



THE ECONOMIC CASE FOR HERITAGE IN SASKATCHEWAN

Getting serious about making an economic
case for the sector and some specific
suggestions on how to do so

This document is an effort of the Saskatchewan Heritage Coalition, made up of Heritage Saskatchewan and the Museums Association of Saskatchewan

The **Saskatchewan Heritage Coalition** is a joint project of Heritage Saskatchewan and the Museums Association of Saskatchewan. The Coalition is an expansion of our collaborative relationship, created to serve our organizations, members, and Saskatchewan's cultural heritage sector. Cultural heritage deserves to be protected for the social, cultural, economic, environmental, and educational wellbeing of all Saskatchewanians. Ensuring this future depends on our willingness to passionately make the case for heritage today.

Heritage Saskatchewan is an independent non-profit organization dedicated to promoting, celebrating, and advocating for the diverse cultural heritage of Saskatchewan. We believe that cultural heritage is living, evolving, and something we all have in common.

The Museums Association of Saskatchewan (MAS) is a non-profit, collective organization of over 250 member museums and a total membership of over 400, including individuals and associates. MAS supports Saskatchewan museums through a variety of education, advisory, and resource programs.

Our Definition of Cultural Heritage

Cultural heritage is a broad concept that encompasses architecture, traditions, arts, music, food, sports, language, and other elements of human life that are passed on to future generations.

We are committed to celebrating the diverse cultural heritage of our province in all its forms. Cultural heritage is not something exclusionary, elite, and divisive. It is a living expression of the people and communities who have shaped, and continue to shape, our province. At its core, cultural heritage shows who we are, where we come from, and where we want to go.

OUR INDUSTRY MIGHT BE FULL OF WONDERFUL

PEOPLE, but that does not mean it is in a wonderful state. Challenging economic conditions, declining volunteerism, and lack of government investment are just a few items on the buffet of problems before us. So, what are we to do? Two paths lie before us.

Down one, we can continue to enjoy our sleepy decline as further stresses are placed upon the industry and we all become a distant, echoing afterthought in the minds of decision-makers. This approach must be tempting, as it is the equivalent of putting ourselves to bed for a warm, never-ending nap.

Down the other path, we can get serious about what we want, gather the data to support these objectives, and make a passionate and persistent case to decision-makers and the public. This path is much less narcoleptic, and thus, much more difficult. It means opening ourselves up to criticism, to challenging questions, and, perhaps most horrifyingly, to increased responsibility should we get what we want.

We don't think there is any question about which path we should go down.

THE INDUSTRY AS IT REALLY IS

Cultural heritage is so much of what makes life worth living, but you might not think this by looking at a decision-maker's list of priorities. Our industry, among other challenges, has to contend with the following:

- **Lack of funding:** Heritage organizations are being asked to do more with less, while core funding has failed to keep pace with rising costs and growing demands. Many organizations are consequently operating in a state of perpetual financial uncertainty.
- **Lack of interest from decision-makers:** Heritage is too often perceived as a nice-to-have or luxury rather than as an essential part of healthy communities, strong economies, and collective wellbeing. This makes it difficult to secure sustained attention and meaningful investment from elected officials and governments.
- **Changing nature of volunteering:** The traditional model of long-term, deeply committed volunteers is increasingly a thing of the past. People have less time, different expectations, and more demands on their attention. Thus, the sector must rethink how we recruit, support, and retain volunteers.
- **Martyr complex within the industry:** We have, so often, become accustomed to doing extraordinary amounts with extraordinarily little. This sacrifice is sometimes rightfully celebrated as resourcefulness, but perhaps we are simply toasting our own doom.
- **Fading optimism:** Years of stagnant or declining resources, coupled with an uncertain future, have taken a toll on morale. In these conditions, it becomes increasingly difficult to convince people to invest their time, money, and energy in an industry when they are not confident that its future is bright.

Economic conditions underpin all of this. The ability of most people to lead comfortable, affordable lives appears to be declining for the first time in generations. When households have less disposable income, governments face greater fiscal pressures, and people have less time to volunteer, our sector inevitably feels the effects.

OUR REALISATION

The issues facing the heritage sector made one thing increasingly clear: we could not continue trying to address them in isolation. Heritage Saskatchewan and the Museums Association of Saskatchewan recognized that the challenges we face are shared. By working together, we could pool our resources, strengthen our collective voice, and focus our efforts on activities that would benefit the sector as a whole, particularly in the areas of data collection and advocacy.

Thus, we came together to create the Saskatchewan Heritage Coalition. The idea behind the Coalition was simple: something needed to be done, and it needed to be done as soon as possible.

Much of our path to success was unclear, but we knew that continuing to do things as we had always done them was unlikely to produce different results.

Our first step was to accrue evidence needed to make a stronger case for heritage. While we had anecdotal knowledge of the impact of the sector, we required the data to prove it. Before we could ask decision-makers to take our concerns seriously, we needed to better understand the realities of the sector ourselves. We therefore set out to collect data to establish a clearer picture of the current state of the sector and its broader impact on society.

So, what data did we collect? And what did it say?

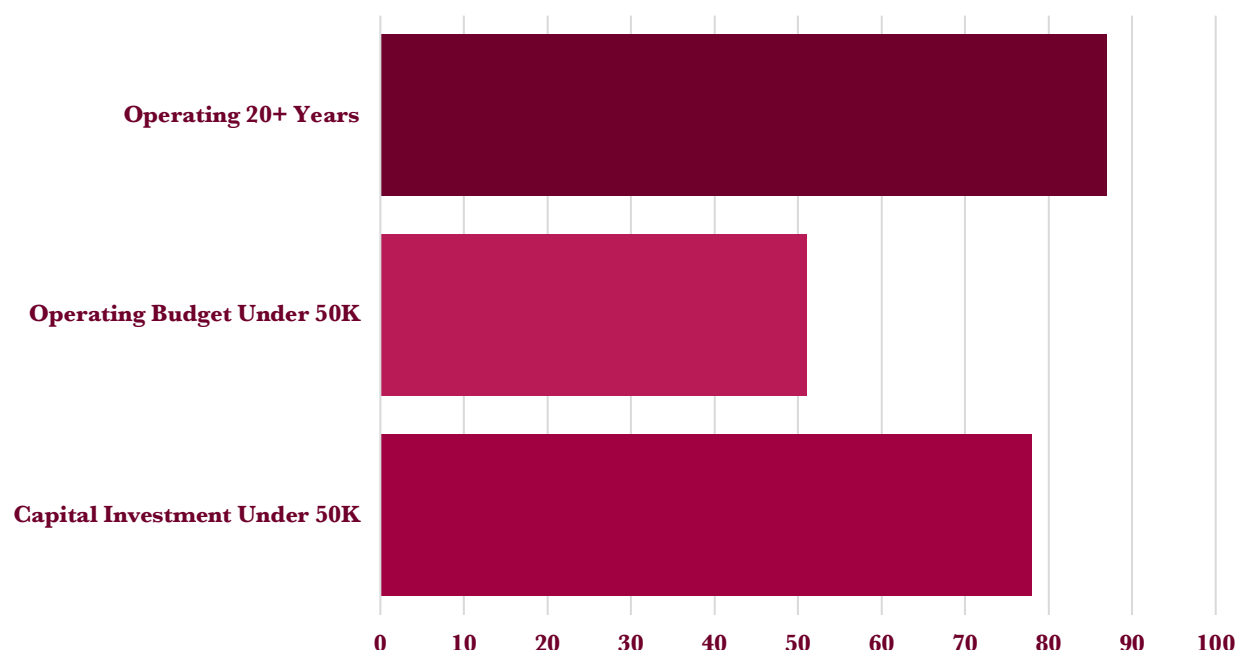
HERITAGE SECTOR SURVEY

In order to measure these impacts, we first needed to understand the organizations that make up the heritage sector and the economic activity they generate. We therefore sought input from organizations and stakeholders involved in cultural heritage, particularly those connected to tourism. Surveys designed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data were distributed to heritage stakeholders in December 2024. We received 85 responses from sector organizations; the following is a summary and analysis of the survey.

Results

- **Heritage organizations demonstrate remarkable longevity:** 87% of tourism-sector respondents had been in operation for more than 20 years. This suggests a sector with considerable institutional resilience, though one that has often sustained itself for decades without substantial growth in capacity.
- **The sector operates on remarkably modest budgets:** 51% of respondents reported annual operating budgets below \$50,000. For organizations responsible for maintaining buildings, collections, programs, and visitor experiences, this represents a considerably limited financial base.
- **Capital investment is particularly constrained:** 78% reported spending less than \$50,000 annually on construction and maintenance, the expenditures necessary to maintain and improve heritage infrastructure. This points to a significant infrastructure deficit and limited capacity for capital investment.

The data presents a striking picture: heritage organizations are remarkably good at surviving, but survival should not be mistaken for sustainability. **The question, then, is not simply how we keep these organizations alive. It is what they could contribute if they had the resources to do more.**



PUBLIC HERITAGE SUPPORT OPINION POLL

Having established what the heritage sector itself looked like, we wanted to understand something equally important: what does the public think?

To answer this question, we commissioned a scientific public-opinion poll conducted by a well-respected firm. There is sometimes skepticism about polling, particularly when it is associated with political campaigns or election forecasting. But public-opinion research provides something that cannot be obtained anecdotally: systematic measure of public sentiment across a broad and representative sample of respondents.

We asked a straightforward question:

“Broadly speaking, do you support or oppose public investment to support economic development and job creation through cultural heritage?”

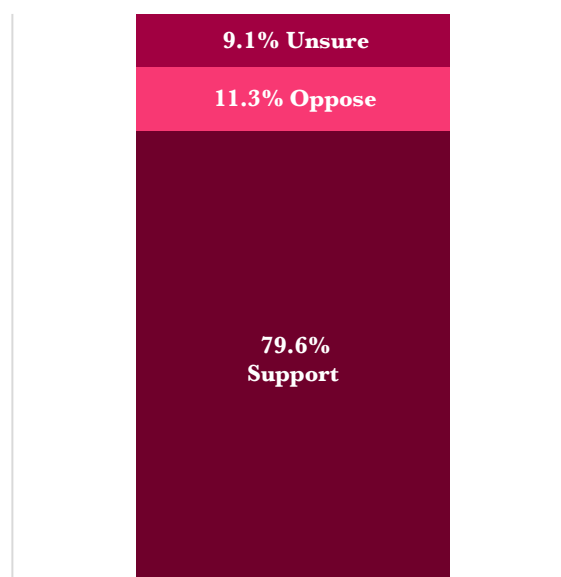
The answer was clear.

- **79.6% of respondents supported public investment in cultural heritage**
- **Support was broad-based across demographic groups.** No age, gender, geographic, family, education, or income group fell below a majority in favour of public investment.
- **Young people were particularly supportive:** 85.2% of respondents aged 18–34 supported public investment
- **Indigenous respondents expressed similarly strong support:** 83.0% supported public investment in cultural heritage.
- **Support was not confined to one part of the province.** While there were differences between regions, significant majorities in every geographic group supported investment, both rural and urban.

Perhaps most importantly, opposition was comparatively limited: just 11.3% of respondents opposed public investment, while 9.1% were unsure.

The case for investing in heritage appears to have significant consensus, even higher than on other important issues like healthcare, climate change, and taxation depending on the specific question being asked. Notably, the substantial public support cuts across many of the demographic divisions that typically shape public opinion on these other issues. **In this fashion, heritage appears to bring people together in a way few other issues do.**

Polling Results



HERITAGE AS AN ECONOMIC POWERHOUSE

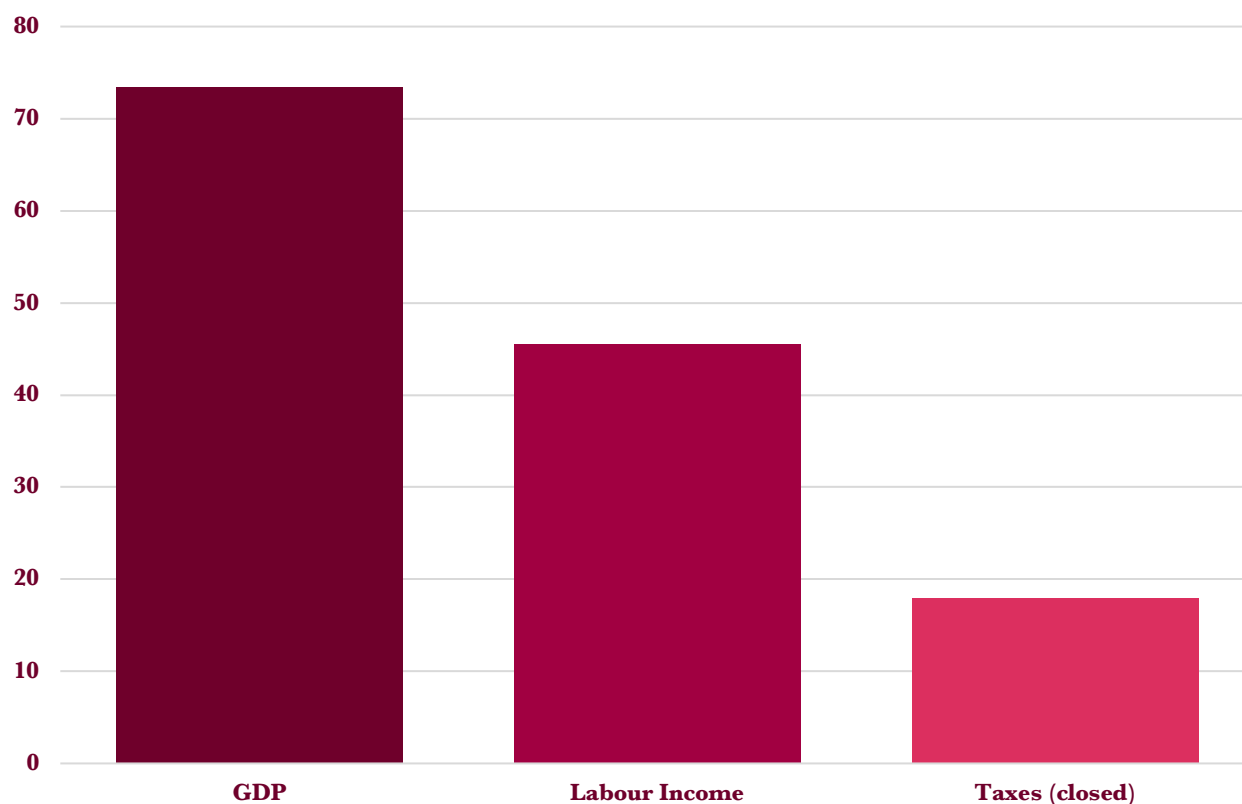
We now had a clearer understanding of the condition of the sector and evidence of public support. The next question was perhaps the most important of all: how does heritage actually contribute to the Saskatchewan economy?

To answer this, we used the Culture, Arts, Heritage and Sport Economic Impact Model (CAHSEIM), incorporating Saskatchewan-specific economic multipliers. The model draws on three principal inputs: operating and maintenance expenditures, infrastructure and capital investment, and heritage-attributable visitor spending.

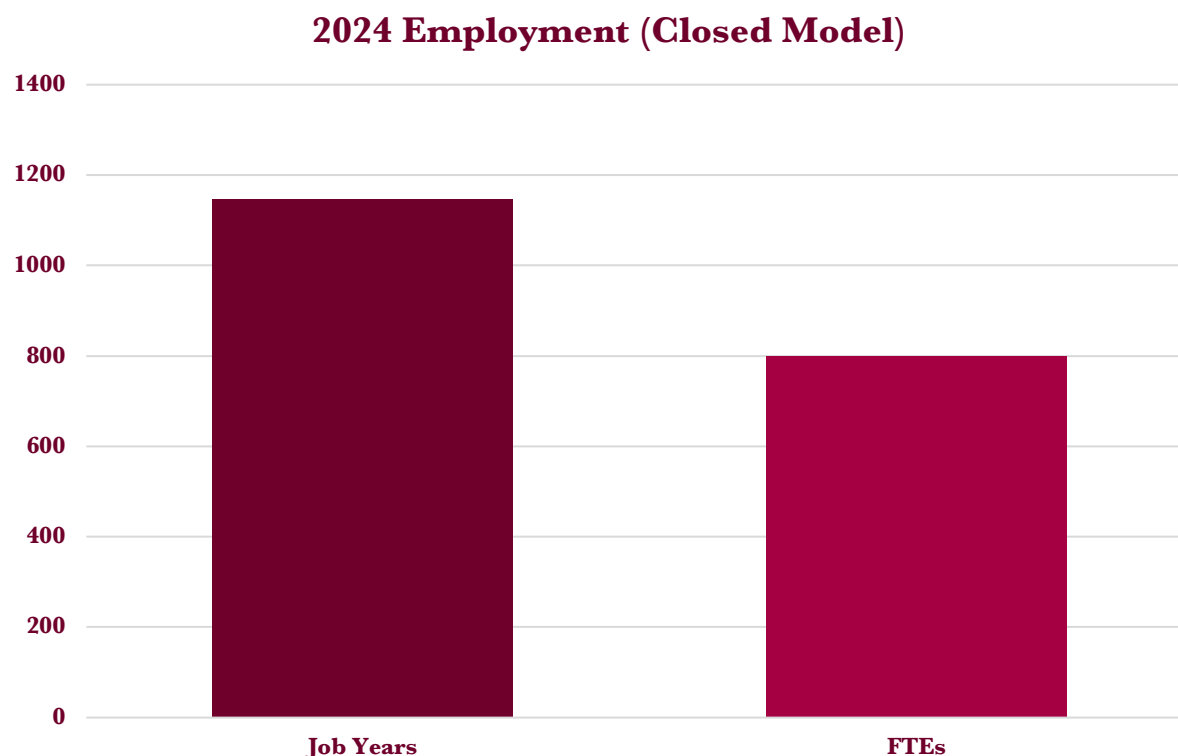
In 2024, these inputs amounted to approximately \$123.6 million: \$14.7 million in operating and maintenance expenditures, \$2.1 million in infrastructure and capital spending, and \$106.8 million in heritage-attributable visitor spending.

The resulting economic footprint is substantial. The model estimates that Saskatchewan's cultural heritage sector contributed \$73.4 million to provincial GDP, generated \$45.5 million in labour income, and produced approximately \$18 million in tax revenue across all levels of government.

2024 Results (Closed Model) in Millions



The activity also supported an estimated 1,148 job-years, equivalent to approximately 800 full-time-equivalent positions. A significant proportion of this employment was associated with tourism-related activity, underscoring the important relationship between cultural heritage and the tourism economy. This association is unsurprising, given the fundamental role that cultural heritage plays in attracting visitors and supporting the tourism sector.



Much of the sector is operating on annual budgets of less than \$50,000, yet its activities generate tens of millions of dollars in economic output and support hundreds of jobs.

And this may be the most important finding of all: **these figures describe what heritage is already doing, not what it could do.** The economic model's projections do not account for additional visitor spending or revenues that could result from upgraded facilities, enhanced programming, or expanded operations.

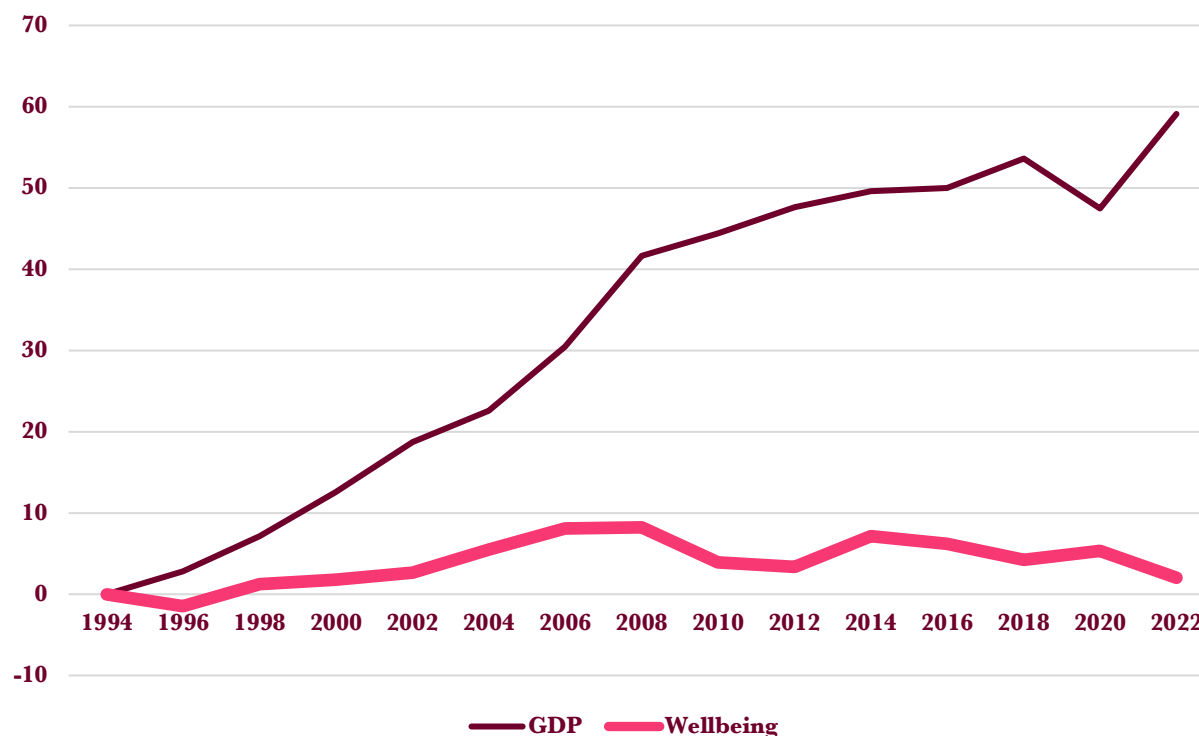
HERITAGE AND WELLBEING

An auxiliary project, funded in part by Heritage Saskatchewan, has provided important information that helps reinforce many of the findings we have already discussed. This work looks beyond economic activity to consider a different, but equally important, question: **how are people actually doing?**

The Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW) was developed to measure the quality of life of Canadians across a broad range of factors, while the **Saskatchewan Index of Wellbeing** applies this approach at the provincial level. Rather than relying on a single economic measure such as GDP, the Index looks at 64 individual indicators of wellbeing, bringing them together to provide a broader picture of how people and communities are faring. These indicators consider dimensions of life that economic measures alone cannot capture such as environment, recreation and leisure, and democratic engagement.

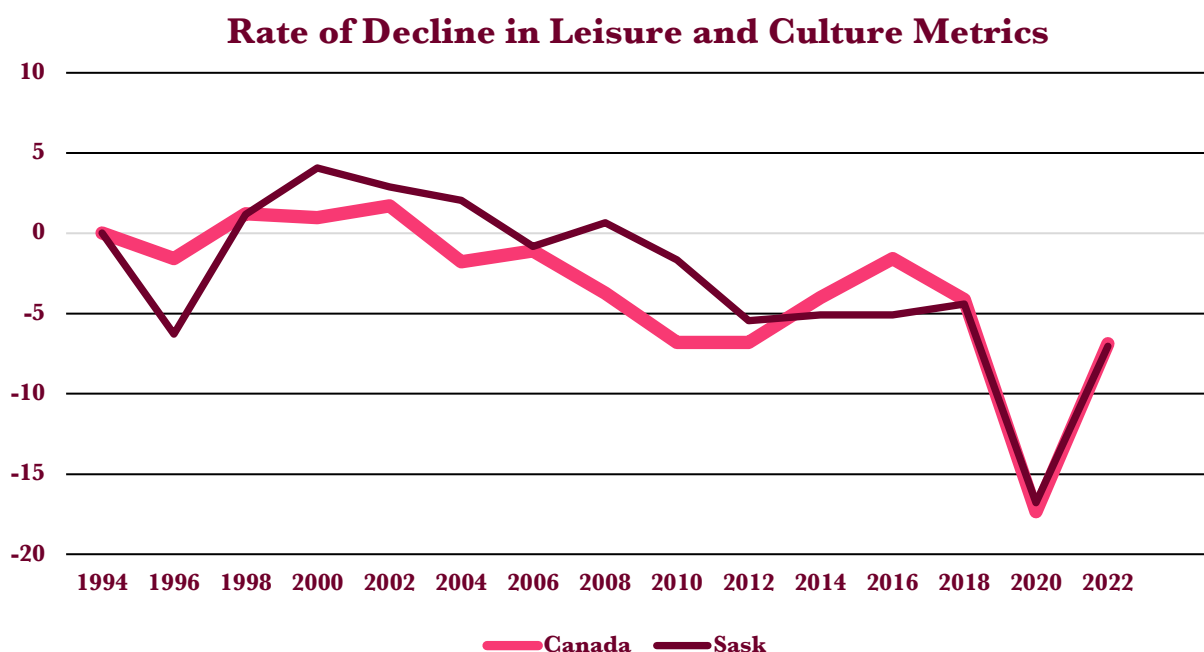
In part, the index answers another important question: When GDP rises, does wellbeing rise alongside it? The answer surprises many. While GDP in many parts of Canada has increased, wellbeing has not followed suit. From 1994 to 2022, GDP in Saskatchewan increased by nearly 60%; during the same period, wellbeing metrics rose by just over 2%. Thus, the story becomes clear: **GDP alone fails to measure how well our population is faring.**

GDP VS. WELLBEING METRICS



Further, there are a number of metrics that have declined since data has started to be collected in 1994.

- **Average time spent on previous day in social leisure activities:**
9.9% decrease in Saskatchewan; 3% decrease in Canada
- **Average time spent on previous day in arts and culture activities:**
12.7% decrease in Saskatchewan; 5.7% decrease in Canada
- **Total expenditures in past year on all culture/recreation as a percentage of total household expenditures:** 0.65% decrease in Saskatchewan; 0.91% decrease in Canada
- **Average attendance per performance in past year at all performing arts:**
39.7% decrease in Saskatchewan; 25.4% decrease in Canada
- **Average nights away per trip in past year on vacation trips to destinations within Canada over 80km from home:** 34.3% decrease in Saskatchewan; 4.1% decrease in Canada
- **Percentage of population that reports having no close friends:** 3.3% increase in Saskatchewan; 2.5% increase in Canada



Taken together, these measures reveal a broad and concerning decline in several aspects of social, cultural, and community wellbeing. The activities, experiences, and connections that cultural heritage helps foster are precisely the kinds of things that appear to be diminishing. **Thus, we do not feel it is a stretch to suggest cultural heritage is part of the solution in addressing the declining state of wellbeing.**

GREAT! AWESOME! AMAZING! SO...WHAT DOES THIS INFORMATION ACTUALLY TELL US?

We have spent a considerable amount of time examining the state of Saskatchewan's cultural heritage sector, collecting data, testing assumptions, and looking beyond the sector itself to understand its broader economic, social, and cultural effects. All of this can be distilled down succinctly to the following key messages and themes:

Heritage Builds a Stronger Economy!

- In 2024, Saskatchewan's cultural heritage sector contributed \$73.4 million to GDP, and sparked over \$2.8 billion in visitor spending
- Heritage-attributable visitor spending reached \$106.8 million in 2024
- In 2022, total direct GDP from archives, libraries, heritage sites, and architecture was \$43.3 million
- Every dollar invested in galleries, libraries, archives, and museums (GLAMs) yields \$4–\$6 in societal benefits

Heritage Creates Great Jobs!

- Safeguarding heritage means supporting thousands of meaningful jobs across Saskatchewan, in conservation work, education, and tourism
- The heritage sector directly supported 866 jobs in 2024
- More broadly, the heritage sector supports 53,000+ jobs in tourism and hospitality across the province

Heritage Brings Us Together!

- Scientific opinion polling shows 80% of Saskatchewan residents are in favour of public investment in cultural heritage to promote economic growth and employment.
- Support for investing in heritage crosses many of the political and demographic divides that otherwise separate Canadians, including the urban-rural divide.
- Few other issues enjoy such broad consensus

Heritage Keeps Young People in Saskatchewan!

- We must focus on supporting the emerging expertise of young professionals if we wish to prevent brain drain.
- Over 85% of young people in Saskatchewan support efforts to invest in cultural heritage; investing in local projects strengthens community identity and provides opportunities for young people who wish to make these communities their home.

Heritage Improves Wellbeing for All!

- Cultural heritage deserves to be protected for the social, cultural, economic, environmental, and educational wellbeing of all Saskatchewanians.
- A strengthened cultural heritage sector supports the public through economic activity, a sense of identity, and social connection, all of which contribute to a better state of wellbeing.

These messages are simple, powerful, and can be retrofitted for personal and political audiences alike. Investment in heritage matters because it improves people's lives economically, socially, and culturally. **When we invest in cultural heritage, we invest in collective wellbeing.**

THE PERSONAL CASE FOR HERITAGE

If we fail to make a personal and community-driven case for heritage, we will not succeed in any fashion. Our message can be supported by data, but ultimately, it must be an argument aimed at the heart. Our message is not that cultural heritage is the answer to every issue in people's lives. However, our argument is that increased investment and attention in cultural heritage makes people's lives much better.

An economy that works for the people, a sense of community, identity, and meaning, and overall wellbeing matter. Cultural heritage supports all of this!

You may say, "Yes, yes, this is all very nice. I am delighted to hear that cultural heritage is so important for Saskatchewan. But I live in PEI/in Ontario/on the moon, why should I care??"

You should care because we are showing that it is in fact possible to do the following. In fact, we recommend you use the following suggestions to create a roadmap for making the case for cultural heritage:

- **Collaborate in coalition with allies:** There is strength in numbers. Working together gives you more resources, more expertise, and a louder voice. Certainly, there must be other organizations you can tolerate and find common ground with.
- **Seek out economic data:** Make the case with both numbers and passion. Find the data that demonstrates what heritage contributes and what investment can achieve. Use our data as a framework as you search for your own.
- **Order public opinion polling:** 80% of people in Saskatchewan would not mind having their tax dollars invested in cultural heritage. Perhaps it will be even higher in your province!
- **Influence decision-makers:** Build relationships, make your case, and keep making it. Heritage needs to be part of the conversations where decisions are actually made.
- **Embark on a media campaign:** We have launched radio advertisements to raise awareness of the Coalition and establish it as a recognizable voice for the sector. We also created a short video to better communicate these issues. We play it every chance we get. Both politicians and the public have reacted with curiosity to these media projects.
- **Be willing to build a plane in mid-air:** We did not know what we were doing at the beginning, and we certainly don't have all the answers now, but we are very glad we started. After all, you do not need all the answers to seek a few out.

All of these actions may feel like making a large life decision based on external factors: there is never the perfect time to do so. The economy might be bad, the government may seem unsympathetic, it might seem too hard, blah blah blah blah.

Try something. If that doesn't work, try something else. Spend a tiny bit of money on a gamble. Waste a bit of time. Put out some coffee and cake and sit down with your friends and allies. Craft a compelling case that would make the first person you could find on the street smile coyly in agreement. **Make an attempt to better the state of the industry. You will be thankful you did.**