



The Cultural Policy Hub at OCAD University

## **Submission to the Department of Canadian Heritage on the Engagement on News and Magazine Support Programs**

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For more information:

Miriam Kramer  
Executive Director, Government Relations & Public Policy, OCAD University  
[mkramer@ocadu.ca](mailto:mkramer@ocadu.ca)

Prepared by:

Clara Godbillon-Vasseur  
Policy Advisor, Cultural Policy Hub  
[cgodbillonvasseur@ocadu.ca](mailto:cgodbillonvasseur@ocadu.ca)

Hamidreza Sheshjavani  
Policy Advisor, Cultural Policy Hub  
[shamidreza@ocadu.ca](mailto:shamidreza@ocadu.ca)

OCAD University  
100 McCaul Street,  
Toronto, ON M5T 1W1  
[culturalpolicyhub@ocadu.ca](mailto:culturalpolicyhub@ocadu.ca)

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## Acknowledgments

### About OCAD University

OCAD U is Canada's oldest, largest and leading art and design university, located in downtown Toronto since 1876. Over 4,500 students attend one of our 17 undergraduate and seven graduate programs. We are a leading hub of art, design, digital media, research and innovation, and our classes are taught by some of the top experts in their fields. Students benefit from hands-on studio learning in small classrooms and have access to state-of-the-art shops and studios.

Our students gain in-demand, employable skills and go on to work in every imaginable sector, including animation, design, film, illustration, publishing, urban planning and visual arts. OCAD U teaches students to innovate and solve the big problems of our time. Our graduates bridge the skills gap in many different sectors including manufacturing, finance, automotive, creative industries and technology. We give them the real-world transferable skills, innovation and creativity demanded by today's high-tech, fast-evolving economy.

### About the Cultural Policy Hub

The Cultural Policy Hub at OCAD University expands the arts and cultural sector's capacity in policymaking, research, data analysis, program innovation, and knowledge mobilization and exchange. The Hub is a national, bilingual platform that builds communities of practice among researchers, policymakers, artists, and creators from across Canada's academic, government, non-profit and private spheres. It supports cultural policy decision-making from the local to the national levels and is a partner in public policy issues to which cultural sectors contribute.

## Background and introduction

The following consultation submission presents existing research, policy pathways, and recommendations in response to the engagement led by the Department of Canadian Heritage (PCH) and identifies potential partners for PCH on each of these issues.

From 2024 to 2026, the Cultural Policy Hub worked with industry practitioners, researchers, and policymakers to develop these pathways and the reports linked below (the timeline for this process is detailed in Appendix A).

As part of this work, the Hub conducted research and hosted convenings with over 50 independent news leaders, funders, researchers, philanthropists, journalists and policymakers across several forums and gatherings. It has worked in direct collaboration with the Inspirit Foundation, Rideau Hall Foundation, Indiegraf, the Local News Research Project, Concordia University, PhiLab at Université du Québec à Montréal as well as the Canadian Journalism Collective (CJC-CCJ), an entity established following a gathering hosted by the Hub at the 2024 DemocracyXChange summit.

Two reports were borne from these partnerships: a [workshop report ideating on the state of the sector and on possible policy solutions and action items](#), as well as a study led by Concordia University and PhiLab at UQAM and supported by the Hub on the role community and other foundations can play in supporting local news and journalism titled [In Defense of the Local: How Community Foundations across Canada are Supporting Local News, and how this can Grow into a Movement](#).

The present consultation submission responds to the targeted engagement led by PCH to inform the future direction of the direct support mechanisms for news and magazines. It aims to answer the following questions, asked in PCH's *Discussion Guide: News and Magazine Dialogue*:

1. “Of the current direct funding supports available, which aspects have had the biggest impact? (...) In your view, who is included and excluded from accessing support? What would you change about the existing support measures?”
2. “Assuming that government investment in news supports does not increase, how would you change or refocus the systems of supports to increase the impact of existing funding? Or to better reflect the evolving state of the industry?”
3. “What changes would be required to leverage more support from philanthropy / donations?”
4. “Are there other issues pertaining to artificial intelligence and news supports that you wish to raise?”
5. “What government support does it take to get to a sustainable future?”

### 1. Impact and limits of the current direct funding support available

The [2019-2022 evaluation of the Local Journalism Initiative \(LJI\) by the Department of Canadian Heritage](#) (PCH) showed that the LJI was achieving two of its immediate goals: increasing journalism capacity in underserved communities and improving news availability in communities across Canada.

The conclusions from this evaluation align with feedback from local news outlets collected by PCH and the Hub. That feedback shows that media coverage of civic affairs hasn't improved as much as coverage of community issues has. Many interest holders say that the LJI is not fully achieving its goal of supporting original civic journalism. Media scholars and PCH's evaluations have also pointed to another problem: the lack of strong data to support analysis and decision-making in the journalism sector.

While the LJI has its limitations, it has also delivered in areas of news poverty (areas with limited access to local news) at a low administrative cost.

According to feedback from participants in the Hub's convenings and on PCH's evaluation, the LJI has conversely not been as effective in news deserts (areas with no access to local news) due to the following factors:

- The lack of eligible outlets, due in part to a requirement that outlets have a certain number of full-time staff;
- The administrative burden of having to reapply for funding every year; and
- And the difficulty or lack of capacity to recruit and train journalists to cover civic affairs in rural communities.

The Hub has identified the following remedies to address these issues, based on research and on feedback collected at convenings with sector leaders:

- Extend LJI funding timeframes from one to three years to facilitate journalist recruitment and training and to reduce administrative burdens;
- Expand eligibility criteria to include outlets that do not have full-time staff, if they can prove intent to cover civic issues in news deserts;
- Include the journalism sector in any Government of Canada future AI training fund;
- Work with news organizations to support the development of a Community Journalism Training Institute to provide targeted training and mentorship and increase the pool of journalists qualified to be hired through the LJI;
- Support local news outlets in diversifying their funding streams; and
- Improve journalism data collection and research to inform decision-making on the LJI and make it more effective.

## 2. How to increase the impact of existing systems of support and adapt them as the news industry evolves

To improve its support to the journalism sector, PCH needs data to follow the evolution of the industry and to better evaluate the efficacy of its policies—data that would be comparable year-over-year on news consumption, on who is getting different forms of public and private funding, what the demographics of journalists are, how financially sustainable news outlets are, how the status of Registered Journalism Organization (RJO) intersects with these factors is, etc.

The 2019-2022 PCH evaluation of the LJI itself points to a lack of strong quantitative data on journalism content and outlets across the country as a barrier.

Scholars in the United States have produced a rich body of literature analysing the state and impact of news media, providing data that philanthropists could use to justify supporting news outlets. By contrast, public debate about journalism in Canada has suffered from a shortage of

historical perspective and data, a long-time problem for media scholars, local news advocates and those responsible for the sector's strategic planning.

In 2000, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) created a [Canadian Media Research Consortium](#) (CMRC) to redress this problem. With funding from Bell Canada Enterprises, the CMRC [did not manage to fulfill expectations](#) and it ceased its activities in 2011 after its seven-year benefits grant did not get extended by the CRTC. However, the CMRC did confirm the need for more research in the following areas:

- changing media usage in a digital era;
- new forms of media;
- media ownership and consolidation;
- media and diversity; and
- the evaluation of media policy.

Several past and current research projects have looked at elements of the news media ecosystem and provided critical data, such as the [Local News Research Project](#), an independent initiative led by researcher and professor April Lindgren of Toronto Metropolitan University. The initiative maps the location and number of local media outlets in communities across Canada and has been one of the key data sources to inform recent news media policy. While research projects such as the one undertaken by Prof. Lindgren are critically important, they often lack access to the precise data required to fully assess policy needs and programs' impacts in this sector. In some cases, this is because the data is proprietary; in others, it is because the data simply does not exist.

Interest holders are expressing support for the development of a Canadian Journalism Research Institute, which would be developed in collaboration and with the support of partners from government and the private and philanthropic sectors.

Industry and academic partners have identified an opportunity for the Local News Research Project, the CJC-CCJ, community foundations, and news collectives to create a collaborative institute hosted at a post-secondary institution (taking inspiration from [Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism](#), hosted by the University of Oxford with core funding from the Thomson Reuters Foundation). The objective of such an institute would be to provide evidence-based analysis on the state of journalism in Canada to support strategy, policy development, and policy evaluation. The benefits arising from the establishment of this type of institute could include:

- o Collecting the same data year-to-year to support policy evaluation and identification of new needs;
- o Understanding new trends in the news landscape as digital media keeps evolving and transforming news consumption habits;
- o Providing evidence to the private sector and foundations on the impact of news outlets' presence in an area; and
- o Producing educational resources that are evidence-based to support better journalism that reaches a wider audience with more financially sustainable outlets.

Based on its research into existing journalism research institutes, the Hub has identified some possible guidelines for the development of this future Canadian institute:

- Developing a governance model with a steering committee that reflects the diversity of the sector;
- Incentivizing foundations and media collectives to fund the institute, ensuring a diversified public and private revenue model;
- Allowing institutions to sponsor specific research projects that are of interest to them; and
- Ensuring transparency in the use of funds and developing a clear policy to limit conflicts of interest.

A partnership between the Local News Research Project and PCH is underway, which should allow for the development of better data collection and analysis on local news outlets across Canada.

### 3. Leveraging support from the philanthropic sector

#### ***Why local journalism matters to community and philanthropic foundations***

Polls reveal that [trust in journalism](#) is on the decline, as a study for the Canadian Journal of Political Science has shown that [Canadians tend to gravitate to news that is compatible with their ideological and partisan beliefs](#).

[2.5 million Canadians have almost no access to local news](#), leaving a void that gets filled with misinformation from less credible news sources. One in three Canadians still rely on Facebook and Instagram to get information on Canadian political and current affairs, [despite Meta's ban on Canadian news outlets](#) on its platforms. Those platforms expose readers to misinformation (much of which is generated by AI bots) and situate that content alongside that of more credible international outlets. Furthermore, social media platforms' algorithms reinforce Canadians' views by exposing them to more of the same content they're interacting with and limiting their access to different opinions.

Given the rise of online misinformation, access to Canadian news, especially local news, is becoming increasingly important. Local media are the most trusted source of information for Canadians (Public Policy Forum, [Lost Estate Report](#), 2025). Local news keeps readers and listeners informed about civic affairs, [encourages participation in elections](#), provides access to public safety guidance in cases of emergencies, helps to [keep local elected officials accountable and connects Canadians to their community](#).

Local news plays an important role in upholding Canadian democracy and combatting political polarization. But without adequate support and funding, local news outlets have been limited in their ability to deliver the news coverage and programming that communities benefit from.

#### ***How community foundations are stepping up***

In 2024, the Hub partnered with Concordia University and PhiLab at UQAM in 2024-2025 on a new study on the potential role of community and other foundations in supporting local news and journalism. The resulting research paper by Magda Konieczna and Jessica Botelho-Urbanski is titled [In Defense of the Local: How Community Foundations across Canada are Supporting Local News, and how this can Grow into a Movement](#).

This study outlined how the Winnipeg Foundation, the Toronto Foundation, the Vancouver Foundation, the Edmonton Community Foundation and the Fondation du Grand Montréal each found unique ways to support local news outlets. The report offered 13 recommendations to grow the relationship between community foundations and local news organizations based on the findings from these case studies, among them:

- “Commit to doing good through your ad dollars (...)
- Be creative about ownership and endowment (...)
- Set up community news fund (...)
- Build a funders’ journalism support group, and ask for help (...)
- Ensure grantees have guarantees of editorial independence (...)
- Have a frank conversation with the donors in your community about why supporting journalism matters.”

To build on these findings, the Hub met with Inspirit Foundation and Community Foundations of Canada throughout 2025 to spark wider conversations on the pathways for community foundations to support local journalism. Work by Community Foundations of Canada with their members is ongoing.

### ***Leadership in the philanthropic sector is coming from many sources***

The Inspirit Foundation has been active in deepening understanding and expanding the role of philanthropic organizations in supporting local news for several years. Inspirit’s 2023 publication, [Funding Journalism: A Guide for Canadian Philanthropy](#) is the first of its kind in Canada, and contains practical information and tools for foundations interested in funding journalism. It was created in collaboration with the Local News Research Project at Toronto Metropolitan University and Philanthropic Foundations Canada. More recently, in February 2026, [Inspirit announced the winners of its Foundation’s Journalism Futures Fund](#), a pooled fund aimed at providing multi-year support to independent news outlets in Canada. Initiatives such as this one show that there could be a real philanthropic impact when community foundations work together to deliver programs across Canada. The fund is the outcome of deep and sustained work by Inspirit in this area, and has set the stage for other philanthropic organizations to engage. The [first round of funding has been announced](#) with 6 awardees receiving a total of \$1.875 million, which represents a historic philanthropic investment in independent media in Canada.

The Rideau Hall Foundation (RHF) has also been active in supporting Canadian local journalism. In collaboration with the Michener Awards Foundation (MAF) and the Public Policy Forum (PPF), it has organized two symposiums in Charlottetown, PEI on “Putting the Local Back in Local News” in 2024 and 2025. Following the 2024 conference, the RHF and MAF supported the Public Policy Forum’s report [The Lost Estate. How to put local back in local news](#), which presented data and trends on local journalism in Canada as well as five case studies and recommendations for philanthropists and policymakers. The 2025 conference culminated with a commitment from foundations across the country to use philanthropy to support journalism in their communities. In November 2025, RHF, MAF, and PPF launched a weekly newsletter on the state of Canadian local news, which promises to keep interest holders informed of the most recent developments in the sector.

## 4. Artificial intelligence, technology and news supports

### ***AI and the problem of content provenance***

Advances in generative artificial intelligence have sped up the production, modification, and spread of synthetic digital content on an unprecedented scale. While these tools expand creative and communicative possibilities, deepfakes, synthetic audio, and manipulated images are no longer just emerging risks: they are now active tools for disinformation, election interference, and the erosion of trust in journalism and democratic institutions.

Incidents like the [Kirkland Lake Bot](#) and the rise of AI ads mimicking news outlets during the last Federal Election highlight acute challenges for Canada's democratic society and electoral integrity. The Canadian Digital Media Research Network found that [80% of Canadians reported concern about misleading AI-generated content and AI-powered misinformation](#) as a key challenge during the 2025 federal election. To lead globally, Canada must first secure its information environment against asymmetric threats. Without robust mechanisms to verify the authenticity of digital content, the nation remains vulnerable to manipulation that compromises sovereignty and public safety.

Technical standards such as the [Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity \(C2PA\)](#) have emerged as an antidote to the problem. These standards allow creators and news organizations to attach cryptographically verifiable "digital birth certificates" to content. However, technical capacity alone is insufficient. For the news media, reliable provenance serves as a tool for factchecking. For the general population, the effectiveness of provenance depends on its consistent adoption and meaningful display across platforms. Currently, digital platforms vary widely in whether they preserve, surface, or verify provenance information. As a result, provenance remains fragmented: it is often invisible to users, but has limited public impact.

[The Canadian Centre for Cyber Security](#) positions C2PA as a critical, emerging technical standard that organizations should consider adopting to provide the cryptographic "receipts" necessary for public trust in an era of AI-generated misinformation. This reflects a broader recognition within government that technical transparency could complement policy interventions. While there is no Canadian federal or provincial legislation or bill that explicitly mentions "data provenance", some legislation, such as [Québec's Bill 64 \(Law 25\)](#), embeds principles that support the tracking of data origins and movements. The federal government also supports organizations not to rely solely on internal logging, but to adopt [public content provenance](#) to verify the origin and history of their information for external audiences, which embeds principles that support the tracking of data origins and movements.

In practice, Canadian public broadcasters are ahead of the game. CBC/Radio-Canada, a clear leader and an early adopter of C2PA, along with other DG8 members<sup>1</sup>, assert that [they use Content Credentials to preserve the freedom of information](#). Google Canada, [in response to the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada Stéphane Perrault's questions about misinformation on digital platforms during elections](#), wrote that: "We will continue to expand its application to more products and use cases over time and encourage more services and hardware providers to adopt the C2PA's Content Credentials standard."

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<sup>1</sup> The DG8 comprises eight international public service media organizations from Australia (ABC), Canada (CBC/Radio-Canada), France (France Médias Monde), Germany (Deutsche Welle), Japan (NHK WORLD-JAPAN), Switzerland (SRG SSR), the United Kingdom (BBC World Service), and the United States (U.S. Agency for Global Media).

Despite these commitments and early steps, a significant gap remains between policy ambitions and the reality on the ground. While major Canadian platforms such as CBC have voiced support for standards like C2PA, the practical challenges of implementation—driven by platform incentives, technical constraints, and global business models—threaten to undermine progress.

Fundamentally, platform incentives are frequently driven by global business models that diverge from national policy priorities, resulting in the systematic removal of metadata. Beyond these operational reasons, platforms also seek to limit legal liability. By discarding provenance data, they can remain neutral hosts rather than verifiers of content authenticity. This protects them from possible lawsuits related to misinformation or deepfakes. Consequently, the infrastructure required to support standards such as C2PA—including the verification, storage, and display of credentials at scale—is considered too complex. This strategic avoidance of technical integration creates a fragmented ecosystem where the preservation of content integrity is secondary to the imperatives of cost reduction and legal insulation.

In addition, smaller media organizations and independent creators may face barriers to adopting provenance technologies, including technical complexity and resource constraints. Without careful design, provenance frameworks risk reinforcing existing inequalities within the information ecosystem.

Taken together, these factors create a sense of urgency. It is time for Canadian public institutions and technology providers to act proactively by developing a coordinated approach that aligns stakeholders and establishes norms before regulations compel them to do so.

The Hub will soon publish a summary report with findings from a workshop on this topic with technologists, independent journalists, experts in media provenance, news publishers, advertisers, and policymakers at the 2026 DemocracyXChange in Toronto.

### ***Digital sovereignty***

Foreign tech giants dominate how Canadians connect, communicate with each other and get informed, promising easy access to news, connectivity to the world and user features that improve with technological innovations. But these monopolies can also be a source of interference that undermines Canada's communications and its political and economic sovereignty. The risks associated with that type of interference include: displacing homegrown platforms; forcing Canadian news organizations trying to reach a domestic audience to go through them; extracting value; and shaping flows of content, traffic, and dollars within monopolized digital markets.

Participants in the Hub's convenings have proposed the creation of a Canadian Digital Sovereignty Fund. The proposed fund would create digital public spaces, networks, and tools that could offer homegrown alternatives to foreign tech giants' services. Those networks and tools would, in turn, improve the independence and sustainability of Canadian culture and media, reflect Canadian values, and strengthen local ecosystems and innovation. The potential impacts and outcomes of those instruments are aligned to other public infrastructure opportunities arising in this moment of transformation in the digital sphere. [In a recent policy reflection](#), OCAD U President Ana Serrano outlined how an AI Commons could transform the creative sector and enumerated the following benefits that kind of transformation would bring: "broad participation, shared prosperity, cultural vitality, and civic trust."

Dependence on foreign tech giants is viewed as a limitation and a liability, in particular for news media, arts and culture, archives, libraries, and publishers. The Canadian Digital Sovereignty Fund would support the development of Canadian tools and infrastructure to curb those dependencies. It could do so, for example, by supporting the development of:

- Local aggregators and networks;
- Federated search engines and social networks;
- Open resources and general-purpose tools;
- Content distribution networks and services;
- Sovereign cloud, AI compute, models or applications;
- Open monetization tools, for subscriptions, donations and micropayments; and
- Translation-, multilingual- and diversity-enhancing designs.

All of these elements of a Canadian digital ecosystem would support the independence of news outlets and may improve trust in the media.

This Digital Sovereignty Fund was raised by participants in the Cultural Policy Hub's DemocracyXChange 2025 workshop, with the proposal that it could be funded through the Digital Services Tax. With that tax set to be repealed, other sources of revenue could be examined as the Government of Canada has highlighted Canadian cultural sovereignty, digital identity, and innovation in technological infrastructures as priorities.

## Conclusion: What government support does it take to get to a sustainable future

Through its convenings, the Hub and its partners have established six key areas of policy priority to improve the sustainability of the sector:

1. Examining the limits and possible reforms of the federal Local Journalism Initiative (LJI);
2. Strengthening the role of philanthropy, and specifically of community foundations, in supporting local news;
3. Coordinating and investing in data collection, research and evaluation;
4. Strengthening the application of federal tax credits and other fiscal tools;
5. Improving Canada's digital sovereignty and reducing the dependence of Canadian media on foreign tech; and
6. Develop a coordinated approach to establish content provenance for AI-generated content.

## Appendix: A Timeline of the Cultural Policy Hub's Work on Local Journalism

### Spring 2024

- The Hub partnered with Indiegraf to deliver a workshop with independent journalists, news publishers, funders, philanthropists, researchers, and policymakers at the 2024 DemocracyXChange in Toronto. This convening focused on [ways to improve supports for independent media outlets and news organizations at the start-up and scale-up stages](#). This included: how to ensure that vulnerable and equity-deserving communities have access to adequate benefits and conditions to scale their impact; how to ensure that the next steps in the implementation of Bill C-18 positively impact independent journalism; and how workshop participants could work to mobilize around the contribution of independent journalism to a healthy democracy. This convening served as a space to ideate on solutions to these issues, and contributed to the eventual establishment of the Canadian Journalism Collective.

### Spring 2025

- The Hub supported a study by Concordia University and PhiLab at UQAM on the role community and other foundations can play in supporting local news and journalism, resulting in a research paper by Magda Konieczna and Jessica Botelho-Urbanski titled [In Defense of the Local: How Community Foundations across Canada are Supporting Local News, and how this can Grow into a Movement](#).
- The Hub contributed again to the DemocracyXChange summit's program in April 2025. The Hub held a [workshop on building pathways to support Canadian local news and journalism](#) and collected propositions and action items on to draft a series of key policy priorities (outlined below). Over 40 independent news leaders, funders, researchers, philanthropists, journalists, and policymakers working in both official languages across Canada came to dialogue, learn, and share their experiences.

### Summer 2025

By the summer of 2025, the Cultural Policy Hub and its partners had established five key areas of policy priority in this arena:

- Examining the limits and possible reforms of the federal Local Journalism Initiative (LJI);
- Strengthening the role of philanthropy, and specifically of community foundations, in supporting local news;
- Coordinating and investing in data collection, research and evaluation;
- Strengthening the application of federal tax credits and other fiscal tools; and
- Improving Canada's digital sovereignty and reducing the dependence of Canadian media on foreign tech.

In the months that followed, the Hub convened 20 of the DemocracyXChange workshop's participants across five breakout groups, creating opportunities for collaboration and engagement through the remainder of the year. This allowed the groups to focus in on specific issues and connect with potential partners to brainstorm and co-develop solutions linked to the areas of policy priority identified above.

## Spring 2026

- The Hub partnered with the CBC to deliver a workshop and a panel on content provenance standards for AI-generated content with technologists, independent journalists, experts in media provenance, news publishers, advertisers, and policymakers at the 2026 DemocracyXChange in Toronto. This convening focused on baseline expectations that should guide the adoption and use of content provenance in Canada. A summary report with findings from this session is forthcoming from the Hub.