

Curatorial Fee Schedule



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About

The Indigenous Curatorial Collective / Collectif des commissaires autochtones (ICCA) is an entirely Indigenous-run and led non-profit organization that aims to support and connect fellow Indigenous curators, artists, writers, academics, and professionals through various methods of gathering.

The ICCA engages in critical discourses, increases professional opportunities for our members, develops programming, and, most importantly, works to build reciprocal relationships with Indigenous curators, artists, communities, and the institutions we engage with.

2026 Curatorial Compensation Fee Schedule

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Section 1

BACKGROUND

Executive Summary

The Indigenous Curatorial Collective (ICCA) has developed this Curatorial Compensation Framework to address a critical and longstanding gap in the arts sector: the absence of a standardized, equitable fee structure for independent curators, and in particular, Indigenous curators.

Grounded in ICCA's ongoing work across workshops, writing initiatives, mentorship, and national and international partnerships, this framework responds directly to the realities faced by curators working outside institutional structures. Independent curators are regularly required to negotiate fees without benchmarks, operate without consistent contractual standards, and absorb unpaid labour across research, relationship-building, and project development. These conditions are further intensified for Indigenous curators, whose work includes cultural protocol, community accountability, and relational practices that extend beyond conventional curatorial roles.

This document establishes a minimum fee schedule and compensation framework designed to support independent Indigenous curators in negotiating fair and transparent contracts. It aligns with national standards such as CARFAC and provincial arts council guidelines, while advancing beyond minimums to reflect the full scope of curatorial labour, including leadership, mentorship, governance, and community engagement.

Importantly, this framework recognizes that curatorial practice within Indigenous contexts is relational, cumulative, and community-based. Curators bring with them networks of artists, long-term collaborations, and responsibilities to the communities they work within. As such, this framework positions curatorial work not as an isolated service, but as a form of cultural leadership that carries broader social, artistic, and intergenerational impact.

The ICCA Curatorial Fee Schedule is intended as a practical tool and policy foundation. It provides:

- Clear minimum fee benchmarks for curatorial work
- Scalable adjustments based on project scope, duration, and complexity
- Guidance for contracting, payment structures, and reimbursable expenses
- Recognition of Indigenous curatorial labour and relational practice

By establishing this framework, ICCA advances a national model that supports sustainable curatorial practice, strengthens Indigenous curatorial networks, and promotes greater equity and accountability across the arts sector.

This is not only a compensation tool—it is an intervention into how curatorial labour is valued, negotiated, and sustained.

Background & Rationale

ICCA and the Development of an Indigenous Curatorial Fee Framework

The Indigenous Curatorial Collective (ICCA) has developed this curatorial compensation framework as part of its ongoing commitment to supporting independent Indigenous curators across Canada. This work builds on ICCA's broader programming, which includes workshops, writing opportunities, mentorship, and partnerships with artist-run centres, galleries, and national organizations.

Through this work, ICCA has identified a consistent and urgent need: independent Indigenous curators do not have access to a standardized, sector-recognized fee schedule to support contract negotiation, project development, or equitable compensation. This framework responds directly to that gap.

ICCA's Role in Supporting Independent Curators

ICCA operates as a national service organization dedicated to advancing curatorial practice through:

- Professional development (workshops, mentorship, and peer exchange)
- Critical writing opportunities (essays, publications, and research platforms)
- Partnership development with institutions, festivals, and artist-run centres
- Curatorial delegations and exhibitions at national and international levels

Through these activities, ICCA works closely with curators at all stages of their careers and has developed a clear understanding of the structural barriers facing independent curatorial practice.

Identified Sector Gap

While curators are increasingly recognized as creative leads and cultural workers, there remains:

- No standardized minimum fee schedule for independent curators
- No shared framework to guide contract negotiation or project scoping
- Inconsistent recognition of curatorial labour across institutions and projects
- Limited tools available to support curators in bidding on or assessing opportunities

As a result, independent curators are frequently required to:

- Negotiate fees without benchmarks
- Accept contracts with unclear scope or expectations
- Absorb unpaid labour across research, writing, and relationship-building
- Operate without protections or consistency across engagements

Indigenous Curatorial Context

For Indigenous curators, these challenges are intensified.

Indigenous curatorial practice includes:

- Cultural protocol and community accountability
- Relationship-building with artists, Elders, and communities
- Mentorship and intergenerational knowledge-sharing
- Translation between institutional systems and Indigenous knowledge frameworks

These responsibilities require additional time, care, and expertise, yet are rarely reflected in compensation structures.

At the same time, Indigenous curators are often:

- Working independently or across multiple short-term contracts
- Entering institutional spaces later due to systemic exclusion
- Evaluated against benchmarks that do not reflect their pathways or contributions

Why a Fee Schedule is Necessary

ICCA's development of a curatorial fee schedule is intended as a practical and actionable tool for independent Indigenous curators.

This fee schedule:

- Provides a baseline for negotiation, reducing reliance on ad hoc decision-making
- Supports curators in evaluating opportunities and determining whether compensation is fair
- Establishes a shared language between curators and organizations
- Encourages institutions and funders to adopt consistent and equitable compensation practices

Importantly, this is not a fixed or restrictive model—it is a starting point that can be adapted based on project scope, scale, and context.

Section 2

CURATORIAL NEEDS

Independent Curator Needs in Contracting and Bidding

Through ICCA's work and consultation, the following needs have been identified as critical when independent curators are:

1. Contracting Work

Curators require:

- Clearly defined scope of work and deliverables
- Transparent fee structures (separating curatorial fee, writing, and programming)
- Milestone-based payment schedules with upfront deposits
- Defined timelines and expectations
- Reimbursement policies for travel, research, and related expenses

Without these elements, curators are exposed to scope creep, delayed payment, and uncompensated labour.

2. Bidding on Opportunities

Curators require:

- Access to minimum fee benchmarks to inform proposals
- Clarity on project budgets and available resources
- Recognition of research and development time within proposals
- Flexibility to propose realistic timelines and deliverables

Without clear benchmarks, curators may underbid their labour, reinforcing systemic undervaluation across the sector.

3. Sustaining Practice

Curators require:

- Compensation that reflects the full lifecycle of a project (not only final outputs)
- Recognition of relational and cultural labour
- Opportunities for multi-project continuity and long-term engagement

Current conditions often require curators to subsidize their own practice, limiting sustainability and sector growth.

ICCA Position

ICCA affirms that:

- Curatorial labour is professional, specialized, and leadership-based work
- Independent curators require tools, standards, and support systems to sustain their practice
- Indigenous curatorial work must be recognized within its full cultural, relational, and intellectual scope

This fee schedule is a foundational step toward:

- Establishing minimum standards for curatorial compensation
- Supporting independent Indigenous curators in negotiations and project development
- Advancing equity and accountability across the arts sector

This framework is not only a compensation tool, it is an intervention into how curatorial labour is valued, negotiated, and sustained.

By developing and sharing this resource, ICCA strengthens the capacity of independent Indigenous curators to:

- Advocate for fair compensation
- Engage in projects with clarity and confidence
- Build sustainable and impactful curatorial practices

Current Challenge

While national standards such as CARFAC establish baseline compensation frameworks for artists, there remains no consistent or dedicated framework for curatorial compensation across the sector, particularly for independent and Indigenous curators.

Within current practice, curatorial fees are often determined on a case-by-case basis, typically referencing CARFAC-aligned consulting or writing rates (approximately \$40–\$70 per hour). However, these rates do not adequately account for the full scope of curatorial labour, nor do they provide a structured approach that reflects:

- Project scale and complexity
- Duration of engagement
- Level of curatorial experience
- Expanded responsibilities within contemporary curatorial practice

This lack of a standardized framework result in:

- Limited transparency in how curatorial fees are established
- Inconsistency across projects and institutions, making comparison and benchmarking difficult
- A systemic undervaluing of curatorial leadership, particularly in areas such as project direction, governance participation, public engagement, and mentorship

Indigenous Curatorial Context

For Indigenous curators, this gap is further amplified.

Indigenous curatorial practice often includes:

- Cultural protocol and community accountability
- Relationship-building with artists, Elders, and communities
- Mentorship and intergenerational knowledge-sharing
- Translation between institutional and Indigenous knowledge systems

These responsibilities extend beyond conventional curatorial roles and are rarely reflected in existing compensation structures.

At the same time, Indigenous curators are frequently engaged in project-based or independent contexts, where:

- There is no institutional salary benchmark applied
- Compensation is negotiated individually without sector guidance
- Additional cultural and relational labour remains unrecognized and unpaid

ICCA Position

The Indigenous Curatorial Collective (ICCA) identifies this as a critical structural gap within the arts sector.

Without a defined curatorial compensation framework:

- Curatorial labour remains inconsistently valued
- Indigenous curators face compounded inequities
- The sustainability of independent curatorial practice is undermined

This document responds directly to this gap by establishing a clear, scalable, and equitable framework for curatorial compensation—one that recognizes curators as leaders within artistic, cultural, and community contexts, and ensures their work is compensated at a level consistent with its scope and impact.

Need for a Curatorial Compensation Policy

The Indigenous Curatorial Collective (ICCA) recognizes the urgent need for a dedicated curatorial compensation framework that reflects the realities of independent and Indigenous curatorial practice.

Developing this policy will:

- Establish consistency across ICCA engagements
- Create a clear and repeatable framework for curatorial compensation across exhibitions, gatherings, delegations, mentorship initiatives, and biennale-scale projects.
- Advance equity, transparency, and accountability
- Ensure that all curators—particularly Indigenous curators—are compensated through transparent, equitable, and professional standards that move beyond ad hoc or case-by-case negotiation.
- Recognize the full scope of curatorial labour

Acknowledge that curatorial work extends beyond exhibition-making to include:

- Public engagement and community relationship-building
- Mentorship and sector development
- Writing, research, and knowledge production
- Governance, reporting, and institutional collaboration
- Align with national standards while exceeding minimums
- Position ICCA's compensation model in alignment with national and provincial benchmarks (e.g., CARFAC, arts councils), while advancing beyond minimum standards to reflect the leadership role of curators within contemporary practice.

Section 3

EVIDENCE BASE & SECTOR EXPLORATION

The development of this framework is grounded in a comprehensive review of national standards, institutional practices, and independent curatorial realities across Canada.

This research process included:

- Analysis of existing compensation frameworks
- Comparison with national and provincial funding guidelines
- Review of institutional salary benchmarks
- Examination of independent curatorial conditions
- Together, this exploration identifies both existing standards and critical gaps in how curatorial labour is currently defined and compensated.

Internal and Sectoral Observations

Existing Curatorial Role Definition

Across institutional and public art contexts, curators are consistently engaged as:

- Creative leads responsible for developing curatorial frameworks and vision
- Decision-makers in artist and artwork selection
- Researchers and writers producing critical and interpretive texts
- Facilitators of community engagement and public programming
- Mentors supporting emerging artists and curators
- Contributors to governance, reporting, and compliance processes

These responsibilities demonstrate that curators operate as senior cultural workers and project leaders, rather than as support roles.

Current Compensation Conditions

Despite this expanded scope, current compensation practices across the sector—including those aligned with CARFAC—typically:

- Reference hourly consulting or writing rates in the range of \$40–\$70 per hour
- Lack tiered structures based on experience, project scale, or duration
- Do not account for the full scope of curatorial labour, particularly in independent contexts
- Are applied inconsistently across projects and institutions

This results in:

- Limited transparency in how fees are determined
- Difficulty comparing compensation across projects
- Systemic undervaluing of curatorial leadership and administrative responsibility

Gap in existing Frameworks

While existing frameworks establish important baselines, they do not provide:

- A project-based compensation model reflective of curatorial practice
- A scalable structure tied to experience and scope
- Recognition of independent curatorial realities, including unpaid labour and financial risk
- Consideration of Indigenous curatorial responsibilities, including cultural protocol, community accountability, and knowledge-sharing

ICCA Position

CCA identifies this as a critical gap within the sector. Without a defined and accessible curatorial compensation framework:

- Independent curators remain structurally under-supported
- Indigenous curators face compounded inequities and curatorial labour continues to be inconsistently valued

This policy responds by establishing a clear, scalable, and equitable model that:

- Reflects the true scope of curatorial work
- Supports sustainable independent practice
- Recognizes Indigenous curatorial leadership and knowledge systems
- Provides a tool for curators, organizations, and funders to adopt and apply across contexts

External Research

Curatorial Salary Comparator (Sept 2025)

Institution Type	Example(s)	Salary Range (CAD)	Notes
Major Museums	ROM, AGO	\$80 000 – \$150 000+	Large-scale, senior curatorship
Mid-sized Galleries	WAG, OAG, AGA, Glenbow	\$60 000 – \$95 000	Comparable civic scale
University Museums	CUAG, UBC MOA, U of A Museums	\$65 000 – \$104 000	Often research-intensive
Regional / Small	McMaster, Grande Prairie	\$40 000 – \$60 000	Entry or assistant level

National averages cluster around \$80 000 – \$100 000, suggesting an equivalent \$45 – \$65 per hour range when converted to freelance contract work.

Comparative Review: How Other Jurisdictions Structure Curatorial Pay

To understand other jurisdictions’ curatorial pay structure, ICCA reviewed several policies and funding frameworks.

CARFAC-RAAV (2025 – 26 Fee Schedule)

The national baseline for professional artist and consultant pay. CARFAC establishes an elastic range that scales by experience and complexity and is understood sector wide as a floor, not a ceiling.

Relevant categories include:

- *Consultation* – \$40–\$70 / hr or \$391–\$689 / day.
- *Writing & Editing* – \$0.50–\$1 / word or \$40–\$70 / hr.
- *Selection Panels* – \$391 (half-day) to \$689 (full-day).

Ontario Arts Council (OAC)

OAC explicitly defines curatorial project budgets, providing a transparent tiered model tied to experience:

Career Stage	Fee Allocation	Typical Experience
Emerging	Up to \$5 000	< 5 years; limited history
Mid-career	Up to \$7 500	5–10 years; regional/provincial recognition
Established	Up to \$15 000	10 + years; national/international standing

This structure links professional recognition to compensation and treats curatorial labour as both artistic and administrative.

Provincial Arts Councils – BC, Manitoba, Saskatchewan

All require CARFAC compliance as a funding condition:

- BC Arts Council (BCAC): Budgets must include fees “at professional standards,” explicitly naming curators.
- Manitoba Arts Council (MAC): Requires CARFAC-aligned payment for artists, curators, and knowledge keepers.
- Saskatchewan Arts (SK Arts): Treats curatorial work as professional labour under mandatory CARFAC minimums.

Together, they confirm a national expectation of parity between artistic and curatorial compensation.

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Section 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Synthesis of Findings

Across this research, ICCA recognizes that curatorial practice—particularly within Indigenous contexts—cannot be understood solely through institutional frameworks or fee comparisons. While national standards provide important baselines, they do not fully account for the relational, cultural, and community-based nature of Indigenous curatorial work.

ICCA's curatorial work already reflects an expanded understanding of this role. Curators engaged through ICCA are not only responsible for exhibitions and writing, but also contribute to:

- Cultural leadership grounded in Indigenous knowledge systems
- Community engagement and accountability
- Mentorship and intergenerational knowledge-sharing
- Governance participation and sector development

These responsibilities extend beyond conventional institutional definitions of curatorial work and must be recognized within compensation structures.

Relational Practice and Community-Based Curation

Within Indigenous curatorial practice, a curator is rarely working in isolation.

To engage a curator is also to engage:

- Their relationships with artists
- Their ongoing collaborations and bodies of work
- Their community connections and responsibilities
- Their networks across territories and institutions

Curators carry with them a living network of practice.

An example of this can be seen in the ongoing curatorial relationship between Kathleen Ash-Milby and Jeffrey Gibson, where sustained collaboration and shared vision led to significant international opportunities, including representation at the Venice Biennale in 2024. This demonstrates that curatorial work is not transactional—it is relational and cumulative, built over time through trust, shared practice, and mutual support. As such, when institutions or organizations contract a curator, they are not only engaging an individual—they are engaging a network of artists, knowledge, and community relationships that shape the project's direction and impact.

Compensation Gap

Across all sources, several key findings emerge:

- Existing fee ranges of \$40–\$70 per hour, aligned with CARFAC minimums, establish a baseline but do not reflect the full scope of curatorial leadership or responsibility
- Current models lack tiering based on experience, project scale, and duration, resulting in inconsistent and often inadequate compensation

Other jurisdictions demonstrate more structured approaches, including:

- Tiered fee systems linked to experience (e.g., Ontario Arts Council)
- Escalation models based on project duration and scope (e.g., RAAV)

However, even these models do not fully account for:

- The relational labour embedded in Indigenous curatorial practice
- The long-term development of artist-curator relationships
- The cultural responsibilities carried by Indigenous curators

Opportunity for ICCA Leadership

This research identifies a clear opportunity for ICCA to lead in establishing a curatorial compensation framework that reflects both professional standards and Indigenous ways of working.

Such a framework must:

- Recognize curators as leaders, connectors, and knowledge holders
- Account for the networks and communities embedded within curatorial practice
- Provide scalable, transparent fee structures that align with national benchmarks
- Extend beyond minimum standards to reflect the true scope and value of the work

ICCA Position

ICCA affirms that:

- Curatorial work is not an isolated service, but a relational practice grounded in community, continuity, and care
- Compensation models must reflect not only deliverables, but the networks, relationships, and cultural labour that curators bring into each project
- Supporting curators means supporting the broader ecosystems they are part of—artists, communities, and future generations

This framework is not only about establishing fees—it is about recognizing the full circle of work that Indigenous curators carry. By grounding compensation in relational practice, ICCA advances a model that:

- Reflects Indigenous knowledge systems
- Strengthens artist and curator networks
- Builds long-term sustainability across the sector

Reference Sources Consulted

The following sources form the evidence base for this exploratory research. Together, they capture the current curatorial role definition at CADA, relevant internal governance documents, and comparative benchmarks across national and provincial contexts.

Category	Source / Document	Date	Purpose / Content Summary	How It Informs Policy Development
National Benchmarks	CARFAC-RAAV 2025–26 Minimum Recommended Fee Schedule	2025 – 26	Sets national minimums for consulting (\$40–\$70/hr; \$391–\$689/day), writing (\$0.50–\$1/word), and selection panels (\$391–\$689/day).	Establishes the professional floor for curatorial and advisory labour; validates CADA’s existing range as compliant but non-tiered.
Market Comparator	Online web search	Sept 2025 to Jan 2026	Aggregates salary data from 15 Canadian institutions (ROM, AGO, Glenbow, OAG, CUAG etc.); ranges \$40 000–\$150 000+, mid-point \$80 000–\$100 000.	Provides quantitative market evidence for parity benchmarking and supports creation of experience-based pay tiers.
Provincial and Regional Standards	Ontario Arts Council (OAC) – Curatorial Projects Guidelines	2023 – 24	Defines project-based curatorial allocations: \$5 000 (emerging), \$7 500 (mid-career), \$15 000 (established).	Demonstrates transparent tiering by experience; model for CADA’s own scalable framework.
	BC Arts Council (BCAC) – Professional Standards Policy	2024	Requires CARFAC-aligned professional fees for all artistic and curatorial labour.	Confirms CARFAC adherence as funding condition and establishes parity expectation between artists and curators.
	Manitoba Arts Council (MAC) – Program Guidelines	2024	Requires payment of artists, curators, and knowledge keepers at professional fee standards (CARFAC).	Reinforces that curatorial labour is recognized nationally as professional practice.
	Saskatchewan Arts (SK Arts) – Visual Arts Funding Programs	2024	Applies CARFAC minimums across all visual-arts categories; includes curators under professional-fee compliance.	Validates national consistency in minimum-fee enforcement.
Québec Model	RAAV (Status of the Artist Act)	Ongoing (2024 review)	Sets enforceable “floor + premium” rates: base CARFAC minimum + 25% for year-long projects and + 50% for unlimited duration.	Demonstrates legislated escalation model adaptable to CADA’s project-based contracts.

Section 5

CURATORIAL FEE SCHEDULE

Positioning Statement

This fee schedule is designed to:

- Support independent Indigenous curators in negotiating fair compensation
- Provide organizations with a clear and accountable framework
- Establish a national baseline for curatorial labour

It reflects both:

- Professional standards (CARFAC, OAC, salary benchmarks)
- Indigenous curatorial realities (relational, community-based practice)

Minimum Standards for Independent Curators

1. Core Principle

This fee schedule establishes minimum recommended fees for independent curators. It is intended as a negotiation tool, not a ceiling.

Fees must reflect:

- Scope of work
- Duration of engagement
- Experience level
- Relational and community-based labour

2. Curatorial Fee Tiers (Project-Based)

A. Exhibition / Project-Based Fees

Level	Experience	Project Scope	Recommended Fee (CAD)
Emerging Curator	0–5 years	Small exhibitions, group shows, assistant roles	\$5,000 – \$10,000
Mid-Career Curator	5–10 years	Multi-artist exhibitions, regional projects	\$10,000 – \$17,000
Established Curator	10+ years	National exhibitions, commissions, multi-site	\$17,000 – \$35,000+
Senior / Lead Curator (Biennale)	10+ years, national/international	Biennale, multi-year, multi-partner	\$35,000 – \$70,000+

B. Duration-Based Adjustments

Curatorial work is often under-scoped. Add:

Duration	Adjustment
3–6 months	Base fee
6–12 months	+25%
12+ months	+50%

Reflects RAAV-style escalation + real workload

C. Scope Multipliers (Critical for Negotiation)

Add to base fee where applicable:

Scope Factor	Adjustment
Multi-site exhibition	+15–25%
New commissions (artists)	+10–20%
International work	+20–30%
Community-engaged / Indigenous-led	+15–25%
Large artist cohort (8+ artists)	+10–15%

3. Separate Fee Categories (NON-NEGOTIABLE)

These must NOT be included in curatorial fee:

Writing Fees

- Essays: \$0.75 – \$1.50/word
- Catalogue texts: \$1,500 – \$5,000

Public Programming

- Talks / panels: \$400 – \$1,000 per event

Mentorship

- \$75–\$125/hour OR flat project fee

4. Hourly/Daily Reference Rates (For Smaller Projects)

Type	Rate
Hourly	\$75 – \$125/hr
Daily	\$500 – \$900/day

Based on translating \$100K+ institutional salaries into freelance reality

5. Reimbursable Expenses (Separate Budget Lines)

Must always include:

- Travel (airfare / mileage)
- Accommodation
- Per diem (\$75–\$150/day)
- Studio visits
- Research materials
- Admissions

Never absorbed into curatorial fee

6. Indigenous Curatorial Considerations (Key Addition)

Additional compensation must be considered when work includes:

- Cultural protocol and community engagement
- Working with Elders / Knowledge Keepers
- Language work or translation
- Land-based or territory-specific work

Recommended addition: +15–25%

7. Relational Price Adjustments (ICCA-Specific)

ICCA recognizes that curators bring:

- Artist networks
- Long-term collaborations
- Community relationships
- Ongoing bodies of work

This is value-added labour, not incidental

Recommended:

- Include network/relational value acknowledgment in contracts
- OR apply +10–20% adjustment for projects relying on existing curatorial networks

8. Payment Structure (Required Standard)

- 30–50% upfront
- 25–40% midpoint
- Final payment on completion

Max payment delay: 30 days

9. Minimum Fee Floor (Critical Statement)

ICCA recommends:

No independent curator should be contracted below \$5,000 per project, regardless of scale.

10. How This Aligns with Policy Development Phases

This fee schedule represents:

Phase 2 – Framework Development

- ✓ Tier grid established
- ✓ Scope variables integrated
- ✓ Indigenous considerations embedded
- ✓ Clear negotiation tool created

Next steps:

Phase 3: Curator consultation

Phase 4: Implementation + adoption



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CONTACT US

info@icca.art
280 Catherine Street
Ottawa, ON K1R 5T3

Visit
icca.art