

REIMAGINING DOON Heritage Village

Phase One
Engagement Insights
Brief Summary
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Background

Like many other cultural institutions around the world, The Region of Waterloo's Doon Heritage Village (the Village) is taking time to pause and reflect on which stories of culture and heritage it shares and, conversely, which are missing.

With the closure of the site during utility upgrades, Regional staff are taking the important first steps to hear from community members on how the Village might expand the stories, resources, and experiences the site provides to all residents and visitors when the site reopens in the summer of 2025.

Engagement Goals & Methods

Leads from Doon Heritage Village collaborated with [Openly](#), a social purpose consultancy, to facilitate phase 1 engagement, particularly with equity deserving communities as well as to support broader engagement. Engagement strategies for this initial phase of engagement we co-designed with:

- An advisory group of Doon Heritage Village leads
- FRIENDS of Waterloo Region museums
- Community members with lived experience
- Regional employees supporting engagement, youth, and reconciliation, equity, diversity and inclusion

Phase 1 engagement goals included:

1. Supporting the development of a new interpretive plan and programming that will represent, resonate with, engage and inspire our community.
2. Ensuring Doon Heritage Village is expanded upon to share and celebrate stories that are reflective of the experiences and identities of our community.

Based on the scope and budget available for this project, the advisory group made decisions about the engagement strategy to focus the first phase on meaningful relationship development and engagement, as opposed to fully representative engagement.

Interviews, group conversations, full-day consultations, and online surveys were facilitated with a variety of audiences (see Table 1 for a full list of audiences and participation). All of these insights were analyzed to reveal recurring patterns, ideas, and themes. The recommendations in this report reflect findings from phase one of three efforts which will conduct deeper engagement and inform the reimagined Village.

Table 1.

Full list of audiences and numbers for phase 1 engagement

Engagement Method	Participants/ Respondents
Public Engage Survey	391
Equity Deserving Community Champions	22
Public Engagement Sessions (2 sessions)	20
FRIENDS of Waterloo Region and Community Champions	15
Staff	15
Youth Advisory Council	15
Key Informant Interviews	2
Total	480

Recommendations

Many recommendations emerged from all combined engagement findings.

1. REIMAGINE THE CONTENT

Update the stories at Doon Heritage Village to accurately reflect all the cultures and communities of Waterloo Region. Show the good, the bad, and the daily lives of the people in the Region from diverse experiences, including those of systemic harm. Explain how the past influenced that era and how that era affects us today. Pay special attention to sharing Indigenous stories in a respectful and collaborative manner.

2. REIMAGINE THE PROCESS

To update and share new stories, work with diverse and representative local leaders and groups who have special knowledge and experience. Plan, create, and present new programs together. Keep what is already successful and add new programs through these partnerships. Partnerships include, but are not limited to, Indigenous groups, schools, festival hosts, and diverse representative groups.

3. REIMAGINE THE EXPERIENCE

Develop a variety of engaging, immersive, hands-on experiences including events, arts and entertainment, and creative interpretation. Share diverse stories with a focus on **hands on, immersive festivals and fairs, food, and holiday** events. Hands-on workshop suggestions include, but are not limited to, baking, blacksmithing, weaving, and gardening for self-sufficiency.

4. REIMAGINE THE ACCESS

Focus on increasing accessibility to and within the Village to facilitate an enjoyable and inclusive experience. Focus on community outreach, low-cost admission options, diversity of interpretive materials, audio, visual, and tactile experiences, virtual engagement options, access to food, and accessible transportation to and within the village. Transportation options include but are not limited to having a bus stop directly in front of the Village and wooden boardwalks around the Village.

Phase 2 and 3 Engagement Recommendations

Continue deeper, meaningful engagement through Phase 2 and 3

Continue to engage those who participated in phase 1 and build deeper relationships, and broader more representative engagement, specifically among equity deserving groups. Ongoing engagement and relationship development will be important even beyond phase 3.

Contextual Considerations

The meaning of community and the notion of community museums

Doon Heritage Village is part of a publicly funded Regional community museum. What it means to be a community museum was discussed as a space that is flexible and reflects a changing community over time. A “community” itself is a broad term reflecting many groups, cultures, religions, geographies, ages, and more; one person can be part of many communities, and each community has diversity within itself.

The political nature of museums and historical villages

Publicly funded organizations often avoid offering sharing “political” perspectives. However, museums are not neutral; they share political pieces, whether intentional or not. Doon Heritage Village has a difficult but important role to share diverse experiences through meaningful partnerships that will be viewed as political.

Next Steps

A detailed engagement report will be used to create an updated draft Interpretive Plan for Doon Heritage Village. Feedback on this draft plan will be asked for in phase 2 of the engagement process. The full Interpretive Plan will support the development of a Reimagined Doon Heritage Village experience, centering employee and program development, which will be soft launched for feedback in phase 3 of the engagement process. The formalized grand reopening of Doon Heritage Village is scheduled for summer 2025.

We would like to extend our sincere gratitude for every person’s involvement in phase 1 of this project. It would not be possible to Reimagine Doon Heritage Village without your engagement, feedback, and ideas.



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