



# Royal BC Museum and Archives Official Response

Regarding the Truth and Reconciliation  
Commission's Calls to Action

Compiled by Raymond Frogner, Archivist

Updated August 24, 2016

## ***Executive Overview***

The Royal BC Museum releases its formal public response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Final Report: "Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future."<sup>1</sup> The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has fulfilled its two-part judicial mandate: it produced a broad ranging report detailing the history of the residential school experience for First Nations communities in Canada, and it proposed 94 "Calls to Action," policy and program recommendations conceived to promote the reconciliation of First Nations and settler societies in Canada.

The following outlines the thematic areas and projects that the Royal BC Museum will undertake in response to and aligned with the TRC's recommendations.

### Thematic Response #1: Education

The Royal BC Museum has significant holdings and resources to effectively engage citizens in educational programs concerning First Nations culture and identity. A core component of these programs is the participation of First Nations communities as both teachers and students. Below are three Royal BC Museum programs which address the recommendations of the TRC.

- Program 1: *Reynolds Secondary School (Victoria, BC) Partner Program- 'Youth Echoing Truth'*
- Program 2: *Truth and Reconciliation School Program-Learning Lab*
- Program 3: *Learning Portal*

---

<sup>1</sup> "Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future," Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, (Winnipeg, 2015), <http://bit.ly/1GW4e2e>

## Thematic Response #2: Language

Over many decades, the Royal BC Museum has participated with First Nations communities on numerous collaborative language initiatives. Today, the Royal BC Museum has several ongoing projects that support the use and protection of indigenous languages. Our inherited languages of description and reflection colour the means of cultural engagement. The language initiatives of the Royal BC Museum are therefore some of the most important responses to the TRC.

- Program 1: *Our Living Languages*
- Program 2: *UNESCO Memory of the World Register Application*
- Program 3: *Local Community Initiatives*
- Program 4: *“Quuquatsa: Speaking our own language”* (March 11, 2016)
- Program 5: *UNESCO Memory of the World Register Application*
- Program 6: *Access to Memory (AtoM) and Digital Access*
- Program 7: *A Registry of Language and Cultural Resources*

## Thematic Response #3: Cultural engagement

The creation of knowledge, through its capture, preservation and accessibility, is a fundamental public responsibility of the Royal BC Museum. Our forms of knowledge, with their subjective, overlapping and cross-cultural uses, must occur within a common space of dialogue, discovery and intercultural negotiation and engagement.

The Royal BC Museum will work towards this goal in the projects below.

- Program 1: *Royal BC Museum Policy Review*
- Program 2: *Appraisal of Records of Aboriginal Identity*
- Program 3: *Taxonomies of Knowledge*
- Program 4: *Collaboration, Collections and Research*

## **Context**

As Canada approaches its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Confederation this is a moment to reassess the traditional principles and structures that inform the nation's relationship with First Nations. In particular, the TRC's Final Report asks our public institutions of memory and cultural representation to be brave and bold, to re-imagine indigenous belonging in these national institutions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The Royal BC Museum recognizes the time is appropriate for a broad ranging reassessment of its fundamental role as a public institution of memory and dialogue. The TRC's calls for reconciliation are an opportunity to initiate an encompassing, fundamental shift in our relationship with the indigenous citizens of British Columbia.

The Royal BC Museum should question its dogmas, interrogate our languages of reflection, and reassess our relationships with First Nations' communities. And like the nation's anniversary, the Royal BC Museum should begin with a reassessment of its origin story: when prominent members of local colonial society in 1886 signed a petition to create a museum over concern for the international loss of indigenous cultural artefacts.

A kind of paternalistic concern for the destiny of aboriginal culture was the origin of this institution. However, over time our relationship with First Nations' communities has evolved away from the assimilating control of cultural gatekeepers.

Today, the Royal BC Museum aspires to provide a common space of encounter and negotiation, where our cultural practices overlap, interact and accommodate. This cultural space should be located in local values and traditions. The Institution must reassess its policies beyond the conventional European paradigms of memory and dialogue, such as the privileging of text over other forms of communication and remembrance; the encompassing protocols of prescribed, rigid cultural practice.

### ***A National Groundswell***

In December 2015, the TRC released its final report, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*. The 535-page report is the end product of the 2008 Canadian legal settlement known as the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA).

The agreement created a three-person commission to “redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation.” In response, the TRC worked to assemble a repository of evidence to document the residential school legacy, and identify pathways to reconcile the relationship between indigenous communities and settler society.

Because recognition is the pre-requisite to any reconciliation, the TRC worked diligently to build a thorough narrative of the Canadian residential school legacy. Over six years the Commission held seven four-day national events in

Winnipeg, Inuvik, Halifax, Saskatoon, Montreal, Vancouver, and Edmonton. Approximately 155,000 Canadians attended these events. Over 9,000 former residential school students registered for these gatherings. The Commission also organized 238 days of local hearings in seventy-seven communities across the country.

The TRC in addition supported “town hall” style meetings on the topic of reconciliation in its Victoria regional event in 2012 and in subsequent national events. The Commission also collected over 6750 statements from former students and witnesses associated with the residential school program. This included family members and others who could contribute knowledge of the history of the residential school system.

The TRC also encouraged the gathering of evidence from former staff of residential schools. The TRC's Final Report is the conclusion of a pan-national programme of consultation and dialogue with Canadians from all parts of society and every region. The work of the TRC began with a court assignment, but over six years of community outreach and research it has become clear the Commission's work cast light on a groundswell of national support. The work recognizes not only the traumatic legacy of the Indian Residential Schools program, but the need to reimagine relationships with the First Nations of Canada.

### ***Recognition***

Led by the Prime Minister's formal apology, Canadian society has collectively recognized, forcefully and thoroughly, that the Canadian government's residential school programme was a project for the cultural assimilation and

erasure of indigenous peoples. Such recognition is the first step toward reconciliation.

In its response to the TRC's national research campaign, Canadian settler society has signalled it is prepared to move beyond historic recognition and atonement to constructing a rehabilitated relationship with First Nations' societies. The scale of national citizen participation in the TRC events proved to be more than a successful public education and research project; it is clear over the last decade that relationships between Canadian settler society and First Nations communities has shifted.

### ***Reconciliation***

Building on this historic recognition, the TRC was also assigned to encourage reconciliation between settler society and First Nations' communities. Accordingly, the TRC concluded its Final Report with 94 recommendations, or "Calls to Action," designed to provide the legal, governmental and social mechanisms for a new era of dialogue, recognition, and accommodation with First Nations' communities.

The intention is to establish the means to inclusively and respectfully engage and represent indigenous constituents of Canadian society. The TRC's six years of work has led Canadians to a simple truth: we are what we choose to remember; but we are also what we choose to forget. Having first urged us towards remembrance, the TRC, through its calls to action, also offers ideas to "give shape and expression to the material, political and legal elements of reconciliation."<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup>*Honouring the Truth*, p. 217.

### ***Next Steps - In Response***

The Royal BC Museum's response addresses the TRC's goals through projects designed to nurture a relationship of reconciliation and partnership with First Nations' communities. Not every "Call to Action" applies to the role of the Royal BC Museum, therefore actions of response are those areas where the Royal BC Museum can make meaningful and purposeful contributions.

These initiatives are not purely a response in apology for the experiences of residential school survivors; these initiatives are measured to move the institution more fully into a "post-apology" era, where First Nations communities and individuals freely participate and contribute to the economy, politics, and civic events of the nation with their identities and cultural values, recognized, secured, and valued.

The institutional responses are arranged into three themes: education, language, and cultural engagement. They reflect the responsibilities of a post-colonial public cultural institution in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The Royal BC Museum's three thematic responses to the TRC's recommendations are as follows.

#### **Thematic Response #1: Education**

The Royal BC Museum has significant holdings and resources to effectively engage citizens in educational programs concerning First Nations culture and identity.



A core component of these programs is the participation of First Nations communities as both teachers and students. Below are three Royal BC Museum educational programs which address the recommendations of the TRC.

**Program 1:** *Reynolds Secondary School (Victoria, BC) Partner Program- 'Youth Echoing Truth'*

The Royal BC Museum's Learning Division is initiating two school projects relating to the TRC in coordination with the flexible studies program at Reynolds Secondary School (Grades 9 and 10). The school's project teams are particularly interested in crafting their engagement with the museum to resonate with youth. The projects open April 14, 2016 and it will be on display for two months.

i. A student-led project team is designing in the Museum's First Peoples' Gallery a project called *94 Calls to Action*. This intervention will include text based 'stepping-stones' on the floor of the gallery inspired by the TRC's 94 "Calls to Action," interpreted through a youth perspective. Each 'stone' will carry an excerpt from one of the "Calls to Action". There will also be a text panel describing the project to visitors.

ii. Working with Songhees' Elder Joan Morris, residential school survivor and the last surviving elder to live on Chatham Island, and Mark Salter, Songhees Nation Wellness Centre Manager, this student-led project will construct a listening booth for the museum galleries.

The recordings in the listening booth will concern Elder Morris' experiences on Chatham Island and in the Nanaimo Residential School Hospital, in addition to her experiences in the Oblate Residential School on Kuper Island. The students on this team will make four visits to Chatham Island with Elder Joan Morris and others from the Songhees Nation as part of the project research and development.

Out of these two Reynolds Secondary School learning projects, a greater relationship has emerged with the Songhees First Nation. This is anticipated to be the start of a rewarding learning collaboration between the secondary school, the Songhees First Nation, and the Royal BC Museum.

**Program 2:** *Truth and Reconciliation School Program-Learning Lab*

In addition to the Reynolds Secondary School TRC initiatives, the Royal BC Museum Learning Division is also supporting a Grade 4 and 5 instructional program on the topic of Truth and Reconciliation. Directed by Cowichan First Nation Museum School Programmer, Hannah Morales, the initiative is described as a learning lab.

This is a student-led, inquiry-based learning project, without a standard lecture format, providing opportunity for open learning about a topic. The school program includes age appropriate facilitated conversations and activities intended for younger students on the topic of the Residential Schools and reconciliation. The program will use the First Peoples' Gallery and Our Living Languages exhibition as a backdrop for this exchange.

### **Program 3: *Learning Portal***

The Royal BC Museum's on-line Learning Portal will add a component addressing the history of Residential Schools.<sup>3</sup> This will also serve as a reference point into greater research in First Nations history, identity, and culture.

The Learning Portal will be available for educators to use in their K-12 curricula supplying content and dialogue on issues including residential school, treaties, and contributions of First Nations communities to the historical development of Canada. It will address identified teacher needs as well as student enabled participation.

### **Thematic Response #2: Language**

Over many decades, the Royal BC Museum has participated with First Nations communities on numerous collaborative language initiatives. Today, the Royal BC Museum has several ongoing projects that support the use and protection of indigenous languages.

### **Program 1: *Our Living Languages***

In 2013-14 The First Peoples' Cultural Council (FPCC) and the Royal BC Museum developed an exhibition titled *Our Living Languages*. The project collaborates with First Nations' communities in their ongoing efforts to revitalize their languages, arts and cultures. In April 2015, this cross-cultural project won the international American Alliance of Museums (AAM) Excellence in Exhibition award.

---

<sup>3</sup> <http://learning.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/>

The Royal BC Museum will continue the *Our Living Languages* exhibition as a part of its official response to the TRC Final Report.

**Program 2:** *UNESCO Memory of the World Register Application*

With the written support of most Band Councils representing the signatory communities to the Vancouver Island Treaties (AKA Douglas Treaties), and the support of the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, the Royal BC Museum proposed the Douglas Treaties as worthy of inscription in the UNESCO Memory of the World Registry.

This advocacy aims to recognize the international cultural and social significance of the 14 treaties signed with First Nations' communities during British Columbia's colonial era. The Royal BC Museum will continue to advocate for the recognition of the treaties' world significance in this international forum.

**Program 3:** *Local Community Initiatives*

The Royal BC Museum continues to promote the revitalization and strengthening of Aboriginal languages through a diverse list of community initiatives including: archaeological site visits, K-12 curriculum development, local municipal consultation, First Nations consultation for preservation of cultural items, ongoing development of significant sites of cultural recognition, and serving at the disposal of First Nations' communities as an information resource on topics of language and culture.

The Royal BC Museum will continue to promote collaborative community initiatives to promote indigenous languages.

**Program 4:** *“Quuquutsa: Speaking our own language”* (March 11, 2016)

As part of the University of Victoria's Ideafest 2016, the Royal BC Museum hosted the *Quuquutsa* event in the *Our Living Languages* exhibition where language learners and activists presented their experiences in the Indigenous Language Mentorship Course.

This event is presented by the Division of Continuing Studies and the Department of Linguistics (University of Victoria), and the Quuquutsa Language Society of the Nuuchahnulth Nations, in partnership with the First Peoples' Cultural Council, and the Royal BC Museum.

**Program 5:** *UNESCO Memory of the World Register Application*

With the support of local First Nations' communities, the Royal BC Museum will apply to have the traditional indigenous ceremonial recordings of West Coast First Nations communities in the BC Archives' Ida Halpern fonds nominated for inclusion in the UNESCO Memory of the World Register, in recognition of their value for world heritage.

**Program 6:** *Access to Memory (AtoM) and Digital Access*

AtoM, an open source database for archival record description used by the BC Archives of the Royal BC Museum, can now accommodate the diacritics and other written characteristics of indigenous languages. The BC Archives of the Royal BC Museum will for the first time apply Aboriginal language descriptions to archival records descriptions online.

Using language in this way will require First Nations experts in relevant languages to participate by entering translations of descriptions into the database. This activity will be an ongoing relationship with First Nations individuals and communities who donate records to the BC Archives of the Royal BC Museum or participate in their interpretations.

### **Program 7: *A Registry of Language and Cultural Resources***

To better serve First Nations communities in their effort to promote and maintain their diverse languages, the Royal BC Museum will create a registry of language and cultural collaborations and studies in which the institution has participated over its history.

This registry will be available to language activists, students, and community members who wish to study and promote their languages.

Our inherited languages of description and reflection colour the means of cultural engagement. The language initiatives of the Royal BC Museum are therefore some of the most important responses to the TRC.

### **Thematic Response #3: Cultural Engagement**

The creation of knowledge, through its capture, preservation and accessibility, is a fundamental public responsibility of the Royal BC Museum. Our forms of knowledge, with their subjective, overlapping and cross-cultural uses, must occur within a common space of dialogue, discovery and intercultural negotiation and engagement. The Royal BC Museum will work towards this goal in the projects below.

**Program 1:** *Royal BC Museum Policy Review*

In 2016 the Royal BC Museum will initiate a policy review of all Royal BC Museum policies. The principles of reconciliation, representation and cross-cultural collaboration will be considered in re-formulating all new policy.

**Program 2:** *Appraisal of Records of Aboriginal Identity*

The BC Archives of the Royal BC Museum will proceed with the work of composing appraisal guidelines for records of aboriginal identity. In addition, the institution will collaborate with the national work of Library and Archives Canada (LAC) to formulate a national appraisal policy that incorporates records of Aboriginal identity. LAC put out a collection development framework in 2005. As a component of this strategy LAC has stated:

The development of a national strategy will be done in consultation and collaboration with Aboriginal communities and organizations, and will respect the ways in which indigenous knowledge and heritage is preserved or ought to be preserved and protected within or outside of Aboriginal communities.

**Program 3:** *Taxonomies of Knowledge*

The access points to our descriptions require ordered vocabulary that can organize the arts, culture, and knowledge models of Aboriginal societies. The BC Archives' implementation of the AtoM records description application, presents the opportunity to apply access points to records descriptions using First Nations knowledge models including indigenous place names, names of peoples and communities, and indigenous social protocols. These knowledge models will be constructed in consultation with First Nations' communities.

## **Program 4:** *Collaboration, Collections and Research*

### **Provincial Archaeological Repository Standards Project**

The Royal BC Museum has initiated a Provincial Archaeological Repository Standards Project and is working with the Archaeology Branch of the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations to create mandatory minimum standards for archaeological repositories throughout BC. This project will strengthen requirements for private contractors working with First Nations archaeological sites, support First Nations archaeological repositories, and enhance First Nations' abilities to retain archaeological materials and associated information within their home territories. Royal BC Museum archaeologists are meeting with other archaeological repositories to share information and establish best practices. Among the goals of the project is an Archaeological Repositories Association that will include First Nations' own repositories and promote access to First Nations archaeological collections throughout BC.

### **Collections Access**

The Royal BC Museum is committed to improving access to the extensive First Nations collections it cares for, increasing the amount and variety of information available on-site and on-line, and improving its publically available collections databases. The museum provides free access for First Nations people to the First Peoples galleries, archival holdings and collections storage.

### **Partnerships with First Nations**

The Royal BC Museum, which has a history of working cooperatively with First Nations, is increasing the number and extent of its formal partnerships with First Nations to enhance public knowledge about First Nations and bring



First Nations people and Aboriginal interpretations into the exhibitions and collections.

***Project Timelines***

<b>Thematic Alignment</b>	<b>Project Title</b>	<b>Anticipated Delivery Date</b>
Education	Reynolds Secondary School (Victoria, BC) Partner Program – Youth Echoing Truth	Results on exhibition until June, 2016.
	Truth & Reconciliation School Program – Learning Lab	Completion of first program in May, 2016.
	Learning Portal	May 2016
Language	Our Living Languages	Launched in June, 2014.
	UNESCO Memory of the World Register Application – Douglas Treaties	Submitted June 2015 At UNESCO Paris awaiting decision.
	Local Community Initiatives (archeological site visits, K12 curriculum development; consultation and collaboration with First Nations regarding preservation of cultural items, etc)	Ongoing
	Quuquatsa: Speaking our own Language	March, 2016
	UNESCO Memory of the World Register Application: Ida Halpern Recordings	May, 2018
	Access to Memory (AtoM) and Digital Access	April, 2016
	Registry of Language and Cultural Resources	December, 2016
Cultural Engagement	Royal BC Museum Policy Review	April, 2017
	Appraisal of records of Aboriginal Identity	December 2017

	Taxonomies of Knowledge	March, 2017
	Collaboration, Collections & Research	ongoing

## ***Conclusion***

In total, the Royal BC Museum has initiated 25 discrete projects which address the TRC's goal of reconciliation. These are available in a complete overview of the Royal BC Museum's response to the TRC's Final Report.<sup>4</sup>

The above listed projects describe by theme some of the most significant projects.

British Columbia's cultural heritage institutions are at a moment when we are being asked to recognize our past and imagine our future. To rehabilitate our cultural institutions, there must be relocation of core principles away from rigid European models of cultural exhibition and conservation and move toward concerns for the local environment and the communities that existed in these ecosystems for generations.

Moving forward, the Royal BC Museum will interact with indigenous communities in public spaces of mutual recognition, accommodation, representation and dialogue. First Nations communities, with all the implications those words suggest, will become foundation stones to building a cultural institution inclusively representing the free citizens of BC society with respect and dignity.