

## Report | “Dear Minister Solomon” Roundtable on Artificial Intelligence and Cultural Policy Prepared by the Cultural Policy Hub

The Cultural Policy Hub at OCAD University convened a virtual roundtable on artificial intelligence (AI) and Canadian cultural policy on June 24, 2025, structured to ask what advice panelists would offer to the new federal Minister of AI and Digital Innovation. The conversation emphasized that AI policy is not only about technology or economic productivity, but about cultural sovereignty, ethics, equity and the public good. Panelists emphasized that copyright and labour issues remain critical for the sector in any discussion of AI. These concerns are essential and ongoing. At the same time, the roundtable underscored the urgency of embedding human-centred, culturally grounded approaches into federal AI policy development.

Panelists shared specific advice that they would give to the Hon. Evan Solomon, Canada’s new Minister of AI and Digital Innovation, including the following:

- **Center the Public Good in AI Policy:** Recognize cultural, social and environmental outcomes alongside economic ones in AI policy development. Understand that cultural policy and AI policy are interdependent: incorporating artists, creators and other cultural perspectives can help and can help shape AI’s direction, purpose and legitimacy, and contribute to how Canada understands innovation. This could involve, for example, investment in public AI digital infrastructure, funding program or labs that support artist-led research or AI experimentation.
- **Support Data Sovereignty and Ensure Indigenous Leadership:** Invest in community-controlled data governance, respecting Indigenous protocols, consent and transparency. This could include community-governed AI infrastructure, such as public compute access and distributed model training, to counter corporate dominance and ensure democratic accountability. This should include partnerships with Indigenous-led initiatives and organizations to develop green energy-powered data centers for data sovereignty and economic benefits.
- **Invest in Education and Capacity Building:** Fund educational programs and internships to build artists’ capacity to engage with AI, ensuring meaningful participation.
- **Strengthen Copyright and Labour Protections:** Modernize copyright frameworks to address unauthorized data scraping and other uses of cultural data and ensure fair compensation and control for artists.

As Canada moves forward to develop its AI policy, this roundtable highlighted the need for a sustained, careful and collaborative approach that aligns technological innovation with cultural values, human creativity and democratic governance.

A recording of the roundtable is available to [watch here](#). To learn more about the event and the panelists that participated, [visit the event website](#).

## Introduction and Framing

The roundtable opened with an acknowledgment of the need for careful, collective thinking about AI's role in society. Panelists emphasized that AI is not only a set of technical tools, but a socio-technical system with broad cultural, economic and ethical implications. Indeed, AI policy in Canada should consider not just economic outcomes, but social, cultural and environmental impacts as well. Culture is not peripheral to technological innovation—it helps shape its direction.

Kelly Wilhelm, the Head of the Hub and moderator of the roundtable, spoke in her introduction about how the arts and creative industries can help shape federal AI policy—not only as stakeholders affected by technological change, but as contributors to a more inclusive, thoughtful vision of innovation in Canada.

Wilhelm cited the June 17 [G7 Leaders' Statement on AI Prosperity](#), which explicitly recognized the transformative impact of AI on the cultural and creative sectors. The statement acknowledged challenges to business models and job security, as well as opportunities to boost innovation. Wilhelm also referenced the "[L'Art est humain](#)" manifesto released by six Quebec unions in the film and television sector, which outlines principles and recommendations for regulation around copyright protection, labour rights, transparency and participation in global policy efforts.

## Key Themes

Panelists agreed that Canada is at an inflection point in its AI policy; the appointment of a dedicated Minister of AI and Digital Innovation signals that the federal government recognizes both the promise and the complexity of this technological transition. In this context, the roundtable explored how cultural policy can help ensure that AI development serves the public interest, cultural sovereignty and human creativity. The following key themes arose from the conversation.

### 1. Cultural Knowledge and Data Stewardship

A central theme concerned the nature of cultural knowledge, data and stewardship. Quelemia Sparrow, an actor, writer and director from the Musqueam Nation, offered an extended reflection on Indigenous knowledge practices. She described how naming, land-based histories and protocol contain rich and precise information about relationships, responsibilities and identity. She emphasized that these forms of knowledge are not abstract or static but are instead living practices of stewardship.

Sparrow explained that even her own name carries genealogical and territorial information that cannot be separated from its context. She described how her grandfather used videotape decades ago to record place names and oral histories for legal recognition in land claims, demonstrating how new tools and technologies can, when used carefully and

appropriately, play a part in adapting Indigenous protocols around how information is gathered and disseminated.

This perspective raised important questions about how AI systems represent, extract and transform cultural knowledge. Panelists discussed the risk that AI development might overlook or flatten these complex forms of meaning. The conversation underscored the importance of ethical stewardship of cultural knowledge, with panelists reflecting on responsibilities of consent, transparency and community governance in managing cultural data.

## 2. Including the Cultural Sector in AI Policy Conversations

Another recurring theme was the importance of including diverse cultural voices in AI policymaking.

Natalie Klym, a multidisciplinary researcher, facilitator, curator and VP of Strategic Initiatives at [Radium](#), described her path from the art world into the technology sector. She noted that much of the current AI innovation is being led by engineers and companies whose incentives are not necessarily aligned with artistic values or the public good.

Klym argued for creating spaces where artists, technologists and policymakers can engage in direct, informed dialogue. She observed that artists have long worked with new technologies in experimental ways, pushing tools beyond their original intentions. And yet, the AI field often treats them as afterthoughts rather than as potential collaborators. In doing so, it misses the opportunity to involve cultural workers in the design and governance of systems that directly affect them. Klym established an Art Residency at the University of Toronto's [BMO Lab](#), inspired by her time at [Vector](#), to enable artists unfamiliar with digital technology to explore AI's creative potential.

Panelists noted that meaningful inclusion means more than consultation. It requires shared authority in defining policy goals, setting ethical standards and determining acceptable uses. Several panelists also stressed that inclusion must address regional, linguistic and cultural diversity across Canada, recognizing disparities in access to technical resources and policy processes.

## 3. Artistic Innovation and Critical Engagement

Panelists emphasized that supporting artist-led research and development is about ensuring that AI systems reflect diverse cultural values and creative perspectives. There was agreement among the panelists that policy should enable artists and cultural institutions to participate in developing AI applications that serve public interest, rather than treating them as passive subjects of technological disruption.

Artist, writer and curator Kate Armstrong shared reflections on decades of work at the intersection of art and technology. She suggested that the current moment resembles earlier

periods of technological change, such as the rise of the internet, in both its promise and its risks. Armstrong argued that artists are not only users of technology but also critical thinkers who can help society understand and shape emerging technologies. Drawing on earlier periods of technological change, she has [highlighted](#) policy failures such as marginalization of artists and siloed funding models that hindered cross-sector innovation.

#### 4. Risk, Regulation and Collective Responsibility

Panelists also considered concrete policy issues, such as copyright protection, licensing frameworks and data transparency requirements. There was broad agreement that Canada should learn from international models, including the [EU's AI Act](#), while adapting policies to local needs and values.

As the roundtable discussion continued, some attendees, including labor representatives and artists, shared concerns in the chat about the threats posed by AI, particularly to creative labor and cultural sovereignty. Concerns centered on:

- The unauthorized scraping of artistic content for AI training datasets, described as a form of extraction that undermines artists' livelihoods.
- Fears that AI could homogenize cultural expression or replace human roles in creative processes.
- Frustration over Canada's lagging AI governance compared to jurisdictions like the EU, with calls for urgent copyright reforms and consent-based models.

Critics likened AI hype to past technological bubbles and warned against ceding ground to corporate interests.

Several panelists discussed the dual nature of AI as both opportunity and risk. Jesse McKee, the Head of Digital Strategy of [221A](#) in Vancouver, situated the conversation in a broader historical context. He noted that past technological shifts, such as the advent of social media, were often shaped by libertarian ideologies that prioritized unregulated innovation over democratic governance. McKee argued that a similar dynamic is at play with AI, threatening to accelerate extraction, inequality and cultural homogenization. He described how past media shifts, such as pirate radio in the UK, forced established institutions like the BBC to adapt and create public alternatives. He suggested that Canada should not only regulate AI but also build new ecosystems that demonstrate superior innovation through collective approaches. He cited by example [Chinook X](#), an Indigenous-led organization in British Columbia that inspired 221A's sustainable AI infrastructure plans.

McKee proposed that a more developed technical imagination is needed: a collective capacity to understand and shape the technical systems that mediate social life. This includes designing democratic infrastructures that help us decode these systems and direct them toward collective benefit. He pointed to the [Serpentine Gallery's recent exhibition \*The Call\*](#) as a model of arts-sector leadership in AI, a project that blended curation with strategy by convening artists, technologists and researchers to set agendas, build understanding and

shape development. He suggested Canada needs similar artist-led research platforms to ensure AI aligns with cultural values and serves public-interest goals.

## 5. A Shared Responsibility

The discussion highlighted that the cultural sector has both an interest in and a responsibility to shape AI's development. Panelists argued that artists, cultural institutions and Indigenous knowledge keepers can offer perspectives essential to ensuring AI contributes to human and cultural flourishing. This includes asking foundational questions: What futures are these technologies building? Whose knowledge is valued? Whose interests are served?

The roundtable affirmed that cultural policy and AI policy should be understood as interdependent. As panelists noted, culture is not removed from technological innovation but fundamental to shaping the values and priorities embedded in technology design: it clarifies purpose by asking who benefits and why and it grounds legitimacy by demanding transparency, consent and accountability to the communities affected. If we let it, culture can help us ensure that AI development is not only technically advanced but also socially meaningful and ethically justified.

In counterpoint to some of the concerns raised by some attendees in the chat, others argued for proactive engagement with AI, stressing that exclusion could marginalize the cultural sector further. Key points included:

- Examples of artists using AI to expand creative possibilities, such as real-time captioning or collaborative storytelling.
- Proposals for artist-led AI tools and datasets to ensure cultural values shape technological development.
- Advocacy for community-governed AI infrastructure to counter corporate dominance, inspired by models like the BBC's response to pirate radio.

This group acknowledged risks but framed AI's influence as inevitable and urged the sector to "get on top of the content curve" through education and policy influence.

## Panelists' Advice

In keeping with the roundtable's framing as a mock briefing session, panelists shared specific advice they would offer directly to the Hon. Evan Solomon, Minister of AI and Digital Innovation. They included:

- **Center the Public Good in AI Policy:** Recognize cultural, social and environmental outcomes alongside economic ones in AI policy development. Understand that cultural policy and AI policy are interdependent: incorporating artists, creators and other cultural perspectives can help and can help shape AI's direction, purpose and legitimacy, and contribute to how Canada understands innovation. This could involve, for example, investment in public AI digital infrastructure, funding programs program or labs that support artist-led research or AI experimentation.

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### Ongoing Work

The Cultural Policy Hub will continue to facilitate conversations among artists, cultural practitioners, technologists and policymakers on this issue. By gathering diverse voices and supporting research, the Hub aims to advance policies that ensure AI development is ethical, inclusive and grounded in the public interest.

As Canada moves forward in developing AI policy, this roundtable highlighted the need for sustained, careful and collaborative work to align technological innovation with cultural values, human creativity and democratic governance.