater awareness of volunteer opportunities and increased volunteerism for organizations.
- Increased participation in events and arts, cultural, and heritage programming – especially among youth and seniors.
- Increased number of neighbourhoods with arts, culture, and heritage activations.
- Increased satisfaction among community event organizers with City support and services.
- Increase in public satisfaction with quality and accessibility of City-run events.

## Pillar 4: Honouring & Supporting Indigenous Art, Culture, & Heritage

### Manadendan Dagoo Wiidokadan Anishinaabe Bimaadiziwin

#### Objectives

- 4.1** Collaborate on purpose-built space for the Indigenous community.
- 4.2:** Increase economic opportunities for Indigenous artists and organizations.
- 4.3:** Cultivate Thunder Bay into a centre for Indigenous gathering and knowledge.
- 4.4:** Celebrate and support the vitality and diversity of Indigenous culture and events.
- 4.5:** Enhance public education and understanding of Thunder Bay's shared history and Indigenous culture.

#### Outcomes

- Improved quality of life and well-being for Indigenous community members.
- Enhanced reputation of Thunder Bay as hub for Indigenous gathering in the region.
- Increased public knowledge and understanding of Indigenous culture.
- Increase in number and success of Indigenous artists and organizations.
- Increase in public awareness of Indigenous contributions (both economic and social) to the community.
- Increase in number of cultural initiatives identified and developed to advance Truth and Reconciliation efforts.
- Strengthened relations between the City and Indigenous partners.

## Pillar 5: Leadership & Support

### Ogemahwin Dagoo Wiidookagehwin

#### Objectives

- 5.1:** Facilitate shared services and knowledge sharing across the sector.
- 5.2:** Galvanize financial support for the sector.
- 5.3:** Strengthen City capacity and enhance awareness and transparency around City support.
- 5.4:** Foster growth of artistic talent and the creative economy.

#### Outcomes

- Increased amount of resource sharing and number of cross-sector collaborations.
- Increased public awareness and understanding of the value of arts, culture, and heritage.
- Increased sector capacity in terms of volunteer and staff resources.
- Improved business skill development among the sector.
- Increased sector satisfaction with City support.
- Greater City capacity to support arts, culture, and heritage, and plan more effectively for City-led events.
- Increased audience development for local talent.
- Enhanced reputation and positive narrative of Thunder Bay.

# Background

A bustling city on the edge of Lake Superior, Thunder Bay is a blend of incredible natural landscapes, rich heritage, and a dynamic arts and culture scene. The amalgamation of Port Arthur and Fort William in 1970 marked an important milestone, transforming the city into what is now known as Thunder Bay. The city also holds significance in Northwestern Ontario, which stems from its roots as a vital hub during the fur trade in the 17th century. To this day, Thunder Bay continues to serve as the economic heart of the region and a central point of connection to the rest of the province.

The history of the land on which Thunder Bay exists extends much further back beyond the last four centuries. Located on the traditional land of the Anishnawbe, this land has been inhabited by Indigenous peoples for time immemorial. Even now, Thunder Bay is home to a significant number of Indigenous peoples, with 12% of the population in the Thunder Bay Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) being of Indigenous ancestry – considerably higher than the provincial average of 1%.<sup>1</sup> The city has also continued to evolve with several diverse cultures and diasporas now also calling Thunder Bay home, including a sizable Finnish, Italian, Indian, and Ukrainian presence – all of which have helped shaped the city's built heritage, language, cultural events, and cuisine. The evolution of the city's demographics continues to strengthen and weave new cultural perspectives into its social fabric.

While the the population of Thunder Bay (approx. 100,000) has remained steady over the past nine years, the Thunder Bay CMA has grown more diverse since 2016, particularly with a growing South Asian community, and driven in part by a number of international students welcomed into the city each year. Moreover, the City – through its new Growth Department – is developing a plan aimed at growing Thunder Bay's population and tax base.

<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada Census Profile 2021. It is expected that the percentage of the population with Indigenous ancestry is higher than officially reported.

It is in this context that the City of Thunder Bay has embarked on a new Municipal Culture Plan: *Create, Connect, Grow: A Plan for Culture in Thunder Bay*. Just as Thunder Bay is a point of convergence in the region; arts, culture, and heritage too plays a connecting role for the community and the region and presents opportunities for growth. It both preserves the past and inspires the future and celebrates uniqueness while building shared community identity.

Aligning with the City's current Strategic Plan, *Maamawe, Growing Together, Create, Connect, Grow* puts forth a renewed vision and direction to guide the City's delivery of cultural services for all those who live, work, and play in Thunder Bay. This plan is meant to be a living document with a primary focus of 3-5 years that can be updated over a 10-year span. The directions laid out aspire to usher in a new chapter of connection and prosperity for the city facilitated through its arts, culture, and heritage.



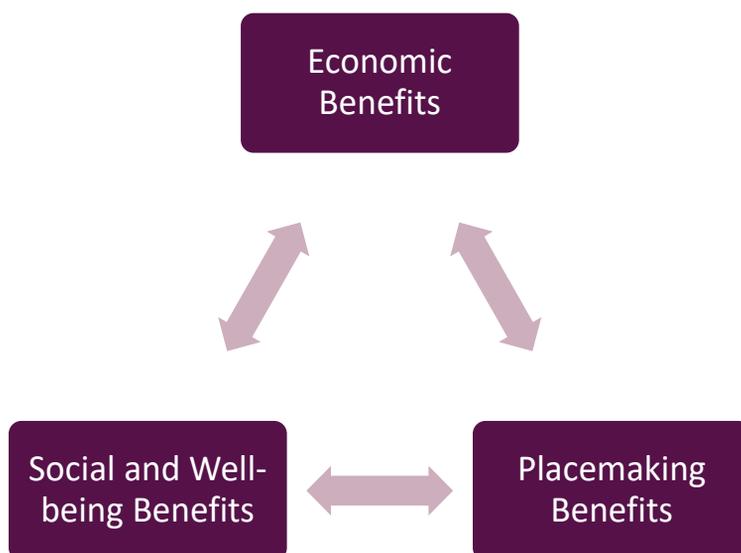
Photo: Women's History Art Bus, temporary art project

# The Benefits of Arts, Culture, & Heritage

Arts, culture, and heritage in Thunder Bay encompasses a wide range of activities including events, visual art, craft, literature, dance, music, theatre, film and media, culinary arts, among other forms of cultural or artistic expression. It also includes broad activations such as public art, as well as historic sites, and natural and built heritage assets.

When asked to describe arts, culture, and heritage, those in Thunder Bay revealed a key characteristic: potential. Arts, culture, and heritage present opportunities for the city to cultivate and showcase a unique identity and to reach greater economic growth through cultural tourism.

Investing in arts, culture, and heritage is in the best interest of any city. It brings a number of wide-reaching benefits that not only contribute to a city's economic prosperity but also enriches the lives of residents, fostering a vibrant, inclusive, and culturally rich community.



## Economic Benefits

The cultural sector contributes to the economy in any city through gross-domestic product (GDP), tax revenues, job creation, and tourism attraction. Within the province, the arts and culture sector comprised 3.5%, or \$28.7 billion, of Ontario's total GDP and supported 301,495 jobs in 2021. The sector not only generates employment opportunities in arts fields but also in supporting industries such as hospitality, retail, and transportation – demonstrating the direct and indirect channels through which arts, culture, and heritage bolster a city's economy and promote growth. Moreover, a vibrant arts, culture, and heritage scene can be a major draw for tourists, leading to increased spending on accommodation, dining, shopping, and other entertainment. Tourists who travel to engage in arts and culture have been shown to spend more and stay longer in their destination, compared to non-arts and culture visitors.<sup>2</sup> Overall, trips made for arts and culture on average have three times the economic impact compared to non-arts and culture trips in Ontario.<sup>3</sup>



Photo: Waverly Park Hogarth Fountain

## Placemaking Benefits

Investing in arts, culture, and heritage also builds opportunity for creative placemaking. Visual indicators of a city's heritage and cultural activity through various placemaking and public art installations can help define a city's identity, creating a unique brand that attracts residents, visitors, and business investment. Moreover, cultural spaces help to enrich the quality of public spaces, making them more attractive, welcoming, and livable. Arts and culture can also revitalize neighbourhoods and previously underdeveloped areas in a city by attracting shops to open-up near key cultural destinations and assets.

<sup>2,3</sup> Ontario Arts Council, [New report: Arts and culture tourism in Ontario has triple the economic impact.](#)

## Social & Well-Being Benefits

Investing in arts, culture and heritage works to advance two specific UN Sustainable Development Goals:

**Goal 3: Good Health and Well-Being** – Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

**Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities** – Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

Cultural activities and events bring various people in a community together, helping to foster a greater sense of belonging, shared understanding, and social cohesion. Moreover, participating in cultural programs and taking in heritage sites offer educational opportunities for all ages and encourages creativity, curiosity, and cultural appreciation. Engaging in arts and culture has also been connected to improved well-being in a community by reducing feelings of social isolation and improving community cohesion. In fact, a number of programs exist in Ontario where medical professionals prescribe participation in cultural activities as an intervention for improved mental health.<sup>4</sup> Overall, more vibrant cultural activity in a city leads to a better quality of life for residents, creates more connected and resilient communities, and also makes a city a more attractive place to live and visit. Additionally, cultural activity and creative placemaking (incorporating arts, culture and heritage into urban planning and design) can make for a safer city by attracting more foot traffic to places in and around the community.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Alliance for Healthier Communities, [Social Prescribing in Ontario Progress Report](#).

<sup>5</sup> As an example, Bloomberg Philanthropies' Asphalt Art Initiative supports the creation of [public art interventions to improve street safety](#).



# Arts, Culture, & Heritage in Thunder Bay

The directions laid out in this strategy build upon Thunder Bay's many strengths in arts, culture, and heritage.

**A varied and vibrant arts and culture scene:** Thunder Bay boasts a diverse and lively arts and culture scene, driven by the diversity of its residents, its many cultural organizations, strong community-led initiatives and organizations, as well as City-led initiatives. The City currently hosts a number of major events, such as Canada Day, Live on the Waterfront, Snow Day, Family Day Powwow, and Culture Days. Thunder Bay is also home to a variety of cultural spaces where the community can engage in cultural activities including – but not limited to – Marina Park, Goods and Co., local theatres, heritage sites and museums, and galleries. This vibrancy is also evident in the diverse culinary scene across the city.

**Built heritage:** Thunder Bay has many spaces of cultural, historic, and architectural significance and interest. The city is home to twenty-six formally designated municipal heritage properties including the Pagoda, the Chippewa Park Carousel, and the Thunder Bay Museum building. These spaces are visual representations of the city's history and help to contribute to the unique character of Thunder Bay.

**Rich local history:** The land has deep Indigenous roots that can be traced back through centuries, additionally, Thunder Bay bears significant history as a major trading hub during the fur trade, and is the birthplace of the iconic red poppy adorned on Remembrance Day. This rich history is shared and celebrated throughout the city's many museums and historic sites, including Fort William Historical Park – one of North America's largest living history sites.

**Strong local support:** Arts and culture in Thunder Bay receives support through grants and funding programs, such as those managed by the City through the Community Youth & Cultural Funding Program (CYCFP) and through the Community Economic Development Commission (CEDC). In 2024, CYCFP provided over \$2.25 million in funding to local cultural organizations, equating to roughly \$20 per capita. The Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) generates approximately \$2 million annually, half of which is managed by the CEDC to support tourism-related initiatives, which include a number of cultural events that draw tourists to the city and contribute to Thunder Bay’s economic growth.<sup>6</sup>

**Accessibility of art:** The City has established a number of public art initiatives in recent years to help breathe life into the city, creating opportunities for local artists, and providing visual indicators that art and culture lives in Thunder Bay. Recent celebrated initiatives have included temporary art installations, such as the Art Bus and traffic light box initiatives. The waterfront is also home to a number of significant permanent public art installations.

**Representation of Indigenous art:** While there is more work to do, Indigenous art is represented through spaces and venues including the Spirit Garden, Thunder Bay Art Gallery, Definitely Superior Art Gallery, and the Painted Turtle Shop.

<sup>6</sup> City of Thunder Bay, [CEDC Launches New Tourism Support Programs](#)



Photo: Maamawe Art Bus

**A growing waterfront:** The city is beginning to attract more tourists coming off of cruise ships, landing right on the waterfront. The waterfront redevelopment underway – which will tie together a number of heritage sites and cultural institutions, including the future site of a new Thunder Bay Art Gallery – paints a promising future and creates opportunities for arts and culture right on Thunder Bay’s shores.

**Proximity to nature:** Thunder Bay is known for its beautiful landscapes and is a prime destination for outdoor enthusiasts. The proximity to nature has inspired stories for generations – such as Indigenous stories tied to Nanabijou (Sleeping Giant) – and continue to play an integral role in inspiring local arts and culture.

**Regional network:** Thunder Bay serves as a central hub within a broader Northwestern Ontario network. The city is strengthened by a supportive network of partners across the region, providing opportunity to collaborate to collectively advance and promote arts, culture, and heritage. Outside the region, the City is also participates in wider-scale conferences and organizations, such as the [Creative Cities Network](#) and [Festivals & Events Ontario](#).

**Diversity:** Thunder Bay’s rich tapestry of different cultures – including a sizeable Indigenous population and strong Finnish, Italian, Ukrainian, and Indian communities – all contribute to the variety of cultural and culinary experiences available in Thunder Bay. As the population continues to grow, new community members have driven new cultural events. Moreover, Thunder Bay is home to a strong 2SLGBTQ+ community, who puts on Thunder Pride each June. This diversity of cultures and lived experiences makes Thunder Bay a more welcoming environment and helps makes the city a more enjoyable place to live. The City of Thunder Bay continues to be committed to advancing equity and access, by supporting and providing opportunities for equity-deserving groups.

# The Process

*Create, Connect, Grow: A Plan for Culture in Thunder Bay* was developed in close collaboration between Nordicity and the City of Thunder Bay's Recreation and Culture Division. The plan was crafted through a four-phase process, deeply rooted in community engagement from design to delivery.

**Figure 1: Overview of the Culture Plan Process**



The process began with an extensive background research and analysis phase (Phase 1) to build a holistic understanding of Thunder Bay's cultural context. This research involved an internal document review; examining Thunder Bay's local policies; reviewing its arts and cultural assets, services, and programming; and exploring comparable municipalities.

A key part of the process was an extensive engagement strategy that sought input from the sector and the Thunder Bay community (Phase 2) to learn about the current state of arts, culture, and heritage in the city, what a culture plan would need to address, and a future vision for Thunder Bay. The findings from both Phase 1 and Phase 2 were then crafted into a preliminary framework for validation (Phase 3). The framework was presented to Council as an interim touchpoint, and was subsequently brought forth to the public for feedback during Culture Vibes on March 6, 2024 at the Baggage Building Arts Centre. The insights and feedback received through the engagement and validation process has been used to refine the objectives and recommendations presented herein.

**Through engagement and validation touchpoints, the following interest groups were engaged:**

- Internal City stakeholders including roundtables and interviews with City staff, Councillors, committee representatives, and tourism entities.
- Arts, culture, and heritage sector including roundtables and interviews with members of the Arts and Heritage Alliance (AHA), event organizers, artists, heritage and community arts organizations. A sector-wide survey was also distributed through Get Involved Thunder Bay.
- Community interventions, including a youth pop-up at the Kinsmen Centre, pop-ups at Live on the Waterfront and Goods and Co, and a public open house at the Baggage Building Arts Centre on March 5, 2024 to validate the initial framework of the plan. A community-wide survey was also distributed through Get Involved Thunder Bay.
- Indigenous community discussions with various artists, organizations, educators, cultural leaders, and regional bodies including Fort William First Nation, Métis Nation of Ontario, Indigenous Tourism Ontario, and Nishnaabe Aski Nation.



**5 community pop-ups**  
~ 272 engaged



**44 interviews**  
~ 52 engaged



**6 roundtables**  
~ 54 engaged



**1 survey on Get Involved Thunder Bay\***  
~ 78 engaged



**1 open house**  
~ 100 engaged

*\*The survey had targeted questions for both the arts and culture sector, as well as the broader community. The City of Thunder Bay and Nordicity recognize that certain limitations may have prevented individuals from engaging fully through the Get Involved platform, specifically the requirement of creating an account to submit a response .*

# Culture Plan Overview

Beginning with an overarching vision for *Thunder Bay Create, Connect, Grow: A Plan for Culture in Thunder Bay* provides measurable objectives and recommended actions structured under five key pillars.

- **Vision:** An aspirational statement, highlighting what the culture plan will help the City work towards achieving.
- **Pillars:** Broad strategic goals that are designed to help reach the overarching vision.
- **Objectives:** Targeted goals in service of the broader pillars with measurable outcomes.
- **Recommended Actions:** An internal version of the Culture Plan includes actions for the city to undertake (whether as a leader, connector, or supporter) in achieving the objectives.
- **Guiding Principles:** These principles underscore the plan and are woven throughout the objectives and actions, reflecting and reinforcing the City of Thunder Bay's broader values.

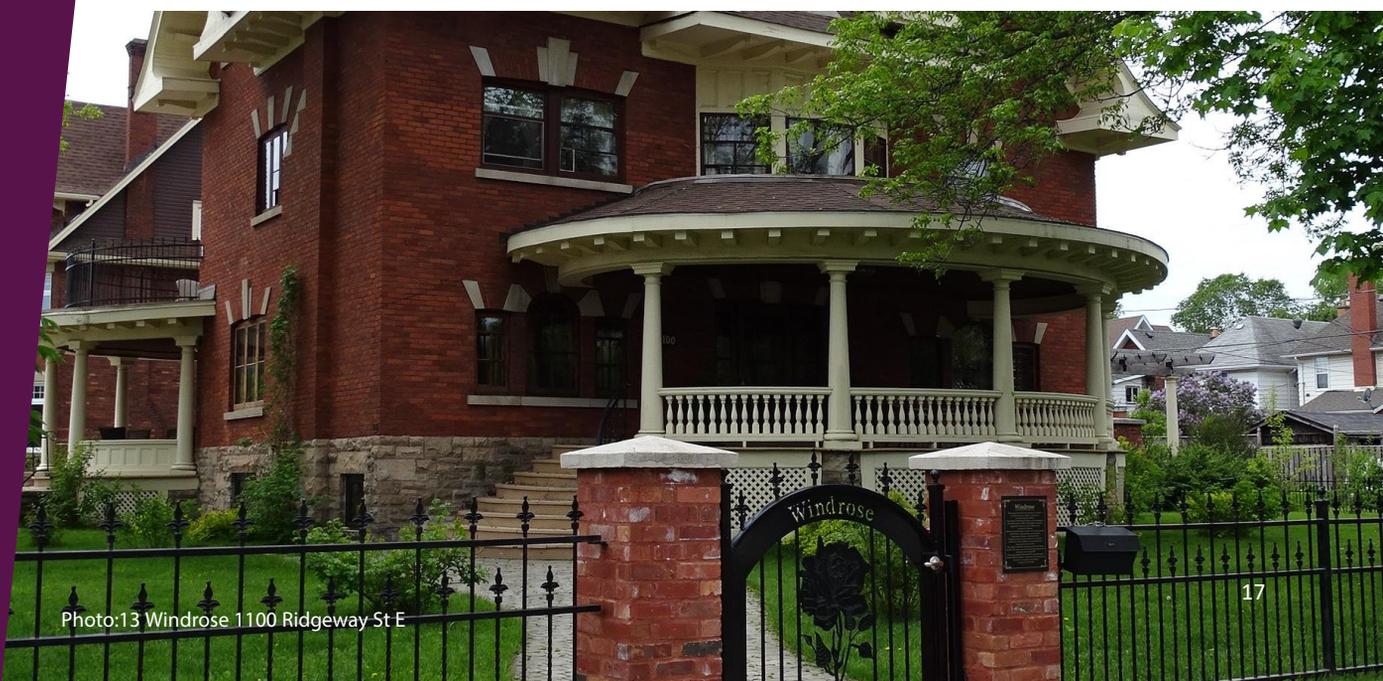


Photo: 13 Windrose 1100 Ridgeway St E



## **Vision for Arts, Culture, & Heritage**

In Thunder Bay, we envision culture at the core of everyday life. Our city is recognized and celebrated as an Indigenous gathering place, and a place where diverse traditions and heritage converge to bring us all together (Maamawe). With a thriving cultural landscape that proudly celebrates its exceptional talent, heritage, and programming, Thunder Bay is a dynamic, year-round destination for both residents and visitors.



## **Guiding Principles**

Arts, culture, and heritage in Thunder Bay:

- Is diverse, equitable, inclusive
- Is accessible to all
- Supports environmental sustainability
- Supports community safety and well-being
- Is constantly innovating
- Tells the stories of the land and community
- Is an essential contributor to economic prosperity
- Is strengthened by a regional approach

## The Pillars

### PILLAR 1

A photograph of a woman in a light-colored, possibly traditional, dress holding a large, light-colored umbrella. The image is semi-transparent and serves as the background for the text.

**Celebration & Promotion**  
**Mamakadendan Dagoo**  
**Waabidehyawmin**

### PILLAR 2

A photograph of a modern, angular building with a dark, textured facade, possibly a museum or cultural center. The image is semi-transparent and serves as the background for the text.

**Spaces & Places**  
**Daawamagad Dagoo**  
**Achigmigad**

### PILLAR 3

A photograph of a person's hands playing a stringed instrument, possibly a harp or a similar traditional instrument. The image is semi-transparent and serves as the background for the text.

**Community Connection**  
**Anakay Dinakii**

### PILLAR 4

A photograph of a person's hands playing a stringed instrument, similar to the one in Pillar 3. The image is semi-transparent and serves as the background for the text.

**Honouring & Supporting**  
**Indigenous Art, Culture, &**  
**Heritage**  
**Manadendan Dagoo**  
**Wiidokadan Anishinaabe**  
**Bimaadiziwin**

### PILLAR 5

A photograph of a woman in a dark jacket speaking into a microphone. The image is semi-transparent and serves as the background for the text.

**Leadership & Support**  
**Ogemahwin Dagoo**  
**Wiidookagehwin**

Pillar 1:

## Celebration & Promotion

LLbUC<sup>a</sup> Cj ·<∧U4P<sup>a</sup>

**Mamakadendan Dagoo  
Waabidehyawmin**



**Purpose:** To increase awareness of cultural activities in Thunder Bay, and continue to build on the visibility of the arts, heritage and cultural assets already established.

Thunder Bay is a diverse community with a vibrant artistic community, and passionate and dedicated citizens that want to share the story of their city. Awareness of all of the arts, culture and heritage activities happening is currently fairly insular. There is an opportunity for more sharing, collaboration, and cross-cultural exchange, and to collectively come together to celebrate all that makes Thunder Bay unique.

The objectives and actions that are part of this pillar will facilitate increased awareness of Thunder Bay’s cultural offering for citizens and visitors alike. This pillar also leverages arts, culture, and heritage to tell a dynamic story of Thunder Bay, to increase local pride, and to solidify arts, culture, and heritage as a reputation-driver for Thunder Bay.

**Tie-in to Strategic Plan:** This pillar advances the City’s goal of “Collaboratively create an attractive and supportive environment where people and businesses can flourish.”

## Objectives

- 1.1:** Integrate arts, culture, and heritage into the narrative of Thunder Bay.
- 1.2:** Increase knowledge of and access to information about arts and culture activities locally.
- 1.3:** Promote Thunder Bay as an arts and culture destination for tourists.
- 1.4:** Showcase and celebrate the diversity of cultures in Thunder Bay.

## Outcomes

- ✓ Increased awareness, reputation, and recognition of Thunder Bay's diverse arts, culture, and heritage across the region.
- ✓ Increased engagement on the City's community channels.
- ✓ Increased pride in local arts, culture, and heritage among community members.
- ✓ Increased participation in events and arts, culture, and heritage programs.
- ✓ Increased number of tourists in Thunder Bay.

Pillar 2:

## Spaces & Places

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**Daawamagad Dagoo Achigmigad**



**Purpose:** To ensure there are spaces for artistic and cultural presentation and creation, and provide places for community members and visitors to engage with arts, culture, and heritage.

There are many spaces within Thunder Bay that showcase art and culture, alongside numerous natural and built heritage sites. At present, there is a need for spaces and facilities that would better enable year-round events and cultural activities, and improved access to creative space among the sector. Additionally, the Baggage Building Arts Centre is currently underutilized but holds ample potential given its prime location on the waterfront. There is also appetite in the community for more public art and beautification efforts to enhance the vibrancy of the city and to celebrate and acknowledge Thunder Bay's Indigenous roots. Arts, culture, and heritage can and should be integrated in all urban design projects, as it is key to fostering a sense of place and belonging within the community.

The objectives and actions outlined in this pillar will lead to increased access to space among the sector and more vibrant visual indicators of cultural activity spread throughout the city. As a result, these outcomes will not only make Thunder Bay a more appealing place to live, work, and play, but also a place where arts and culture can thrive.

**Tie-in to Strategic Plan:** This pillar advances the City's goal of "creating and maintaining strong neighbourhoods and Indigenized spaces where people connect and engage."

## Objectives

- 2.1:** Activate the Baggage Building Arts Centre (BBAC) as a centralized hub for arts, culture, and heritage and a draw for visitors to the area.
- 2.2:** Enhance public art and creative placemaking within the city.
- 2.3:** Honour and recognize Indigenous presence, history, and culture throughout the city.
- 2.4:** Support sector access to creative space and year-round opportunity.
- 2.5:** Preserve the natural and built heritage of Thunder Bay, and integrate culture and heritage into urban design.

## Outcomes

- ✓ Increased foot-traffic in and regular use of the BBAC.
- ✓ Increased number of public art and creative placemaking activations throughout Thunder Bay, and in particular, Indigenous-led activations.
- ✓ Greater public knowledge and understanding of Indigenous heritage and culture.
- ✓ Increased number of arts, culture, and heritage integrations in urban design, placemaking, and beautification projects.
- ✓ Increased awareness and use of existing spaces in Thunder Bay for arts and cultural use by both the public and the sector.

Pillar 3:

## Community Connection

◁σ9 nαP

**Anakay Dinakii**



**Purpose:** To ensure there are diverse opportunities for people to get involved and further integrated into the community (including newcomers, international students, Indigenous adults and youth, and community members from diverse cultural and economic backgrounds and circumstances), and to leverage arts, heritage and culture to foster an increased sense of civic pride, cohesion, and well-being.

In Thunder Bay, there is a variety of diverse, accessible programming, offered by the City and also various community groups offering programming and experiences. Not all programming is as open and accessible as it could be. There are several barriers that this pillar aims to address, including cost; transportation; and programming for a variety of ages, seasons and locations.

The objectives and actions in this pillar will support the City to build greater connection between arts, heritage and culture activities and the Thunder Bay community for an increasingly connected community. As of 2023, immigrants make up nearly 9% of Thunder Bay’s population.<sup>7</sup> Expanding opportunities for the community to be involved and for newcomers to volunteer, gather, and connect will help contribute to more pride in place for residents, and grow Thunder Bay as a great place to live, work, and visit.

**Tie-in to Strategic Plan:** This pillar supports the City’s priority of “collaboratively create an attractive and supportive environment where people and businesses can flourish”.

<sup>7</sup> CBC News, [Newcomers are fueling an African business boom in Thunder Bay, Ont.](#)

## Objectives

- 3.1:** Ensure a variety of year-round arts and culture programming and experiences for all.
- 3.2:** Build a more engaged and connected community through arts, culture and heritage.
- 3.3:** Strengthen partnerships to activate public spaces across the city.
- 3.4:** Address barriers to access to promote wider participation in cultural activities and running community events.

## Outcomes

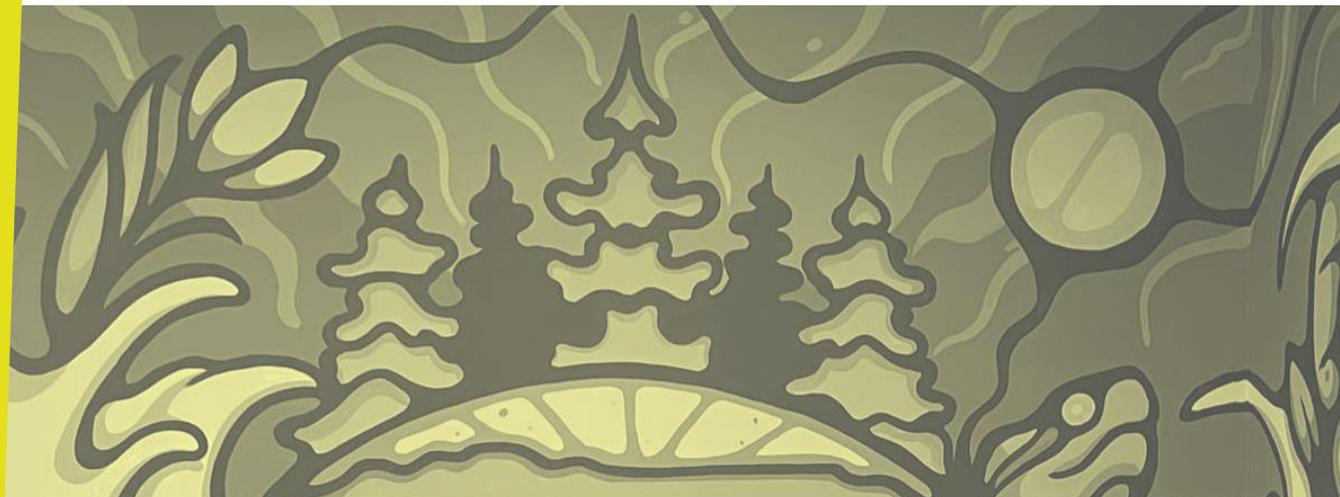
- ✓ Improved well-being, quality of life, and civic pride among Thunder Bay residents.
- ✓ Greater awareness of volunteer opportunities and increased volunteerism for arts, culture, and heritage organizations.
- ✓ Increased participation in events and arts, cultural, and heritage programming – especially among youth and seniors.
- ✓ Increased number of neighbourhoods with arts, culture, and heritage activations.
- ✓ Increased satisfaction among community event organizers with City support and services.
- ✓ Increase in public satisfaction with quality and accessibility of City-run events.

**Pillar 4:**

**Honouring & Supporting  
Indigenous Art, Culture, & Heritage**

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**Manadendan Dagoo Wiidokadan  
Anishinaabe Bimaadiziwin**



**Purpose:** To follow the lead of the local Indigenous community in ensuring there are spaces and opportunities to gather, practice, share, and honouring Indigenous culture within the city.

A vibrant community of Indigenous artists, artisans, musicians, storytellers and organizations contribute significantly to Thunder Bay’s cultural tapestry. However, there is a recognized need to collaborate and further boost their work. As noted through engagements, the Indigenous community strongly desires an Indigenous Cultural Centre and dedicated cultural spaces to gather and serve as a safe space in the community. Additionally, Thunder Bay has the potential of becoming a prominent Indigenous gathering space and hub for Indigenous knowledge not only within the local community, but within the region and beyond. Valuable traditional skills, such as birchbark canoe making, are being actively preserved and revitalized. There is also room to strengthen connections between the City and Fort William First Nation, Nishnawbe Aski Nation, Matawa First Nations, Indigenous Tourism Ontario, as well as various local educational centres including the Northern Nishnawbe Education Council (NNEC), and Indigenous organizations.

The objectives and actions laid out in this pillar will help lead to strengthened representation, acknowledgement, celebration and inclusion of Indigenous culture, shared community recognition and understanding, and improved well-being for Indigenous peoples in Thunder Bay.

**Tie-ins with Strategic Plan and other plans and policies:** This pillar advances the City’s goal of “strengthening the City’s relationships with Indigenous communities, leaders and organizations to advance Truth & Reconciliation priorities together.” This pillar also looks to strengthen the directions laid out in the City’s Indigenous Relations and Inclusion strategy.

The actions in this pillar have also been informed by and will be guided by other commissioned reports and City policies, including:

- [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;](#)
- [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action;](#)
- [Relationship Agreements between the City of Thunder Bay and Indigenous partners.](#)



## Objectives

- 4.1:** Collaborate on purpose-built space for the Indigenous community.
- 4.2:** Increase economic opportunities for Indigenous artists and organizations.
- 4.3:** Cultivate Thunder Bay into a centre for Indigenous gathering and knowledge.
- 4.4:** Celebrate and support the vitality and diversity of Indigenous culture and events.
- 4.5:** Enhance public education and understanding of Thunder Bay's shared history and Indigenous culture.

## Outcomes

- ✓ Improved quality of life and well-being for Indigenous community members.
- ✓ Enhanced reputation of Thunder Bay as hub for Indigenous gathering in the region.
- ✓ Increased public knowledge and understanding of Indigenous culture.
- ✓ Increase in number and success of Indigenous artists and organizations.
- ✓ Increase in public awareness of Indigenous contributions (both economic and social) to the community.
- ✓ Increase in number of cultural initiatives identified and developed to advance Truth and Reconciliation efforts.
- ✓ Strengthened relations between the City and Indigenous partners.

Pillar 5:

## Leadership & Support

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**Ogemahwin Dagoo  
Wiidookagehwin**



**Purpose:** To build capacity to support the arts, heritage and culture sector, and to ensure artists and arts, heritage, and culture organizations have the supports needed to thrive.

The arts, culture, and heritage sector in Thunder Bay is strong and resilient, but are somewhat siloed and disconnected. There is a broader need for a unified voice to champion audience development, advocacy, and capacity building in the sector. Economic opportunities would also help to strengthen the sector, and not all artists are aware of what financial supports exist and how to navigate them. Moreover, the sector points to staff and volunteer capacity challenges, pointing to a need to improve the talent pipeline and secure the future generation of culture workers in the city.

The City of Thunder Bay currently has a small and nimble Recreation and Culture Division that is responsible for the delivery of cultural services. However, a small team means that most staff are pulled away from other core responsibilities to support major events during the busy summer months. Additionally, there is a current capacity challenge with administering grant funding.

Investment (time, resources, support) is necessary to ensure there is continued, ongoing leadership and support. Leadership will need to prioritize arts, culture and heritage, trickling down to cross-departmental collaboration to move initiatives forward. Increased City capacity in grant administration, and running City-led events would have significant impacts on the delivery of cultural services for the sector and community alike.

**Tie-in to Strategic Plan:** This pillar advances the City's goal of "improving access to supports for priority populations to narrow gaps in equity."



## Objectives

- 5.1:** Facilitate shared services and knowledge sharing across the sector.
- 5.2:** Galvanize financial support for the sector.
- 5.3:** Strengthen City capacity and enhance awareness and transparency around City support.
- 5.4:** Foster growth of artistic talent and the creative economy.

## Outcomes

- ✓ Increased amount of resource sharing and number of cross-sector collaborations.
- ✓ Increased public awareness and understanding of the value of arts, culture, and heritage.
- ✓ Increased sector capacity in terms of volunteer and staff resources.
- ✓ Improved business skill development among the sector.
- ✓ Increased sector satisfaction with City support.
- ✓ Greater City capacity to support arts, culture, and heritage, and plan more effectively for City-led events.
- ✓ Increase in audience development for local talent.
- ✓ Enhanced reputation and positive narrative of Thunder Bay.

