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## ***FACT SHEET***

### ***Digital Citizen Initiative***

#### **Background**

##### *Phase One*

- On January 30, 2019, Minister Gould announced funding of \$7 million for Phase One of the Digital Citizen Initiative (DCI) which supports citizen-focused activities using four existing programs: the Canada History Fund, Youth Take Charge, Exchanges Canada and the Canada Periodical Fund. This phase of the DCI promotes civic, news and digital media literacy through independent third party (civil society, academia, and private sector) educational activities and programming to help citizens become resilient against disinformation and other online harms.
- Activities range from awareness sessions and workshops to the development of learning materials from experienced and expert organizations that work with Canadians of all ages and backgrounds, in both official languages, to help Canadians to:
  - critically assess online reporting and digital media;
  - understand how algorithms work and when they might impact a user's online experience;
  - know how and when malicious actors exploit online platforms and other internet technology;
  - acquire skills on how to avoid being susceptible to manipulation online; and/or
  - effectively engage in public debate and discourse online.
- All \$7 million in funding has been allocated through twenty-two contribution agreements via the four existing programs listed above (Canada History Fund - nine projects, Youth Take Charge - four projects, Exchanges Canada - one project, and the Canada Periodical Fund - eight projects) and will support activities prior to the federal election. Minister Gould made an announcement via a press release on July 2, 2019.
- The recipients, as a condition of their contribution agreements, are required to report to PCH with an update on their activities in the coming months. More information on the implementation of the projects will become available at that time.
- In addition to the \$7 million announced on January 30, PCH also provided MediaSmarts with \$75,000 for National Digital Media Literacy Week, which will take place October 7-11, 2019, via a supplement to an existing contribution agreement through the Canada History Fund. The Minister approved this supplement on July 18, 2019.

##### *Phase Two*

#### **Digital Citizen Contribution Program**

- Budget 2019 provided a further \$19.4 million over four years for PCH to implement Phase Two of the Digital Citizen Initiative (DCI). These funds, s. 39 - Cabinet Confidence

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s. 39 - Cabinet [APG] include the creation of a new Digital Citizen Contributions Program (DCCP) which supports research and policy development activities on online disinformation.

- For this second phase, PCH recognized that none of its existing programs were able to support research activities relating to online disinformation. To address this gap, PCH has created a new program, the DCCP, to fund applied research activities in line with the government's need to better understand the origins, impacts and potential responses to online disinformation in the Canadian context. The DCCP includes opportunities for local communities, organizations and academics to obtain funds for new or existing pure and practical research and evaluation initiatives. It also has the ability to fund tools development and digital media and civic literacy initiatives.
- The Terms and Conditions of this new program were approved s. 39 - Cabinet s. 39 - Cabinet Confidence
- The DCCP launched its first call for proposals on August 30, 2019, with a deadline of November 01, 2019. DCI staff are currently assessing applications. The results will be announced in February 2020.

#### Joint Initiative with SSHRC

- Phase Two also includes \$2.4 million for a joint initiative with the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) titled the PCH-SSHRC Initiative for Digital Citizen Research.
- The PCH-SSHRC Initiative for Digital Citizen Research funds research projects that are relevant to the government's priorities on online disinformation, to ensure it becomes a key area of research in Canada, and that there is a robust body of peer-reviewed academic research on online disinformation in Canada.
- Based on the identified priority areas, the joint initiative funds eligible candidates judged meritorious through SSHRC's existing merit review processes. Following these processes, SSHRC will be providing PCH with a list of ranked projects to be reviewed and approved by PCH's DCSC.
- As a condition of receiving funding, all grant and award holders are expected to participate in an annual conference on Digital Citizenship Research, to be organized by PCH, to share and disseminate knowledge.
- The research produced via this joint initiative will build evidence base to study online disinformation in Canada and will feed into future policy-making.

#### Digital Democracy Project

- Phase Two of the DCI also allocated \$2.5 million over four years in funding to the Public Policy Forum's Digital Democracy Project (DDP), which will be delivered via the Digital Citizen Contribution Program (DCCP).

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- The DDP, launched in Fall 2018, is seeking to address the lack of rigorous attention, research and coordination around the nature, impact and potential societal responses to online disinformation in Canada.
- The DDP is made up of four interdependent programs of work:
  - *Monitoring* to serve as a central filtering organization for rapidly evolving global developments around digital democracy issues;
  - *Applied research* to serve as the central hub for Canadians conducting research on digital democracy in civil society, academia, media, private sector and government, and foster connection with international counterparts;
  - *Civic infrastructure and market responses* to serve as a Canadian liaison and testing lab for innovative solutions around online disinformation, data privacy, and democratic engagement; and,
  - *Policy Development Lab* to develop policies using innovative policy development techniques and communicate results through publication.
- The PPF has formally submitted a proposal to the DCCP so that we can negotiate a contribution agreement. This contribution agreement will span four years, from 2019-20 to 2022-23.

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