



CHRIS ROBINSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## BUILDING YOUR MUSEUM

*Bringing the Alberta story to life!*

As the new building downtown takes shape, my colleagues and I are focused on the difficult and intricate task of bringing the story of Alberta to life. We are highly conscious of the fact that the stories cannot be chosen or developed in isolation from their protagonists (and, sometimes, antagonists). If a museum is to be relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, then it must seek to get at the truth, even if that truth sometimes makes us uncomfortable. We have, therefore, taken great care to ensure a culturally appropriate and respectful approach to presenting the values and traditions of all groups whose stories will be told. Moreover, we are seeking to deliver multiple perspectives and to recognize the right of groups to have a say in how their own culture is represented. These principles are embedded in our engagement process, which will provide direction, counsel and oversight to gallery development and, later, to museum programming.

To gather inspiration and material for our galleries, we have established three broad streams of connection: engagement panels, individuals & institutions, and evaluation & prototyping. Each is intended to provide direction in a continuous feedback loop, helping us to set clear destinations and ensure we don't lose our bearings along the way.

**Engagement Panels:** We have struck five engagement panels for spaces ranging in scale from a single thematic area (e.g., Children's Gallery) to larger gallery wings comprising multiple themes. The panels address Aboriginal Content, Human History, Natural History, Children's Gallery, and Access & Universal Design. The panels involve more than 60 individuals, from all corners of the province (and beyond), including educators, artists, writers, academics, historians, naturalists, cultural knowledge holders, and organizations representing persons with disabilities. Their role, beyond assisting with content development, is to advise on visitor behaviour and interests, interpretive direction, programming and, as needed, to direct us to others who can provide further insight.

**Individuals & Institutions:** The second stream seeks counsel from other museums and galleries, literature reviews and direct contact with community-based individuals,

organizations and agencies. It is this last community-based component that is proving the most rewarding in story development. Through more than 40 meetings with individuals, organizations and agencies, the lion's share involving First Nations and Métis communities, we have gained new insights and perspectives that will deepen and enrich gallery content.

**Evaluation & Prototyping:** The third stream draws on expertise from visitors to achieve exhibits, experiences and programs that are audience-focused, accessible and socially inclusive, responsive and engaging, and of a high quality. This step is key to enhancing our understanding of visitor behaviours and interests, and the effectiveness of proposed exhibits.

### PHOTOS

**FIGURE 1** Executive Director Chris Robinson and Capital Development Director Tom Thurston visit the new Museum building in downtown Edmonton.