



Written Submission for the
Pre-Budget Consultations
in Advance of the
2024-2025 Federal Budget

Recommendations

Recommendation 1 - Community Radio Initiative: We recommend that the Government of Canada provide an annual operating budget for all community, Indigenous, and campus-licensed radio stations (approx 250). This could be established and administered by the Community Radio Fund of Canada. The proposed fund would be 25 million dollars annually and would provide an average of 90 thousand dollars annually for operations at all stations that are meeting or exceeding their licensing standards as established by the CRTC; it would allow the CRFC to produce an annual report on the state of Canadian community broadcasting, and would allow ongoing support for special projects featuring Canadian voices. This fund would be critical in supporting those local stations on the front lines of highlighting the Canadian voice.

Recommendation 2 - Local Journalism Initiative: We recommend that the Government of Canada increase funding for the Local Journalism Initiative to \$20 million annually and ensure the funding is timely. This program has already had a significant impact in providing Canadians with valuable local news and information. Hundreds of journalists serve news deserts across Canada (which are increasing alarmingly), but uncertainty and underfunding prevent the program from realizing its full potential. Permanent funding at \$20 million a year would provide an essential antidote in the fight against disinformation.

Recommendation 3 - Advertising via Community Radio Stations: We recommend that the Government of Canada make advertising with campus and community radio stations mandatory for all government advertising campaigns.

About

The National Campus and Community Radio Association/Association nationale des radios étudiantes et communautaires (“NCRA/ANREC”) represent 125 or so community radio broadcasters. The Community Radio Fund of Canada distributes support on behalf of commercial broadcasters and the federal government to community, campus and Indigenous broadcasters. The Community Broadcasters Foundation of Canada/Fondation des radiodiffuseurs communautaires du Canada is a new foundation to provide support to Community Radio across Canada, with a focus on indigenous communities, education & training, and arts & culture in Canada

Introduction

With the rise of disinformation on social media platforms, the dissemination of verifiable information and journalistic integrity are more important than ever.

The COVID-19 pandemic and Hurricane Fiona have put the need for trusted sources of factual content on full display, and we are acutely aware of the need for a reliable emergency broadcast network Canadians depend on the news to learn how to keep themselves and their families safe and informed, regardless if it's health, environmental or social emergencies.

Unfortunately, misinformation is being widely spread throughout social media channels, putting a greater onus on traditional media to reach Canadians with factual information. There is no question that quality and trusted local news and information are key to the fight against disinformation. And now, we fight against tech giants who want to control Canadian content.

Campus and community radio stations are a pillar of broadcasting in Canada, with unique access to urban and rural underserved communities. Our members delivered accurate public health information to Canadians in at least 65 languages throughout the pandemic. The sector comprises thousands of people committed to ensuring broadcasts meet rigorous standards. As many as nine and a half million Canadians¹ in over 150 communities regularly listen to community radio at least 1 once monthly. For many, it is their only source of live, local information.

Nowhere is this more important than in rural Canada. More than 130 community and Indigenous broadcasters are in communities of less than 50 000 people. This is where Canada has lost many of the 275 local news outlets which have disappeared over the last 15 years. The rise of disinformation in these communities is particularly alarming.

The government must provide a small level of consistent and reliable support for stations that have continued to support and promote their communities on shoestring budgets:

- To provide the minimum support to the front lines in the fight against disinformation.
- To ensure our urban and rural communities are covered in times of need.
- To continue providing critical support for Canadian artists, future broadcasters, and the Canadian voice.

¹ <https://archive.ncra.ca/listener>

COMMUNITY RADIO INITIATIVE / INITIATIVE DE RADIO COMMUNAUTAIRE

As public and private broadcasters increase their focus on major urban centres and newspapers cease to operate at an alarming rate, regional and rural markets home to more than 30% of Canadians are in critical need of support. Community broadcasters have existed for generations in Canada, some for over a hundred years. These broadcasters remain uniquely positioned to fill that void today and for the foreseeable future.

C-11, the An Act to amend the Broadcasting Act, included a new definition of the community element, which acknowledges that community radio "...reflects both the diversity of the communities being served, including concerning the languages in use within those communities and to their ethnocultural and Indigenous composition and the high engagement and involvement in community broadcasting by members of those communities, including matters of public concern..." and that "...through collaboration with local organizations and community members, are in the unique position of being able to provide varied programming to meet the needs of specific audiences...".

These are the broadcasters who play the majority of Canadian artists before anyone else, who organize festivals, and who sponsor local events.

If Hurricane Fiona taught us anything, AM and FM transmitters still have an essential role when the power goes out. Many of the communities these stations serve have little to no broadband or even cellular connectivity. A recent study has shown that AM/FM is still how most Canadians consume audio programming at 39%, with Youtube coming in second at 14%.

²

Unlike the CBC, community-based stations do not receive consistent funding from the government. Budget 22-23 proposed increasing the allocation to the CBC/Radio-Canada by 400 million dollars as it is increasingly getting out of the local markets and moving towards what it calls "Regional Hubs."

[A copy of our full request is available here](#)

Recommendation: Establish the Community Radio Initiative

² Radio Connects "Radio on the Move" July 2022

EXTEND AND INCREASE THE LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

The Local Journalism Initiative has been an overwhelming success. It has had a material impact on creating and supporting journalism that covers the diverse needs of underserved communities across Canada. Community and campus radio stations have served these communities for decades, and the LJI has [strongly impacted local stations](#) and our democracy.

The Community Radio Fund of Canada is one of 7 organizations that administer the program. Since the beginning, we have hired more than 435 journalists at more than 230 media outlets, including 59 Indigenous journalists and 122 official minority language journalists.

The program was funded for five years and expires in April 2024. We wholeheartedly support the permanent extension of the program and see the increase to \$15.4 million as the floor. We recommend increasing the annual allocation to \$20 million for the program and immediately funding the program so there is no gap in funding, which would cause devastating impacts on both the employment and accessibility to news and information at the stations already involved in this project.

As we see local news and information eroded regularly, the void is being filled by increasingly unreliable sources of information and promoted by social media algorithms that have been demonstrated to hurt our society and democracy. The void in local news and information has resulted in a full third of US citizens who believe their election was stolen, horse medication flew off global shelves as an antidote to COVID because of one statement by an uninformed US president, and a total of about a dozen accounts are responsible for more than 80% of the vaccine disinformation available on social media³.

Additional funds need to be placed into three areas.

- (1) Placement of (at least one) paid journalist in all communities deemed news deserts or in a state of news poverty.
- (2) Centralized administrative support unit to govern and nurture independent content development (toward locally reflective news leads).
- (3) Enhanced resources toward promotion, marketing and technology for effective news distribution.

By extending and increasing the LJI, the government has a material impact on local journalism and will send more in-depth and up-to-date local news, keeping communities informed and without overreaching; this will impact our democracy.

Recommendation #2 - Extend and expand the LJI.

³ <https://www.npr.org/2021/05/13/996570855/disinformation-dozen-test-facebooks-twiters-ability-to-curb-vaccine-hoaxes>

Government Advertising via Not-For-Profit Radio

The Government of Canada uses the services of a single Agency of Record (AOR) to develop media plans and purchase media space for government advertising. An AOR enables the government to get better value by leveraging the collective buying power of departments. Centralizing these services also enables better integration, oversight, control and reporting.² Therefore, when the Government of Canada launches different advertising campaigns, such as those seen during COVID-19 to keep Canadians informed, they use the AOR to complete the advertising purchases with different media outlets.

The most recent study by the Association des radiodiffuseurs du Québec (ARCQ) shows that 78.4% of community radio listeners surveyed consider their station to be the best source for local information, far ahead of other media. A study carried out in 2022 demonstrated the correlation between advertising investment and the amount of news and current affairs produced by community radio stations. As media is run locally by volunteer citizens responsible for administration, community media investment encourages local purchasing, economic development, and democracy.

Despite its imperfections and the need for a higher percentage, we firmly assert that the Quebec model, initiated by the government in 1995, which advocates for a minimum 4% investment in community media, holds the key to resolving our current challenges. As we address the political audience, we propose that the federal government swiftly embrace and customize this model for adoption across Canada. This approach offers a straightforward solution, given its existing implementation in our nation, and it also lends crucial support to Canadian organizations focused on advancing our economy and production endeavors.

The federal government must take its leadership role in addressing tech giants and their ability to impact news and information nationwide and set an example by investing advertising dollars responsibly with a Canada-first approach. The Canadian government's advertising purchases have been made from foreign companies for too long without considering the different communities in the country and forgetting the impact its actions can have. While no longer investing advertising dollars in Meta is a step in the right direction, there will be no long-term impact if there are no new targets or ways of doing things to change the way the government buys advertising. It's increasingly important that the government of Canada share its information directly with listeners who cannot access it via social media.

Recommendation #3 - Mandate government advertising to include campaigns on campus/community & indigenous not-for-profit radio stations in Canada.

IN CONCLUSION

We are proposing three inexpensive commitments that will have a material impact on the lives of Canadians in ways that are core to the values we believe in. Because each station is not-for-profit as a condition of their licence, every dollar invested in these stations is reinvested in the community.

At the core of a prosperous society are informed and connected people. We are happy to discuss further or provide additional information upon request.



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