



Conference 2020: *Vital Operations:* *Museums and Organizational Sustainability*

September 17 - 19, 2020 | Calgary, Alberta

Organizational sustainability is one of the most important factors affecting a museum's operational capacity, potential impact, and long-term growth. Rooted in the museum's values, vision, and mission, "museum sustainability is demonstrated by organizational agility, community relevance, and responsiveness to the interconnected world in which the museum exists and the issues affecting its future."¹ As museums and their communities face changing political, social, and environmental circumstances, building sustainable organizations is key to the immediate and continuing vitality of the museum sector.

The Alberta Museums Association (AMA) has promoted five facets of sustainability as core principles for addressing the increasingly urgent change needed in the museum sector.² In broad terms, organizational sustainability requires a holistic approach that encompasses financial, social, and environmental facets.³ In recent years, environmental stewardship has often been the most discussed aspect of organizational sustainability. Yet, sustainable management practices must also prioritize the fiscal and social responsibilities that support operational success.

All aspects of museum work are affected by and contribute to organizational sustainability. Where collections managers may look at targeted collecting and safe storage, educational programmers may focus on developing low-cost programs that are more connected to community needs. Museum managers must balance fund development and diversification with advocacy and succession management. Curators, conservators, and facilities staff each have their own areas of interest and action which, when all are implemented together, ensure the museum grows sustainably, remains relevant, and has increased impact and value.

As entities "in the service of society and of its development"⁴ for present and future generations, museums also have a responsibility to support the sustainability of their local communities. Through innovative programming, business and community partnerships, and collaborations, museums have the opportunity to support global priority areas, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, climate action, reconciliation, and other objectives.⁵ Yet their capacity to make these positive impacts on both local issues and global initiatives is dependant on their internal sustainability.

¹ Alberta Museums Association, *Sustainability Working Group: Recommendations Report* (2013), p. 6.

² Alberta Museums Association, *Sustainability Working Group: Recommendations Report* (2013), p. 1-3, 5-7.

³ Museums Association, *Sustainability and Museums: Report on Consultation* (January 2009), p. 3.

⁴ Alberta Museums Association, *Definition of a Museum* (adopted May 14, 2001).

⁵ Jasper Visser, "A How-to Guide for Museums and the Sustainable Development Goals,"

<https://thefutureofmuseums.com/2019/08/30/a-how-to-guide-for-museums-and-the-sustainable-development-goals/>. Accessed: December 10, 2019.

The challenges of operating sustainably are wide-ranging and require long-term planning.⁶ Museums may face changing funding structures, overworked staff, new and shifting community relationships, and more. To develop the business and management practices needed to meet these challenges and ensure future relevance and operational success,⁷ museums must work to meet the needs of the present without compromising future generations' ability to meet their own needs.⁸

The AMA's 2020 Conference will focus on organizational sustainability, exploring the initiatives, strategies, and practices museums and cultural institutions undertake to build for the future. Delegates will examine how collections, programming, partnerships, exhibitions, leadership, and financial practices can increase organizations' ability to thrive in changing and uncertain times.

Conference 2020 will explore organizational sustainability themes that may include (but are not limited to):

- **Museum Practice**
 - Collections sustainability
 - Meaningful programming on a budget
 - Co-curation
 - Membership development
 - Collaborative resource sharing
- **Human Resources and Operations Management**
 - Succession planning
 - Board management
 - Diversity and inclusion
 - Social justice
 - Partnerships in smaller communities
- **Fund Development**
 - Revenue diversification
 - Partnerships and sponsorships
 - Advocacy and government relations
 - Funding and grant applications

For more information about the AMA and our Annual Conference, please visit [our website](#).

⁶ Museums Association, *Sustainability and Museums: Your Chance to Make a Difference* (2008), p. 4.

⁷ Canadian Museums Association, *Ethics Guidelines* (1999), p. 5; Museums Association, *Sustainability and Museums: Your Chance to Make a Difference* (2008), p. 4-5, 7.

⁸ Museums Association, "Sustainability Campaign," <https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/sustainability/sustainability-report>. Accessed: January 7, 2020.