



STEP

St. Paul / Elk Point  
Economic Development Alliance

# Arts & Culture for Tourism Strategy:

*Supporting Tourism Growth  
in the STEP Region*



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# Executive Summary

The Arts and Culture Tourism (ACT) Strategy for the St. Paul, County of St. Paul, and Elk Point (STEP) region was developed with the shared goal of celebrating our local creativity, heritage, and identity. It builds on the region’s vibrant artistic and cultural strengths to deepen community connections, welcome visitors, and support inclusive economic development. This strategy outlines a collective path forward—shaped by local voices and insights—to nurture a thriving cultural tourism destination rooted in sustainability and pride of place.

## Vision and Mission

At its heart, this strategy imagines a welcoming and dynamic arts and culture tourism scene—one that honours the diversity, stories, and talents of our communities. It aims to uplift and promote local cultural assets through collaboration, shared leadership, and experiences that resonate with both residents and visitors.

## Key Findings and Strategic Themes

Informed by a blend of community roundtables, stakeholder interviews, cultural resource mapping, and research, the strategy reflects the ideas and aspirations of those who live, work, and create in the region. Five key themes emerged as priorities for moving forward together:

### 1. Infrastructure and Space Development

- Celebrate our public spaces through murals, sculptures, and interactive art.
- Breathe new life into local cultural landmarks and make them easier to access and enjoy.
- Grow and promote places where creativity thrives—like galleries, museums, and stages.
- Explore immersive tools like augmented reality (AR) to bring our stories to life in fresh, exciting ways.

### 2. Youth Involvement in Arts and Culture

- Foster mentorship and opportunities for emerging young creatives.
- Support youth-led arts programs, festivals, and hands-on cultural experiences.
- Build partnerships with schools to integrate arts and heritage storytelling into education.
- Spark curiosity with an “Art Passport” to explore both local and global cultures.

### 3. **Creative Capacity Building**

- Offer learning and networking for artists, covering skills like marketing, grant writing, and business development.
- Create more opportunities for residencies, shared spaces, and creative collaboration.
- Boost regional markets and performances that showcase local talent.
- Support well-being through expressive arts programs that connect people and promote mental health.

### 4. **Community Culture Development**

- Strengthen our volunteer spirit through appreciation and engagement.
- Co-create tourism experiences that combine the arts with local food, history, and nature.
- Build partnerships among artists, businesses, and community groups to amplify impact.
- Celebrate together through festivals, Indigenous storytelling, and cultural events that honour our roots.

### 5. **Awareness and Promotion**

- Shape a unique cultural brand that reflects the identity and creativity of the STEP region.
- Strengthen our digital presence with a dedicated cultural tourism site and active online storytelling.
- Collaborate with tourism partners and content creators to broaden our reach.
- Introduce new experiences—like walking art tours, artist-led retreats, and cultural workshops that invite participation and connection.

## Opportunities and Challenges

Our region already has a strong base of passionate individuals, rich cultural resources, and growing tourism potential. The future offers opportunities to deepen partnerships, grow digital engagement, and enhance the visitor experience. At the same time, we'll need to work together to navigate challenges like limited funding, volunteer fatigue, and the draw of larger urban destinations, with creativity, resilience, and shared commitment.

## Implementation Approach

The strategy outlines a collaborative, phased approach:

- **Short-Term (1–2 years):** Launch marketing efforts, build foundational partnerships, and roll out early cultural projects.
- **Medium-Term (2–4 years):** Expand cornerstone events, co-host an Arts and Culture Summit, and grow our digital storytelling reach.
- **Long-Term (5+ years):** Establish the STEP region as a national cultural tourism destination through sustained investment and innovation.

## Conclusion

The ACT Strategy offers a community-rooted framework to elevate the STEP region’s arts and cultural scene. By working together—residents, artists, businesses, and municipal leaders—we can create a destination that invites exploration, supports local creativity, and reflects the heart of our communities. With continued engagement, this strategy can foster meaningful experiences, lasting economic benefits, and a cultural legacy for generations to come.



# 1. Introduction

This Arts and Culture Tourism (ACT) Strategy reflects a shared commitment to celebrating and building upon the region's rich cultural, historical, and artistic resources. It aims to co-create a vibrant tourism ecosystem that highlights local talent, involves community stakeholders, and collaboratively addresses challenges and opportunities. Rather than serving as a stand-alone document, this strategy is envisioned as a resource to guide future planning and policy decisions across various municipal departments. It is designed to complement the Tourism Opportunities Report and foster concerted effort between cultural development and tourism growth.

## Vision of STEP for Arts and Culture for Tourism

To collaboratively create an inclusive, vibrant, and sustainable arts and cultural tourism destination that honours the community's creativity, heritage, and diversity, while contributing to both economic vitality and local quality of life.

## Mission of STEP for Arts and Culture for Tourism

To work together to develop, support, and promote cultural and artistic assets, strengthen community engagement, and enhance visitor experiences through innovative programming, strategic partnerships, and sustainable practices.

### Important Definitions:

#### What is Culture?

*Culture is the shared way of life of a group of people, including their beliefs, customs, language, food, art, religion, and social practices. According to Velvet Nelson, culture shapes how people interact with the world and with one another, and it also influences the landscapes we create and the experiences we seek as tourists. It is both learned and passed down through generations, making it central to understanding human behavior and places. – Velvet Nelson, Ph.D.*

#### What is Heritage?

*Heritage is what people in the present choose to remember, preserve, and celebrate from the past. Heritage isn't the past itself, but a version of the past shaped by memory, identity, and emotion. It reflects how societies use history to create meaning, connect with their roots, and tell stories about who they are. Heritage can include monuments, traditions, languages, and even landscapes—anything we value enough to pass on to future generations. – David Lowenthal, Ph.D.*

#### What are the Arts?

*The arts in tourism refer to creative and cultural expressions, such as music, visual art, performance, dance, literature, and film, that attract visitors, shape destination image, and provide meaningful cultural experiences. The arts play a key role in cultural tourism, offering both tangible and intangible value by connecting tourists to the identity, heritage, and creativity*

*of a place. They also support local economies and promote intercultural understanding. – Greg Richards, Ph.D.*

## 2. Methodology Section

This community-informed Arts and Culture Strategy was developed through multiple collaborative processes, including a literature review, a preliminary resource inventory, twelve interviews with key stakeholders, and a community roundtable that brought together 23 participants. During this roundtable, participants engaged in personal meaning mapping and a collective SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis.

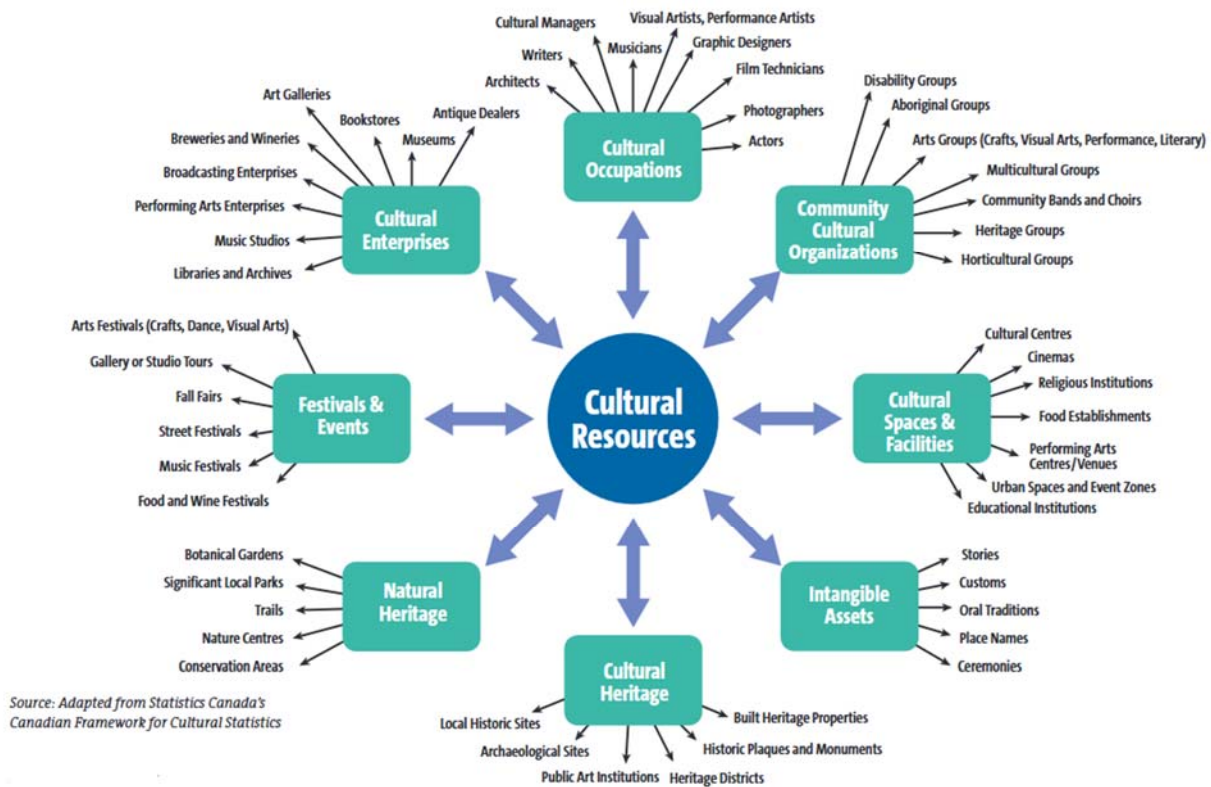
Personal meaning mapping, developed by Dr. John Falk in the field of education and interpretation, allowed participants to share and explore their connections to arts and culture. (More information on this tool can be found at

<https://digitalcommons.cortland.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1037&context=reseoutded.>)

Data collected through stakeholder interviews, SWOT analysis, and meaning maps were thematically analyzed using an inductive approach, allowing patterns and insights to emerge organically from community input. The use of qualitative research methods kept the findings grounded in local perspectives, offering an authentic and detailed understanding of the region's cultural tourism potential.

Findings emphasize the importance of local arts, artisans, and the cultural landscape in attracting both regional and external visitors for passive and active cultural participation, ranging from half-day engagements to weekend and overnight stays.

### 3. STEPS Cultural Resource Inventory Scan using the Cultural Resource Framework



Using Statistics Canada’s Canadian Framework for Cultural Statistics as a guide, the STEP region’s diverse cultural assets include:

#### Community Cultural Organizations

- ACFA
- Elk Point Allied Arts and Leisure Centre with Dinner Theatre
- Elk Point Choir
- Elk Point Youth Drama Club
- Allied Arts Centre Committee
- St. Paul and District Arts Foundation Committee
- St. Paul Visual Arts Centre Committee
- St. Paul Ukrainian Committee
- Champions of Change Committee

#### Cultural Spaces and Facilities

- Portage College

- Allied Arts Centre – Elk Point
- St. Paul Ukrainian Centre
- Public Art in the Town of St. Paul
- Public Art at Lagasse Park
- St. Paul and District Arts Centre – programs and artists
- St. Paul Visual Arts Centre – programs and artists
- The UFO Landing Pad, St. Paul

**Intangible Assets** (stories, customs, oral traditions, place names, ceremonies)-unknown at this time. Recommended to be researched further.

## Cultural Heritage

- Local historic sites
- Lagasse Park – Ukrainian Monument
- Lagasse Park – Métis Monument
- Heinsburg Water Tower and CN Station
- Murals on the Friendship Centre and around St. Paul and Elk Point

## Natural Heritage

- Lagasse Park Waterfront Boardwalk
- North Saskatchewan River – throughout the region

## Festivals and Events

- St. Paul Art Walk – Champions for Change Art Walk
- Fiddle Camps – Calvin Vollrath Camps
- St. Paul Visual Arts Centre – Market Day x2
- St. Paul Farmer’s Market – runs weekly
- St. Paul Ag Fair and Exhibition
- Lakeland Rodeo Finals
- Open Farm Days
- Alberta Culture Days
- Stoney Lake Pasture Party
- Canada Day Celebrations

## Cultural Enterprises

- Stewart Steinhauer Sculptures
- Portage College – Wall Gallery and Art Education (Fine Arts, Culinary Arts)
- St. Paul Museum and the People's Museum
- Mallaig Museum
- Lakeland Brewing Company
- Fort George Buckingham House
- The Landing (Canalta) Gallery
- The Landing Pad, Tourism Information Centre, and Gallery

## **Cultural Occupations**

- Eric Spoeth
- Brock Duncan
- Joleen Sabatier
- Herman Poulin
- Stewart Steinhauer
- Community Futures – Digital artists
- River Ranch
- Twisted Fork
- Herman Poulin

## 4. Literature Review

Creating an arts and culture strategy for the STEP region provides direction and focus for channelling organizational and strategic planning efforts. The literature from the other Arts and Culture Strategies provides informative details and considerations which can be used to inform and inspire the STEP strategy. The following are some of the key themes highlighted in existing arts and culture strategies.

Domestic tourism is recognized as an industry/ visitor economy, and recreation, arts, and culture are viewed as service-oriented priorities for local municipalities. Combining arts and culture with a focus on tourism provides a strategic direction that includes exploring, encouraging, and promoting the strengths of a region's organic spaces and talent to a broader audience beyond local residents.

One of the primary themes in arts and culture tourism literature is **the integration of arts and culture into tourism**. Arts and culture can drive tourism by leveraging local identity, heritage, and creative industries. Cork City Council aims to establish Cork as a world-class cultural destination through public art, festivals, and heritage projects, thereby attracting both domestic and international tourists. The Cork Midsummer Festival uses public spaces to create immersive arts experiences. Calgary's Cultural Plan aligns events like the Music Mile and the Calgary Stampede to enhance the city's reputation. Festivals can act as anchors for communities. Cork's year-round events and Calgary's "Year of Music" showcase how cultural festivals can enhance a destination's appeal.

*\*\*\*Arts and culture play a vital role in tourism, offering the St. Paul, County of St. Paul, and Elk Point (STEP) region an opportunity to celebrate and share its local identity and creative talents. By working together, local artists, community organizations, and tourism stakeholders can transform public spaces into vibrant hubs for meaningful events and cultural programming that reflect the region's unique spirit. The regional calendar initiative, launched by Travel Lakeland and supported by the STEP Economic Development Alliance, is a collaborative effort to highlight and promote creative and cultural events across the region. This grassroots approach not only aims to attract visitors and support the local economy but also nurtures a shared sense of pride, connection, and belonging through arts and cultural expression.*

A second theme running through the literature is the promotion of **inclusivity and accessibility**. Arts and Culture Strategies emphasize the importance of engaging underrepresented groups to ensure cultural participation reflects the diversity of communities. Arts and Culture for "all people" encourages accessibility for tourists who may find themselves travelling to destinations that differ from what they are used to and the population they visit or are unfamiliar with. The Cork's "Art for Everyone" prioritizes inclusivity, aligning with the Arts Council's Equality, Human Rights, and Diversity Policy. Saanich's Music in the Park, located on Vancouver Island, offers free performances throughout the neighbourhoods, promoting accessibility. West Vancouver hosts an Indigenous arts programming showcase that highlights local history and culture, aiming to attract a diverse audience. Inclusivity can also include a special focus on youth programming, such as Saanich's Limelight Youth Festival, which engages younger audiences and fosters intergenerational connections.

*\*\*\*Making arts and culture more inclusive and accessible is a meaningful opportunity for the St. Paul, County of St. Paul, and Elk Point (STEP) region to celebrate the richness of its communities through tourism. By collaborating with local artists, Indigenous leaders, youth groups, and community organizations, the region can co-create cultural experiences that reflect a wide range of voices and traditions. Together, initiatives such as youth-led festivals, neighbourhood performances, and Indigenous arts showcases can help ensure everyone feels seen, heard, and welcomed. These collective efforts not only enhance the vibrancy of the local cultural scene but also foster deeper community connections, inviting visitors to experience the region's diversity in authentic and engaging ways.*

**Preserving cultural heritage** assets is a key element in many strategies, as it provides the differentiator and uniqueness that contribute to the quality of place. Cultural tourism encompasses both the historic and modern elements of culture, allowing tourists to experience the tangible and intangible aspects of a culture. Whitehorse's Schwerkolt Cottage and Museum Complex integrates historical narratives into tourism. At the same time, Calgary's Indigenous-focused outdoor spaces focus on connecting natural and cultural heritage to attract travellers seeking a connection to the culture.

*\*\*\*Preserving cultural heritage is key to celebrating and sharing the unique identity of the St. Paul, County of St. Paul, and Elk Point (STEP) region, which is home to vibrant Indigenous, Ukrainian, Métis, French, and Filipino communities. Through collaborative efforts with cultural leaders, community organizations, and residents, the region can co-create opportunities to showcase both historic roots and contemporary cultural expressions. From community-led storytelling and intergenerational knowledge sharing to locally organized heritage events and outdoor cultural spaces, these initiatives foster pride, deepen local connections, and invite visitors to engage with the region's diverse heritage in meaningful ways.*

**Public infrastructure, spaces, and placemaking require ongoing development and maintenance to remain accessible and attractive to tourists.** Public art and cultural infrastructure are recognized for creating visitor-friendly environments; however, they must be appropriately funded, planned and maintained to be intentional and attractive. These spaces may include waterfront developments that host festivals featuring music, art, and performances, such as the West Vancouver Harmony Arts Festival, as well as mural initiatives and public sculptures designed to beautify urban areas and attract cultural tourists or visitors who appreciate cultural narratives. Physical spaces can also be cultural hubs. Coquitlam's City Centre is a cultural hub that integrates public art, festivals, and creative spaces, activating a physical space. Interactive Public Art in West Vancouver's placemaking initiatives, such as interactive installations, cater to tourists seeking unique photo opportunities.

*\*\*\*Investing in public spaces and cultural infrastructure offers the St. Paul, County of St. Paul, and Elk Point (STEP) region an opportunity to build tourism from the ground up, together. By engaging residents, local artists, municipalities, and community groups in the planning and design process, these spaces can reflect local values and cultural stories. Rural areas can enhance natural gathering places, such as municipal parks and campgrounds, through community-led waterfront improvements, festivals, and nature-inspired art installations. In*

*urban spaces such as Lagasse Park, downtown corridors, and community hubs, collaborative mural projects, interactive art, and cultural programming can help create vibrant, welcoming places that locals take pride in and visitors are drawn to. Through shared stewardship and creative placemaking, the region can foster tourism while strengthening community bonds and celebrating its unique cultural landscape.*

Arts and Culture for tourism can be supported when **framed as economic development**. With investments in boosting local projects, locations become increasingly attractive and visitor-ready. This can be achieved through grant programs such as Coquitlam’s Spirit of Coquitlam Grants, which support cultural projects, or Saanich’s “Gorge on Art,” which attracted over 2,000 visitors, resulting in an economic impact due to the arts-based tourism project. Many communities also experience the arts and culture through performance arts festivals, which drive visitation to distinct regions for overnight stays. Examples of this include the Shaw Performing Arts Festival at Niagara-on-the-Lake and the Stratford Festival in Stratford, Ontario.

*\*\*\*Investing in arts and culture through a community-driven lens offers a powerful opportunity to grow tourism and strengthen the local economy in the STEP region. By working together—local artists, cultural organizations, municipalities, Indigenous communities, and business leaders—projects can emerge that reflect local identity while attracting visitors. With support from partners such as Travel Alberta, the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, and regional economic development alliances, funding and resources can be channelled into grassroots initiatives that uplift local talent and foster creativity. Whether it’s through community-led festivals, artist residencies, or shared performance spaces, the region can build on its existing cultural strengths to create jobs, support small businesses, and position the STEP region as a vibrant, inclusive cultural destination rooted in collaboration.*

Maximizing the potential of the creative and cultural industries within tourism requires intentional and sustained collaboration among local municipalities, cultural organizations, Indigenous communities, individual artists, and both artistic and non-artistic sectors of the private industry. While financial investment remains an important component, effective partnerships must also include in-kind contributions, access to venues, planning and policy alignment, coordinated promotion, and open channels for information sharing.

A community-driven approach to strategic collaboration acknowledges that many successful cultural events, particularly festivals, are rooted in cooperative efforts. These partnerships form the foundation of a supportive ecosystem that enables high-quality, locally relevant events to thrive. Applying this same collaborative model to the broader arts and culture tourism landscape will enhance the diversity and depth of visitor experiences across the STEP region.

Local examples, such as Strathcona County’s partnerships with arts organizations to co-host festivals that celebrate local talent, offer valuable insights. Events like *Music in the Field* are well-positioned to grow through expanded community involvement. Similarly, STEP’s rodeos, sports tourism events, and outdoor recreation offerings present opportunities to weave in arts and cultural components. By intentionally integrating these sectors, the region can create more prosperous, more inclusive tourism experiences. Achieving this, however, depends on a shared commitment to collaboration, inclusive planning, and collective visioning.

The literature review summary notes that the arts and culture tourism strategies thrive when built through strong partnerships and meaningful collaboration between a wide range of stakeholders. At the same time, there is a shared understanding that the quality of cultural offerings must meet and exceed expectations, not just for local enjoyment, but also to resonate with visitors. Growing the arts and cultural tourism sector in a way that welcomes and engages tourists depends on the collective ability to make arts and culture accessible and appealing to those from outside the community or region. This can be achieved by:

- **Leveraging Festivals and Events:** Signature events such as Cork’s Midsummer Festival or Calgary’s Music Mile can serve as anchor points for tourism campaigns. Communities can collaborate to attract niche tourism markets by aligning their shared aspirations and developing thematic festivals tied to unique local identities, such as cuisine, history, or art. Smaller cities can adopt this approach by coordinating a “cultural year” centred on a specific theme, engaging local artists and businesses to promote broader community participation.
- **Promoting Cultural Diversity:** Celebrating Indigenous and multicultural contributions can be a powerful way to co-create inclusive and authentic cultural experiences. For example, in Calgary, the Blackfoot Nation’s stories and the cultural significance of natural heritage sites, such as Nose Hill Park, are central to Indigenous tourism. Collaborations have led to initiatives such as public art, outdoor cultural spaces, and authentic programming developed with Indigenous communities.
- **Investing in Creative Infrastructure:** Flexible, multipurpose venues can play a key role in serving both residents and visitors. The expansion of the Cedar Hill Recreation Centre in Saanich is one such example. This space combines gallery and performance areas with community arts programming, creating a welcoming environment that supports both local creative expression and visitor engagement.
- **Enhancing Public Spaces:** Vibrant public spaces enriched through art and thoughtful design can help establish cultural districts that feel alive and welcoming. Port Moody and Coquitlam demonstrate how cities can effectively harness these elements. In areas with natural assets, such as rivers or waterfronts, public art installations, including murals and sculptures, help express local identity while drawing in visitors. In Strathcona County, the Canada Day Festival held at Broadmoor Lake Park weaves together arts, heritage, and environmental themes, offering an experience that appeals especially to eco-tourists.
- **Collaborating Across Sectors:** Building lasting partnerships among tourism boards, cultural organizations, and businesses enables communities to pool resources, clarify shared goals, and collectively shape the direction of tourism programming. This kind of cooperation can lead to targeted investment in cultural programs and services across multiple levels, and may include:
  1. Continuing direct project funding through grants, such as those awarded to *Champions for Change*,

2. Exploring the creation of a *Community Cultural Endowment Fund* to provide long-term support for the arts and culture sector, and

## 5. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

The SWOT analysis results from the Community Round Table findings are:

### Strengths:

1. **Active Community Involvement**
  - Artists and arts admin young adults are actively involved
  - Numerous organizations and strong local enthusiasm
  - High-quality local leadership and community shakers and movers
  - Passionate, educated, and knowledgeable community members
2. **Cultural and Artistic Vibrancy**
  - Diverse and passion-driven cultural experiences and opportunities
  - Many artists, artisans, and cultural groups
  - Many strong arts practices are supported by arts organizations
  - Artists collaborating with groups to enhance arts culture and tourism
3. **Infrastructure and Facilities**
  - Strong infrastructure and good facilities, including scenic landscapes and well-maintained roads
  - Abundance of facilities, assets, and knowledge in the community
  - Fort George: Adequate signage and extraordinary attendance by school tours
4. **Community Support and Resources**
  - Regional and municipal stakeholders providing support
  - Fort George: Great resources and a large area offering artifacts
  - Availability of activities and resources for target groups
  - Resources and opportunities are open to all ages
5. **Resilience and Positive Attitude**
  - Stoic resilience and positive attitude from professional training
  - Confidence and determination within the community

### Weaknesses:

1. **Support and Retention Challenges:**
  - Difficulty retaining local artists due to better opportunities elsewhere.
  - Difficulty retaining and keeping volunteers
2. **Financial and Resource Constraints:**
  - Heavy dependence on volunteer efforts and grant funding.
  - Insufficient sustainable funding and a shrinking pool of aging volunteers.
  - High demand for resources that exceeds available funding and manpower.
  - Limited financial resources to expand activities.
3. **Competition and Silo Effects:**
  - Competitive environment for the same grant money.
  - Fragmented efforts due to unintentional and intentional silos.
  - Competition among similar groups for resources and funding.
  - Lack of collaboration and cohesiveness among various groups.
4. **Municipal and Community Support:**
  - Subjective valuation of the arts by municipal government affects support and prioritization.
  - Insufficient municipal engagement and support for the arts.

- Lack of awareness about local opportunities, particularly in Lakeland.
- Absence of organized efforts to promote and support arts activities, such as organized arts tours.

## Opportunities:

### 1. **Community Engagement and Partnerships**

- Uniting the arts and culture community to define roles and responsibilities.
- Leveraging community enthusiasm and interest.
- Attracting connected travellers, visitors, and temporary workers.
- Encouraging day trips from nearby regions.
- Facilitating professional teaching opportunities, such as retreats.
- Creating joint grant applications for idea sharing.
- Partnering with local government for support.

### 2. **Tourism and Marketing**

- Developing tourism communications like booklets and calendars.
- Marketing the region as a prime destination for artists.
- Selling local art at tourist information booths for economic benefits.
- Linking events with other community activities to enhance accessibility and attendance.

### 3. **Public Spaces and Funding**

- Utilizing public spaces and walls for public artwork.
- Accessing provincial funds for various projects.
- Improving access and infrastructure, such as ATV trail access and river dock signage at Fort George Buckingham House

### 4. **Educational and Cultural Programs**

- Meeting the demand for arts programming.
- Organizing school tours and educational activities.
- Displaying family history and technological evolution items in Museums
- Connecting events with other community days to increase access and participation.

### 5. **Mental Health and Participation**

- Highlighting the mental health benefits of engaging in arts and culture.
- Encouraging participation in performing arts across all age groups.

## 6. Personal Meaning Mapping

A high-level summary of the Personal Meaning Map exercise brought forth the following key themes:

1. **Cultural Engagement and Preservation:**
  - Meeting connections with First Nations and the communities.
  - Keeping immigration traditions alive.
  - Sharing history with youth through technology.
  - Local attractions acknowledging history.
2. **Community and Volunteer Involvement:**
  - Recruiting more volunteers from the new community members.
  - Sustainability of volunteers.
  - Need for mentorship and community participation.
3. **Arts and Culture Integration:**
  - Developing a local radio station and utilizing local podcasters.
  - Availability of arts and culture for mental health and non-competitive engagement.
  - Opportunities for graffiti art in designated spaces.
  - Increasing the value of arts and culture through original showcases.
4. **Educational and Technological Innovation:**
  - Targeting youth education through websites, podcasts, and augmented reality.
  - Interpretive tours and interactive experiences.
  - Promoting visits to museums and art exhibits for older students.
5. **Inclusivity and Accessibility:**
  - Making arts and culture accessible for everyone.
  - Ensuring community members feel included and comfortable.
  - Celebration of diverse cultures through festivals and events.
6. **Collaboration and Event Coordination:**
  - Creation of a regional calendar to avoid double-booking events.
  - Collaborative efforts for large community events like Canada Day.
7. **Artistic Opportunities and Growth:**
  - Attracting and supporting artists with mentorship and events.
  - Providing spaces and opportunities for public participation in the arts.
  - Fostering organic growth of the arts through retreats and showcases.
8. **Media and Communication:**
  - Utilizing the Saint Paul Journal as a central information source.
  - Promoting regional events through various media platforms.
9. **Historical and Cultural Tours:**
  - Offering interpretive tours and showcasing local history.
  - Celebration and education about the fur trade and other historical events.
10. **Diverse Art Forms:**
  - Inclusion of various art forms like writing and quilting.

## 7. The Consolidated SWOT and PMM Findings:

### Strengths for the STEP Region

- **Cultural Diversity and Heritage:** Representation of Indigenous, Métis, Ukrainian, and French cultures through public art, festivals, and heritage programming.
- **Community Engagement:** Passionate, educated, and knowledgeable community members with strong volunteer-driven initiatives.
- **Infrastructure and Facilities:** Scenic landscapes, well-maintained roads, and venues like art centers and museums.
- **Innovative Programming:** Integration of technology (QR codes, AR), art-based wellness programs, and diverse cultural offerings.
- **Tourism Integration:** Proximity to major regions, strong collaborations with local businesses and tourism boards.

### Weaknesses of the STEP Region

- **Funding and Resource Constraints:** Heavy reliance on grants, volunteer labour, and insufficient sustainable funding.
- **Marketing and Visibility Gaps:** Limited online presence and outreach; overdependence on local promotions.
- **Operational Challenges:** Aging infrastructure, volunteer burnout, and lack of offerings for specific demographics.
- **Accessibility Issues:** Limited transportation options and insufficient signage for cultural sites.
- **Retention of Talent:** Relocation of artists due to better opportunities elsewhere.

### Opportunities for the STEP Region

- **Community Engagement:** Unite arts and culture stakeholders to foster collaboration and define roles.
- **Tourism and Marketing:** Develop regional tourism campaigns, self-guided trails, and cross-promotional packages.
- **Digital Innovations:** Enhance online presence through interactive tools and virtual storytelling.
- **Youth and Family Engagement:** Expand workshops, school tours, and family-friendly programming.

- **Public Spaces and Funding:** Leverage public spaces for art installations and secure diverse funding sources.

### Threats for the STEP Region

- **Economic Instability:** Fluctuating funding, rising costs, and reliance on discretionary spending.
- **Volunteer Attrition:** Aging volunteer base and lack of youth engagement.
- **Competition:** Competing cultural initiatives and urban centers with superior resources.
- **Infrastructure Limitations:** Lack of transportation options and inadequate facilities.
- **Demographic Shifts:** Challenges engaging younger generations and adapting to technological changes.

## 8. Arts and Culture for Tourism Strategies

The arts and culture for tourism strategy builds on the insights outlined above to identify potential regional opportunities.

**“The success of this strategy relies on strong working relationships and shared efforts. The objectives and actions outlined below serve as starting points that will be most effective when shaped in partnership with the arts and cultural assets and organizations identified in the Cultural Framework, presented at the beginning of this report. The recommended strategies can be adapted, refined, or used as a foundation to position STEP as the vibrant arts and cultural hub it truly is.”**

The strategy is structured around five key pillars:

1. Infrastructure and Space
2. Youth Involvement in Arts and Culture
3. Creative Capacity
4. Community Culture Development
5. Awareness and Promotion

### 8.1 Infrastructure and Space Strategies

To strengthen the region’s cultural and creative ecosystem, a phased infrastructure and space strategy has been developed, outlining short-term, medium-term, and long-term priorities. These initiatives are designed to enhance public art, improve access to cultural assets, and support the physical and digital spaces where arts and heritage can thrive. Strengthening this foundation involves collaborative investment in facilities, signage, technology, and public spaces that nurture artistic expression, cultural participation, and memorable visitor experiences.

#### Short-Term Strategies (1–2 years)

**Renovate existing public art:** Refresh and restore cherished public art pieces, including the 100-foot mural in Elk Point, the interpretive storyboard at the Pete Fidler statue in Elk Point, and the interpretive panel at Riverview Campground, Elk Point.

- *First Steps:* Draft proposed upgrades, gather input, secure funding, engage local artists, and enhance existing infrastructure.
- *Lead:* County staff, EDOs, and the chamber of commerce, in collaboration with local artists and community volunteers.

**Produce, print and install signage for Arts and Cultural Assets:** Highlight important sites such as the Landing Pad, the Visual Arts Centre in St. Paul, the St. Paul and District Arts Foundation, and the Allied Arts Centre in Elk Point. Add both directional signage and artistic markers on the properties.

- *First Steps:* Draft signage designs, engage artists, secure funding, and work with community groups to install signage.

- *Lead:* County staff, EDOs, and the chamber of commerce, with input from cultural organizations and resident artists.

**STEP Artists and Artisans Legacy Initiative:** Create a dedicated space, whether physical, digital, or both, to document, commemorate, and celebrate significant artists and artisans in the STEP region, thereby elevating local talent and honouring their cultural contributions. Launch a “Legacy Initiative” with clear selection criteria (e.g., art form, sample work, community connection, location to possibly view). Feature artists through rotating exhibits, a digital archive, and community nominations, in collaboration with local cultural and Indigenous organizations. Capture oral stories from the artist as part of this initiative.

- *First Steps & Leadership:*  
The initiative would be spearheaded by the local tourism and economic development committees, in partnership with municipal staff, regional arts councils, Indigenous leaders, and cultural organizations. Initial steps include:
  - Forming a working group to guide development
  - Creating selection criteria and nomination process
  - Identifying locations for physical displays and building the online platform
  - Launching a community-wide call for nominations

**Host Outdoor Arts Events:** Bring creativity into public spaces through exhibits, a mobile arts unit (e.g., pop-up truck or trailer), installations, community fundraisers like the “Art Trail Ride” along the Iron Horse Trail, and interactive performances in parks and along trails (e.g., ‘Art Along Paths’).

- *First Steps:* Secure permits, invite artists and performers, and build partnerships with parks departments and local sponsors.
- *Lead:* Event planners, arts organizations, and business associations, supported by community volunteers and sponsors.

**Expand Public Art & Installations:** Build on initiatives like Champions of Change by installing murals, interactive public art, and seasonal features in high-traffic areas, including trailheads and parks (e.g., Iron Horse Trail self-guided tours with QR code interpretation).

- *First Steps:* Audit popular public spaces, engage local artists and community members, and apply for grants or public-private funding.
- *Lead:* Local arts commissions, municipal cultural departments, and business improvement districts working with community partners.

**Enhance Digital and Interactive Experiences:** Introduce immersive experiences using AR, VR, and QR-coded storytelling to engage residents and visitors in cultural exploration.

- *First Steps:* Identify key heritage and cultural sites, develop partnerships with tech firms and schools, and launch pilot AR/VR projects.
- *Lead:* Tourism boards, tech startups, and cultural organizations, with youth and community input.
- *Example:* The Louvre AR App and Van Gogh: The Immersive Experience showcase how digital tools bring history and art to life.

**Support Affordable Studio Spaces:** Create inclusive and affordable places for artists to create, collaborate, and exhibit work, fostering a vibrant creative scene.

- *First Steps:* Identify underutilized properties, collaborate with landlords and organizations to create artist-friendly leasing options, and pursue funding for necessary upgrades.
- *Lead:* Municipal planning departments, artist collectives, and nonprofit developers in partnership with the broader arts community.

### Medium-Term Strategies (2–4 years)

**Create an Arts & Heritage Trail:** Expand the St. Paul Arts Walk and develop a unified brand and promotion strategy, connecting museums, galleries, and historical landmarks into a cohesive cultural tourism network.

- *First Steps:* Map cultural assets, design branding and signage, and foster partnerships with tourism, economic development, and Indigenous cultural groups.
- *Lead:* Local tourism offices, historical societies, and Indigenous partners, with input from artists, businesses, and residents.

### Long-Term Strategies (4–7 years)

**Invest in Film & Digital Arts Spaces:** Establish a dedicated creative space for film editing, digital arts, game design, and projection-based public art.

- *First Steps:* Conduct a community-informed market study, secure a suitable location, and apply for funding from film commissions and tech incubators.
- *Lead:* Film commissions, digital media startups, and municipal cultural offices, working collaboratively with artists, youth, and educators.

## 8.2 Youth Involvement in Arts and Culture for Tourism

Engaging youth in arts and culture is essential to nurturing future creators, cultural stewards, and community ambassadors. This strategy presents a series of community-rooted initiatives designed to foster artistic expression, leadership, and cultural awareness among young people, while also contributing to long-term tourism development. Encouraging youth involvement means building inclusive, accessible, and age-appropriate programs through collaborative efforts—connecting young participants with local heritage, creative industries, and place-based storytelling. These initiatives aim to build confidence, promote wellness, and celebrate cultural identity, while strengthening intergenerational relationships and creating vibrant tourism experiences.

### Short-Term Strategies (1–2 years)

**Youth-Focused Arts Programs:** Provide a diverse and inclusive range of artistic activities—including graffiti workshops, choirs, theatre camps, and student-run exhibitions—starting within local schools and community centers.

- *First Steps:* Identify and invite local artists, educators, and community spaces to co-create pilot programs that reflect youth interests and encourage artistic exploration.

- *Potential Lead:* Local arts organizations, municipal cultural departments, school boards, with support from parents, Elders, and youth councils.

**Leadership & Mentorship:** Develop mentorship opportunities where older youth mentor younger peers in planning exhibitions, marketing, and storytelling through the arts, fostering confidence, leadership, and collaborative learning.

- *First Steps:* Recruit experienced youth artists and facilitators to lead peer-led sessions, and work with local organizations to co-develop a framework that supports creative leadership.
- *Potential Lead:* Youth arts organizations, community centers, mentorship programs, supported by schools and parent associations.

**Summer Art & Outdoor Learning:** Co-design immersive summer experiences and day camps that blend the arts with local history, ecology, and astronomy. Engage partners like Fort George Buckingham House, regional museums, the Friendship Centre, the Visual Arts Centre, the Allied Arts Centre, and the St. Paul Art Foundation—ensuring programming is inclusive, culturally respectful, and non-sporting. Develop “Arts and Culture 101” modules grounded in local stories and examples from the STEP region and make these available to any stakeholder interested in offering summer youth programming.

- *First Steps:* Hire a curriculum writer to work collaboratively with local partners to create content for indoor/outdoor summer programming. Align modules with organizations already running summer activities (e.g., Fort George Buckingham House, museums).
- *Potential Lead:* Economic development officers (EDOs) to coordinate content creation; delivery supported by a network of cultural and educational partners.

**Mental Wellness Through Art:** Create safe, creative spaces for youth to explore and express emotions through expressive arts programming such as mask-making, painting, and storytelling. These programs aim to build emotional resilience and self-awareness in a supportive community setting.

- *First Steps:* Partner with mental health professionals, art therapists, and educators to co-develop and deliver programming in schools and local centers, while securing necessary funding.
- *Potential Lead:* Mental health organizations, arts therapy professionals, schools, and wellness-focused nonprofits.

### Medium-Term Strategies (2–4 years)

**Cultural Exchange & Art Passport Program:** Launch a school-based “Art Passport” initiative where students explore both global and local art traditions. Modelled after interactive, pavilion-style learning (as inspired by Rachel Bouchard’s Folklorama-style concept), this initiative can include food, dance, storytelling, and music from various cultures.

- *First Steps:* Co-design the Art Passport framework with teachers, artists, Elders, and cultural groups; form partnerships with schools, tourism organizations, and cultural centers to support delivery.
- *Potential Lead:* School districts, cultural organizations, tourism offices, and community cultural groups.

## Long-Term Strategies (5–7 years)

**Early Art Education & Discovery Learning:** Invest in early years arts education through community-based initiatives that spark imagination and encourage analytical thinking, such as shadow play experiments, music circles, and story-based learning.

- *First Steps:* Collaborate with early childhood educators, artists, and caregivers to co-develop curriculum-based modules for pilot preschool programs grounded in local culture and creative practice.
- *Potential Lead:* Early childhood education centers, arts-based learning organizations, and cultural institutions, with input from families and community Elders.

## 8.3 Growing Creative Capacity

Building creative capacity is essential to sustaining a vibrant cultural ecosystem and fostering long-term economic and tourism benefits. This strategy aims to empower artists, cultural workers, and creative entrepreneurs by providing them with the necessary tools, spaces, and community support to thrive. Growing creative capacity means investing in people and relationships—supporting professional development, nurturing peer networks, promoting mental wellness through artistic expression, and encouraging opportunities for creative and cultural storytelling that connect residents and visitors alike through dynamic, place-based experiences.

This isn't something achieved by one person or organization alone—it is the result of many hands and hearts working together.

## Short-Term Strategies (1–2 years)

**Business Training for Artists:** Offer practical, locally relevant training in marketing, project management, and proposal writing to support the growth and sustainability of creative practices.

- *First Steps:* Co-develop training modules in partnership with local economic development agencies, arts councils, and business incubators to ensure the content is tailored to community needs.
- *Potential Leaders:* Arts organizations, economic development offices, local colleges/universities, and experienced creative professionals.

**Annual Arts & Culture Summit:** Create an annual gathering to spark collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and innovative ideas across creative sectors.

- *First Steps:* Form a diverse planning committee, secure funding through grants and sponsorships, and co-create a summit theme with community input.
- *Potential Leaders:* Arts councils, tourism boards, cultural organizations, and representatives from the local creative community.

**Art & Mental Health Awareness:** Raise awareness of the therapeutic value of creative expression through public campaigns and inclusive arts-based wellness workshops.

- *First Steps:* Partner with mental health professionals, resource teachers, and arts therapists to design and deliver programs in schools, clinics, and community spaces.
- *Potential Leaders:* Health organizations, educators, arts therapists, and local community centers.

**Artist Critique & Professional Development Hubs:** Create welcoming spaces for regional artists to gather, exchange feedback, and support one another’s creative development through mentorship and peer critique.

- *First Steps:* Reach out to interested artists and collectives, secure accessible meeting spaces, and develop a regular schedule for sessions.
- *Potential Leaders:* Regional arts organizations, post-secondary institutions, and artist-run centers.

### Medium-Term Strategies (2–4 years)

**Affordable Studio & Collaborative Spaces:** Strengthen support for organizations like the St. Paul Visual Arts Centre, St. Paul and District Arts Foundation, and the Elk Point Allied Arts Centre that offer accessible, affordable spaces for artists to create, connect, and grow.

- *First Steps:* Conduct a community-driven needs assessment, identify underutilized spaces, and explore funding and partnership models.
- *Potential Leaders:* Municipal governments, arts collectives, nonprofit developers, and property owners.

**Economusée & Artisan Demonstrations:** Broaden access to cultural experiences through hands-on workshops and artisan-led demonstrations that celebrate both traditional and contemporary craftsmanship.

- *First Steps:* Identify interested artisans and makers, and develop partnerships with tourism agencies, museums, and heritage organizations to co-host demonstration events.
- *Potential Leaders:* Craft guilds, tourism departments, cultural heritage organizations, and local artisans.

**Culinary Arts and Gastronomic Tourism as Cultural Storytelling:** Elevate food as a cultural bridge by weaving Indigenous ingredients, traditional cooking techniques, and storytelling into culinary experiences.

- *First Steps:* Collaborate with Portage College’s Culinary Program to design culturally grounded menus and plan an immersive food-focused event.
- *Potential Leaders:* Portage College, tourism departments, Indigenous chefs, and cultural heritage organizations.

**Creative Retreats & Residencies:** Invite artists and culture-seekers to participate in immersive retreats and residencies in natural settings such as Westcove, encouraging reflection, collaboration, and new work creation.

- *First Steps:* Identify ideal retreat locations, secure funding, and build partnerships with arts organizations, Indigenous knowledge keepers, and educational institutions.

- *Potential Leaders:* Arts foundations, cultural tourism boards, retreat centers, and regional collaborators.

**Digital Storytelling & Art Documentaries:** Use film and multimedia to spotlight local artists, movements, and Indigenous voices—making creative work visible and accessible across the region and beyond.

- *First Steps:* Secure funding, identify compelling stories and featured artists, and collaborate with local filmmakers, videographers, and media platforms.
- *Potential Leaders:* Film collectives, media production companies, cultural organizations, and community storytellers.

## 8.4 Community Culture Development

Fostering community culture at both the meso (regional) and macro (inter-community) levels is essential for strengthening social ties, building cultural pride, and creating vibrant, welcoming tourism experiences. This strategy emphasizes connecting people through shared creative expression, intercultural exchange, volunteerism, and inclusive celebrations. Supporting community culture development means creating meaningful opportunities for participation, recognition, and cultural storytelling, where arts and heritage are not only showcased but deeply woven into the everyday lives, identities, and shared values of the region. It is a process best guided by many voices, contributions, and collaborations.

### Short-Term Strategies (1–2 years)

**Volunteer Appreciation and Recruitment:** Host a region-wide volunteer recognition event and run targeted recruitment campaigns that engage youth, seniors, and culturally diverse groups. This celebration can showcase regional collaboration—Portage College’s Culinary Program can provide food services, high school students can participate as servers, and local artists can create the volunteer awards.

- *First Steps:* Identify a date, develop a recognition program (e.g., awards, training incentives), and co-design recruitment campaigns using social media, word-of-mouth, and grassroots outreach.
- *Lead:* Local cultural organizations, municipal recreation departments, and volunteer networks, with involvement from schools, culinary partners, and local artists.

**Rotate and Exhibit Indigenous Art Pieces at Portage College: Partner with Portage College in Lac La Biche to showcase** art and/or photographic images of Indigenous Art from the Museum of Aboriginal Peoples' Art and Artifacts (if originals are not to be relocated). This rotation and exhibition of new pieces will promote Indigenous art and stories among students, community members, and visitors, building a regional connection to Indigenous culture.

- *First Steps:* Coordinate with the Collections Contact at Portage College to select pieces for rotation, develop a travelling exhibit, and plan a showcasing event with community partners.
- *Lead:* Portage College representatives, regional volunteer coordinators, and arts organizations, in collaboration with Indigenous knowledge keepers and cultural educators.

**Sustained Investment:** To strengthen the creative and cultural vitality of the region by continuing direct project funding through grants (e.g., Champions for Change), exploring the establishment of a Community Cultural Endowment Fund to ensure long-term sector sustainability.

- Direct Project Funding  
*First Step:* Review outcomes of past grant recipients and identify priority areas for continued and future funding (continue Champions of Change funding, etc).  
*Lead:* Regional Economic Development Officer or Arts and Culture Committee.
- Community Cultural Endowment Fund  
*First Step:* Host an initial stakeholder roundtable to assess interest, identify champions, and explore legal/financial models.  
*Lead:* Arts and Culture Committee in collaboration with a local Community Foundation or philanthropic advisor.

**Organize and Host a Folklorama-Style Festival in the Region:** Inspired by Winnipeg’s Folklorama, co-create a regional festival featuring diverse cultural pavilions that highlight music, dance, food, and stories. Begin with a weekend-long event as part of Culture Days or similar celebrations and grow over time by packaging the experience for visitors from nearby cities and communities.

- *First Steps:* Identify key cultural groups and stories, secure venues, and build partnerships with artists, historians, Elders, and community leaders to design meaningful programming.
- *Lead:* Municipal cultural committees, tourism boards, local arts councils, and cultural associations.

**Arts Integration into Tourism and Community Events:** Collaboratively enhance community gatherings, such as rodeos, sports tournaments, and Canada Day, with pop-up galleries, artisan markets, and live art demonstrations. Integrate folk art, sculpture, and storytelling into fairs and festivals to make cultural expression more visible and engaging.

- *First Steps:* Audit existing community events for opportunities to include arts and culture, connect with local creatives, and co-develop pilot projects for upcoming events.
- *Lead:* Tourism boards, event organizers, artist collectives, and local artisans.

**Art as a Seasonal & Cultural Anchor:** Expand culturally rich, art-themed events that celebrate seasonal rhythms and local traditions. These can include:

- *Harvest Art Nights* – Art workshops paired with Fall Suppers
- *Open Air Nights* – Live painting under the Northern Lights
- *Nuit Blanche-style events* – Transforming community streets into open-air galleries
- *Métis Art Gatherings* – Celebrating beadwork, sash weaving, and oral storytelling, building on Métis Crossing programming at the St. Paul Museum

*These events can strengthen community identity and offer immersive, intergenerational experiences.*

**Creative Career Awareness & Mentorship:** Support youth and emerging creatives through workshops and mentorship in marketing, digital media, game design, art history, and curation. These programs can foster local talent and inspire career pathways from high school through to Portage College and Blue Quills University.

- *First Steps:* Survey youth and aspiring artists to identify interests, build mentorship connections with professionals, and secure funding to support hands-on training.
- *Lead:* Post-secondary institutions, arts councils, and business development agencies—working closely with schools, students, and industry mentors.

## 8.5 Awareness and Promotion

Raising the visibility of the region’s rich arts and culture scene is essential for attracting new audiences, uplifting local creators, and supporting a sustainable tourism economy. This strategy focuses on building a shared regional identity, enhancing digital and physical platforms for storytelling and promotion, and embedding creative experiences into everyday life. Supporting awareness and promotion means collaboratively building narratives, nurturing partnerships, and creating welcoming, interactive spaces where both residents and visitors can connect to the region’s cultural heartbeat.

### Short-Term Strategies (1–2 years)

#### **Develop an Arts and Culture Specific Brand as an Extension of the Travel Lakeland Brand:**

Create a unifying identity that celebrates the region’s cultural richness and natural beauty. This brand would help attract niche visitor markets such as cultural and eco-tourists, while also tying together all initiatives under the Arts and Culture for Tourism Strategy.

- *First Steps:* Host stakeholder workshops to collectively define core brand values, visual identity, and messaging that reflect the region’s spirit and resonate with targeted visitor segments.
- *Lead:* Regional tourism organizations, cultural associations, and local economic development agencies—guided by artists, Elders, youth, and business owners.

#### **Enhance Digital Presence:**

Co-create a regional arts and culture tourism website that maps cultural spaces, profiles artists, and lists events. Integrate SEO strategies, a unified event calendar, and QR code-linked interactive exhibits for deeper engagement. Use virtual reality and digital storytelling tools to invite virtual visitors and foster immersive connections.

- *First Steps:* Build a central website with strong SEO optimization and a shared calendar system. Work with local businesses and cultural venues to integrate QR codes and digital elements.
- *Lead:* Destination marketing organizations (DMOs), municipal tourism departments, and local business associations, with input from creative tech partners and artists.

#### **Leverage Influencers and Tourism Partnerships:**

Collaborate with influencers, regional and provincial arts organizations (e.g., Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Alberta Craft Council, Edmonton Arts Council, Calgary Arts Development), and local businesses to amplify stories and cross-promote events.

- *First Steps:* Identify local influencers and community ambassadors, develop partnerships with tourism boards, and co-create content-sharing plans that reflect diverse voices and experiences.
- *Lead:* Tourism operators, marketing agencies, local chambers of commerce, alongside community creators and culture bearers.

### **Invest in and Promote the Elk Point Allied Arts Centre Dinner Theatre Program:**

Support the ongoing success and expansion of the Allied Arts Centre’s Dinner Theatre as a vital cultural gathering space, encouraging new performances and audience growth.

- *First Step:* Conduct an economic impact study to demonstrate the value of this programming and guide future promotion and funding efforts.
- *Lead:* Economic development officers (EDOs), grant writers, and the chamber of commerce—collaborating with local performers and volunteers.

### **Integrate Art into Everyday & Unexpected Spaces:**

Bring art into daily life by installing temporary artworks in non-traditional locations such as grocery stores, gas stations, cafés, and liquor stores. Encourage restaurants and cafés to showcase local artists, host storytelling nights, and offer live painting or music sessions.

- *First Steps:* Collaborate with businesses like Twisted Fork or Lakeland Brewing Company to pilot interactive arts programming (e.g., workshops or pop-ups). Invite property owners to participate in displaying various forms of art—quilt-making, spoken word, painting, and multimedia installations.
- *Lead:* Local arts councils, business improvement districts (BIDs), and municipal cultural offices—guided by business owners, youth, and artists.

## **Medium-Term Strategies**

### **Expand Cultural Tourism Packages:**

Develop bundled, immersive experiences such as e-bike art tours, storytelling retreats, and art-and-wellness packages. These offerings can encourage longer visits while giving guests opportunities to co-create and actively participate in cultural production.

- *First Steps:* Identify existing tourism and cultural assets, design themed packages, and partner with local businesses and creators to offer engaging, multi-day itineraries.
- *Lead:* Tourism operators, event planners, and hospitality providers—collaborating with artists, makers, and community guides.

### **Tourism-Embedded Art Engagement:**

Engage summer students, youth leaders, and entrepreneurs to lead “Walking Art Tours,” inspired by the St. Paul Art Walk. These guided experiences can highlight restaurants, hotels, galleries, and street art, celebrating both heritage and contemporary creativity.

- *Initial Actions:* Secure funding and hire a youth or local entrepreneur to design and lead the tours. Work with local businesses to feature artwork and create a digital self-guided version for wider access.
- *Lead Partners:* Municipal tourism offices, arts organizations, and historical societies, with local youth and Champions of Change committee members as ambassadors.

### **Value and Expand Cultural Tourism by Starting with Key Attractions:**

Use the well-known UFO Landing Pad as a cultural launch point—drawing visitors into nearby arts and cultural hubs through story-based itineraries and creative events.

- *First Steps:* Create a feasibility and business plan to evolve the Landing Pad into a multi-use destination. Work with artists, event planners, and tourism partners to develop storytelling routes and a signature event, such as a weekly laser light show.
- *Lead:* Regional tourism boards, UFO Landing Pad operators, local historical societies, Travel Alberta, and cultural organizations.

## 9. Ecological Categories for Arts and Culture for Tourism Strategy

Organizing arts and culture tourism strategies through an ecological lens offers a thoughtful, inclusive way to address the diversity of voices, roles, and scales within the sector. By categorizing strategies into individual, interpersonal, organizational, and global levels, communities and stakeholders are invited to engage with the strategy in a way that best reflects their strengths, interests, and capacities. This approach supports personal empowerment, strengthens community ties, fosters collaboration across institutions, and connects the region more meaningfully with wider provincial, national, and global networks. It recognizes that impactful change happens when many people contribute in ways that feel relevant and accessible to them.

### Individual Level:

Focuses on personal skills, knowledge, and engagement. These strategies support individuals—especially artists, youth, and emerging leaders—on their creative journeys by providing tools, resources, and learning opportunities.

- **Business Training for Artists** – Enhances individual capacity in marketing, project management, and proposal writing.
- **Artist Critique & Professional Development Hubs** – Supports individual growth through peer feedback and knowledge-sharing in supportive environments.
- **Mental Wellness Through Art** – Offers accessible, creative outlets for emotional resilience and personal healing.
- **Leadership & Mentorship** – Fosters individual leadership through peer-to-peer arts engagement and mentorship pathways.
- **Creative Career Awareness & Mentorship** – Opens doors to career pathways in creative industries through hands-on workshops and guidance.

### Interpersonal Level:

Focuses on relationships, connection, and social networks. These strategies emphasize the power of collaboration, storytelling, and shared experiences in strengthening community bonds and cultural awareness.

- **Youth-Focused Arts Programs** – Encourage creative friendships and collaborative learning through graffiti workshops, choirs, and theatre camps.
- **Cultural Exchange & Art Passport Program** – Builds bridges across cultures and communities through immersive, educational experiences.
- **Volunteer Appreciation & Recruitment** – Celebrates and engages diverse community members through recognition and inclusive outreach.
- **Integrate Art into Everyday & Unexpected Spaces** – Sparks spontaneous connection and conversation by bringing art into daily public settings.
- **Summer Art & Outdoor Learning** – Combines social engagement and learning through creative, nature-based programming for youth.

## Organizational Level:

Involves institutions, community groups, and local businesses. These strategies rely on shared leadership, cross-sector partnerships, and strong local networks to make arts and culture more accessible and visible.

- **Sustained Investment:** Continue project funding (e.g., Champions for Change) and explore a Community Cultural Endowment Fund to support long-term cultural vitality.
- **STEP Artists & Artisans Legacy Initiative:** Develop a physical and/or digital space to honour significant local artists through rotating exhibits, a digital archive, and community nominations. Include clear selection criteria and capture oral stories in partnership with cultural and Indigenous organizations.
- **Host Outdoor Arts Events** – Encourages collaboration among event planners, cultural organizations, and community businesses.
- **Expand Public Art and Installations** – Activates public space through joint efforts between arts commissions, municipal staff, and business districts.
- **Enhance Digital and Interactive Experiences** – Brings together tourism boards, tech partners, and cultural organizations to offer innovative, accessible engagement.
- **Support Affordable Studio Spaces** – Strengthens local creative ecosystems through partnerships between planners, artist collectives, and nonprofits.
- **Annual Arts & Culture Summit** – Builds relationships and momentum through regional convening and knowledge exchange.
- **Invest and Promote the Elk Point Allied Arts Centre Dinner Theatre Program** – Elevates community programming by investing in existing cultural institutions.
- **Tourism-Embedded Art Engagement** – Merges tourism and culture by involving organizations in curated, art-centred visitor experiences.

## Global Level:

Addresses broader systems, outreach, and cultural exchange beyond the region. These strategies help connect the region's stories, artists, and cultural identity with wider audiences, networks, and platforms, reinforcing a sense of pride and global relevance.

- **Expand Cultural Tourism Packages** – Builds tourism appeal through curated, immersive experiences that attract both local and international visitors.
- **Develop a Distinct Regional Arts and Culture Brand in alignment with Travel Lakeland** – Amplifies the region's creative identity in provincial, national, and global contexts.
- **Leverage Influencers & Tourism Partnerships** – Supports local voices by partnering with national and global organizations to increase reach and impact.
- **Digital Storytelling & Art Documentaries** – Shares local and Indigenous stories through multimedia platforms that resonate beyond the region.
- **Expand Cultural Tourism Starting from Key Attractions** – Uses iconic regional landmarks to guide visitors into deeper cultural exploration and engagement.

# 10. Performance Metrics and Evaluation

Based on the detailed strategies outlined in this report, the following Key Performance Metrics (KPIs) and Evaluation Criteria will help effectively measure success, track progress, and support funding applications and stakeholder engagement:

## 1. Cultural Asset Activation & Infrastructure Development

- Definition: Number of new or revitalized public artworks, signage, installations, and creative spaces completed annually.
- Why it matters: This reflects a tangible investment in cultural infrastructure and visitor appeal.
- Evaluation Methods:
  - Inventory of completed murals, signage, and interactive/digital installations.
  - Number of new or repurposed studio/workshop/retreat spaces.
  - Occupancy/utilization rates of these spaces.

## 2. Event Implementation & Participation Rates

- Definition: The number of cultural events held and the total visitor participation (including locals and tourists).
- Why it matters: Indicates success in drawing audiences and implementing tourism-focused arts programming.
- Evaluation Methods:
  - Attendance data (tickets, counters, QR/app engagement).
  - Event calendars, permits, and reporting.
  - Demographic breakdowns (youth/adult, local/visitor).

## 3. Youth Arts Engagement Index

- Definition: Youth participation in arts programs, including camps, mentorships, expressive arts therapy, and creative workshops.
- Why it matters: Tracks long-term cultural capacity-building and community wellness.
- Evaluation Methods:
  - Registration, attendance, and completion records.
  - Feedback from youth, families, and educators.
  - Continuity and leadership emergence among youth.

## 4. Artist and Creative Sector Engagement

- Definition: The number of artists and cultural workers engaged through contracts, studio access, training, and exhibitions.
- Why it matters: Measures support for the creative economy and local talent development.
- Evaluation Methods:
  - Artist rosters, studio usage logs, and participation in training or mentorship.
  - Satisfaction surveys/testimonials from artists.
  - Showcasing and commissioning records.

## 5. Cultural Tourism Economic Impact

- Definition: Financial contribution of cultural tourism to the regional economy.
- Why it matters: Demonstrates return on investment and potential for tourism growth.
- Evaluation Methods:
  - Visitor spending data (surveys, event-linked business reports).
  - Ticket and merchandise sales.
  - Economic impact studies (e.g., Dinner Theatre model).

## **6. Community Engagement and Volunteer Metrics**

- Definition: Community involvement through volunteering, event organizing, and grassroots cultural expression.
- Why it matters: Indicates social capital, inclusivity, and sustainability.
- Evaluation Methods:
  - Volunteer hours and retention rates.
  - Number of community-led cultural initiatives.
  - Intercultural/intergenerational participation levels.

## **7. Digital Reach and Technology Integration**

- Definition: Digital engagement across websites, social media, QR codes, and immersive tools (AR/VR).
- Why it matters: Reflects innovation, accessibility, and the ability to reach a wider audience.
- Evaluation Methods:
  - Website traffic, QR code scans, AR/VR downloads.
  - Social media metrics, influencer reach, campaign hashtags.
  - Time spent on digital platforms and user feedback.

## **8. Brand Awareness and Cultural Identity**

- Definition: Recognition of regional arts and culture branding among residents, tourists, and tourism operators.
- Why it matters: Supports coordinated promotion and destination appeal.
- Evaluation Methods:
  - Pre- and post-campaign surveys on brand awareness.
  - Media coverage and third-party endorsements.
  - Branding uptake by local tourism partners.

## **9. Collaborative Partnerships Formed**

- Definition: Number and quality of cross-sectoral partnerships (tourism, education, health, Indigenous orgs, etc.).
- Why it matters: Indicates systemic collaboration and funding leverage.
- Evaluation Methods:
  - Documented MOUs, co-hosted programs, and joint funding.
  - Stakeholder engagement records.
  - Outcomes of joint initiatives (e.g., art and wellness, culinary heritage).

## **10. Participant & Visitor Satisfaction**

- Definition: Feedback on the quality, relevance, and emotional resonance of arts and cultural experiences.
- Why it matters: Provides insight into impact and areas for improvement.
- Evaluation Methods:
  - Post-event surveys, Net Promoter Scores (NPS).
  - Focus groups and informal testimonials.
  - Repeat attendance or positive word-of-mouth.

### Priority Implementation Timeline:

- Short-term (1 -2 years): Launch brand and marketing campaigns, establish partnerships, and develop initial programming.
- Medium-term (2 -4 years): Expand programming with signature festivals, an Arts and Culture Summit, Artist Residencies, and Retreats, and develop infrastructure.
- Long-term (5+ years): Position the region as a recognized arts and cultural tourism destination and refine strategies based on performance metrics.

## 11. Conclusion

This *Arts and Culture for Tourism Strategy* outlines a shared path forward for the St. Paul, County of St. Paul, and Elk Point (STEP) region to grow as a cultural destination. Rooted in the unique character and creativity of local communities, the strategy provides a framework for fostering a vibrant and sustainable arts and culture tourism sector by leveraging the area's artistic strengths, historical assets, and deep community involvement.

At its heart, this strategy champions collaboration. Strengthening partnerships among municipal governments, arts organizations, local businesses, and Indigenous communities will be vital to expanding cultural tourism and enriching the visitor experience. Together, we can activate public spaces, amplify festivals, and bring historical narratives to life in ways that celebrate regional identity and support long-term economic development.

The strategy also highlights the importance of inclusivity and accessibility. By encouraging youth involvement, supporting underrepresented groups, and creating interactive, engaging experiences, the region can foster broader participation in the arts and attract a more diverse audience. Collective efforts to invest in cultural infrastructure, elevate regional branding, and launch digital marketing initiatives will contribute to a stronger, more connected profile as a creative tourism destination.

Key strategic initiatives proposed in this strategy include enhancing public spaces with murals, interactive art, and cultural installations; developing year-round arts festivals and tourism packages; expanding digital storytelling and virtual experiences; and supporting affordable studio spaces and mentorship programs for local artists. Additionally, cultural exchange programs and the integration of the arts into community events will contribute to a more dynamic and inclusive tourism environment.

A phased approach is recommended to guide implementation, beginning with foundational efforts such as branding and programming, followed by medium- and long-term investments in infrastructure, skill development, and supportive policy. Progress will be guided by key success measures, including visitor engagement, economic impact, and community participation, which will inform future adjustments and enhancements.

By embracing creativity, inclusion, and collaborative growth, the STEP region is well-positioned to emerge as a cultural hub that benefits residents and welcomes visitors. This strategy lays the groundwork for continued development, ensuring arts and culture remain central to the region's tourism and economic future.

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## Appendix A: Contributors at the June 2024 Community Round Table

Sylvie Smyl, ACFA

Linda Sallstrom, STEP Economic Development

Anna Pratch, St. Paul and District Arts Foundation

Valerie Pratch, St. Paul and District Arts Foundation

Richard Wild, St. Paul and District Arts Foundation

Eric Spoeth, Artist

Vicki Brooker, Friends of the Fort

Renee, St. Paul Visual Arts Centre

Jolene Bendera, Artist

Brock Duncun, Artist

Marianne Jenke, Travel Lakeland

Joanne Metchooyeah, Portage College

Roberta Dallaire, Mallaig Museum,

Raymond Amarathe, Mallaig Museum

Rae Michaud, Mallaig Museum

Alice Bourget, St. Paul Museum

Clement Fontaine, St. Paul Museum

Penny Fox, Community Futures

Mienna Starosielski, County of St. Paul

Amil Shapka, Champions of Change

Don Conrad, Elk Point Allied Arts Centre

## Appendix B: Contributor Interviews

Suzanne Prevost, EconoMusee

Herman Poulin, Artist, St. Paul

Vicki Brooker, Friends of the Fort, Fort George Buckingham House

Alice Bourget, St. Paul, Museum

Val Pratch, St. Paul and District Arts Foundation

Eric Spoeth, Artist, St. Paul

Rene Fontaine, St. Paul Visual Art Centre

Amil Shapka, Champions of Change

Don Conrad, Elk Point Allied Arts Centre

Rachel Bouchard, Travel Lakeland

Michelle Wright, Travel Lakeland

Marianne Jenke, Travel Lakeland

# Appendix C: Market Segmentation Considerations for STEP Arts & Culture for Tourism

## **1. Market Segmentation, Travel Alberta**

The STEP region (St. Paul, County of St. Paul, and Elk Point) offers a compelling mix of cultural heritage, creative expression, and community-driven tourism experiences. Targeting specific visitor segments is essential to increase visitation, boost economic impact, and deepen engagement with local culture. This segmentation aligns STEP's offerings with two high-potential Travel Alberta segments:

- Curious Adventurers
- Hotspot Hunters

### **Target Segments**

#### **Segment A: Curious Adventurers**

##### **Profile Highlights (from Travel Alberta):**

- Lifelong learners and meaning-seekers
- Value authentic, immersive, off-the-beaten-path experiences
- Interested in local stories, Indigenous culture, art, and history
- Travel to connect with people and deepen cultural understanding
- Appreciate nature, community, and slow travel
- Enjoy museums, walking tours, festivals, and artisan markets

##### **STEP Alignments:**

- **Cultural Heritage Sites & Stories:** Fort George Buckingham House, Métis and Ukrainian monuments, Indigenous art exhibits
- **Immersive Experiences:** AR/VR storytelling trails, artist-led retreats, heritage cooking and craft workshops
- **Festivals & Events:** St. Paul Art Walk, Alberta Culture Days, community-led festivals with storytelling
- **Community Connections:** Opportunities to meet artists, Elders, and local storytellers through residency events or walking tours
- **Mental Wellness & Nature:** Art-and-nature retreats, mindfulness through creative expression
- **Youth & Intergenerational Programming:** Family-friendly and educational experiences (e.g., Art Passport)

##### **Marketing Channels:**

- Educational and cultural blogs
- Cultural and nature-focused social media influencers
- Partnerships with educational institutions and elder hostels

## Segment B: Hotspot Hunters

### Profile Highlights (from Travel Alberta):

- Trend-savvy, energetic, and social
- Looking for buzz-worthy, Instagrammable experiences
- Like vibrant festivals, food, nightlife, and cultural moments
- Often travel in groups (friends, young families, couples)
- Will travel for art shows, concerts, and unique accommodations
- Highly influenced by social media and peer reviews

### STEP Alignments:

- **Photo-Ready Attractions:** UFO Landing Pad, murals, interactive public art, pop-up art installations
- **Unique Events:** Elk Point Dinner Theatre, Nuit Blanche-style evenings, Harvest Art Nights
- **Trendy Venues:** Lakeland Brewing Co., Twisted Fork hosting art events, live music
- **Seasonal Festivals with a Twist:** Open Air Nights, Art Trail Rides, and Folklorama-style pavilions
- **Digital Enhancements:** QR-coded art tours, interactive maps, augmented reality experiences

### Marketing Channels:

- Instagram, TikTok, YouTube
- Influencer partnerships
- Digital ads on Spotify, travel podcasts, and a regional tourism app

### Opportunities for Cross-Segment Appeal

Both segments share an interest in:

- Cultural authenticity
- High-quality visitor experiences
- Memorable visuals and storytelling

### Shared Strategic Offers:

- **Art & Heritage Trails:** Self-guided or guided with AR enhancements
- **Creative Tourism Packages:** Combine art, food, history, and nature (e.g., e-bike mural tours, culinary storytelling)
- **Artist Residencies and Showcases:** Live events with social media coverage
- **Pop-Up Galleries & Cultural Markets:** Combine trendiness with tradition

### Strategic Recommendations

- **Brand Development:** Craft an arts and culture brand aligned with Travel Lakeland that speaks to creativity, diversity, and local flair

- **Content Creation:** Invest in visually striking and story-rich content for social and traditional platforms
- **Partnerships:** Collaborate with Travel Lakeland, Indigenous tourism partners, Alberta Craft Council, and local businesses
- **Experience Design:** Focus on co-creation (DIY art, culinary classes), digital interactivity, and storytelling
- **Evaluation:** Track visitor engagement via digital analytics, social media mentions, event participation, and feedback loops

## **2. Market Segmentation Based on Destination Canada’s Tourism Data Collective**

*Each Business and Organization in the STEP region is encouraged to complete the Market Segmentation- Destination Quiz to view their respective Market Segmentation results.*

Integrating insights from Destination Canada's Traveller Segmentation Program is worth considering. This program identifies seven distinct traveller segments based on behavioural values and psychographic factors. Among these, four are classified as Highly Engaged Guests, aligning well with the STEP region's offerings. (<https://www.tourismdatacollective.ca/segmentation/destination-quiz>)

### **1. Culture Seekers**

*Profile Highlights:*

- Thrive on connections with new people, history, and art.
- Seek authentic and immersive experiences that deepen your cultural understanding.
- Value storytelling, local traditions, and artistic expressions.

*Example STEP Alignments:*

- **Cultural Heritage Sites & Stories:** Fort George Buckingham House, Métis and Ukrainian monuments, Indigenous art exhibits.
- **Immersive Experiences:** AR/VR storytelling trails, artist-led retreats, heritage cooking and craft workshops.
- **Festivals & Events:** St. Paul Art Walk, Alberta Culture Days, community-led festivals with storytelling.
- **Community Connections:** Opportunities to engage with artists, Elders, and local storytellers through residency events or walking tours.

*Marketing Channels:*

- Educational and cultural blogs.
- Partnerships with educational institutions and elder hostels.
- Cultural and nature-focused social media influencers.

### **2. Outdoor Explorers**

*Profile Highlights:*

- Pursue adventure in natural settings.
- Enjoy activities that combine physical engagement with cultural learning.
- Seek scenic landscapes and outdoor experiences.

*Example STEP Alignments:*

- **Art & Heritage Trails:** Self-guided or guided tours with AR enhancements through natural and cultural sites.
- **Creative Tourism Packages:** Combining art, food, history, and nature (e.g., e-bike mural tours, culinary storytelling).
- **Seasonal Festivals with a Twist:** Open Air Nights, Art Trail Rides, and Folklorama-style pavilions set in natural environments.

*Marketing Channels:*

- Outdoor adventure blogs and magazines.
- Partnerships with eco-tourism organizations.
- Social media platforms focusing on travel and adventure.

### **3. Refined Globetrotters**

*Profile Highlights:*

- Prioritize high-value experiences and discovering new places.
- Engage in sophisticated cultural and artistic pursuits.
- Appreciate exclusive events and premium services.

*Example STEP Alignments:*

- **Unique Events:** Elk Point Dinner Theatre, Nuit Blanche-style evenings, Harvest Art Nights.
- **Trendy Venues:** Lakeland Brewing Co. and Twisted Fork host art events and live music.
- **Artist Residencies and Showcases:** Live events with social media coverage, offering exclusive access to art and culture.

*Marketing Channels:*

- Luxury travel magazines and websites.
- Collaborations with premium brands and services.
- Influencer partnerships focusing on luxury travel and experiences.

### **4. Purpose-Driven Families**

*Profile Highlights:*

- Focus on meaningful, educational moments during travel.
- Seek family-friendly activities that are both fun and enriching.
- Value experiences that foster learning and personal growth.

*Example STEP Alignments:*

- **Youth & Intergenerational Programming:** Family-friendly and educational experiences, such as the Art Passport.
- **Festivals & Events:** Activities designed for family participation, such as interactive art workshops and storytelling sessions.
- **Community Connections:** Engagements with local artists and cultural practitioners suitable for all ages.

*Marketing Channels:*

- Family travel blogs and forums.
- Educational platforms and school partnerships.
- Social media groups focused on family travel and education.

**Strategic Recommendations:**

- **Brand Development:** Develop an arts and culture sub-brand that embodies creativity, diversity, and local charm, appealing to these identified segments.
- **Content Creation:** Invest in visually captivating and narrative-rich content tailored for various platforms, highlighting experiences that resonate with each segment.
- **Partnerships:** Collaborate with organizations such as Travel Lakeland, Local Cultural Organizations such as ACFA, St. Paul Ukrainian Committee, Museum Committees, Indigenous tourism partners, Alberta Craft Council, and local businesses and others to co-create and promote offerings.
- **Experience Design:** Emphasize co-creation opportunities (e.g., DIY art, culinary classes), digital interactivity, and storytelling to enhance engagement.
- **Evaluation:** Monitor visitor engagement through digital analytics, social media interactions, event participation, and feedback to assess and refine strategies.

By aligning the STEP region's arts and culture tourism initiatives with these traveller segments, the region can effectively attract and engage visitors whose interests and values resonate with the unique experiences offered.

# Appendix D: Illustrations of Selected Personal Meaning Maps





ELK POINT DINNER THEATRE GROUPS  
BRINGS PEOPLE TO TOWN.

What is your area (town) history?  
An Attraction that is acknowledges the history of the area.

- BRINGS PEOPLE TO TOWN  
Have some things that encourage everyone to visit the property.

ARTS - CULTURE - TOURISM - Have more to offer from the community.  
↓  
Variety of Cultural Programs and Services

Have the facility to encourage all art forms

Have all groups working together for various functions

- Non-competitor!

- WITHIN THE ARTS COMMUNITY YOU WORK WELL TOGETHER.

EXAMPLE

Canada Day  
Different Groups should work together to support each other  
Not "undercutting" each other  
to benefit themselves themselves.

- LACK OF FUNDING IS A HUGE OBSTACLE AND "NAY" SAYERS.

Classes: Painting, Pottery, mosaics, glass, <sup>3</sup>MARY, many others.

Retreats: Beginner, Intermediate, Advanced - bring in experts in each medium.

Artist in residence: rotate different mediums, styles, etc. 6 mo. - 12 mo. and @ different locations.

Art walk - guided / self guided, maps, QR codes, website, social media  
Make the lakeland an art mecca. Beautiful scenery, settings, inspirational.

St. Paul (lakeland) is such a deeprooted cultural part of the Province: Indigenous, Metis, Ukrainian (Blue Settlement), French. Bring those cultures to life through art, stories, places.

Build out an <sup>annual</sup> lakeland art festival.

Music, Theatre → How do we collaborate?

Museums → identify each of the "unique" things of artists, museum and build a story - reason for ppl to make from one museum to the next instead of them thinking seen one, seen them all.

↓ As part of another strategy it was identified the region has an unusually high number of artists, but each one, seen one, seen one,

Interpretative tours  
by e-bike, or vehicle.

Arts  
Culture  
Tourism

