

Policy Brief: A Primer on the Draft 2026-2029 Federal Sustainable Development Strategy

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Purpose

The Government of Canada recently released its *Draft 2026–2029 Federal Sustainable Development Strategy* (the *Draft FSDS*) and is now in the process of [seeking input](#) on its contents. This feedback will inform updates to the final version of the strategy, which in turn shapes priorities for federal organizations and their departmental strategies.

The purpose of this brief is to help the Hub’s network and other sector interest holders understand the *Draft FSDS*, supporting their response to the government’s calls for comments on the draft. Canadians are being asked to provide input on the draft strategy by May 12, 2026, before it is considered by Cabinet and tabled in Parliament in November 2026. Comments can be submitted through an [online form](#) or by [email](#) to the Sustainability Directorate within the Department of Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC).

Background on the Federal Sustainable Development Strategy

The Federal Sustainable Development Strategy aligns federal government actions with the [17 United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals](#) and the UN’s recent [2024 Pact for the Future](#). It builds on Canada’s previous strategy, the 2022 to 2026 Federal Sustainable Development Strategy. As stated in the draft, the FSDS “outlines the Government of Canada’s sustainable development priorities, establishes corresponding goals and targets, and identifies federal plans to achieve them.” This is a whole-of-government framework for fostering transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement. The FSDS aligns all departments with shared priorities for: combatting climate change; building a strong, resilient economy; advancing reconciliation and inclusion; and improving the quality of life for everyone in Canada.

The *2025 Progress Report on the 2022 to 2026 Federal Sustainable Development Strategy* shows positive progress toward 44% of the targets established in the last strategy (17 rated as on track and 5 targets achieved). However, 14% (7) of targets required acceleration to meet commitments and 32% showed negative progress, rated as either deteriorating (9) or limited progress (9).¹ The progress report indicates that the strongest performance is across economic targets, while environmental and social goals show the most challenges and fragility. Structural equity and wellbeing outcomes also continue to lag.

Draft 2026–2029 Federal Sustainable Development Strategy

The *Draft FSDS* renews the federal government’s commitment to sustainable development over the next three years. This new strategy builds on past goals and, for the first time, introduces goals, targets, and implementation strategies to which Canada’s arts, culture and heritage sector and creative industries can contribute, as outlined in Figure 1 below.

¹ Furthermore, two targets could not be assessed (tracking single-use plastic and self-reported rates of intimate partner violence) and one target was not achieved (federal public service workforce equity). There was a total of 50 targets included in the progress report.

Figure 1: Draft 2026-2029 FSDS Goal 1.2 and associated targets and implementation strategies.

GOAL	TARGETS	IMPLEMENTATION
Reinforce Canadian Culture and Identity	Increase Canadians' sense of belonging to local community from 53.4% in 2024 to 56% in 2030	Promote Intercultural dialogue by developing official language minority communities Ensure participation, expression, preservation, revitalization, creation, promotion of and diversity of Canadian culture, arts, and ways of life Support Indigenous Peoples' efforts to preserve, revitalize, and promote intergenerational and cross-societal transmission of Indigenous languages and cultures
	Increase cultural sector's GDP by 4% from \$54.03B in 2023 to \$56.19B 2030	Support improvements to cultural facilities and expand access to exhibitions, cultural and heritage sites Support research, access to education, skills training, jobs, and working conditions in the cultural sector Ensure discoverability, access, and competitiveness of Canadian content and cultural products in domestic and global markets

Understanding Goal 1.2

The first section of the *Draft FSDS* commits to building a safe, inclusive, and resilient society where no one is left behind. This vision is based on the principle that strong societies are founded on democratic institutions, universal access to education, decent work, safe communities, as well as respect for and celebration of human rights, culture, and identity. To meet this objective, the first section of the *Draft FSDS* focuses on:

- Building confidence in democratic institutions
- Strengthening Canadians' sense of belonging
- Protecting communities and cultures
- Reducing inequalities
- Enhancing safety, quality of life, and well-being for individuals and communities

Goal 1.2 to reinforce Canadian culture and identity is one of seven goals intended to meet the vision. This goal recognizes, as stated in the draft, the “global [consensus](#) that culture is critical to sustainable development because of the many ways it shapes our identity, influences how we interact with others, and supports mental and physical health and well-being.”² Through this goal, the government aims to support cultural and creative innovation, protect Indigenous culture and languages, promote Canada’s natural and cultural heritage, and strengthen national identity to build resilient communities. This is the only goal that emphasizes arts,

² Government of Canada. [Draft 2026–2029 Federal Sustainable Development Strategy](#).

culture, and heritage. Responsibility for the goal is shared by several federal organizations and departments, including: Canadian Heritage (PCH); the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC); Economic and Social Development Canada (ESDC); Library and Archives Canada (LAC); the National Film Board (NFB); and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), among others.

The inclusion of Goal 1.2 (and its set of two targets and six implementation strategies outlined in Figure 1 above) is a welcome addition to the *Draft FSDS*. Under Goal 1.2, the Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture will become responsible for reaching a target for 56% of Canadians to have a strong sense of belonging to their local communities on the [Quality of Life Index](#) by 2030—last indicated as down to 48.1% from 53.5% by Statistics Canada.³ The Minister will also become responsible for reaching the target to increase the real gross domestic product of Canada’s cultural sector by 4% by 2030. This means growing the cultural sector, measured at \$54.03 billion in 2023, by \$2.16 billion. According to the most [recent reports in *The Daily*](#), real GDP for the culture sector decreased 0.6% in Q3 2025, as goods-producing subdomains continue to face challenges and jobs decline.⁴

Key Issues to Consider

The Hub reviewed the *Draft FSDS* to identify issues of particular relevance to the arts, culture and heritage sectors and the creative industries. This is not a comprehensive list and respondents are encouraged to respond to the issues that most resonate with their interests, organizational missions, and communities.

Targets and Metrics

The draft strategy sets a target to increase sectoral GDP, but federal financial support for the arts, culture and heritage sector is trending downward. An [October 2025 Artworks report](#) by Business / Arts and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce determined that “The federal government’s allocation to arts, culture and heritage is declining as a share of total federal spending, while Canadian private contributions lag at 0.8% of income — below both North American (0.94%) and global (1.04%) averages.”⁵

The Department of Canadian Heritage’s \$93.1 million in operational spending reductions under the Comprehensive Expenditure Review seem to complicate commitments in the Draft FSDS. The UN’s *2024 Pact for the Future* includes steps to improve how we measure human progress, including looking beyond GDP to capturing human and planetary wellbeing and sustainability. The arts, culture and heritage sector and creative industries do more than simply increase individuals’ sense of belonging or national GDP: they can support the measurement called for by the *2024 Pact for the Future*. This could be reflected by refining targets and implementation strategies in the draft *FSDS*. For example, could the *Draft FSDS* monitor:

³ Statistics Canada, [Canadian Social Survey](#)

⁴ Statistics Canada. “The Daily — National Culture Indicators, Second and Third Quarters 2025.” *The Daily*, January 13, 2026. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/260113/dq260113c-eng.htm>.

⁵ Business / Arts . “Arts and Culture Sector Contributes \$131 Billion to Canada’s Economy.” Canadian Chamber of Commerce, February 17, 2026. <https://chamber.ca/news/arts-and-culture-sector-contributes-131-billion-to-canadas-economy/>.

- Total proportion of government spending (as investigated by Business / Arts) on arts, culture, and heritage sectors and creative industries to better reflect government work towards the GDP target?
- Sectoral innovation by tracking creators' registration of intellectual property vehicles, like licensing fees, copyrights, trademarks, industrial designs, and patents?
- Composition of cultural exchange to better understand the diversity and variety of goods and services traded within and across our borders?
- Engagement in trade missions and other international cultural exchange programs?

Question for reflection: How can the Government of Canada get to its stated goals while at the same time reducing its operational costs under the Comprehensive Expenditure Review? What if there are cuts to grants, transfer payments, or program? What might the impact of this be?

Question for reflection: Are there more meaningful measures or targets for progress that could be incorporated to Goal 1.2?

Federal Cultural Policy Framework

The draft's stated cultural policy alignments omit newer legislation and reference policy frameworks that are out of date. An updated policy alignment would be required to fulfill implementation plans of supporting the vitality and development of Canadian identity and belonging, ensuring Canadian content becomes easier to find and consume, and strengthening the cultural sector's role in international trade and diplomacy.

The policy framework referenced to achieve Goal 1.2 is *Creative Canada* (2017), which offers a vision and approach to growing the creative economy that is now about ten years out of date. The framework does not account for the *Online Streaming Act* (formerly Bill C-11), which provides a framework for the discoverability of Canadian content, including French-language and Indigenous-language content, on major digital platforms and the co-development of the Indigenous Broadcasting Policy. The framework also does not account for *The Online News Act* (formerly Bill C-18), which requires large digital platforms to bargain fairly with Canadian news businesses for their content, and the *Online Harms Act* (2024) (formerly Bill C-63), which aims to hold social media services accountable for reducing exposure to harmful content.

That said, some of the goals outlined in the *Creative Canada* framework might be elevated by the new *FSDS*, including:

- Global recognition of Canada's high-quality creative content and industries that are engines of economic growth;
- Unique and diverse Canadian stories becoming more sought after; and
- Building strength and trust in Canada's public broadcaster.

The draft also fails to mention the important role that the *Creative Export Strategy* (whose renewal was just announced in the [Spring Economic Update 2026](#)) plays in facilitating dialogue between the federal government and creative industries on export-related trade. In doing so, the *Draft FSDS* does not account for the important role that culture can play in increasing Canada's economic competitiveness at home and abroad.

The Canada-U.S.-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA) is also not included for policy alignment, despite the upcoming joint-review. CUSMA's "Chapter 32: Exceptions and General Provisions"

counterbalance the dominance of American cultural expressions in Canadian media and protect Canadian cultural sovereignty. Miriam Kramer, Executive Director, Government Relations & Public Policy, OCAD University, reflected on the potential of cultural trade saying, “As a middle power with a global agenda, Canada could be leveraging culture to push forward its diplomatic objectives. However, as they stand now, Canada’s policy and program mechanisms are not in place for it to do that.”⁶ With CUSMA’s future still unclear, Kramer’s reflections call for culture to be embedded in trade diversification, expansion of the *Creative Export Strategy*, and reinstatement of programs for cultural diplomacy.

Question for reflection: Which recent Canadian government policies might augment or support accomplishment of the goals in the *Draft FSDS*?

Question for reflection: How might the Government of Canada’s new consultative bodies, such as its Advisory Council on Rights, Equality and Inclusion and its AI and Culture Advisory Council, help deliver on the *Federal Sustainable Development Strategy* goals?

Decolonization, Truth & Reconciliation

The draft commits to advancing reconciliation and upholding the rights of Indigenous Peoples that are reflected in the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act](#) (2021). However, it does not reference the existing [Calls to Action](#) recommended by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2012. These include the establishment of a dedicated national fund for commemorating reconciliation (Call 68) and the creation of a reconciliation framework for Canadian Heritage and commemoration activities (Call 79).⁷

These calls are made to the Department of Canadian Heritage as critical pieces of the truth-telling required to reach reconciliation. As such, the calls support the achievement of *FSDS* targets to increase sense of belonging in Canada, as well as the implementation strategy of supporting Indigenous Peoples’ efforts to preserve, revitalize, and promote intergenerational and cross-societal transmission of Indigenous knowledges and cultures.

The use of Indigenous culture to represent Canada needs to be done with care and in a good way, following First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities’ leadership.

Question for reflection: How might the TRC Calls to Action be better integrated into the *Draft FSDS* to ensure Indigenous leadership and sovereignty across all goals?

Others Areas Where Culture Contributes

Beyond its responsibilities for Goal 1.2’s implementation strategies, Canadian Heritage (PCH) has a role in two other implementation strategies:

- *Implementation strategy 1.1.1.3:* Protect against foreign interference, boost digital literacy, counter misinformation and disinformation, and strengthen the resilience of Canadians and Canadian critical infrastructure to threats, including cyber threats, to increase confidence in federal government actions and activities.
- *Implementation strategy 1.4.1.1:* In partnership with all orders of government and populations experiencing discrimination, reduce systemic barriers to economic, social,

⁶ Kramer, Miriam. “Markets, Makers and Middle Powers: What a Mexico City Market Taught Me about Canada’s next Trade Chapter.” Policy Reflections, March 2026. <https://culturalpolicyhub.ocadu.ca/news/markets-makers-and-middle-powers-what-mexico-city-market-taught-me-about-canadas-next-trade>.

⁷ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action (2015).

and cultural participation and decision making to reduce discrimination and unfair treatment.

Question for reflection: What are some measurable ways that content creators, cultural producers, and heritage organizations can contribute to combatting online harms, the spread of misinformation + disinformation, and reduce systemic discrimination?

Question for reflection: How might the final *2026-2029 FSDS* integrate Canada's forthcoming AI strategy or new pieces of legislation that are focused on addressing similar challenges to those outlined in the *FSDS* goals?

Get Involved

Responses to this consultation process will be summarized and shared by ECCC to develop the final *2026-2029 FSDS*. Input will be shared with relevant federal organizations and will be consolidated in a public "What We Heard" consultation report by ECCC.

Submissions to the *Draft 2026-2029 Federal Sustainable Development Strategy* consultation do not need to address all listed policy issues. Taking action and sharing perspectives of the art, culture and heritage sectors comes first. Respondents should weigh-in based on lived experiences and current expertise. This consultation is open for comments until May 12, 2026. Get involved by completing this [online form](#) or by emailing the Sustainability Directorate at SDO-BDD@ec.gc.ca.