

National Trust for Canada  Fiducie nationale du Canada



CALL FOR PRESENTATIONS
National Trust Conference 2026
(with Canadian Association of Heritage Professionals
& Indigenous Heritage Circle)

Heritage 
FUTURES

October 22–24, 2026 (Waterloo Region, Ontario)

The heritage conservation sector in Canada faces a “perfect storm” of social and political pressures. Heritage places are increasingly threatened by fast-tracked development, deregulation, and housing demands, even as rising cultural nationalism highlights their vital role in Canadian identity and economic resilience. At the same time, the sector is advancing reconciliation, addressing inequities in practice, and leading on climate action.

In this period of rapid change, how can the heritage sector shape the future of Canada’s tangible and intangible heritage? How are societal shifts and new technologies transforming conservation and stewardship? What will heritage leadership look like tomorrow?

Canada’s largest heritage learning and networking event will convene 500+ professionals, policymakers, industry and NGO leaders, academics, students, and volunteers. Join this dynamic, annual, cross-sector conversation.

Heritage Futures will bring together bold ideas, practical case studies, and solution-focused dialogue to chart a path forward.

Presentation/session proposals are invited on the following themes:

1. **Housing Creation & Building Reuse: Heritage Solutions for Increasing Density, Accelerating Development, and Reducing Carbon**

Heritage conservation is not about preventing change — it's about shaping thoughtful change that responds to real community needs. Yet in today's polarized climate of urgency and "housing at all costs," heritage is often cast as a barrier rather than a catalyst.

Can the sector reclaim its narrative and champion compelling models for density-rich reuse and infill? Can it help shift development away from a take-make-waste paradigm?

Possible topics include:

- **Championing Good Density in Heritage Areas** – Practical approaches to adding density in neighbourhoods, downtowns, and cultural landscapes; applying "compatible, subordinate, and distinguishable" in the Standards & Guidelines; positioning heritage as a constructive voice in public debate.
- **Pragmatism in Conservation** – When to insist on full in situ reuse and when compromise is appropriate; façade retention, relocation, and emerging reuse models (e.g. faith properties adapted for housing or community use).
- **Affordability and Gentrification** – Policies and case studies that support affordable and "missing middle" housing in heritage contexts while mitigating displacement.
- **Streamlining and Investment** – Reducing process barriers, incentivizing adaptive reuse, clarifying regulatory pathways, and leveraging innovative financial tools.
- **Circular Economy and Embodied Culture** – Aligning conservation with deconstruction, material salvage, and circular economy principles to preserve both resources and community identity.

2. **Re-Storying and Reclaiming Heritage Places: Heritage Sites, Policies, and Organizations**

Expanding the heritage lens to recognize the contributions of underrepresented people, places, and cultures remains an urgent priority. For historically marginalized communities, heritage is not only about the past — it is a process of discovery, healing, and reconnection. Without sustained support, this heritage risks further loss.

How can the sector shift its culture and challenge entrenched paradigms — including who defines heritage and how? How can practitioners, volunteers, and policymakers foster a more inclusive conservation practice? And how can heritage sites be sustained and reimagined in turbulent times?

Possible topics include:

- **Transforming Narratives** – Truth-telling and authentic storytelling; presenting difficult histories and sites of conscience; amplifying diverse voices; linking Indigenous language and cultural revitalization to land and place.
- **Elevating Underrepresented Heritage** – Identifying, protecting, and interpreting marginalized histories; commemorating landscapes with limited human interventions or places with no remaining fabric; reforming policy; advancing oral history and intergenerational knowledge sharing; leveraging AI to expand access to digital archives.
- **Braiding Knowledge Systems** – Best practices for engaging with Indigenous communities; integrating Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews, protocols, and approaches.
- **Cultural Landscapes and Extraction Legacies** – Protecting the connections between land, culture, and identity; sustaining tangible and intangible values in ethno-cultural districts and rural areas; addressing the impacts of resource extraction.
- **Evolving Organizations and Sites** – Building diversity within the sector; advancing co-management, reciprocity, and right relations; improving accessibility and inclusion in heritage places and institutions.

3. Retooling the Heritage System: Policy, Codes, and Communities in a New Era

Canada’s heritage enterprise is a complex ecosystem — spanning NGOs, Knowledge Keepers and Elders, professionals, municipal committees, developers, and more. Legislation, regulation, and policy shape what is valued, permitted, and protected, while education, lifeways, and community values sustain cultural heritage and landscapes. Financing systems – governments, lenders, insurers — determine risk and funding eligibility.

How can this system be retooled to be sustainable, fair, equitable and effective? Do we have the tools needed to respond to the climate emergency?

Possible topics include:

- **Transforming Planning Systems** – Updating inventories and programs to reflect evolving values; expanding zoning and heritage tools; incentivizing adaptive reuse; addressing demolition by neglect; strengthening heritage planning education.
- **Demystifying and Aligning the Sector** – Navigating tensions between heritage recognition and insurance or real estate systems; bridging divides within the sector in pro-growth contexts; evolving heritage advocacy approaches.
- **Weaving Worldviews** – Integrating Indigenous and non-Indigenous heritage systems in legislation, policy, and practice; advancing more just and equitable relationships.
- **Legislation, Policy, and Codes** – Modernizing federal and provincial-territorial tools; removing barriers to reuse in building codes and tax systems.

- **Decarbonization and Climate Adaptation** – Leveraging avoided and embodied carbon benefits; aligning conservation with lifecycle assessment and environmental regulation; strengthening resilience to fire, erosion, and extreme weather.
- **Sustaining Heritage Organizations** – Innovative funding, audience development, and diversification strategies; supporting volunteer engagement in municipal committees and NGOs.

4. Craft, Tech, and Teaching: Leveraging Digital Tools, Sustaining Heritage Knowledge, and Educating the Next Generation

The convergence of traditional craft and rapidly advancing digital tools — including artificial intelligence (AI) — is poised to transform heritage conservation, improving efficiency, visualization, and data analysis. Yet Canada faces a growing crisis in heritage trades and professional training, as post-secondary programs shrink or close. Without renewed investment in education and skills, Canada risks losing the capacity to protect, adapt, and revitalize its heritage places — and to support Indigenous cultural resurgence.

What role should new technologies play in preservation? How do we safeguard heritage education and ensure knowledge is passed to the next generation?

Possible topics include:

- **AI and Conservation: Opportunities and Risks** – Integrating AI with 3D models, material data, and historical records; building condition assessment; code analysis for adaptive reuse; spatial modelling; improving and validating heritage datasets.
- **Digital Twins and Visualization** – Using digital replicas, walkthroughs, and augmented reality to model reuse scenarios, predict maintenance, and make conservation work visible; AI-enabled reinterpretation of heritage.
- **Heritage Education and Training** – Embedding heritage conservation in architecture, engineering, planning, trades, and history programs; strengthening and expanding post-secondary heritage offerings.
- **Recovering and Sustaining Knowledge** – Oral history and intergenerational knowledge-sharing initiatives; responsible use of AI and digital tools to document oral traditions and Indigenous knowledge.
- **Scaling Up the Heritage Workforce** – Strengthening Canada’s heritage trades and private-sector capacity; applying traditional building knowledge to resilient contemporary design; identifying and addressing workforce gaps.

PRESENTATION FORMATS:

- **Traditional Presentation (15 minutes)** – These presentations will use case studies and research results that offer broadly applicable insights, principles, or real solutions others can apply in their communities.

- **Spark Presentation (7 minutes)** – Brief, effective, powerful. These “Pecha Kucha” inspired presentations raise heritage issues and offer lessons in dynamic sessions.
- **Deep Dive Presentation or Training Module (30 minutes)** – These presentations or modules will be more in-depth and technical in nature, with the goal of training attendees to understand or implement practice or policy, or to equip attendees with a deeper knowledge of the subject matter. They will focus on the “how” of a project.
- **Conference Session (75-90 minutes)** – Propose an entire conference session, roundtable, panel discussion, workshop, direct action, cultural performance, etc.

PLEASE INCLUDE WITH YOUR SUBMISSION:

- Title of presentation/session proposed, format, and a summary (450 words or less).
- Please include at three learning objectives that clearly articulate what attendees will learn as a result of attending. For example: "Analyze and interpret a case study that examines how heritage conservation contributes to neighborhood revitalization and fights displacement".
- Which conference stream(s) your presentation/session aligns with.
- Your name, contact information, short bio (150 words), and photo (for website).
- Your student status, if applicable.

To encourage participation of community and other external partners (those working outside of the heritage sector) who will only attend their session, registration fees may be waived in consultation with the National Trust.

The National Trust will work with the presenter(s) and make efforts to find resources to support their participation. If you require an accommodation in order to participate in any part of this conference, or if you have suggestions on how we can improve accessibility, please let us know how we can support by sending an email to conference@nationaltrustcanada.ca

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS: Monday, April 13, 2026

Notification of acceptance of submissions will be made later in May 2026. Presenters of accepted abstracts will receive a discount on full conference registration. Student presenters will receive full conference registration at no cost.

All sessions and presentations at National Trust Conference 2026 (with CAHP & IHC) may be live streamed, filmed, and images or video footage taken. To participate in the conference, presenters will need to agree to a speaker release allowing images and video footage to be webcast on the National Trust Conference 2026 website, displayed or archived on other National Trust/CAHP/IHC channels, or used in promotional materials.

To submit your proposal: go to the *Heritage Futures* [abstract submission page](#).

For more information: conference@nationaltrustcanada.ca