

UNCLASSIFIED

PUBLIC INQUIRY INTO FOREIGN INTERFERENCE INSTITUTIONAL REPORT (IR) - CANADIAN HERITAGE

DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW

Mandate & Ministerial Authority

- The Department of Canadian Heritage's (PCH) mandate is set out in the *Department of Canadian Heritage Act* and is centred on fostering and promoting Canadian identity and values, cultural development, and heritage. PCH's policies and programs promote an environment where Canadians have access to dynamic cultural expressions, can celebrate our history and heritage and build strong communities.
- The Digital and Creative Marketplace Frameworks (DCMF) branch within the Cultural Affairs Sector of PCH focuses on policy related to: broadcasting including online streaming; online news media; online disinformation and online harms; copyright; and foreign investment review within the cultural sector (ex: books, newspapers or periodicals, film & video, audio or video music recordings, and music). DCMF includes the Digital Citizen Initiative Directorate, which manages the Digital Citizen Contribution Program (DCCP) and does policy work related to online harms and disinformation.
- PCH fulfills its mandate under the leadership of five Cabinet Ministers. The DCMF branch falls within the purview of the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Pascale St-Onge.

Responses to Commission Questions

- (1) A listing and description of all major instances of suspected foreign interference targeting Canada's democratic processes, including summary, dates, target, country involved, key players, information flow and any responses taken.**
- NIL – Given its mandate, PCH has no such instances to report.
- (2) A listing and description of all existing means at the disposal of each government department and agency to detect, deter and counter any foreign interference activities, including any relevant changes to or evolution in these means.**
- All efforts in this category are strictly limited to the Digital Citizen Initiative (DCI), which is addressed below.
- (3) A listing and description of all policy proposals, legislative plans and resource requests related to foreign interference, including but not limited to memos to the Deputy Minister (or equivalent) or Assistant Deputy Minister (or equivalent). At a minimum, this should include the date of the request, date of decision (where applicable), a summary of the proposed changes and the outcome of the request.**

Disinformation and Democracy

- In 2019-20, as part of the Government's approach to protecting its democracy, Canadian Heritage contributed \$7 million over 9 months to 23 projects delivered by Canadian civil society stakeholders

UNCLASSIFIED

that strengthened citizens' critical thinking about online disinformation and their ability to be more resilient against online disinformation, as well as their ability to get involved in democratic processes.

- Funding was provided for civic, news, and digital media literacy, ranging from awareness sessions and workshops to the development of learning materials. This initiative was delivered through the following programs: 1) Canada History Fund; 2) Collective Initiatives – Canada Periodical Fund; and 3) Youth Take Charge.
- The Digital Citizen Initiative (DCI) was subsequently formally established in 2020 and is a multi-component strategy that aims to support democracy and social inclusion in Canada by building citizen resilience against online disinformation and building partnerships to support a healthy information ecosystem. This included the creation of the Digital Citizen Contribution Program (DCCP), which supports the priorities of the DCI by providing time-limited financial assistance for research and citizen-focused activities.
- Budget 2019 earmarked \$19.4 million over four years for the DCI. The DCI has also allocated almost \$4.5 million in additional funding through the Emergency Support Fund for Cultural, Heritage and Sport Organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic. The DCI was then renewed until 2024-25 and received an additional \$31 million in the 2022 Fall Economic Statement¹.

Digital Citizen Contribution Program

- The DCCP supports the priorities of the DCI by providing time-limited financial assistance for research and citizen-focused activities. The Program aims to support democracy and social inclusion in Canada by enhancing and/or supporting efforts to counter online disinformation and other online harms and threats.
- Since January 2020, the DCCP has disbursed over \$31 million to 142 projects² to better understand and build citizen resilience to disinformation and other forms of harmful content online. These projects reach Canadians on a national and local scale, online and offline, in minority communities, in both official languages and in Indigenous communities.
- PCH funds projects that have clear objectives and measurable results. In the specific case of the DCCP, applications are evaluated based on a set of criteria, and reviewed by two governance committees who assess applications and prioritize them in relation to the funds available. Evaluation criteria are: demonstrated need for the project; evidence that the project will have a positive domestic impact on Canada or Canadians; the ability to seek wide participation, as well as being inclusive of Indigenous communities, official language minority communities, youth, and equity-seeking communities.
- DCCP applications are reviewed by two governance committees: a Consultative Body and a Steering Committee.
- The Consultative Body is made up of representatives from PCH and over 21 other federal government departments (OGDs). The Consultative Body's purpose is to: 1) review applications submitted to the DCCP for suitability and relevance to the Government's objectives on countering online disinformation and other online harms, bringing to bear any existing subject matter expertise or experience in working with applicants; 2) raise awareness on project proposals that may align

¹ This amount includes both Vote 1 and Vote 5 funding.

² In addition to the projects funded pursuant to Regular Calls for Proposals and Special Calls for Proposals, described below, the DCCP provides funding to specific recipients in seeking to build capacity.

UNCLASSIFIED

with their own programs with an eye towards coordinating funding activities; and 3) review the funding priorities developed by PCH for each new call for proposals.

- The Steering Committee is made up of representatives from academia, civil society, and not-for-profit funding organizations. Its primary objective is to “frame the agenda of the research component of the Department, of the DCI, which includes DCCP and the PCH- Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Initiative for Digital Citizen Research (IDCR).” This includes reviewing and providing input on upcoming DCCP funding priorities.
- The DCCP partners with the SSHRC to provide funding support through arm’s-length SSHRC Connection Grants. The purpose of this funding is to: 1) promote Canadian research that will develop better understanding — based on empirical evidence — of the impacts of online disinformation in Canada to better inform programs and policies; 2) build Canada's capacity to conduct research on and related to countering online disinformation and other related online harms; and 3) help foster a community of research in the digital citizenship and online disinformation space in Canada.
- The Joint IDCR supports the goals of the Government of Canada’s approach to protecting democracy and combatting disinformation and other online harms.

DCCP: Regular Calls for Proposals

- Regular calls for proposals are administered approximately once per year. The DCCP’s first call for proposals launched in 2020-21 and provided \$2,094,422 to 8 projects. The call prioritized projects that aim to understand online disinformation and other online harms in a Canadian context, including their evolution and differential impacts on Canadians. It also sought to define success in building citizen resilience and digital media literacy, and to understand the impact of such activities in a Canadian context. The goal is to enhance the digital safety and literacy of Canadians.
- The DCCP’s second call for proposals in 2021-22 allocated \$758,691 to 9 projects. The focus was on predicting future online disinformation issues, understanding the impact of disinformation on diverse and marginalized Canadian communities, and exploring the societal and psychological factors that drive individuals towards disinformation activities. It also aimed to understand the effects of limited exposure to diverse online content, including how Canadians access reliable news, and the influence of algorithmic systems on the content users consume online.
- The DCCP’s third call for proposals in 2021-22 allocated \$1,331,635 to 15 projects. The focus was on understanding the role of algorithms and AI in the spread and impact of disinformation on online platforms, and their potential for fostering a diverse information ecosystem. It also aimed to understand the spread and impact of disinformation on diaspora, Indigenous, and non-English primary language communities in Canada using a GBA+ lens. Additionally, it sought to evaluate existing research and programming related to online disinformation and their effectiveness in promoting citizen resilience and media literacy.
- The DCCP’s fourth call in 2022-23 funded 16 projects with \$1,285,615. The focus was on evaluating platform efforts against disinformation, understanding non-news sources of disinformation, and studying the behavioural aspects of disinformation spread in Canada.
- The DCCP’s fifth call in 2023-24 allocated over \$9 million to 27 projects. The focus was on developing tools for digital media literacy, identifying bot-generated content, and combating online violence against women, girls, and 2SLGBTQI+ communities. It also aimed to create resources to prevent cyberbullying, build technical capacity in small and medium civil society organizations, and develop tools to counter mis-/disinformation from foreign governments like the Peoples Republic of China

UNCLASSIFIED

(PRC) and Russia targeting Canadian citizens and diaspora communities. Research, testing, and evaluation of tools related to these priorities were also included.

DCCP: Special Calls for Proposals

- Special calls for proposals are launched in response to acute issues and the evolving nature and impacts of disinformation and other forms of harmful content online.
- The DCCP's first two special calls for proposals were launched in 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and together, they provided \$4.3 million to 34 projects. The priorities for these calls focused on projects that would amplify efforts supporting citizens to think critically about the health information they find online, to identify mis- and disinformation, and to limit the impact of racist and/or misleading social media posts relating to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The DCCP's second special call for proposals launched in 2022 in response to the war in Ukraine. This special call provided \$2.5 million to 11 projects. The priorities for this call focused on projects aiming to help increase civic literacy, promote critical thinking when it comes to validating sources of information, and build capacity in Canada to fight disinformation online. Preference was given to projects that squarely address Russian disinformation in Canada generally and as it relates to the Ukraine crisis and impacts on Canadians and Ukrainian-Canadians specifically and projects that build Canadian capacity for digital tools that are easily accessible.
- The DCCP's third special call for proposals launched in 2023 and focused on raising awareness about online safety. This special call provided \$543,468 to 11 projects. The priorities for this call focused on projects that increase public awareness in Canada about tools and services offered by non-government organizations. These tools help recognize, report, avoid, and address the negative impacts of hate speech, violence incitement, terrorist content, child sexual exploitation, and non-consensual distribution of intimate images. It also emphasized how to use social media and online service tools to prevent or reduce such harmful content.

The Canadian Digital Media Research Network

- The DCCP supports the work of the Canadian Digital Media Research Network (CDMRN) based out of McGill University and the University of Toronto. Over the course of three years, the DCCP will provide the CDMRN with \$5.5 million in funding.
- Launched in 2023, the CDMRN focuses on protecting and building resilience within the Canadian information ecosystem by leveraging best practices in quantitative and qualitative data analysis. The CDMRN will protect the Canadian information ecosystem through: producing and supporting the production of world class research into the dynamics of Canada's information ecosystem and how this information affects Canadians' attitudes and behaviours; informing Canadians about the quality of information in the information ecosystem, including the identification of foreign interference and mis and disinformation, and developing signals of reliable information; and developing and supporting the implementation of strategies to build Canadian information resilience and digital literacy.

Responsibilities Related to the Broadcasting Act

- The Minister of Canadian Heritage is responsible for the *Broadcasting Act*, which provides the CRTC with the powers and tools to regulate and supervise the broadcasting system. The CRTC is the independent public authority responsible for regulating and supervising Canada's broadcasting

UNCLASSIFIED

system. Should the Government of Canada have concerns regarding broadcasting undertakings activities and potential foreign interference via broadcasting means, it has a specific power under the *Broadcasting Act* to request that the CRTC hold a hearing or report on a particular topic. Citizens may also make complaints to the CRTC.

(4) A listing and description of all existing arrangements and undertakings (including Memoranda of Understanding) between government departments and agencies, and with international partners, aimed at detecting, deterring, and countering foreign interference activities, including the dates that the arrangements have been in place.

- NIL - Given its mandate, PCH has no such arrangements and undertakings.

(5) A listing and description of all warrant applications related to foreign interference submitted to the Minister of Public Safety, and ministerial authorizations submitted to the Minister of National Defence, including date submitted to the Minister, date approved by the Minister, date of decision by the Federal Court and, if applicable, the reasons for decision.

- NIL – Given its mandate, PCH is not called upon to prepare or submit such warrant applications or ministerial authorizations.

(6) A listing and description of the date, venue, participants and summary of discussion for all engagements by senior executives (ADM and above, including Ministers) with representatives of foreign governments (especially China, Russia and India) where the subject of foreign interference was raised.

- Canadian Heritage officials have periodically engaged with representatives of foreign governments, such as the European Commission (EU), European Union member states, the United Kingdom and Australia, to discuss policy developments and best practices related to online harms, including online disinformation. While these discussions were not focused on Foreign Interference specifically, they sometimes may have touched on the intersection between disinformation more broadly and disinformation sponsored by foreign states.
- These engagements encompass the following:
 - Fact-finding mission to Europe on disinformation and content diversity; delegation visited the Council of Europe, France, Germany, the European Commission and the United Kingdom (summer 2018)
 - Periodic Canada-EU Digital Dialogues (inaugural meeting in 2019 to present)
 - Periodic engagement with Australia (2019 to present)
 - Periodic engagement with New Zealand (2019 to present)
 - 3rd Meeting of the OECD Expert Group on Mis- and Disinformation (March 2022)
 - Participation at G20 event on information integrity, hosted by Brazil (April 2024)
 - Fact-finding mission to the European Commission on online harms (May 2024)

UNCLASSIFIED

(7) A listing and description of all education campaigns aimed at Parliamentarians and their staff, political parties, government employees at federal, provincial or municipal levels, diaspora groups, or the general public related to foreign interference.

- The DCCP’s latest call for proposals included seven priorities, one of which specifically sought out projects to develop and publish tools to build resilience to mis-/disinformation stemming from foreign governments, such as China and Russia, targeting Canadian citizens including diaspora communities. Funding for projects under this call for proposals were approved by the Minister of Canadian Heritage in April 2024. Three projects that support this specific priority were approved for funding and are currently underway. They include activities that build awareness among the public and government officials about the tactics used by foreign governments and those that research latest trends in information manipulation by foreign governments. These projects are supported financially by the Department but are conducted at arm’s length.
 - “Canadian Digital Defenders Collective,” a citizen focused project by the Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies (MIGS), an institute based at Concordia University. The project will strengthen the cognitive resilience of Canadians to online disinformation, hate speech, and foreign influence campaigns by building their capacity to recognize these threats and giving them the tools to address them. MIGS will provide one-day training sessions in four Canadian cities, offer briefings with Canadian federal and provincial officials, as well as diplomats, law enforcement, migration officials, and parliamentarians, develop a podcast series, host Live X Spaces discussions, and develop an Operational Playbook on digital threats and resilience. The organization received \$406,803 for this project.
 - “Strengthening Community Resilience to Foreign Interference,” a research project by the Digital Public Square, whose focus is to strengthen our understanding of foreign influence, disinformation, and transnational repression campaigns in Canada originating from the PRC, and to build societal resilience to such campaigns and associated efforts that seek to undermine social inclusion. The project will conduct research activities to improve our understanding of foreign interference as well as build tools to raise awareness about Foreign Interference campaigns and increase Canadian’s resilience to their impacts. The organization received \$949,471 for this project.
 - “Disinformation in Canadian Chinese-language Media,” a research project developed by the University of Calgary. This project’s focus is foreign interference in Canadian Chinese-language media coverage and its impact on Chinese diaspora communities in Canada. The organization will develop an open-access AI tool for both text and images that can identify narratives, sentiment, and emotions in Chinese-language media and make it accessible to key stakeholders to help identify foreign interference. They also intend on measuring narratives, sentiments, and emotions to evaluate Chinese views of Taiwan in Canadian Chinese-language media sources and how it has evolved from 2013-23 as well as assess how information operation on Taiwan may impact Chinese Canadian communities and Canadian institutions. Finally, they will provide recommendations on how to address foreign interference in Canadian Chinese-language media. The organization was awarded \$210,037 for this project.

UNCLASSIFIED

(8) (PCO and/or Public Safety) For each interdepartmental committee related to foreign interference, listing of meeting frequency (or meeting dates if *ad hoc*) and description of what documentation is routinely produced for each committee (e.g. agendas, list of participants, annotated agendas for the Chair, meeting summaries, minutes).

- NIL – this question is not applicable to PCH.

(9) A listing of all engagements at divisional Director level (or equivalent) or above with representatives of diaspora groups where the subject of foreign interference was discussed. Listing should include dates, names of departmental and diaspora representatives and summary of discussion.

- NIL – PCH’s divisional Director level (or equivalent) or above have not engaged with representatives of diaspora groups where the subject of foreign interference was discussed.

(10) Any relevant updates related to the information provided in the Stage 1 Institutional Report.

- NIL-PCH did not participate in Stage 1.

Key positions (September 1, 2018 to March 15, 2024)

Listing of key positions whose responsibilities related to the matters covered by the Commission’s Terms of Reference.

Position/Title	Name
Minister of Canadian Heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pascale St-Onge (July 2023 – Present) • Pablo Rodriguez (October 2021 – July 2023) • Steven Guilbeault (November 2019 – October 2021) • Pablo Rodriguez (July 2018 – November 2019)
Deputy Minister	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isabelle Mondou (May 2021 – Present) • H��l��ne Laurendeau (October 2018 – April 2021) • Graham Flack (July 2014 – September 2018)
Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Cultural Affairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joelle Montminy (May 2021 – Present) • Jean-St��phen Pich�� (October 2017 – April 2021)
Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Cultural Affairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Owen Ripley (October 2022 – Present)
Director General, Digital and Creative Marketplace Frameworks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amy Awad (August 2023 – Present) • Michel Sabbagh (October 2022 – July 2023) • Owen Ripley (June 2018 – October 2022)
Director, Digital Citizen Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pierre-Marc Perreault (April 2020 – Present) • Chris Beal (May 2018 – May 2020)