

Open letter to Premier David Eby and Spencer Chandra Herbert, B.C. Minister of Tourism, Arts, Culture & Sport

Dear Premier Eby & Minister Chandra Herbert:

We're writing to seek the urgent renewal of the B.C. Fairs, Festivals and Events Fund (BCFFE) — or a replacement — in order to provide immediate and meaningful support to arts, cultural, community, and events throughout the province. With an increasing number of Canadians looking for homegrown travel experiences, it's never been more important to encourage thriving, exciting fairs and festivals.

As businesses and organizations we recognize these are challenging times for all levels of government, and we appreciate your efforts to protect B.C. industries from the looming impacts of possible tariffs. In spite of the uncertainty caused by rising cross-border tensions, it's heartening to see a sudden increase in Canadians seeking out products made within our borders and cancelling U.S. travel plans in favour of experiences that bring us together as a nation . . . experiences like B.C. fairs and festivals.

Our events are cornerstones of cultural identity, economic vitality, and social cohesion. Throughout the province, they offer a unique platform for celebrating our diverse talents and traditions — allowing us to come together in ways that reflect the fabric of B.C.

But our fairs and festivals are more than entertainment. They attract tourists and lift up local businesses, from venues and suppliers that provide AV, stages and decor, to food vendors and specialty artisans. Jobs created by the arts and culture sector intersect with many other key industries. The same people that work festivals and arts-focused events also work in B.C.'s booming film industry, sporting events like the Invictus Games and FIFA, and major concert tours that have enormous economic impact — shows like Taylor Swift, Ed Sheeran, Luke Combs, and many more. Without skilled workers, these industries and productions will struggle; investing in B.C. events helps train the skilled workforce they require.

That's important, because according to your own stats, B.C.'s arts, culture, and heritage sector adds more than \$8.6 billion to B.C.'s annual GDP, and employs more than 150,000 British Columbians, representing 5.4 per cent of the province's overall labour force — the highest proportion in the country. Support for events is an investment in the livelihood of our communities, promoting tourism within our borders, and ensuring that British Columbia producers, artists, and performers have opportunities to thrive.

That's why we wish we could say planning for the future of B.C. events and festivals is well underway . . . unfortunately, we can't.

During the NDP's successful 2024 re-election campaign, we were elated to see your commitment to "Provide stable, year over year funding for fairs, festivals and events." We appreciated this commitment and your direct attention to the crucial role that events and festivals play in B.C.'s economic landscape. We were emboldened by your dedication to ensure our sector was supported, it made us feel we had security for our future.

However, as time continues to pass without news of what that funding will be, our industry becomes more vulnerable and lacks the confidence to move forward.

The clock is ticking on this year's events and festival season, and B.C. is beginning to lose long-standing and beloved events such as *The Vancouver Mural Festival* and *The Vancouver Island Music Festival*, to

name just two. Sectoral challenges around ongoing cost increases and dropping revenues continue to plague the industry, and show no signs of improving in the short-term. Cancellations, postponements, and cheap downsized-versions of what were once thriving and impactful events in communities all across B.C. will be the result if action is not taken now.

Once again, we seek your urgent renewal of the BCFFE program, or an adequate and meaningful replacement fund, that will immediately provide support to events and festivals throughout the province.

Thank you for your attention. We look forward to seeing you follow through on your commitment to provide stable, year over year funding for fairs, festivals and events. The arts and culture industry is in a fragile and vulnerable state, and its future is in your hands.

Sincerely,

Bard on the Beach Shakespeare Festival
Bass Coast Electronic Music and Art Festival
BC Live Performance Network
Brewery & the Beast
Crankworx Whistler
Culinaire Victoria
Denim on the Diamond
FVDED In The Park
Honda Celebration of Light
Hopscotch Festival
Italian Day on The Drive
Just For Laughs Vancouver
Pacific National Exhibition (PNE)
Phillips Backyard Concert Series
PuSh International Performing Arts Festival
Rifflandia Festival
Song & Surf Music Festival
Sunfest Country Music Festival
The Cup
Vancouver Craft Beer & Music Festival
Vancouver International Children's Festival
Vancouver Writers Fest
Victoria International Wine Festival
Whisky Global

. . . and hundreds more in B.C.'s arts and culture community.