

November 24, 2025

Mayor Jefferies and Members of City Council
City of Red Deer
4914 48 Ave
Red Deer, AB T4N 3T3

Re: Critical Concerns About the 2026 Community Culture Development Fund (CCDF) Process, Funding Outcomes, and Sector Impacts

Dear Mayor Jefferies and Members of Council,

We, the undersigned arts, culture, and heritage organizations of Red Deer, are writing to express profound concern regarding the recently announced CCDF funding allocations for the 2026 to 2028 grant cycle. The outcome of this adjudication process does not reflect the needs, scale, or realities of our sector—and if allowed to stand, it will result in severe reductions of cultural services, loss of staff positions, closure of programs, and potential collapse of multiple longstanding institutions.

This is not simply a difficult funding year. It is a crisis precipitated by a misaligned process, an under-resourced program, and decisions that contradict the City's own policies on community development, public participation, and fair treatment of community groups.

A Process Misaligned with Arts & Culture Expertise

At the 2025 intake information sessions, organizations were told the CCDF adjudication would be handled entirely in-house by City staff with grant experience. No commitment was made to include arts or heritage professionals, sector specialists, or representatives with cultural industry knowledge.

Based on the funding outcomes, it appears highly likely that an FCSS-style lens was applied — one focused on social development metrics, “dollars-per-head” calculations, and program outputs tangentially related to cultural quality, heritage preservation, or professional arts standards. This contradicts the intent of the Art & Culture funding stream within Community Development Grants.

Under earlier models, adjudication was handled at arm’s length through the Community Foundation, ensuring transparency, sector expertise, and alignment with artistic standards. That balance has now been lost and the results are stark.

Multiple major cultural institutions received \$0, including heritage organizations stewarding municipal history; arts organizations essential to community wellbeing and cultural growth saw drastic reductions; and many arts- and culture-specific programs were deprioritized in favour of projects aligning more closely with social service and economic development frameworks.

This raises legitimate concerns about whether the 2026 – 2028 adjudication process met the standards for equity, transparency, informed participation, consistency, and fair access outlined in City policy.

The 2026 – 2028 Funding Pool Is Critically Out of Step with Sector Growth. Red Deer is preparing for significant population increases, including 5,000+ new residents connected to the regional hospital expansion. A growing city requires a growing cultural infrastructure. Yet CCDF funding has not increased since 2022, despite demand rising every year.

Historical Context of the CCDF Funding Pool

- 2018: funding pool was \$317,405 annual funding for the 3-year term. \$532,105 was requested annually.
- 2022: the funding pool was increased to \$380,000, plus \$20,000 for Opportunities funding for each of the next three years.
 - \$573,875 Funds requested per year (3-year cycle)
 - \$346,825 Granted yearly for the 2023–2025 cycle.
 - \$96,450 was requested for further one- and two-year programs during 2024–2025. \$65,450 was granted for 2024 and \$43,250 for 2025 (on two-year projects.)
- 2026: No noted increase to the available funds, but demand has been higher than ever, with over \$1,100,000 in grant applications, nearly triple the funding available.

These numbers alone demonstrate that arts and culture in Red Deer are growing far faster than municipal investment.

National indicators support this:

- Canada's arts and culture sector has grown nearly 8% in the last three years—double the national economy's growth.
- The sector has added almost \$10 billion since 2021 and continues to outpace key industries.
- 78% of Canadians say arts experiences are as or more important than the year before.
- 75% say arts experiences improve community belonging.
- Every \$1 invested in Arts & Culture brings a \$25 of return through aligned sectors.

Red Deer is out of alignment with these national trends and risks becoming a cultural desert unless investment catches up. We also recognize Council faces the stark reality of a \$20 million municipal deficit, but cutting cultural infrastructure during economic challenge is counterproductive. Arts investments historically yield high economic, social, and community returns—and cost far less than municipally run service equivalents.

The CCDF pool has not increased since 2022, despite population growth, rising costs and inflation, increased demand for arts programming, a significant influx of new community groups and emerging artists, and Red Deer preparing to welcome 5,000+ new residents due to the hospital expansion.

Past application demand confirms this trend:

- 2018: \$317,405 available vs. \$532,105 requested
- 2022: \$380,000 available vs. \$573,875 requested (3-year cycle)
- 2023–2025: \$346,825 was disbursed for 2023 and an additional intake in 2023 for 2024 & 2025 funding also funded
- 2026–2028: \$380,000 available vs. \$1,100,000 requested (3-year cycle)

The cultural sector has rapidly expanded, while the funding pool has remained unchanged for three years.

Across the sector, the reductions are catastrophic. As one example, Red Deer Arts Council's impacts will be significant: In 2024, RDAC paid over \$45,000 to Red Deer artists for their creative work. Under the new allocations, only \$20,000 is directed toward all expenses for RDAC's core arts community programming, of which, only \$4,000 may be used for administration. We will be unable to pay artists fairly for their creative work and that is our mandate as an organization.

The organization cannot staff or administer the programs the City has chosen to fund. Sector-serving services, professional development, and community-wide arts activation become impossible. Even the one program that received full funding, the Creative Hub, will collapse if core operations cannot be maintained.

Red Deer Arts Council is one example among many. Others, including heritage institutions like Sunnybrook Farm Museum, have already outlined shortened seasons, cancelled school programs, staff layoffs, and significant reduction of services if operational funding is not made available. The ripple effect will be immediate and city-wide.

Without emergency reconsideration, Red Deer will see:

- Reduced access to lifelong learning and creative participation
- Loss of cultural tourism revenue
- Decrease in resident satisfaction and community belonging
- Lower retention of skilled workers relocating for hospital expansion
- Collapse of multi-decade community cultural institutions
- Loss of volunteer engagement and community connection
- Sharp decline in paid artistic work for Red Deer creators

These are not theoretical concerns. They represent imminent operational realities.

We acknowledge the challenging financial conditions the City faces and we deeply value the longstanding partnership between municipal leadership and the cultural community. Our intent is not accusation but urgent problem-solving.

We respectfully request:

1. A Full Review and Overhaul of the 2026 - 2028 CCDF Adjudication Process

- Apply an arts & culture industry lens.

- Include knowledgeable community representatives or return to arms-length adjudication.
- Ensure consistent application of evaluation criteria reflective of the arts.
- Provide clarity about decision pathways and weighting of criteria.

2. Expansion of Funding Available to the Arts & Culture Stream

The demand and growth of the sector far exceed the current stagnant budget of \$380,000, set four years ago. To meet current needs, the fund requires inflationary adjustment, population-growth adjustment, and cultural infrastructure investment comparable to similar municipalities.

3. Reinstate Operational Funding for Key Cultural Organizations

Program-only funding models are not sustainable. Predictable, stable operational support is essential to deliver programming responsibly. Municipal policy states that grant processes must be transparent, equitable, consistent, and informed by meaningful public participation. The 2026 CCDF outcomes do not reflect these principles. We urge Council to take immediate action to review the process, increase funding levels, and reaffirm the City's commitment to arts, culture, and heritage—pillars that strengthen Red Deer economically, socially, emotionally, and civically.

We welcome a meeting with Council to discuss these concerns in detail and collaboratively shape a healthier, more sustainable model.

Thank you for your consideration and your commitment to the people and future of Red Deer.

Sincerely,

Arts, Culture, and Heritage Organizations of Red Deer

Suzanne Hermary, Executive Director
Red Deer Arts Council

Julie Macrae, Director
Norwegian Laft Hus Society

Ian Warwick, Executive Director
Sunnybrook Farm Museum

Peter Stevens, President
Red Deer Pottery Club

Judy Robins Weir, Board President
Red Deer Festival for the Performing Arts

Starlise Waschuk, Co-Artistic Director
Prime Stock Theatre Society

Cynthia Edwards, Board President
Central Alberta Theatre Society

Ben Arthur, Board President
Red Deer Highland Games Society