

Digital Strategies for Museums in Ontario: Planning for the Future

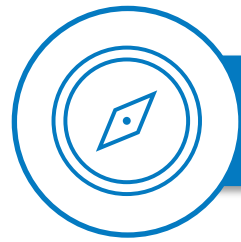
Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming

April 2025



Purpose

- Provide additional context for the Ministry's request for a **Digital Strategy** in 2025 and an overview of the requirements as set out in the Standards for Community Museums.



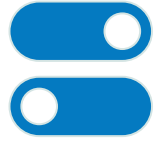
Context

- Museums applying for the Community Museum Operating Grant (CMOG) must comply with requirements set out in the Standards for Community Museums in Ontario.
- The Ministry requests specific policies and plans with reference to the Standards on an annual basis to demonstrate a museum's compliance with requirements.
- The 10 standards for community museums represent the minimum requirements for the operation of a good community museum.
- The goal is to help museums meet the minimum Standards and to encourage continuous improvement and professionalism in the sector.
- For 2025, the Ministry is requesting a **Digital Strategy, due June 30, 2025**, along with CMOG applications.
- For 2026, the Ministry is requesting a Strategic Plan (see Appendix).



What is a Digital Strategy?

- A Digital Strategy is a concise document that sets out a museum's current digital capacity and plans to support enhanced capacity and digital service delivery in the future.
- The strategy should demonstrate that the museum is incorporating considerations around digital into their strategic objectives and plans.
- All museums should have their own Digital Strategy, which draws on the museum's [Community Standard](#) and [Collections Standard](#).
- The goal is not to assess the museum's digital capacity but to assess how museums are working toward enhancing their digital areas of focus and incorporating them into their strategic objectives and plans.



Digital Requirements in the Community Standard

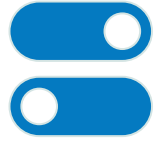
The Community Standard's Objective:

- A community's heritage is part of its identity. As a steward of the community's heritage, the museum is actively engaged in the community and responsive to its needs. The museum is accessible and relevant and draws support from its community.

Requirements relevant to digital capacity in the Standard include that museums:

- f) endeavour to provide **equality of access to information** about the museum's collections, services and programs through adequate promotion
- g) endeavour to provide equal access to all members of the community, both physically and intellectually, to the museum's collections, information, services and programs, including **through electronic means for example, a website or social media**





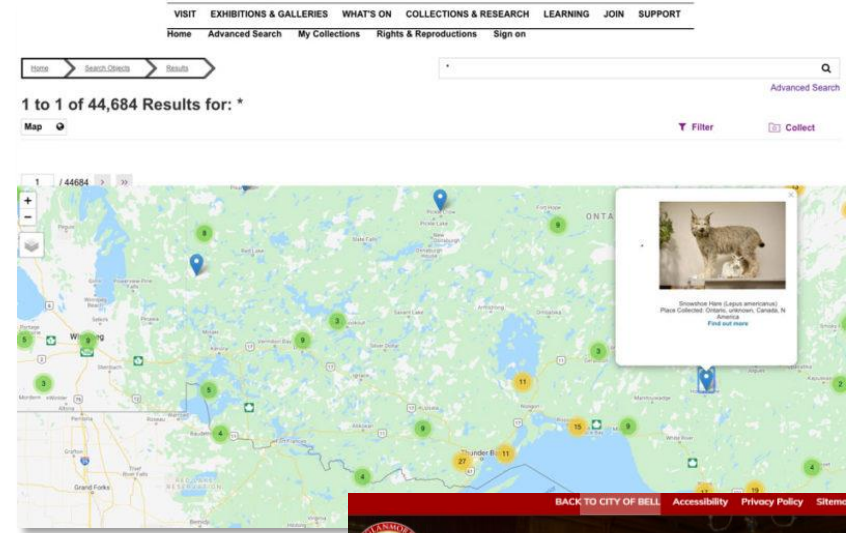
Digital Requirements in the Collections Standard

The Collections Standard's Objective:

- As a community museum, the artifacts you keep represent your community's heritage. To protect their value, museums must maintain a well-organized, managed and documented collection.

Requirements relevant to digital capacity in the Standard include that museums:

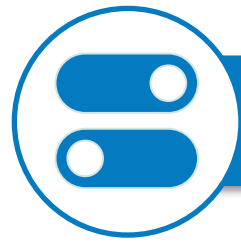
- Use an effective collection documentation system, which may be paper-based, electronic, or a combination and includes:
 - a standardized numbering system
 - an accession register
 - a master catalogue file
 - signed donor and loan forms
- keep a periodically updated paper or electronic copy of the collection records off-site in a secure location
- keep its collection records current



Museums have collectively invested millions in systems to digitize, organize, store and, in many cases share, their own collections. How might they use that infrastructure to support trusted, stable digital collectibles?

Image 1: ROM's eMuseum "Map Our Collection" feature, a dynamic alternative to standard browsing. Credit: Gallery Systems.

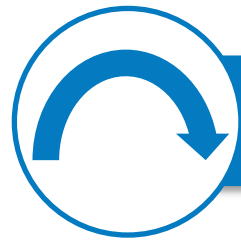
Image 2: Glanmore National Historic Site. Online Collections Database. Credit: glanmore.ca



Additional Standards to Consider

Other **Standards** of relevance to the Digital Strategy involve using digital to enhance **accessibility (equality of access)**. For example, from the Interpretation and Education Standard:

1. Providing a variety of interpretation methods to meet a range of visitor needs.



Elements of a Digital Strategy

- A museum's Digital Strategy should:
 1. Define goals and objectives that address the digital needs of the museum.
 2. Identify essential areas of focus including digital content, collections documentation and digitization, programs, online marketing and opportunities for improvement.
 3. Specify required technology, skills, and staffing for delivery of services.
 4. Determine general cost estimates and timelines.
 5. Identify key metrics to monitor, such as followers count, YouTube views, collections digitized, online/hybrid programs offered, etc.
 6. Include next steps and evaluation methods.
 7. Demonstrate compliance with the Community and Collections Standards.



Next Steps and Deadlines

- Deadline for submission is June 30, 2025, with your CMOG grant submission.
- Reach out to the Ministry at CMOG-SFMC@ontario.ca with any questions.



Appendix: Recommended Resources

Museum Standards resources:

- [Standards for Community Museums in Ontario](#)
- [Alberta Museums Association. Standard Practices Handbook for Museums, 3rd edition. 2014.](#)

Digital Strategy Planning Resources:

The Digital Strategy – Intention through Application: Small Bytes Webinar Series

Corey Timpson, Corey Timpson Design Inc.
• Mary-Katherine Whelan, Amherstburg Freedom Museum • Ontario Museum Association

Presentation Slides
Video



Development and Design • Digital Media • Engagement • Small Bytes Project Resources

Digital Strategy Checklist Tool

Corey Timpson, Corey Timpson Design Inc. • Mary-Katherine Whelan, Amherstburg Freedom Museum • Ontario Museum Association

Worksheet/Template



Appendix: Looking Ahead

2026-27: **Strategic Plan**

- For 2026, the Ministry is planning to review museums' Strategic Plans. Strategic Plans spanning three to five years in duration were last required in 2018-2019.
- Museums will be asked to submit a copy of the museum's board-approved Strategic Plan which may also be a museum's Business Plan or Master Plan.
- The plan should be a document that sets out the **long-term goals** and **objectives** for the organization.
- As per Regulation 877, a museum "has a statement of purpose that clearly sets out the aims and objectives of the institution and that has a collections policy relative to such aims and objectives."
- The Governance Standard includes the following:
 5. The museum's operations and activities must be:
 - a) directed by short and long-term written plans (for example, business plan, strategic plan, visioning plan or master plan) that are:
 - b) approved by the governing body
 - c) contain goals and objectives relevant to the museum's statement of purpose