

A photograph of the Murney Tower, a cylindrical stone structure with a red roof and arched windows, set against a blue sky. The tower is surrounded by a low stone wall and green grass. A large, dark, leafy branch is visible in the foreground on the left. A red banner is overlaid on the bottom left, and a black banner is overlaid on the bottom right.

2021-2026 STRATEGIC PLAN

**MURNEY TOWER MUSEUM
NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE OF CANADA**



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Murney Tower Museum National Historic Site of Canada (NHSC) has a unique place within Kingston's cultural and military history. When it was established in 1925, Murney Tower Museum, then Kingston's only museum, was tasked with sharing the story of our city. Today, the museum proudly continues this tradition. The Museum Committee believes a community-oriented and comprehensive strategic plan is key to reinforcing the museum's current role and positioning in its community. At the heart of this plan is a commitment to strengthening the museum's relationship with the community and making its services more accessible and appealing to a diverse group of audiences. We strive to transform the museum into a cultural and educational hub that engages the community with the cultural and military history of Kingston.

This plan is the product of an extensive one-year planning and data collection process, which was co-developed with a broad range of internal and external stakeholders. Our planning process began in June 2020 with our Strategic Plan Project Proposal, which set the overall direction and goals for the project. Over the summer of 2020, the museum staff undertook extensive research by studying the process of developing a strategic plan and exploring different facilitation tools and methods available, thereby setting the groundwork for the data collection stage. Between January and April 2021, the museum held five focus group conversations with various internal and external stakeholders and created a comprehensive online survey to collect feedback from the broader public. Focus groups were attended by 45 people, while the survey received responses from 262 participants. These results have determined the strategic priorities, objectives, and actions that will guide us forward for the next five years.

2021-2026



The feedback has revealed the eight topics that are most relevant and important to our community; these topics have, in turn, determined our next five-year priorities: education, preservation, community engagement, curation, accessibility, modernization, operational and financial capacity, and partnerships and collaborations. We intend to stimulate learning, preserve Kingston’s tangible and intangible heritage, and engage with a diverse and broad range of community members through enhanced curatorship, engaging programming, strong partnerships, and active research. This plan also captures our commitment to community engagement and outreach as we work towards removing physical, social, and cultural barriers and telling more diverse and compelling stories of Kingston’s past. At the same time, this plan places an emphasis on partnership building and collaborative practices both within and beyond Kingston, thereby strengthening the museum’s position on local, regional, and national levels. Finally, it underlines the museum’s commitment to completing the process of modernization and professionalization of the museum through strong governance, financial stability, and staff development.

We believe that successful museums in the twenty-first century are those who listen to their audiences and are open to constantly evolving and revising their services, programs, and practices in light of changing local, national, and global conditions. Our strategic plan reflects this spirit. It will be our road map, reminding us of who we are and where we want to be in 2026 – but it will also leave room for flexibility and change, allowing us to respond to future opportunities and challenges and transform the museum along the way. With our exhibits, programs, services, and site, we intend to create meaningful cultural experiences that will appeal to all members of our community and capture the compelling, diverse, and rich stories of Kingston’s past, which will ensure our success by the museum’s 100th year in 2025.

2021-2026



OUR HISTORY

As a Tower (1846-1925)

Murney Redoubt was built in 1846 as part of a series of fortifications that were constructed in Kingston in response to the Oregon Crisis. Since the establishment of Fort Frontenac at the nexus point between Lake Ontario, the St. Lawrence River, and the Rideau Canal in 1673, Kingston had served as a strategic military centre in North America – of which the Oregon Crisis of 1846 is a quintessential example. The land in question in this territorial dispute was over 4,000 kilometres away from Kingston, yet the city’s critical location prompted the construction of a defensive fortification network of Martello towers, including that of Murney Tower.

The tower, once constructed, was occupied by several military units from 1848 until 1885. The Royal Canadian Rifle Regiment (RCRR) lived in the tower until 1871, followed by Battery A until 1880, Battery B until 1884, and the Prince of Wales’ Own Regiment until 1885. At most, the tower housed 22 inhabitants – six soldiers accompanied by their family members. After 1885, the tower was abandoned and fell into disarray.

As a Museum (1925-present)

On September 30, 1921, an exceptionally heavy autumn gale tore off the tower’s frame roof, fatally injuring a young boy. This shocking tragedy refocused community attention on the abandoned tower, which was repaired and transferred from the Department of Militia and Defence to the Department of the Interior on July 10, 1924. In the fall, on November 1, 1924, a lease agreement with the Kingston Historical Society was signed, allowing the tower to be operated as a museum.





One year later, on August 1, 1925, the Murney Tower became the Murney Tower Museum. Originally a museum of curios and local history deposited by citizens of Kingston, the site today has broadened its focus to emphasize the military and cultural history of Kingston. It is now home to over 1,000 artifacts, which capture the life of nineteenth-century Kingston. As the city's oldest operating museum, Murney Tower Museum has become an iconic landmark on the Lake Ontario waterfront, representing the city's unique built heritage and embodying Kingston's cultural and historical significance.

Today

Today, the museum is protected by a number of designations that highlight the significance of our site to both local and national history. With other sites, it is part of the Rideau Canal World Heritage Site and the Kingston Fortifications National Historic Site of Canada. On its own, it is designated as a National Historic Site of Canada and a Federal Heritage Building Review Office Classified Building. The museum is located within the Old Sydenham Heritage Conservation District, and within the Ontario Heritage Act designated property Macdonald Park. From an abandoned tower intended to be demolished to a National Historic Site of Canada, the Murney Tower Museum now delightedly welcomes visitors from around the world every summer.





GOVERNANCE

The Murney Tower Museum has been operated by the Kingston Historical Society since 1925. The museum is governed by a steering committee of the Kingston Historical Society, which comprises volunteers and cultural heritage professionals. The committee governs Murney Tower Museum and regularly monitors its operations and organizational performance by meeting regularly and corresponding daily with staff. The committee is responsible for the museum's progress and growth operations and is committed to ensuring the success of its next five-year strategic priorities.



OUR MISSION

The Murney Tower Museum NHSC is a public, non-profit museum which strives to connect visitors with Kingston's military and cultural history through collection, preservation, research, and interpretation.

OUR VISION

At Murney Tower Museum, our vision is to create meaningful experiences and provide a sense of place for our community by representing Kingston's distinct cultural and military heritage through programs, research, and interpretation as a designated NHSC.

OUR VALUES

As Kingston's oldest museum, our values are as time-honoured and deep-rooted as our institution.

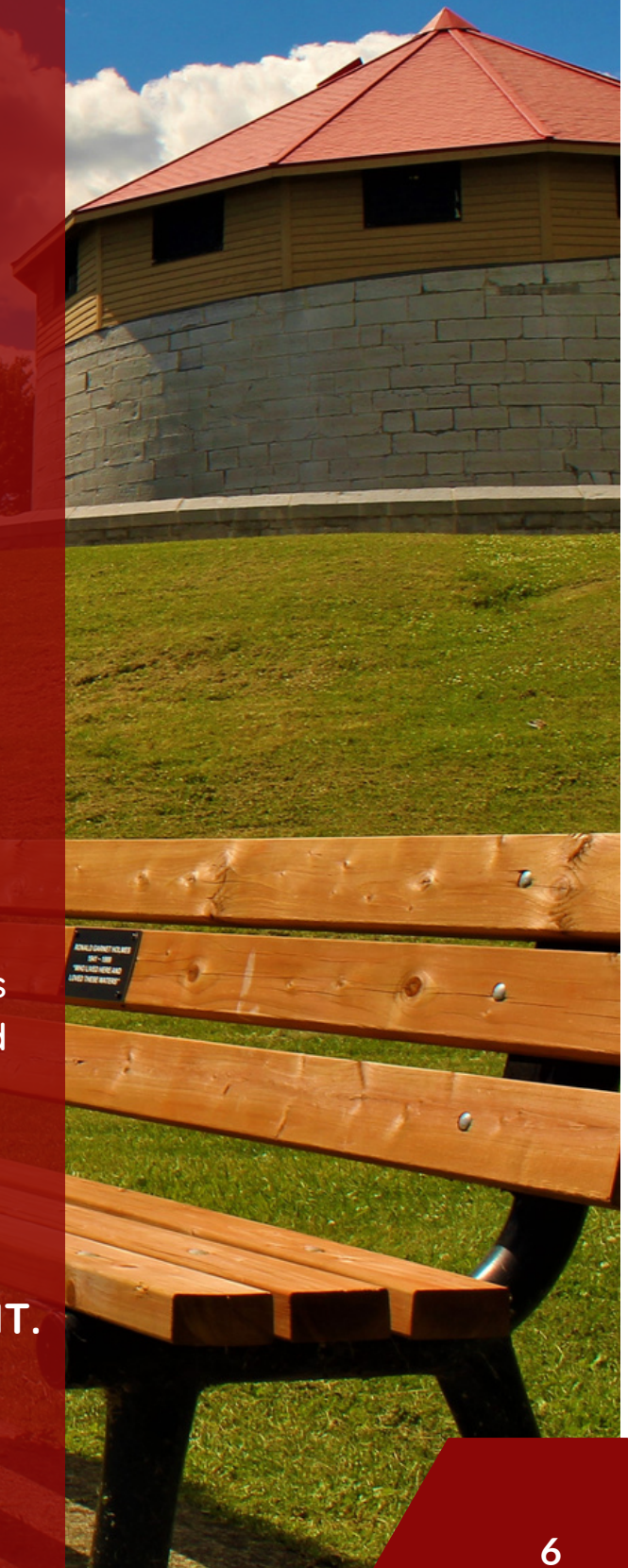
ENHANCE PRESERVATION.

FOSTER EDUCATION.

FACILITATE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.

PROMOTE COLLABORATION.

AUGMENT ACCESSIBILITY.





STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Stimulate learning and strengthen educational efforts.

Museums are sites of learning, and it is of the utmost importance for us to produce and share the knowledge that we house within the walls of our tower. Through formal programs, educational collaborations, and expanded research efforts, we seek to expand our educational outreach and cultivate knowledge within our community and beyond.

Maintain and enhance the preservation of the museum and its collections.

The preservation of our over 1,000 artifacts – including the tower itself – is, naturally, a critical endeavour. We will prioritize the preservation of our collections and our site, while at the same time preserving and sharing the narratives and memories of nineteenth-century Kingston.

Enhance visibility and community engagement.

Our relationship with the community must always remain active, collaborative, and engaging. By improving our external visibility, diversifying our stories, and hosting a variety of events to increase engagement with our community, we will foster and strengthen this relationship.

Develop creative programs and curatorial practices which tell diverse stories.

The curatorial activities of any museum are paramount, and it is important to us that these activities are high-quality, innovative, and diverse. In order to realize this aim, we will seek to improve exhibit quality, amplify research efforts, and narrate diversified histories through creative curatorship.

Make Murney Tower Museum inclusive, diverse, and accessible to all.

Museums in the twenty-first century ought to be spaces which are inclusive, welcoming, and accessible to all. By reshaping our ways of storytelling and implementing accessibility strategies while dismantling physical, social, and cultural barriers, we aim to realize this commitment and allow all people to interact with all that our museum has to offer.

Modernize and professionalize the museum.

Our museum can only grow and improve if we dedicate ourselves to its modernization and professionalization. By following museum standards, improving the quality of cultural heritage services, and supporting the professional development of staff members, we can propel the museum forward.

Strengthen operational and financial capacities.

A solid operational and financial base is necessary for the ongoing existence of the museum. Through a focus on human resources, policy development, good governance, and diversified revenue, we will guarantee and expand our operational and financial capacities.

Maintain and expand partnerships and collaborations within the Kingston community and beyond.

Our collaborations allow us to connect, cooperate, and thrive beyond the site of our tower. By maintaining current partnerships while exploring local, regional, and national collaborative opportunities, Murney Tower Museum will seek to form lasting connections across the country.



The Murney Tower Museum produces lasting memories as a *hidden gem*, discovered walking along the water. It's a place where interpreters and curators interact with visitors to produce a *lasting experience*.



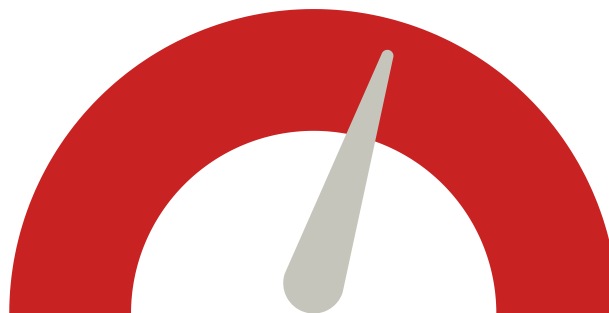
STRATEGIC PRIORITY

Stimulate learning and strengthen educational efforts.



Objective	Actions
Educate the public through the implementation of formal educational programs, including guided tours and historical interpretation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue to update tour scripts to improve the quality of guided tours.• Develop new onsite and traveling school programs with strong curriculum links.• Establish relationships with teachers or Faculty of Education students to help ensure that programs meet curriculum standards.
Expand educational outreach through collaborations across the Kingston museum and heritage community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintain a strong relationship with Kingston Association of Museums (KAM) and their various programming initiatives.• Continue to participate in events such as March of the Museums and Kingston Regional Heritage Fair.• Connect with other Kingston museums to create collaborative educational programs and events.
Increase research efforts to help facilitate public education through workshops, collection highlights, crafts and activities, and written stories.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Revisit and revitalize existing programs with new research findings.• Brainstorm and develop new learning initiatives which broaden the scope of educational programs.• Research new pedagogical methods to deliver accessible and diverse educational programming.

Education: 59% of focus group participants said education is the primary purpose of a museum.

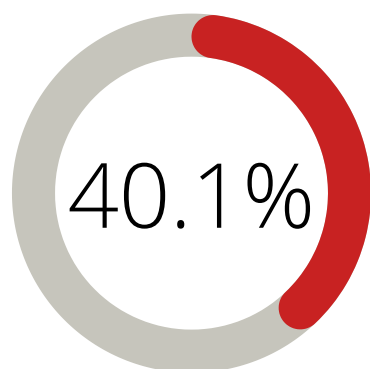




STRATEGIC PRIORITY

Maintain and enhance the preservation of the museum and its collections.

Objective	Actions
Improve the condition of the tangible heritage of the museum through effective collections care and management.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Practice regular and constant collections care through cleaning and restoration.• Organize the new storage facility and create a full inventory of the museum collections.• Photograph all artifacts and make collections available digitally through our website for research.
Collaborate with Parks Canada in order to ensure the preservation of the historic Murney Tower Museum site.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintain and strengthen our unique partnership with Parks Canada, one of the oldest of its kind in the country.• Maintain high standards for site preservation.• Implement new strategies to improve the preservation and protection of the tower.
Enhance the preservation and awareness of the intangible heritage of the museum through staff research and community outreach.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Undertake research into neglected areas of the museum's history, including women and children's history, Indigenous history, and people of the tower.• Design exhibits which communicate intangible heritage to the broader community.



Preservation: 40.1% of survey respondents say preservation is the primary purpose of a museum.





STRATEGIC PRIORITY

Enhance visibility and community engagement.

Objective	Actions
Increase community awareness and knowledge of the museum through improved external visibility, including outdoor and digital presence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explore and implement strategies to revamp outdoor presence, including updated signage and landscaping.• Investigate opportunities and acquire permission to host outdoor events and programming.• Continue regular updating of social media accounts and the website, including the use of boosted posts.
Diversify our museum's stories to encompass a variety of nineteenth-century histories, with an emphasis on military and cultural history.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Incorporate community perspectives and memories into research initiatives through oral histories and similar projects.• Engage with military and cultural history in order to expand current narratives.• Gather community feedback to guide the types of stories highlighted at the museum.
Implement a wide range of events and programs to engage a broad audience, including reenactments, performances, and workshops.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Plan and host events pertaining to the history of the museum, such as reenactments and workshops.• Plan and host social events that bring the community together, such as live music performances.• Continue to host existing events with organizations such as Phantoms of Yore, March of the Museums, and Doors Open Kingston.



Community Engagement:

Murney Tower intends to continue to host events, such as Paint Night with the Marine Museum (pictured left) to engage a broad range of audiences throughout the community.

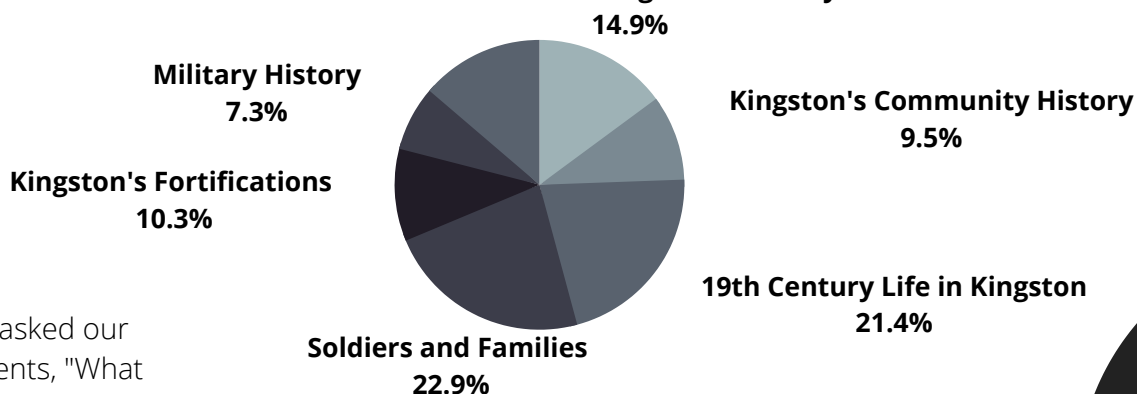


STRATEGIC PRIORITY

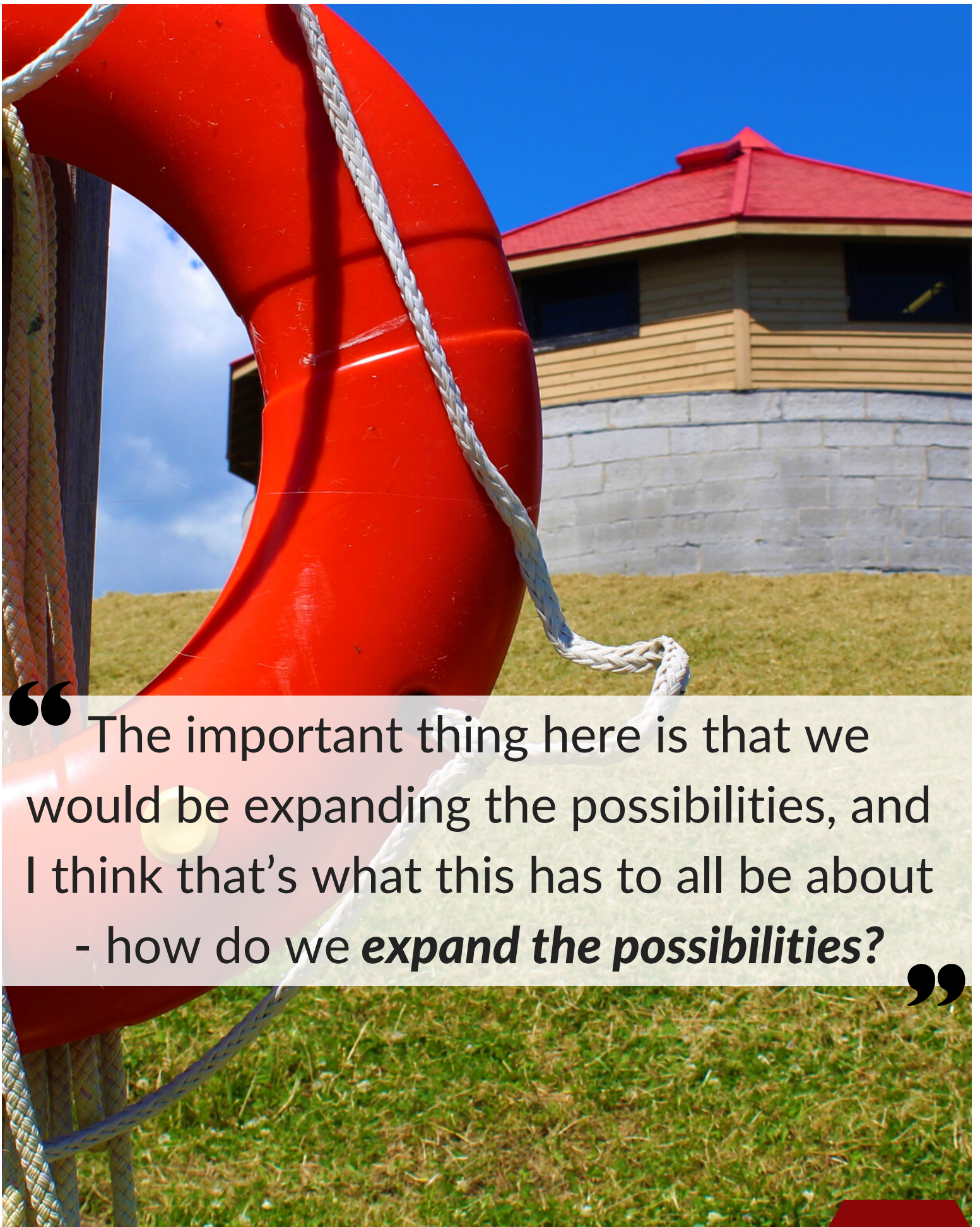
Develop creative programs and curatorial practices which tell diverse stories.

Objective	Actions
Maintain and improve curatorial activities through enhanced exhibit quality, design, and renewal.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create thematic exhibits which highlight diverse aspects of the museum’s expansive collections. • Seasonally renew temporary exhibits and maintain permanent ones. • Upgrade exhibit labels and panel designs.
Amplify research efforts in order to develop innovative and informative curatorial practices and programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use available resources to research relevant and up-to-date curatorial practices and implement such practices into permanent museum exhibits. • Continue to develop and deliver programs which highlight the museum’s collections and exhibits.
Narrate an expanded and diversified history of the tower through creative and engaging curatorship.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with diverse curators, historians, and creators to jointly develop new, creative, and inclusive curatorial practices and programs. • Communicate diverse stories through new visual and textual curatorial methods. • Adopt a new collaborative approach to curatorship based on co-curation and co-creation of exhibits with the community.

Colonial and Indigenous History



Curation: We asked our survey respondents, "What type of stories should we tell at Murney Tower Museum?"



“ The important thing here is that we would be expanding the possibilities, and I think that’s what this has to all be about - how do we ***expand the possibilities?*** ”



STRATEGIC PRIORITY

Make Murney Tower Museum inclusive, diverse, and accessible to all.

Objective	Actions
<p>Implement strategies, narratives, and ways of storytelling which make the museum an inclusive, safe, and welcoming place for all.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore methods to collect visitor demographics. • Identify the groups that are missing from the museum’s “traditional” audience. • Experiment with programs, exhibits, and stories which encourage diverse and expanded visitorship.
<p>Create and execute accessibility strategies to allow all audiences to interact with the museum’s programs, collections, and services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote our accessibility initiatives to audiences through digital marketing tools, including social media, newsletter, and website. • Provide a space for marginalized communities to tell their own stories, as related to our museum’s history. • Constantly update our virtual tour and continue to work toward the creation of an audio-visual tour.
<p>Implement new and effective strategies in order to remove physical, social, and cultural barriers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify all barriers which inhibit full participation in the museum. • Discuss with Parks Canada and Kingston Historical Society the removal of physical barriers through new technologies, such as a wheelchair ramp and audio-visual tour. • Continuously educate and train staff on social and cultural barriers presented within our spaces and work towards finding suitable and realistic solutions.

Washroom onsite



Smartphone app with audio-visual tour



Onsite Parking



Accessibility: Survey respondents were asked "Which of the following options would make Murney Tower more accessible to you personally?"







STRATEGIC PRIORITY

Modernize and professionalize the museum.

Objective	Actions
<p>Implement strategies to adapt operations and services to appropriate museum standards.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to follow CORE Standards for Canadian Museums and International Standards for Museums set by ICOM. • Strengthen supervision capacity in order to ensure that best practices are consistently followed. • Support skill development and training of volunteers and summer staff to ensure effective preservation, research, and public outreach.
<p>Strengthen existing modernization efforts in order to improve the quality of cultural heritage services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain domain name and professional email addresses. • Maintain and regularly update the museum's new website. • Ensure that current museum policies reflect changing local and global conditions and address the ongoing needs of staff and audiences.
<p>Implement innovative strategies to promote professionalization and excellence in practices to increase the museum's profile and revitalize its services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constantly seek professional development opportunities for staff members. • Ensure that these newly developed skills are implemented into the daily operations of the museum. • Continue to practice mentor-mentee relationships between existing and incoming staff for knowledge development.



Explore Engage Connect Visit    

Contact Us

Modernization: In 2021, the museum launched its new website, which is now regularly updated with announcements, events, collections, and more.



Welcome to the Murney Tower Museum!

STRATEGIC PRIORITY

Strengthen operational and financial capacities.

Objective	Actions
<p>Support and strengthen the museum’s operational capacity through human resources, policy development, and diverse revenue stream.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue working with Queen’s Law Clinic to revise HR policy in light of changing local, national, and global conditions. • Increase the museum’s professional staff capacity by working towards creating new full-time and part-time positions. • Conclude each season with a year-end report to support and improve future operations.
<p>Regularly monitor operations, organizational performance and growth through good governance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain an active KHS steering committee to govern the museum and improve succession planning. • Ensure regular meetings and daily correspondence between committee members and staff regarding operations and major projects. • Train committee members to assist director and staff with governing the museum.
<p>Diversify sources of funding in order to ensure the continuity of operations and ongoing financial stability.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to leverage funding from grants such as the City of Kingston Heritage Fund, Young Canada Works, and Canada Summer Jobs. • Research and apply for alternative provincial or federal grants to support operations. • Build on past successful collaborations with diverse organizations, including Phantoms of Yore, Haunted Walk, Daft Brewing, and local schools.

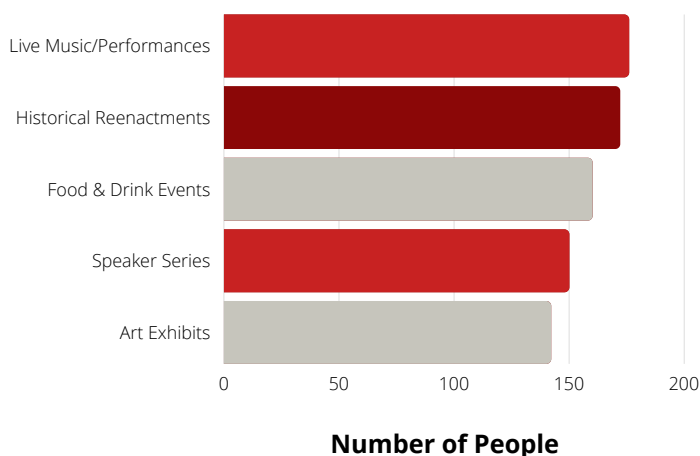




STRATEGIC PRIORITY

Maintain and expand partnerships and collaborations within the Kingston community and beyond.

Objective	Actions
Explore new and existing opportunities to maintain and strengthen partnerships and collaborations with various organizations throughout the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue hosting events in collaboration Phantoms of Yore and Daft Brewing. • Maintain relationships with Queen’s University and Fleming College. • Explore alternate networking opportunities with local organizations.
Strengthen and build relationships with the Kingston cultural heritage community and the Kingston Fortification Network.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue partnership with KAM. • Actively participate in Kingston-wide educational and heritage events. • Strengthen relationships with heritage sites within Kingston Fortification Network to foster interest in the military history of Kingston.
Engage with local, regional, and national heritage communities by exploring partnership opportunities across Canada.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek out collaborations to work with organizations such as WorkInCulture to further promote the museum. • Engage with Martello tower organizations around the world to spread international awareness of our organization. • Continue to participate in virtual campaigns, such as Museum Week and International Museum Day.



Partnerships and Collaborations:

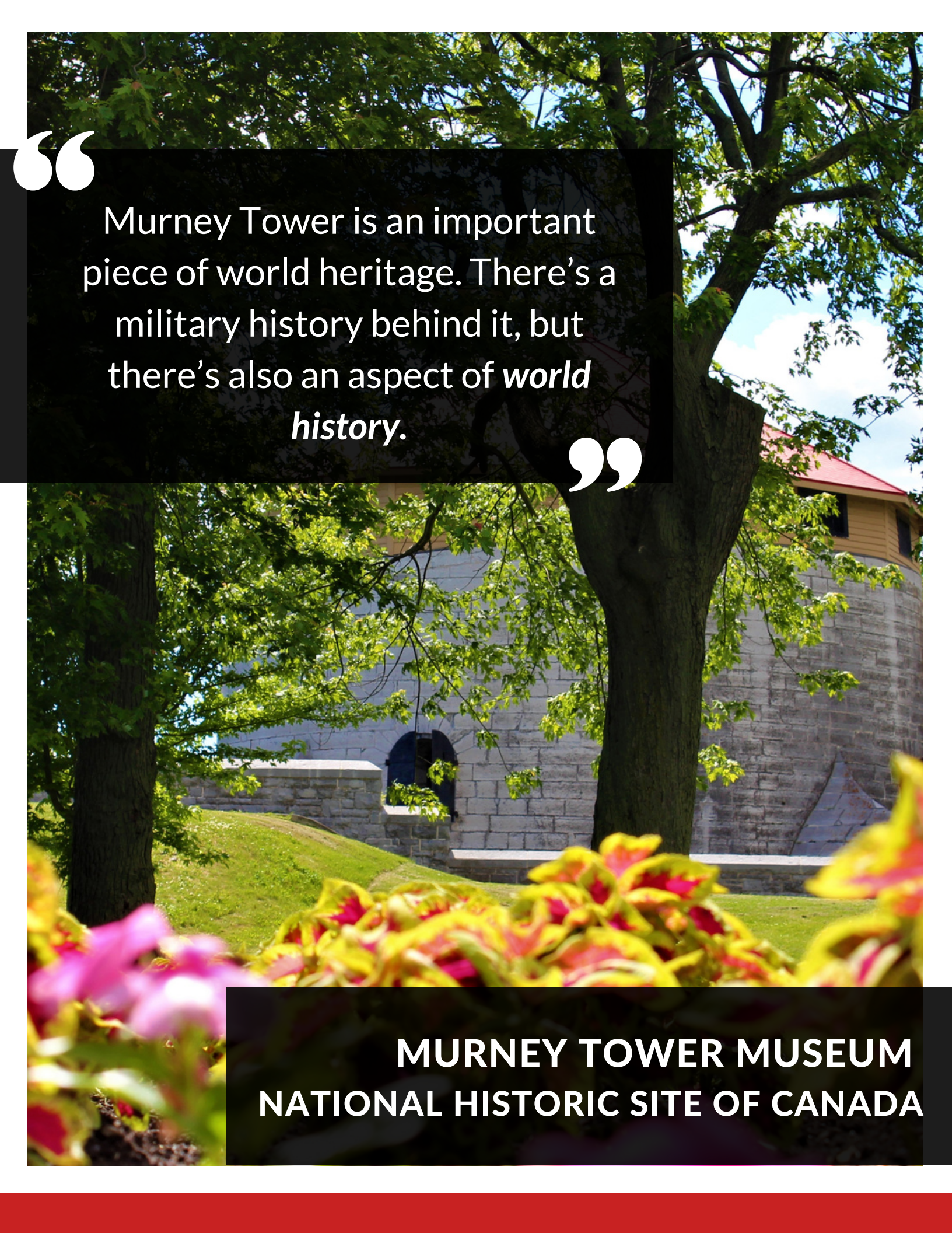
Throughout our survey, the community expressed interest in diverse events, several of which require collaboration with external organizations and individuals.



CONCLUSION

Successful museums in the twenty-first century are those which recognize that, despite their role as bearers of the past, they too must give ample consideration to both the present and the future. Museums today must be eager to learn, ready to adapt, and open to change. They must recognize the value of working closely with their community in order to become attuned to changing local, national, and global conditions. Not only should they listen closely to their locality, but they should also expand by forming connections beyond its bounds. Attentive museums work toward narrating a diverse collection of stories through innovative research, curatorship, and outreach. At Murney Tower Museum, our eyes follow the shifting needs, criticisms, and concerns of the present. As conditions at the local, national, and global levels transform, so must our practices. As the needs of various audiences change, so must our institution.

In recognizing the importance of these considerations, the museum sought to develop a strategic plan which considered, above all, the voices of the community. After an extensive and comprehensive data collection process in collaboration with our internal and external stakeholders, we identified the eight key areas which are critical to the advancement and improvement of the museum in the next five years. These areas have formed the basis of this plan's strategic priorities, which are introduced above. As Kingston's oldest operating museum, we endeavour to achieve each of the objectives as outlined in this plan in order to protect and preserve our long and rich history. This community-oriented, five-year strategic plan will guide us toward our 100th anniversary in 2025 and beyond. By the year of our centennial, Murney Tower Museum will be the quintessential, Kingstonian space where people can discover their past, reflect on the present, and anticipate the future.



“ Murney Tower is an important piece of world heritage. There’s a military history behind it, but there’s also an aspect of *world history*. ”



**MURNEY TOWER MUSEUM
NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE OF CANADA**