

ARTS BUILD ONTARIO
Creative Spaces Case Study Series
The Thunder Bay Art Gallery



This Creative Spaces Case Study Series is Supported by:

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Introduction

These in-depth case studies serve as a resource for arts and heritage organizations embarking on a capital project to learn from the successes and challenges of others in the sector.

In these case studies, we analyze the **why** (why they took on this capital project), the **what** (what were they building and creating), the **who** (who are they serving, who supported this project, who led this project and who they hired), the **how** (how was the project financially supported and what positions were created/how were they funded), and **the ongoing** (what happened after? How is the building maintained/operated? Is it sustainable? How is revenue generated?) behind each project.

We looked at a wide range of spaces from across the province with varying operational models, sizes, locations, project sizes and artistic disciplines. The case studies focus on each organization's process for completing their project; from the planning phase, to the building phase, to the operations and maintenance phase. Following the completion of all 19 case studies, a Best Practice Summary released on ABO's website, free for all to access.

The case study series is supported by the Learning Series, which is a collection of webinars and workshops that support ABO's core programs. Webinars that highlight the capital projects featured in the 2018-2020 case studies series are available on the ABO website. Please check <https://www.artsbuildontario.ca/learning/webinars/> for more information.

The case study series is supported by the Department of Canadian Heritage and Canada Council for the Arts.

ArtsBuild Ontario

ArtsBuild Ontario is the only organization in Ontario dedicated to realizing long-term solutions to building, managing and financing the sustainable arts facilities needed in our communities.

ABO offers tools, resources and programs that support arts organizations with their creative space projects. ABO's core programs include Asset Planner for the Arts, the Creative Spaces Mentoring Network, and the Learning Series.

Thunder Bay Art Gallery

Interviewee

- Sharon Godwin, Director

Mandate

As a non-profit, public art gallery, the Thunder Bay Art Gallery exhibits, collects, and interprets art with a particular focus on the contemporary artwork of Indigenous and Northwestern Ontario artists. The Gallery advances the relationship between artists, their art, and the public, nurturing a life-long appreciation of contemporary visual arts among visitors to Thunder Bay and community members of all ages.

Historical Background

In the 1970s, the vision of a few dedicated people in the community gave life to the idea of an art gallery for Thunder Bay. Initially, a small gallery was opened within the Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society's space. In just two years' time, the vision had expanded and capital funds were secured to construct a National Exhibition Centre on the campus of Confederation College.

In 1976, gallery advocates Dr. John Augustine, his wife Annette Augustine, and other Historical Museum Society board members officially opened a 4,000 square-foot facility dedicated to the Gallery. In fact, the Gallery was one of 26 newly-established national exhibition centres that opened across Canadian communities. The vision of a place for the display and interpretation of art in the community was truly taking shape.

By 1982, the Thunder Bay National Exhibition Centre and Centre for Indian Art – as the Gallery was called then – had evolved into the facility we know today with three exhibition galleries, a collection storage area and new capacity for exhibition and acquisition of art. The Gallery has continued to grow. Today, there are more than 1600 works of art in the permanent collection. Over 30,000 people visit the Gallery each year. Every day, the Gallery provides school tours, hosts artistic events or shares our space with community groups. The Thunder Bay Art Gallery has become the cultural hub committed to contemporary Indigenous, local and regional art that our founders envisioned.

Project Summary

In 2009, the Thunder Bay Art Gallery embarked on a large-scale capital project, with plans to create a new purpose-built facility on the shore of Lake Superior. Currently located on the campus of Confederation College, the gallery is looking to resolve space issues and improve visibility to better serve their community. With construction expected to begin in 2020 or 2021, designs for the 37,000-square-foot facility will include six separate exhibition spaces, three multi-purpose rooms for programming, a climate controlled storage unit, a cafe and expanded gift shop. Complimenting the City's developing waterfront and contributing to the local cultural

economy, this project intends to enable the gallery to better store and display their collection, and provide extensive visual arts programming to the diverse communities of Thunder Bay and beyond.

The “What”

What is the Thunder Bay Art Gallery Building?

Thunder Bay Art Gallery’s (TBAG) capital project will include the design of a 38,000 square foot facility on the Thunder Bay Waterfront. This project will see the gallery gain 25,000 square feet to accommodate their collection of over 1600 works of art by contemporary Indigenous artists in Canada. Among the features of the new gallery, the building will offer flexible exhibition spaces that can accommodate up to six separate exhibitions and a climate-controlled collection storage vault. There will be ample room for community programming with the inclusion of classrooms and studios that offer dedicated space for creative art learning and artist-in-residence programs. An 180 square-foot Event Hall with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking Lake Superior, and a versatile Community Room for artist talks, film screenings, and event rentals will also be made available for community use. The new Gallery will also feature a comfortable Café with outdoor seating and an expanded gallery shop.

What is the project timeline?

This capital project is over a decade in the making. After the initial feasibility study that began in 2009 was completed, the TBAG staff started planning for their capital project and sourcing funding in 2012. Due to an environmental issue with the site, the building of the facility was delayed for three years. The gallery is now anticipating a two-year construction phase scheduled to start in 2020, with an estimated opening year of 2022.

What partners will be involved in the project?

The Gallery intends to form a partnership with a local business to manage their Café. While this partnership will be finalized later in 2020, the Gallery has been consulting with the local culinary community and plans to seek advice from other arts organizations to inform the creation of this partnership.

The “Why”

Why did the Thunder Bay Art Gallery take on this capital project?

As the TBAG has been operating in their current space for the past 40 years, the need for this capital project was clear. With their collection expanding, the aging facility was lacking suitable space for exhibiting, collecting and programming. Along with three exhibition spaces, their current building offers one community room that is used for all programming activities. This includes classes and workshops, community exhibitions and rentals.

Above all, the organization wanted a facility that could better serve their community. With inclusion at the heart of their mandate, the Gallery’s goal is to welcome more families, school groups, seniors and city visitors to the TBAG through this capital project. They are aspiring to create a space that feels warm and welcoming to all, and facilitates the Gallery’s ability to offer engaging programming to the diverse communities in the city.

Another important factor was the Gallery’s location and visibility. Considering the current facility is located at the back of the Confederation College campus, the Gallery is lacking a visible physical presence. By moving to a rapidly developing and popular location, they are anticipating an increase in foot traffic and more individuals discovering the Gallery. The need to increase visibility was also acknowledged in the initial feasibility study in 2009. Building on the waterfront was identified a potential solution.

Finally, timing also played an important role in the project moving forward. As the Gallery’s extended lease with the college will be coming to an end in 2025, they were at a critical point in which they could choose to renew, or move to a different location.

Why did the Thunder Bay Art Gallery engage their community in this project?

In order to ensure the new building reflects the diverse communities in Thunder Bay, the Gallery has engaged in community consultations throughout the project. Before the building was designed, the gallery invited Indigenous artists and Gallery stakeholders to participate in a gathering, and provide input on the design. This consultation resulted in the creation of a narrative to the building that features a turtle coming from the lake and wandering into the building then turning around in the lobby and leaving through the courtyard.

The “Who”

Who is leading the project?

The project is being lead by the Gallery’s director, Sharon Godwin, and the organization’s board of directors. In her role, Godwin is responsible for general project oversight as well as overseeing the project manager and fundraising efforts.

In the beginning stages of the project, the board formed a renewal committee that would be responsible for the Gallery’s revitalization efforts. This group has since developed into a building committee.

Who supported the project outside of the organization?

Outside of the Gallery, several supporters have championed this capital project. Among these individuals are provincial and federal members of parliament that have advocated for the value of the project. They include; The Honourable Patty Hajdu, MP for Thunder Bay-Superior North and current Minister of Health, The Honourable Bill Morneau MP for Toronto Centre and current Finance Minister, Don Rusnak, previous MPP for Thunder Bay-Rainy River and MPP Michael Gravelle, previous Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

There has also been very strong community support for this project. Before Godwin went to City Council for project approval, the organization sent out an email campaign to their members, asking them to send letters of support to their local representatives. After this campaign, the office was inundated with letters. A counsellor noted that they had never received such a range of thoughtful and passionate letters, individually written by local community members and organizations. This expressed support was central in project approval and supported the project being passed with ten votes in favour, and three votes opposed.

Who was hired for the project?

During this first phase of the project, they hired a project manager from Colliers Project Leaders to act on the Gallery’s behalf as well as the project architects Patkau Architects, and Brook McIlroy. These positions were selected through an RFP process that was revised by the organization’s evaluation committee.

The TBAG also received an Ontario Trillium Foundation Capital Grant to fund a part-time assistant for the duration of the capital project. Working 20 hours a week, the Assistant to the Director supports administrative tasks, enabling the Director to focus on project responsibilities. The Gallery is also considering hiring a part-time Fundraising Coordinator to manage their upcoming community campaign. This individual will coordinate the public campaign alongside the team, initiate outreach and foster community relations.

Who opposed the project?

While the project has mostly received support from the community and municipality, some have opposed the need for the creation of a new gallery with public funds. These oppositions have been met with overall council approval and continued communications on how the new gallery would be providing enriched arts experiences for the community.

The “How”

How will the project move from concept to construction?

As the Gallery will be built on a brownfield site, the City of Thunder Bay and the Gallery are working to satisfy provincial environmental assessment requirements of the building site. Since some contaminated soil has been identified, the area needs to be remediated before construction can begin. While the architect and initial design plans have been created, a contractor will be selected once the site has been cleared for construction.

How is the construction plan being formed?

The architect, project manager and contractor will finalize the construction plan once the contractor has been selected. In the meantime, the TBAG has undergone a bid document review. Through this process, the Gallery has engaged retired, experienced contractors to review the architectural drawings ahead of time, highlighting any potential challenges and offering suggestions where they see fit.

How have day-to-day operations and organizational capacity been impacted?

Undergoing this capital project has been a major feat for the Gallery team. While they have not yet begun the construction phase, managing the environmental contingency, designing the facility, securing funding and maintaining operations in the current space has resulted in a major increase in workload for the Gallery’s Director. In order to mitigate staff burn out, Godwin ensures that staff maintain regular work hours, and are compensated for any over time accrued.

How were contingencies managed?

The most impactful contingency the Gallery has come across in the project thus far, is a three-year delay that resulted from unforeseen soil contamination on the construction site at Prince Arthur’s Landing. Despite being initially advised that the site would not be an area of concern, a provincial environmental assessment indicated soil has been contaminated from decades of industrial use. Following provincial recommendations, The City of Thunder Bay and the Gallery have been working to remediate the soil and are waiting to receive approval to move forward with construction.

While this contingency has set the project timeline back a few years, the project team has adopted a flexible, “can do” attitude. Recognizing that unexpected obstacles are to be expected

in any construction project, they keep on top of the issue, but do not dwell on it. The project team spends their time addressing other aspects, such as finalizing design plans and securing project partners. As the Gallery maintains their lease with the college, they intend on continuing programming and community engagement at their current site.

How was accessibility included in the project?

In order to ensure accessibility is included in the project, the City of Thunder Bay's accessibility committee has revised the project's drawings, and plans. The Gallery intends to continue to work with this committee as the project moves forward to ensure they go beyond the current accessibility legislation. The Gallery is also looking to address experiential accessibility through their facility and programming offerings. This includes features such as sensory rooms and guided tours for those who are visually impaired.

How was energy efficiency and the environment incorporated?

While the Gallery does not intend to go through the designation process, they have been working with architects and consultants to ensure they fulfill LEEDS Silver qualifications. Being energy efficient and saving on energy costs has been a major priority for the Gallery. The new Gallery will feature double pane windows, energy efficient LED lights and it is intended that the facility is built without disturbance to the neighbouring wetlands.

How was the project funded?

The new Gallery will be funded by municipal, provincial and federal grants, along with donations secured through the Gallery's capital campaign. Early support for the Architectural Design Phase in the amount of \$2.5 million was received from the federal, provincial and municipal governments. In April 2016 the City of Thunder Bay approved \$5 million toward the construction of the new facility pending support from the federal and provincial governments. On January 31, 2018, then Premier Kathleen Wynne announced a contribution of \$5 million from the Province of Ontario through NOHFC (the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation). The project also received the largest grant from Canada Cultural Spaces Fund to date. On July 17, 2018, the federal government pledged \$11.5 million announced by Minister Patty Hajdu and MP Don Rusnak. Most recently, \$3.5 million was granted by the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario (FedNor).

For this project, the Gallery hired a consultant to undertake a fundraising feasibility study in 2013. Based on the feedback they received from the community, the consultant conservatively estimated they would be able to raise \$2.5 million. Still in the quiet phase of fundraising, the gallery has already secured \$2.4 million from local community members, foundations, and businesses, and intends to raise their goal to \$3.5 million. Throughout their campaign, there have been some unexpected donors that have made significant contributions. This includes a local potter that had been a member for years, who came forward with an unsolicited donation of \$800,000.

Much of this fundraising success can be attributed to the Gallery Director and fundraising committee, and the AWE (Art Waterfront Experience) Committee, composed of board members and community volunteers.

The “Ongoing”

How have finances been projected for the new facility?

The Gallery anticipates updating their budget to reflect an increased percentage of earned revenue. Within the new facility, the organization intends to incorporate additional rental spaces and expand adult programming as well as earn revenue from the cafe and gift shop. The Gallery also anticipates the new visible location will result in more revenue from visitor attendance. Whether they maintain their Pay What You Can policy, or incorporate a flat admission fee, the Gallery anticipates that the increase in foot traffic will generate more revenue. Municipal funding will also be increased by the City of Thunder Bay to support growing operations.

In the early stages of predicting their new financials, TBAG consulted with galleries that were similar in size, and had recently completed a renovation project. For instance, through a connection with their architect, they have been consulting with the Audain Art Museum to gain insights on their energy usage and costs of operations.

How will staffing be impacted in the New Gallery?

As they are more than doubling in size, the Gallery intends to hire additional staff to support operations. This includes increasing janitorial and maintenance positions along with Gallery administrative staff. Curatorial, marketing and partnership development positions are anticipated, and a facilities manager will be brought on to oversee the building and support installations. These positions will be incorporated into the increased operating budget and supported by grants, earned revenue, and internship positions.

How will the facility be maintained?

While the Gallery does not currently have software in place, they intend on securing an asset management system to predict capital upgrades and incorporate future repairs into their business plan.

What lessons have been learned?

While still in the initial phases of the project, the Gallery has learned the value of relationship building in a capital project. By maintaining active communication and positive relationships with city council, funding agencies and program officers, they were able to secure project approvals and funding. Similarly, they are not afraid to ask questions or request further clarification when needed. In most instances, these agencies and funding bodies are looking to support organization and want to see projects succeed. Keeping dialogue open and checking in with program officers will help a capital project unfold more efficiently. Relationship building is

also important within a project team. From the architect to the project manager, all members are after the same goal. Building trust and promoting open communication will lead to a positive team dynamic and overall successful project.

Case Study Summary

The Thunder Bay Art Gallery waterfront relocation project will see the Gallery move from its current 16,000-square-foot building on the Confederation College campus, to a purpose built 37,000-square-foot facility on Lake Superior. Realized by community stakeholders, government support, and a resilient project team, this project intends to increase the visibility of the gallery and support cultural and commercial growth on the newly developed Waterfront. Despite an unexpected environmental setback, the project team has remained focused on seeing this project through and making the space a reality for their community. As they move into the construction phase of the project, the team intends to create a space that welcomes communities near and far, and engages them in thoughtful programming and exhibitions that excite, challenge and inspire.

Resources

The following resources below have been provided as additional information for readers.

Websites:

- [Thunder Bay Art Gallery - Waterfront Relocation Project Page](#)

Documents:

- [Waterfront Site Feasibility & Economic Impact Assessment](#)

Videos:

- [What the Waterfront Art Gallery will bring to the Community](#)
- [Meet the Architectural Team for the Waterfront Gallery](#)
- [The role of Indigenous Inspiration in the Design of the Waterfront Gallery](#)

News Releases:

- [New Waterfront Gallery Funding Update](#)