

What Should the CBC Be?



Centre for MEDIA,
TECHNOLOGY
and DEMOCRACY

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The Centre for Media, Technology and Democracy
Montreal: July 2025



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Executive Summary

Report Overview

This report presents the findings of a two-year study that draws on best practices in public service media from within Canada and in 17 other countries around the world. It is informed by consultation with a broad range of media and public media experts, as well as insights from our national survey, “Do We Need the CBC?” We sought to understand the current role of public media in the larger Canadian media landscape, to assess its relevance and to propose appropriate recommendations to bring the CBC/Radio-Canada — and the resources allocated to it — in line with needs and expectations of Canadians today.

What We Learned From Two Years of Studying the CBC/Radio-Canada

Internationally, the CBC/Radio-Canada is recognized as a large, respected public media service, but domestically, it has lost relevance to a number of Canadians. Recent recommendations in the public sphere have typically addressed specific problems (i.e., the size of the English television audience) without addressing the broader question of the purpose of public media historically and today. Designed for citizens as well as educators and policy insiders, this report seeks to examine the greater needs of Canadians — reliable and relevant information, shared experience and communications to help keep us safe in times of crisis — within the context of what serves the greatest number of people in the current media climate. If a national public media service serves only certain regions or demographics, it fails.

Like Canada, the CBC/Radio-Canada is unique — but many of the challenges it faces are shared by public broadcasters worldwide. Our research explores responses to everything from political threats to funding, technological shifts and declining trust, along with emerging best practices from different jurisdictions for dealing with them. We place special emphasis on the rising role of public media in emergency preparedness and public safety, especially in response to the climate crisis and geopolitical threats (a role recommended for the CBC/Radio-Canada but not yet formally established in law).

While many recent policy proposals for the CBC/Radio-Canada are directed to its specific challenges, such as declining trust, we have sought to explore the mandate, funding and public engagement forms at the CBC/Radio-Canada in a context of global media and public service media trends worldwide. And going outside the current political climate, we asked Canadians directly what they think about their public broadcaster.

KEY FINDINGS:

- **Broad support and utility:** Put simply, 78% of Canadians want the CBC/Radio-Canada to continue, especially if it addresses the major criticisms levelled against it. This is true across political lines, ages and regions.

- **Putting Canadians' needs at the centre:** Through funding cuts, technological developments and environmental conditions (such as the decline of local journalism), the CBC/Radio-Canada is no longer universally accessible to all Canadians. The CBC/Radio-Canada will better serve the country when it is appropriately funded and mandated through the lens of what the audience needs first — including the news-avoidant audience.
- **Funding must reflect the mandate and Canadians' priorities:** Canada has funded its public media service at a much lower level (around \$33 per capita today) than most of its international counterparts (currently an average of \$79 per capita) for decades. While the federal government committed to maintaining funding in 2025, funding allotments should not seem arbitrary. The CBC/Radio-Canada's budget needs to be indexed to the scope of its mandate and its ability to perform its role as Canada's national public media service. If the government expects to raise the per capita funding for the CBC/Radio-Canada, Canadians need to be assured of the value of the product they will be paying for. Regular and in-depth demographic reviews of the audience should be established to determine the kind of content Canadians require and the way they need to receive it. Models for this form of consultation include nation-wide town hall meetings, citizens' assemblies and comprehensive surveys of the public (not merely existing members of the CBC/Radio-Canada's audience).
- **Mandate reviews should be regularly scheduled and apolitical:** Canada's approach to reviewing the mandate for the CBC/Radio-Canada, its national public media service, is undefined and inconsistent with best practices in place in many leading countries. (The last full mandate review of the CBC/Radio-Canada before 2025 was conducted in 1991.) The following legislative changes will help to keep the CBC/Radio-Canada up to date in better serving all Canadians:
 - ▶ Schedule regular mandate reviews of the CBC/Radio-Canada at a predetermined schedule (i.e., every five or 10 years). These reviews should be held outside election cycles.
 - ▶ Mandate review committees should be cross-partisan or nonpartisan and involve public consultations or in-depth demographic surveys: They need to be based on actual current data, not on vibes.
- **Prioritize public safety:** Originally designed to protect cultural tradition and/or educate the public, the role of public media services worldwide especially in regions affected by the climate crisis and/or geopolitical changes is shifting to include national emergency preparedness and crisis response, especially in a world of increasing misinformation/disinformation and news deserts. This aspect of the CBC's mandate should be strengthened and formalized, with appropriate resources (for instance, well-maintained radio towers and local journalism coverage) allocated to preserving the CBC's role as an emergency communications support and a cultural connector across the country — important considerations in ensuring Canada's sovereignty.

- **Restore universality of access:** The CBC/Radio-Canada serves its function when Canadians use it, and is best situated to fulfill its mandate when it is able to reach everyone in the country. Young audiences have moved online, Canadians in small towns don't get coverage (or reception) and demographic minorities don't feel adequately represented. We highlight four areas of focus for the CBC/Radio-Canada to continue investing in to maximize its reach and impact to all Canadians:
 - ▶ Address the digital divide through funding, mandate and cultural prioritization.
 - ▶ Invest in local journalism. Across the country, more than half of Canada are dissatisfied by their local news options (this number rises outside cities and towns).
 - ▶ Create meaningful, not performative, representation. This goal addresses equity, diversity and inclusion, but more broadly, political and regional diversity as well.
 - ▶ Invest in media literacy programs. Enacted at the federal/public service level in the most trusted jurisdictions worldwide, this measure serves all media, not only public media.
- **Rebuild trust and transparency:** The CBC and Radio-Canada remain the most trusted media outlets in their respective languages, yet trust in each is declining, as it is in media and in public media elsewhere. Trust is earned when the audience knows they can hold the Corporation to account and that their criticisms are heard. Three ways to build trust and transparency at the CBC/Radio-Canada are to:
 - ▶ Create more public engagement outside of the regulated CRTC license renewal channels. Canadians should feel seen and heard by their public media service.
 - ▶ Consider regional councils (for instance, provincial advisory boards) made up of representative citizen groups who can advise on community priorities, changing trends and offer feedback on the way the CBC/Radio-Canada serves the community. Canadians should have visibility to this work.
 - ▶ Depoliticize the appointment of the CBC/Radio-Canada president and board. In keeping with best practices for modern board governance, the CBC's board should have a skills matrix, regional/demographic representation and cross-partisan or nonpartisan makeup. It should be structurally evident that the CBC/Radio-Canada serves all Canadians, not the current political government.

Adequate funding is key to a better, stronger CBC/Radio-Canada, but our research shows that a population is more willing to financially support their public media service if they report higher levels of trust in it. Therefore these recommendations and policy proposals for the CBC/Radio-Canada should be considered to be interconnected. Any endeavours to reform the CBC/Radio-Canada — whether through modernized legislation, demographic reviews, increased audience engagement, media literacy programs, more meaningful (not performative) representation or digital innovation — must be considered together. Taken holistically, these measures can help to clarify what Canadians need and deserve from their public media service.

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1. Introduction

In early 2023, then-Conservative Party of Canada leader Pierre Poilievre announced his intention to “defund” the CBC if elected Prime Minister of Canada. This unusually declarative position for the leader of a major political party led to public debate about the purpose and future of the CBC/Radio-Canada. Over the last two years, media coverage, political campaigns and public events have put forth a range of views about the current state of Canada’s national public media service, offering competing visions for what should be done with it. Rather than a free service funded through taxes, should the CBC’s services be opt-in only, for those willing to pay for it? Or devoted to news only? Poilievre’s ultimate proposal was to “defund” English CBC programming and services and preserve Radio-Canada. There is general agreement that the CBC/Radio-Canada needs to evolve, but no clear consensus among people of different ages, political affiliations and regions about the ideal form it should take.

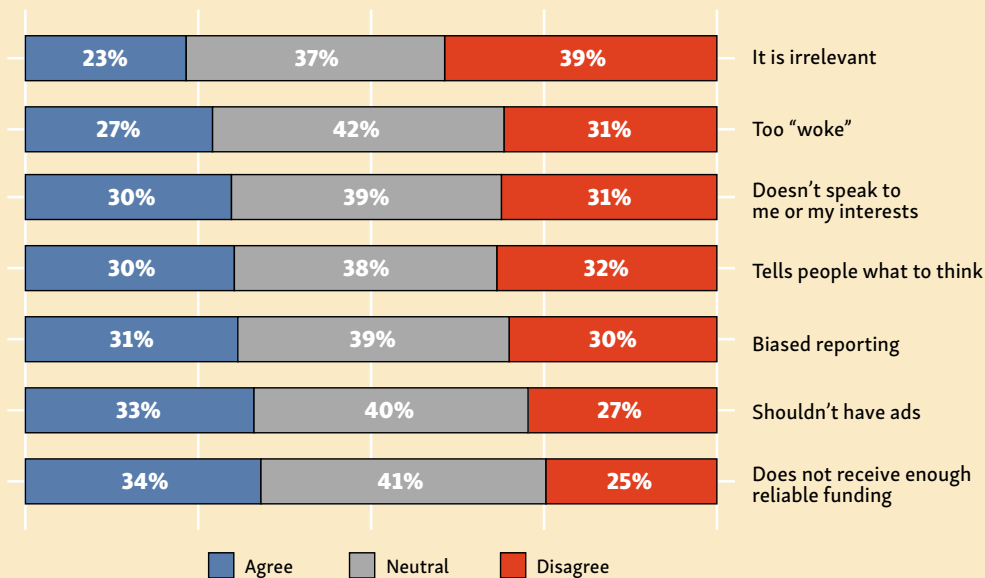
It has been a long time since anyone last took a hard look at the legislation and mandate that directs the day-to-day operation of the CBC/Radio-Canada, the “Broadcasting Act”—in fact, it was last reviewed before the digital age. When Canadians talk about the future of the CBC/Radio-Canada, it is often through the lens of a funding fight. Even the 2025 federal election, which saw Liberal Mark Carney defeat Poilievre, became an issue of funding for the CBC/Radio-Canada instead of the organization’s mandate.

On April 28, 2025, Carney won the election, bringing to an end, for now, the almost weekly speculation in the media about the general survival of Canada’s national public media service that had defined the last two years. The **Liberal campaign platform** included a commitment to continued funding for the outlet, with some future legislative safeguards to protect it from challenges like the one Poilievre’s Conservatives made.

But the story of what Canadians themselves want for the CBC/Radio-Canada is yet to be written.

In fall 2024, our group of researchers at The Centre for Media, Technology and Democracy conducted a **national survey**, “Do We Need the CBC?,” that found 78% of Canadians want the CBC/ Radio-Canada to continue, especially if it resolves its major criticisms. We also found that nearly equal numbers of respondents agree as disagree about commonly made criticisms that we sourced from media coverage, political debate and the public square — enough to make it clear that in-depth clarification of what audiences do and don’t value, and what they perceive to be missing, is key to strengthening the outlet and aligning it with the contemporary needs of Canadians.

Do you agree or disagree with any of the following criticisms of the CBC/RC?



In late 2023, the Honourable Pascale St-Onge, former Minister of Canadian Heritage, indicated the federal government’s intention to conduct a mandate review for the CBC/Radio-Canada.¹ In May 2024, the Ministry **announced the appointment** of an expert advisory panel to guide the process. In February 2025, they released the results of this almost year-long process in the form of a publication titled “**The Future of CBC/Radio-Canada**.”² The recommendations currently have no legal enforcement; they could be interpreted as a wish list for the next government and Canadians — and an attempt, perhaps, to inform conversation ahead of the federal election. They also — perhaps because of the timeline and political circumstances around the debate about the CBC/Radio-Canada — emphasize funding.

But the uncertainty of the last two years indicates a need to go farther than “**The Future of CBC/Radio-Canada**,” which was largely conducted out of the public eye. It failed to address the biggest things Canadians have been arguing about: Content and distribution methods. When Pierre Poilievre called to defund the CBC, he really launched a much-needed public conversation about the role and value of the broadcaster in a rapidly changing media climate. But the conversation shouldn’t begin and end with the question of the CBC’s survival. The CBC/Radio-Canada, like any other public

service, should strive to meet the needs of its audience. Two years after a broad public debate for the continued existence of the CBC/Radio-Canada first started, Canadians still don't have a clear picture of what that should entail. With this report, we aim to provide the conditions for such a discussion.

Mandate reviews can be a slow, iterative process — perhaps why so many Canadian governments have tended to avoid them over the last few decades. But the public benefits of conducting an in-depth mandate review for a public media service now are obvious: to determine the genuine needs of the people. Those needs could be assessed through the lens of programming or the type of content that gets produced, distribution or how the audience accesses this content (TV, radio, online, etc.) and the demographics of the country, which includes who is accessing the content of the CBC/Radio-Canada and as importantly, who isn't. That includes the 11% of Canadians who, according to our research, want to defund the CBC.

For media researchers, there are reasons beyond the recent political debate about funding to study the CBC/Radio-Canada's role and future: the state of the journalistic ecosystem. Since 2008, over 500 local news outlets in Canada have closed, according to April 2025 data from the [Local News Research Project](#) at Toronto Metropolitan University. In that time, over 400 new local outlets were launched, of which one third are now shuttered. Many communities in Canada are without any local media outlet³, or have only one source of coverage which may well be the CBC/Radio-Canada, whose existence has been threatened. Indeed, our survey data reveals that more than 50% of Canadians are dissatisfied by the quality of their local media coverage, even within cities.

The conditions in Canada are a microcosm of the state of media everywhere over the last decade. Trust in public media is declining worldwide⁴, while the polarization of opinion has been on the rise.^{5,6} Research has shown that these shifts are intrinsically connected, and can be attributed to a variety of factors including the rise of populism and populist movements⁷, an algorithm-driven social media environment⁸ and the increase of “news deserts” (areas without adequate media coverage⁹).

The challenges faced by the CBC/Radio-Canada aren't unique: All over the world, jurisdictions have recently revamped and debated their own public media services. Some of this debate is related to funding challenges from political candidates, as in the case in Canada. Other jurisdictions have also been responding to technological shifts from traditional broadcast channels (radio, television) to digital. Many public media services face declining revenues from dwindling advertising and license fees.

The CBC/Radio-Canada is the country's largest media outlet, producing more content through its different distribution channels — website, radio, television, podcast, social media accounts — than any other in Canada. Even the best-known media outlets in the private sector have struggled to raise adequate revenue and to respond to shifts in the tech sector, such as the 2023 Meta news blocks.¹⁰ At the very least, the continued existence of a successful CBC/Radio-Canada could ensure the availability of reliable media for the largest number of people across the country.

We also accepted the possibility of discovering through this project that the CBC/Radio-Canada as it was once envisioned has served its purpose or that the best option for Canadians might be to change it drastically. In that spirit, we undertook “What Should the CBC Be?”



The CBC/Radio-Canada in 1938 and today. Left: An engineer adjusts the antenna on the CBC's first mobile unit. Right: The CBC building on Front Street in Toronto.

About this Project

The Centre for Media, Technology and Democracy is a research centre based at the Max Bell School of Public Policy at McGill University. This project was initiated through an independent research grant to study the current state of media and propose solutions. The context at the time was widespread concern about the state of Canadian media and a call for policy solutions, especially in the realm of the role of public service media. With that in mind our project began with an extensive list of open-ended questions:

- The CBC was founded in the 20th century to meet a specific set of goals. Are those goals and its current mandate “to inform, to enlighten, and to entertain”¹¹ still relevant?
- Are Canadians able to access quality information through the current public and privately-funded media landscape, or are there gaps in the information ecosystem? What (if anything) do Canadians need from the media they’re not currently getting?
- How do the evolution of social media and the arrival of new technologies affect the need for the continuance of traditional media (broadcast radio, television, etc.)?
- For the purposes of this conversation, should Radio-Canada and the CBC be considered together or should they be treated as separate entities?
- If you took the approximately \$1.4 billion¹² base allocation currently appropriated annually by the federal government for the CBC/Radio-Canada and reassigned it to a media product or policy better suited to meeting the needs of Canadians, what would that look like?¹³

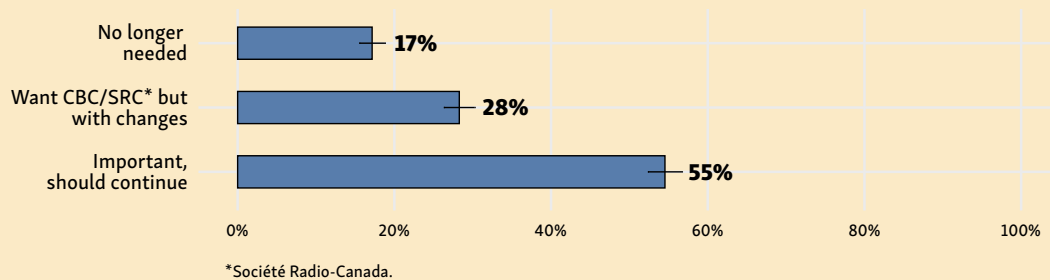
Many of the above questions have been raised in the CBC’s history before, but never in this context — amidst the rapid decline of Canadian media, and the direct threat of discontinuation by a leading political candidate. In the summer of 2023, we set out to develop a framework to answer the questions with existing data and to develop new ones. Over the next 18 months we compiled a reading and contact list of approximately 200 sources; hosted panels with global public media experts

at two editions of “Saving Journalism,” an annual conference co-produced by the Centre for Media, Technology and Democracy and Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs; and conducted dozens of in-depth interviews with public media leaders from Canada and internationally. In advance of the federal government’s 2024–25 mandate review of the CBC, we delivered background research for the minister’s expert panel consisting of case studies and best practices in public service media in Canada and around the world in three subject areas: funding, governance and mandate. Early in fall 2024, we conducted a national survey of 2,055 Canadians entitled, “**Do We Need the CBC?**”¹⁴

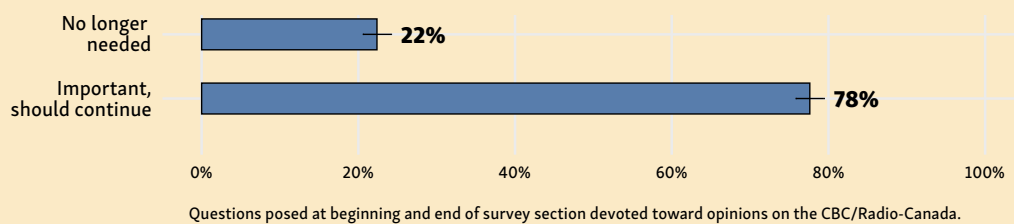
We acknowledged that it was possible that the CBC/Radio-Canada had run its course in our current media climate. We accepted from the outset the possibility of discovering that the CBC/Radio-Canada as we know it had served its purpose — and also that, as some critics have alleged, the rise of social media and alternative platforms may make the need for traditional channels like television and radio redundant.

Our simple finding is that there is at least as much need and desire for the CBC/Radio-Canada as there may have been in earlier times, and perhaps more. There is also considerable agreement among Canadians across political lines about the need for the CBC/Radio-Canada.

Which is closer to your view of the CBC/Radio-Canada?



And if the CBC/Radio-Canada addressed its major criticisms, what is closer to your view?



Given the context for the project — concern about the rise of misinformation and disinformation and the declining media climate — we tested an assumption about whether a solution to the CBC’s financial challenges and declining trust might be to narrow the scope of the CBC to news, and to restrict the presence of television dramas. But we found that a majority of Canadians don’t want a radically retooled vision of the CBC/Radio-Canada. Asked whether the outlet should focus on news

or act as a Canadian cultural hub, a majority (53%) said it should do “both equally.” If anything, most people apparently want the CBC/Radio-Canada to exist in the form it currently has, but to do a better job of serving them.

In 2025, following the second inauguration of US President Donald Trump and his repeated threats to Canadian sovereignty, a new justification for preserving the CBC/Radio-Canada has entered public discourse. “Sovereignty” can take many forms: in the current age, it ranges from information sovereignty to cultural sovereignty to the sheer stability of Canada’s borders. Concern for Canada’s cultural sovereignty was behind the founding of the CBC/Radio-Canada in the 1930s. As Prime Minister R. B. Bennett told the Canadian Parliament in 1932: “This country must be assured of complete Canadian control of broadcasting from Canadian sources, free from foreign interference or influence.”¹⁵

Today, the threat to Canada’s information sovereignty is just as likely to come from a foreign power such as Russia or China, in the form of online misinformation and disinformation, than the outside influence of US cultural products over Canadian ones. Canada’s relationship with the United States has changed, and changed again. For the purposes of this report, we focus on information and communications sovereignty, although ensuring access to cultural content for the greatest number of Canadians inevitably has implications for different forms of sovereignty, including national identity. The complexity of what that means — to Quebeckers, to Indigenous people, to Albertans, to anyone who finds themselves tearing up before the CBC’s reporting on the Olympics or a Remembrance Day ceremony — we’ll attempt to address, if not exactly define, in this report.

Given that, all things being equal, Canadians would support the continuation of the CBC/Radio-Canada (57% would either increase or maintain its current funding),¹⁶ this report will address several key roles the public media service should (and could) play in our lives, and suggest paths to take towards making that happen.

What is the CBC/Radio-Canada Today?

The CBC/Radio-Canada has been the country’s national public broadcaster for almost 90 years.¹⁷ It currently offers content in both of Canada’s official languages, English and French, as well as eight Indigenous languages: Dëne Sųłné, Dene Kədá, Dene Zhatié, Eastern Cree, Dinjii Zhu’ Ginjik, Inuktitut, Inuvialuktun and Tłıchų.¹⁸ CBC/Radio-Canada currently has 27 TV stations and 88 radio stations across Canada, as well as six permanent international bureaus. Content is distributed through TV broadcasts, radio, online ([CBC.ca](https://www.cbc.ca) and [ici.radio-canada.ca](https://www.ici.radio-canada.ca)), podcasts, streaming channels and mobile apps.

The CBC/Radio-Canada is so large, and so wide-ranging, it can be key to clarify which “CBC” a user is referring to, and how they access it in any discussion about its purpose and who it serves.

According to 2024–25 records, the CBC/Radio-Canada annually produces over 22,000 hours of TV news, 10,000 hours of Canadian TV entertainment, 48,000 hours of podcasts, 13,000 hours of music and 95,000 hours of local news and programming on radio.¹⁹ It offers over 50 programs

in Indigenous languages across platforms, 120 French-language news shows on radio and 450 daily online news articles²⁰.

The Canadian economy is not often invoked in calls to defund or maintain the CBC/Radio-Canada, but it is the country's largest media employer and a major employer in certain other sectors of the economy and regions. Nationally, the CBC/Radio-Canada employs over 7,000 people.²¹ As a commissioner and distributor of content, it spends \$400 million annually in Canada's independent production industry.²²

The CBC/Radio-Canada is one corporation, although often referred to by Canadians as two separate companies, the "CBC" and "Radio-Canada."²³ In fact, they share services and infrastructure, such as buildings, equipment and people, and the same mandate; it's more accurate to think of the name as the bilingual translation of a single entity, like many products and landmarks in Canada. The CBC and Radio-Canada are both national, serving francophones and English speakers across the country (Radio-Canada does not operate solely in Québec, which is home to approximately 84% of the country's francophones, with almost one million living in other provinces and territories).²⁴

- 1 The Canadian Press, "Heritage Minister Says She'd like CBC's Mandate Updated to Include Strong Online Presence, Fill Info Gaps," CBC News, December 29, 2023, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/st-onge-redefine-public-broadcaster-1.7071057>.
- 2 The Centre for Media, Technology and Democracy provided background research to the panel about a range of funding models, governance structures, and mandates for public media services in Canada and in other jurisdictions internationally. Details of that research and our findings appear throughout this report.
- 3 Local News Research Project. "The Local News Map." <https://newspoverty.geolive.ca/?>
- 4 "Trust in the news has fallen, across markets, by a further 2 percentage points in the last year, reversing — in many countries — the gains made at the height of the Coronavirus pandemic." See: Nic Newman et al., Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2023 (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.60625/RISJ-P6ES-HB13>.
- 5 Shearer, Elisa, and Kirsten Eddy. "Republicans Have Become More Likely since 2024 to Trust Information from News Outlets, Social Media." Pew Research Center, May 8, 2025, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/05/08/republicans-have-become-more-likely-since-2024-to-trust-information-from-news-outlets-social-media/>.
- 6 Studies in the United States have shown that affective polarization, referring to how much opposing parties of an issue dislike each other, is clearly on the rise. See: Amy Ross Arguedas et al., "Echo Chambers, Filter Bubbles, and Polarisation: A Literature Review," (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2022), <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/echo-chambers-filter-bubbles-and-polarisation-literature-review>.
- 7 Clara Juarez Miro, "'Everything Is Biased': Populist Supporters' Folk Theories of Journalism," *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 30, no. 1 (2025): 63–82, <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612231197617>.
- 8 Shearer and Eddy, "Republicans Have Become More Likely since 2024 to Trust Information from News Outlets, Social Media."

- 9 “As News Deserts Spread Across US, Trust Breaks Down,” directed by Liam Scott (VOA News, 2023), <https://www.voanews.com/a/as-news-deserts-spread-across-us-trust-breaks-down/7264778.html>.
- 10 In 2023, responding to Bill C-18 (the Online News Act), proposed Canadian legislation that would induce revenue sharing between tech platforms that distribute news content and Canadian publishers, Meta (the owner of Facebook and Instagram) blocked all news. The result was a sharp decline in the amount of news consumption in Canada. See: Sara Parker et al., “Old News, New Reality: A Year of Meta’s News Ban in Canada” (Media Ecosystem Observatory, August 1, 2024), <https://meo.ca/s/Meta-News-Ban-Report-08-19.pdf>.
- 11 As defined in the “Broadcasting Act.”
- 12 CBC/Radio-Canada Annual Report 2023–2024, page 32. [Annual Report 2023–2024 | Radio-Canada](#)
- 13 In 2025, Prime Minister Mark Carney announced a \$150 million annual increase to the budget of the CBC/Radio-Canada if elected. See: “Mark Carney’s Liberals to Protect Canada’s National Identity by Strengthening CBC/Radio-Canada,” Liberal Party of Canada, April 4, 2025, <https://liberal.ca/mark-carneys-liberals-to-protect-canadas-national-identity-by-strengthening-cbc-radio-canada/>.
- 14 Data for this report includes nationally representative survey responses from 2,055 Canadian adults conducted from August 28, 2024, to September 6, 2024, using a commercial survey panel provider. The margin of error for a comparable probability-based random sample of the same size is +/-2.16%, 19 times out of 20. Values shown are weighted means, weighed by gender, region, and age according to Statistics Canada. See: Jessica Johnson, Christopher Ross, and Emma Wilkie, “Do We Need The CBC? A National Survey of Canadians on Public Service Media” (Centre for Media, Technology and Democracy, October 2024), https://www.mediatechdemocracy.com/s/CBC-Survey_2024_Final_MTD.pdf.
- 15 “House of Commons Debates, 17th Parliament, 3rd Session: Vol. 3, Page 3035” (Library of Parliament / Bibliothèque du Parlement, May 18, 1931), https://parl.canadiana.ca/view/oop.debates_HOC1703_03/677.
- 16 Johnson, Ross, and Wilkie, “Do We Need The CBC? A National Survey of Canadians on Public Service Media.”
- 17 CBC/Radio-Canada, see: “CBC/Radio-Canada, There for You since 1936,” <https://cbc.radio-canada.ca/en/your-public-broadcaster/our-value>.
- 18 The history and role of this Indigenous programming is addressed elsewhere in the report.
- 19 CBC/Radio-Canada, “CBC/Radio-Canada: What We Offer,” <https://site-cbc.radio-canada.ca/media/9206/wcag-what-we-offer.pdf>.
- 20 One of Canada’s national newspapers, to provide a single point of comparison, might publish between 100 and 200 online articles a day.
- 21 7,000 includes permanent, temporary and contract employees. See: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, “CBC/Radio-Canada Annual Report 2023–2024.”
- 22 The creative industry in Canada contributes \$72.9 billion and 630,000 jobs to the Canadian economy every year. See: CBC/Radio-Canada, “CBC/Radio-Canada at a Glance” (CBC/Radio-Canada, February 2025), <https://site-cbc.radio-canada.ca/documents/about-apropos/cbc-radio-canada-at-a-glance.pdf>.
- 23 In this report, we refer to the CBC/Radio-Canada as one entity as the corporation is currently structured, unless otherwise specified.
- 24 Department of Canadian Heritage, “Some Facts on the Canadian Francophonie,” Government of Canada, May 30, 2024, <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/official-languages-bilingualism/publications/facts-canadian-francophonie.html>.



2. What Should the CBC Be?

The History of Public Media

To understand why the CBC/Radio-Canada is what it is today, it helps to understand the reason it was created, and how it compares to other public media services around the world.

Like Canada, most democratic countries (including all members of the G7) have some form of public service media. Two of the biggest names in public service media, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and National Public Radio (NPR) in the United States, also happen to be two of the most recognizable media brands among English speakers. But public service media organizations vary in size and scope; they exist for a variety of localized reasons and to serve their audience's specific needs. According to the Public Media Alliance, a non-profit and advocacy organization based in the United Kingdom, more than 100 media outlets worldwide self-identify as public media services.¹

Some of today's leading public media services were founded in the 20th century as a means to combat propaganda and influence from private and international radio broadcasts. The BBC began broadcasting nationally on radio in Britain in 1922 in an effort to regulate the spread of information and combat propaganda in private broadcasting. In Germany, public media services were introduced by allied western countries after WWII with the purpose of being independent from the state, but not privately owned, in order to help the public to become empowered to participate in a healthy democracy.² Many European countries established free, nation-wide radio services designed to reach all citizens regardless of who or where they were.

There is a longstanding correlation between public media and democracy, which includes support for a form of media free of political bias or commercial influence, which can also hold institutions to account and reflect the voices of citizens across the spectrum. As Sue Gardner³, former head of CBC.ca and executive director of the Wikimedia Foundation, explained in the 2017 report "Public



The CBC/Radio-Canada in 1944-45.
Left: Madame Dandois, sound engineer in Montreal at her console.
Right: Announcers for the CBC's short wave service at the Crescent Street studio in Montreal.

broadcasting: Its past and its future,” those who founded public broadcasting saw it as “an opportunity to support the health of democracy” and designed the organizations to be “key institutions helping societies be well-informed, politically engaged and socially cohesive.”⁴

Public Media in the Digital Age

Over the last century, many countries updated the mandates for their public media services in response to shifts in technology and distribution methods: At first it was radio, then television, then direct-to-home satellite TV, then the internet. It was during the transition from radio to television that Canadian scholar Marshall McLuhan published his enduring line, “The medium is the message.”⁵

Even just within the last two decades, the way people consume media has changed dramatically: Widespread adoption of the internet led news to go online, followed by the rise of social media platforms like X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook as distribution channels. Streaming brought competition to traditional Canadian film and television production. Much like the experience of driving Canada's highways before speed limits and seatbelts were implemented, perhaps, the digital age has changed the media landscape through the influx of misinformation and disinformation, complicated further by the rise of content created through artificial intelligence.

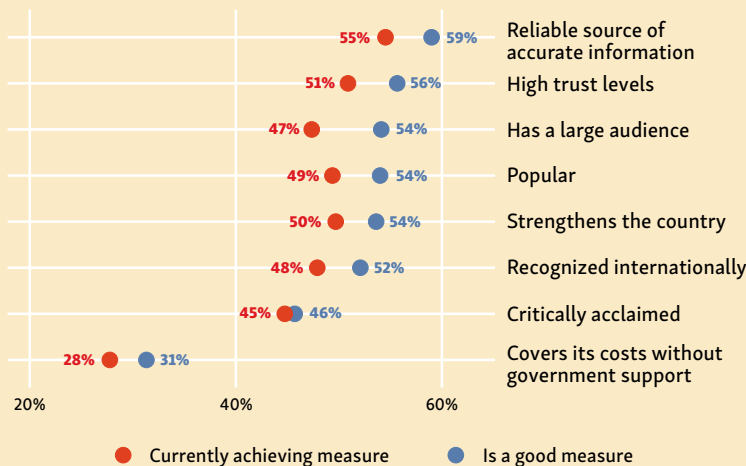
In many countries, digital advancements and widespread adoption of technology have generally surpassed the rate at which governments can create legislation and/or for public media services to adapt. These factors have implications for public safety, societal cohesion and democracy. In an effort to evolve along with technological advancements, some governments worldwide are now seeking to modernize their public media services. Where these updates have particular relevance for Canada, we've discussed them in the section, “**Mandates: The Legal Blueprint for Public Media.**”

Worldwide, countries maintain public media services for a variety of modern reasons: to keep citizens connected to each other, to deliver reliable information free from political or corporate interference, to support emergency preparedness measures and matters of national defence and to reflect the countries' cultural identities and linguistic minorities, including Indigenous languages and cultures. In Canada, a new rationale for the CBC/Radio-Canada emerged in 2025 with the inauguration of

US President Donald Trump. During the 2025 Canadian federal election, we asked Canadians, “In light of Canada’s changing relationship with the US, do you think it is more or less important to keep the CBC/Radio-Canada?” Forty-five per cent of respondents said the CBC/Radio-Canada is “more important.”⁶ Canada’s communications and cultural sovereignty — which includes such factors as the climate crisis and other emergencies, misinformation and disinformation — and military and economic threats, are explored in the section “[Public Media and Public Safety](#).”

Measuring Success for the CBC/Radio-Canada

Percentage reporting “Somewhat agree” or “Strongly agree”



The Purpose of Public Media in Canada

One of the world’s largest public media services,⁷ the CBC/Radio-Canada has always earned relatively high levels of trust and support from Canadian audiences. Looking at the course of public service media around the world over the last 100 years, however, Canada has generally failed to fund and direct a public media service that keeps up with the needs of the audience, perhaps due to a combination of underfunding, prioritization at the organization that misinterpreted the future needs of the audience, and sheer public policy neglect.

In our fall 2024 survey “[Do We Need the CBC?](#),” we asked Canadians how they defined the success of a public media service, and how well they think the CBC/Radio-Canada is performing according to those measures of success.

The CBC/Radio-Canada scored slightly below audience expectation according to the most important factors for respondents who selected “somewhat agree” or “strongly agree”, including the measures “is a reliable source of accurate information,” “has high trust levels” and “has a large audience.” (At the same time, despite a prominent Conservative campaign to defund the CBC, only 31% of Canadians would hold the outlet to a standard of covering its costs without government support.)

Where do we go from here? There have been no shortage of proposals in the public square recently about what to do with the CBC/Radio-Canada. A few major ideas that we’ve heard over

the last two years include: make paying for it opt-in only; divide up the corporation to fund only the French services; make it a news-only outlet; eliminate the advertising that currently serves as one of its only (declining) commercial revenue streams; and invest in more local news bureaus. We've also heard that the CBC is both irrelevant and not irrelevant; that it is and is not too "woke"; we've heard from Canadians that the age of social media makes an outlet like the CBC/Radio-Canada even more necessary, not redundant.

To date, most proposals have tended to reflect the priorities of a swath of society (all too often, the perspective of an urban, relatively affluent, English speaker) rather than the country as a whole. Even recent government proposals in the form of a mandate review and the 2025 Liberal budget commitment have emphasized funding levels and the legislative structure around funding as priorities, rather than viewing the CBC through the more holistic lens of programming and distribution requirements. The value of discussion about doing away with certain elements of the CBC (television) or emphasizing others (digital) is limited without comprehensive demographic study that includes all voices and aspects of the population — young, old, urban, rural, east, west and various points on the political spectrum.

There is no quick answer to fix the CBC/Radio-Canada without identifying which problem you are solving. Is it to make the CBC/Radio-Canada cost the taxpayer as little as possible? Is it to make a public media service for Canada that is relevant to as many people as possible, and of high quality? Is it to sustain us as a culturally unique nation? Is it to build up as much trust in public media so that we can rely on it to keep us safe in an emergency? Our answer is that it depends which of these priorities we're trying to solve for.

To truly fix — not just patch up — the CBC, policy makers and the organization itself must consult widely and transparently with Canadians. What does the audience need most and how do they want to get it? We don't know, because after almost two years of debate about the CBC/Radio-Canada, almost nobody has brought the people of Canada into the public policy discussion. In the section "[Connecting with Canadians: Rebuilding Trust and Engagement](#)," we talk about some good ways to do this kind of public consultation based on our studies of other countries.

Public Service Thinking

Part of the CBC's journey over the last few decades has been from a relatively well-funded, full-service public media outlet to the seventeenth or eighteenth-worst funded public media service among twenty major countries. The organization has had to balance the mandated expectations of a public media service with a need to generate commercial revenue. Also as a result of dwindling funding due to cuts and inflation, the CBC has made decisions to prioritize areas where it has the greatest audience — national programming — at the expense of local journalism. Our survey found that half of Canadians, whether they live in rural communities or large urban centres, were dissatisfied with their local news options. (Local journalism is now, gradually, being reprioritized.)

When we think of reforming the CBC/Radio-Canada, we should think not of what serves our immediate interests — we should ensure that Canada has a public media service from which everyone in Canada can benefit. A way to ensure that is to re-emphasize the value of what Sylvain Lafrance, former executive vice president of French services at the CBC/Radio-Canada, describes as "public service thinking."

What is “public service thinking” in 2025?

According to the **Values and Ethics Code**, part of Canada’s official Public Service policy, all public sector and Crown Corporations in Canada must abide by the values of respect for democracy, respect for people, integrity, stewardship and excellence. These are all values designed to foster a sense of equity among people and to ensure human rights.

At its core, a public service is in place to help people. In Canada there are many public services that were established with this goal at heart: health care, education, law enforcement, water and wastewater, roads and infrastructure. All of these services are funded from taxes and are in place for the benefit of Canadians. Defined for any federally funded Crown corporation or the public service, they hold a particular relevance to the foundations of public service media, here and worldwide.

Just as these services have specific purposes, each must adapt to changing climatic conditions and innovate to serve the needs of Canadians over time. The CBC/Radio-Canada is no different; in the face of declining revenue or technological changes (such as the shift from traditional broadcast to digital among younger audiences especially), the motivations of the public media service and government policy around it should be directed, at the core, by a commitment to public service values.

We believe that the CBC is currently unable to fully act on these overarching public service principles through a combination of lack of funding, outdated policy, and (perhaps) mandate creep. It has lost what at least two of our experts referred to as “universality of access” — the principle that makes a public media service (as in the case of leading public media services the BBC and France-Télévisions) accessible and trusted.

A Media Service for All

What do we think the CBC/Radio-Canada should be? The biggest lesson of the last two years for us has been the multiplicity of things, both interconnected and sometimes seemingly contradictory, the Canadian audience needs from the public media service across ages, regions, and demographics. That said, we have two observations:

The CBC/Radio-Canada is only valuable if people actually use it, and the CBC/Radio-Canada is most valuable if it reaches everyone.

The CBC/Radio-Canada is currently present in 66 **bureaus** across Canada. But that doesn’t mean that all Canadians access CBC/Radio-Canada content with equal ease, or that they feel equally served by what it offers. Young people, for example, are less likely to use traditional media formats (like TV and radio) and are less likely to engage with traditional media outlets such as the CBC/Radio-Canada.⁸ Conservatives are more likely than supporters of other major political parties to say that the CBC/Radio-Canada is irrelevant and to support defunding it.⁹ Overall, Canada’s population is changing rapidly and no longer resembles the one addressed in the 1991 “Broadcasting Act,” let alone the one when the CBC/Radio-Canada was founded a century ago following WWI. In order to fully serve the Canadian audience regardless of age, region, income or identity, the CBC/Radio-Canada needs to consider where people access journalism, the type of content they need from public service media and on what platforms they are most likely to consume it. For many audiences, accessibility means feeling seen and represented by the media that covers them.

Other countries are looking at similar considerations. We have highlighted the following common priorities at public media services worldwide to demonstrate the ways that the CBC/Radio-Canada can better ensure and restore universality of access to reach Canadians.

THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

In 2023, former CBC/Radio-Canada president Catherine Tait announced plans to transition the outlet fully to digital platforms in the next ten years, doing away with TV and radio broadcasts.¹⁰ This follows a global trend — the United Kingdom also recently introduced a **Media Bill** to facilitate BBC's content delivery on digital platforms, planning on making the transformation to 100% digital within the next ten years. But there are several things to consider when making such a move in Canada. The cost of doing so needs to be carefully measured against the principle of universality of access. (For more, see the section “Public Media and Public Safety.”)

The CBC/Radio-Canada's role is to “inform” all Canadians, but often remote and Northern areas lack proper infrastructure to reach everyone whether via broadband or digital means. Currently, there is no explicit obligation in the mandate for the CBC/Radio-Canada to develop or maintain this infrastructure, even though historically the Corporation was charged with developing a country-wide cable distribution network for television in the 1950s.¹¹ Today, the CBC/Radio-Canada maintains 521 transmission towers, whose 727 radio transmitters help give the organization the ability to reach 99% of all Canadians.¹²

More studies are needed to analyze the cost benefit of doing away with the broadband distribution aspect of the CBC/Radio-Canada's mandate compared with the cost of delivering reliable internet access to every citizen — or alternatively, declaring the towers a form of Canadian public infrastructure to be protected in support of communication sovereignty. (As of 2025, according to the CBC/Radio-Canada, 60% of the towers owned by the organization are over 40 years old and at the end of their lifespan.) Moreover, at the moment, radio broadcasts offer the most secure possibility of coverage everywhere, such as in areas affected by power outages and cell coverage vulnerabilities.

However, it is clear that the CBC/Radio-Canada must also continue and even increase its concentration on providing digital versions of its content on its platforms, tailored to online audiences, and investing in ways to boost the user experience using new technology, including AI. As Tait said in 2023, “What do our audiences want, and where are they?... [T]hey're on digital in increasing numbers. And so if we are not there we're no longer relevant.”¹³ The inverse is also true: content that reflects contemporary Canadian life and communities should not be reserved for online audiences (as is the case with some influential programming on the CBC's streaming platform, Gem).¹⁴

Many public media services worldwide are working in parallel to the CBC/Radio-Canada to adapt to their evolving circumstances. We present Australia and Sweden as case studies.

Case study: Australia

Despite its comparably low population density (3.46 people per square km¹⁵, while Canada's is four people per square km¹⁶), the ABC has an impressive digital reach. This is in part due to unique circumstances, including a notably low cable and **pay-TV penetration** rate. ABC's digital services are

expected to surpass TV and radio reach in the near future. A **five-year plan** is currently in place, acting as a guiding document as Australia undergoes a “significant” digital transition:

- Moving away from **AM radio stations**, focusing instead on podcasts/digital radio;
- A focus on providing **seamless and personalized** user experiences via its digital products;
- A move away from “**linear television programming towards on-demand digital content**”;
- The implementation of a digital-first local version of the news program Stateline for on-demand reports on regional issues;^{17,18}
- **A digital-first approach** to commissioning and choosing content, which includes tasking producers and journalists to produce new types of content and to experiment with ways to reach new audiences online (especially youth).

Case study: Sweden

Sweden’s approach to modernizing its public service media mandate focuses on a “technology-neutral” approach¹⁹, to be able to adapt to future technologies as well as current ones. This mandate directs the outlet to create content while allowing it to adapt and reset priorities with time, unlike Canada’s “Broadcasting Act,” which directs the CBC/Radio-Canada to create content for radio and television (but not digital, since the legislation predates the internet)²⁰, and thus effectively forces it to privilege older platforms. Sweden’s **new mandate proposes** that web and digital content should only be “complementary” to TV and radio coverage and that the broadcasters’ own platforms should be their priority online, as opposed to posting on social media platforms. Radio Sweden has also begun integrating AI technology²¹ into its programming services so that when content is consumed digitally, behaviour in the app can be used to personalize news playlists based on the likes and interests of the user. For example, this has the ability to provide more local stories or programming based on the user’s location.

REBUILDING THE LOCAL JOURNALISM NETWORK

Part of the CBC/Radio-Canada’s mandate is to “reflect Canada and its regions to national and regional audiences, while serving the special needs of those regions,”²² but the production of this regional coverage is still subject to limited resources, and is not always broadcast on a national level.

Many smaller and remote communities in Canada have lost the infrastructure to be able to produce their own news. Investment in local production by the CBC/Radio-Canada would provide essential cultural programming while also contributing to the sustainability of media production in these areas.

In January 2025 the CBC/Radio-Canada announced that it would be hiring up to 30 new permanent journalists to work in 22 underserved communities, with the stated goal of “delivering trusted news to even more Canadians.”²³ A number of these roles — particularly those in rural and interior B.C., Alberta and Saskatchewan — will be based in currently Conservative political ridings. Prime Minister Mark Carney also pledged an additional \$150 million to the Corporation in April 2025, in part to strengthen local news with more local bureaus and reporters.²⁴

These are good measures. But they don't replace the thousands of journalism jobs lost in Canada, many of them at local newspapers and stations, in the last 20 years. The Canadian Media Guild estimates 12,000 positions in the media industry were lost in the last decade,²⁵ primarily impacting local newsrooms. As acknowledged by Senator Andrew Cardozo in the 2025 report "[CBC/Radio-Canada, An essential service](#)," the scale of closed local news outlets in Canada has left "a void that is not easily filled."²⁶

Case Study: The United Kingdom

The Royal Charter, the legislation that outlines the obligations and purpose of the the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)²⁷, includes a commitment aimed at addressing a gap in the "reporting of [local democracy](#) issues across the UK." Like Canada, the UK has seen a "collapse of local media,"²⁸ and reports hundreds of shuttered local outlets in the last decade. The BBC's [Local News Partnerships](#) initiative was set up in 2017 as a link "between the BBC and the UK regional news industry aimed to support public service reporting, sustain local democracy and improve skills in journalism." This initiative includes:

- News Hub: A database of BBC video material that other media organizations can access;
- Shared Data Unit: A team of data journalists to collect and share data with other outlets;
- Local Democracy Reporters: 165 locally employed reporters to cover municipal and public affairs in their region to pass along to the BBC and other outlets.

The News Hub and Shared Data Unit provide resources to smaller media organizations, giving them the ability to cover local issues that have national significance without having to spend additional resources to research more widely and produce their own reporting in other jurisdictions. This collaboration gives local outlets the possibility for more rich coverage and redirects spending towards their own operations. The Local Democracy Reporters are journalists paid by the BBC who work for separate regional news outlets across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Their mission is to cover local politics in their areas and act as journalist watchdogs for their local authorities.

If Canada followed the BBC's Local Democracy Reporters example, the CBC/Radio-Canada could assign even more journalists to work in smaller cities such as Prince Rupert, BC; Timmins, ON; or Rivière du Loup, QC (several places where there is currently no CBC/Radio-Canada presence). Collaborating with other smaller outlets to share staffing and resources could extend the reach of the CBC/Radio-Canada without any major additional investment in infrastructure — and assist in fulfilling its mandate to connect/reach all Canadians. More regional representation in staffing and upper management could help create content that serves rural and remote audiences with equal care as audiences in downtown Toronto or Vancouver — in turn building trust and engagement.

MEANINGFUL DEMOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION

If the CBC/Radio-Canada was created originally out of an instinct to preserve a shared national identity²⁹, the country's culture and values have since evolved toward the amplification of many

voices. Research has demonstrated that diversity and multiculturalism are important parts of the Canadian identity. According to Statistics Canada and Environics, “more than one in four of us are now racialized, and one in twenty is Muslim. The population of members of visible minorities in Canada rose from 9.4% in 1991³⁰ to 25% in 2022³¹ and the Indigenous population is growing faster than any other demographic. [The] Indigenous population is growing almost twice as fast as the non-Indigenous population and will soon surpass two million.”³²

The CBC/Radio-Canada has a strong directive to cover Indigenous, Black and other racialized audiences. The “Online Streaming Act”(Bill C-11) added provisions for the greater support of racialized people’s content in Canadian media to the “Broadcasting Act.”^{33,34} And yet, criticism in the public square suggests a disconnect between the CBC/Radio-Canada’s efforts and reception to its equity, diversity and inclusion strategies.

One possible explanation for this divide is that the high degree of regulation that surrounds the CBC/Radio-Canada (through its legislated mandate, the “Broadcasting Act”) and chronic underfunding have rendered some promoting equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) initiatives more performative than second-nature to the organization. As we discuss in “The Funding Fight,” budgets affect the success of programming for all kinds of reasons, from production values to staff training and marketing ventures.

Regardless, the CBC/Radio-Canada seems to have ended up with content that is both too “woke” for some and not inclusive enough for some of the most important stakeholders in its equity, diversity and inclusion initiatives — its own staff and audience members.³⁵ To be effective, EDI policies need to be authentically incorporated into an organization’s internal and external culture.

Global jurisdictions reflect an increasing trend toward inclusiveness in public service media as countries — many of which, like Canada, have seen sharp spikes in immigration — place more value on representing their total audiences including diverse communities and groups, not just their traditional programming languages, as well as Indigenous populations. In this section, we discuss recent research about Indigenous representation, staff and community and strategic objectives.

Indigenous Representation

In 2020, the **Broadcasting and Telecommunications Legislative Review** published “Canada’s Communications Future: Time to Act.” The influential report presages many of the issues at stake for the CBC/Radio-Canada, including Indigenous sovereignty:

“Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples has become a national priority and is inextricably linked to the promotion of Indigenous cultures and languages. The question of how the legislative framework can best ensure these voices are nurtured and supported is critical. It is also important that the needs and expectations of younger Canadians are addressed.”³⁶

Indigenous audiences are a particular priority for public media services in a number of jurisdictions, including New Zealand, Australia and Sweden, as well as Canada. We include New Zealand as a case study because of the country’s significant Indigenous population (16.5% Māori)³⁷ and structural similarities its public media services share with Canada.³⁸



Senior radio host and journalist Betsy Longchap broadcasting in 2021. Longchap hosted Winschgaoug and co-hosted the East Cree podcast Wihh'teh for the CBC North Cree Unit in Montreal.

Case study: New Zealand (or Aotearoa)

In New Zealand's **Strategic Framework for a Sustainable Media**, public media services commit to work towards shared outcomes with Māori **media agencies**. The framework includes investment and support towards Māori-led journalism, workforce capacity and capability, and journalistic collaboration. New Zealand's **Ministry for Culture and Heritage is obligated** to support the success of the Māori media system in joint investigations, funding arrangements and infrastructure. Moves to improve **diversity within the structure** of public media services are important to uphold their goal to provide content to all their population, including Māori, Pacific Islanders and Indian and Chinese communities. A third publicly-funded media in the country, other than TVNZ and RNZ, is **Whakaata Māori**, the national Indigenous-run media organization.

The CBC/Radio-Canada's **Indigenous programming** is primarily run by the parent company and board, although plans are in place to establish a separate **Indigenous office** “to better reflect, respect and amplify diverse Indigenous perspectives.” Other jurisdictions, including New Zealand, have made further steps towards this goal by supporting a separate, Indigenous public media service (**Whakaata Māori**) that operates collaboratively with RNZ and other outlets.

As Canada's national public media service, the CBC/Radio-Canada's structure mirrors the country: one entity, founded around two official languages³⁹. Our interviews proposed a broad range of scenarios for reimagining the organization, including a scenario where CBC Indigenous is its own cultural pillar, like the CBC and Radio-Canada.

In “Future of CBC/Radio-Canada”, the Ministry of Heritage recommended that the organization develop “a strategy in collaboration with First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities to consider their needs in the context of its activities,” with the organization to be held publicly accountable for such a strategy within three years of its incorporation into the mandate (via an amendment to the “Broadcasting Act”).

Discussions about the structure of the CBC/Radio-Canada, Canada's national public media service, are a reflection of discussions about the country — simultaneously timely, significant and consequential, they should neither be taken lightly nor ignored. We recommend that the topic of Indigenous

sovereignty be incorporated into the next mandate review for the CBC/Radio-Canada — which as we recommend in “[Mandates: The Legal Blueprint for Public Media](#),” should be held regularly, on a schedule, outside of election cycles.

Staff and Community

The CBC/Radio-Canada employs more racialized journalists than any other major media outlet in Canada. With a 55% increase in the number of visible minorities and more than double the number of people with disabilities at the organization from 2016 to 2020, the Corporation can probably be perceived to be doing a “good job” at promoting EDI, especially when not all newsrooms in Canada self-report. But is that enough to reflect the Canadian audience?

In 2020, the CBC reported employing 18.1% visible minorities and 7.4% at Radio-Canada.⁴⁰ In 2021 Québec reported about 16% visible minorities in the population⁴¹, while in Canada overall, Statistics Canada has projected up to 30% to be a visible minority by 2026.⁴² This changes significantly in Toronto, in which over half of the population in a 2021 census identified as belonging to a racialized group.⁴³ The CBC/Radio-Canada needs to continuously update its equity and inclusion targets. Racial diversity is just one measure of EDI; the CBC/Radio-Canada also measures and sets goals for other forms of diversity, such as accessibility.⁴⁴

A 2024 study from the University of Calgary (“[Representing the Underrepresented](#)”) reports that while the CBC/Radio-Canada does make consistent efforts to represent Indigenous and Black groups in its newsrooms and reporting, many other groups remain underrepresented. In addition, the study found that coverage of issues affecting underrepresented communities is often insufficient in its depth, due to a disconnect between the journalist and that community. The authors found that in several cases, however, “self-identifying diverse journalists use their lived experiences to provide additional context and nuance to diverse stories, which provides the opportunity for education.”⁴⁵

In recent years, a number of journalists of colour have questioned the CBC/Radio-Canada’s ability to embody equity, diversity and inclusion goals meaningfully. Others have described pushback against their identities or beats as an obstacle to creating effective journalism.⁴⁶ The relationship between inclusive practices and serving audiences is explicated in a 2024 article published in J-Source, a publication led by the Toronto Metropolitan University and Carleton University journalism schools, by Nana aba Duncan. In it, the former host and producer describes the seemingly benign traditional practice at the CBC/Radio-Canada of extrapolating the response of a hypothetical member of the CBC audience with a view to ensuring the accessibility of a particular story. In time, her understanding of this fictional person, “Susie in Saskatchewan”⁴⁷ became concretized as educated, heterosexual and white: “As a Black person, I was trained to view my own perspective as secondary to Susie’s. That means I did not make it a regular practice to prioritize Black, African or immigrant communities,” she writes⁴⁸.

As discussed, EDI measures are most effective when they are organic to an organization — thus, the importance of representing people who are racialized and/or members of other equity-seeking groups (reflecting the actual demographic makeup of Canada) in leadership positions. As Pacinthe Mattar, a former CBC journalist and media scholar, writes: “It’s long been clear that Black, Indigenous

and other racialized people must be at the forefront of the change in leadership that newsrooms so desperately need—at the decision-making tables, with enough power and security to sit in their seats comfortably, shake the tables or flip them entirely.”⁴⁹ As the national public media service of Canada, where people of many different backgrounds share space, there is room for the CBC/Radio-Canada to be a world leader in the representation of its total audience.

Strategy and Goals

In 2025, the CBC/Radio-Canada released “**Progress in Progress**,” a detailing of the organization’s EDI initiatives from 2022–25.⁵⁰ The report includes an accounting of almost too many individual initiatives to enumerate in communities and provinces across Canada, ranging from developmental initiatives like the Manitoba Pathways Program for emerging journalists to a voluntary gender-tracking initiative in production (a wider industry-led initiative), to “**Strengthening Initiatives, Walking Together**,” its 2024–27 Indigenous Strategy.

Other than communicating breadth, however, it’s not clear what the CBC/Radio-Canada considers to be “success” in this area, nor how it will be clear when it is reached. Assessment seems to reflect how far the organization has come, or how leadership feels about the progress made, rather than where it wants to go. For instance:

“We have seen some interesting progress in employee engagement over the life of our EDI Plan, notably as a result of mentoring and targeted leadership development programs that target underrepresented groups. This appears to be paying off.”⁵¹

However, in May 2025, the CBC/Radio-Canada released a progress report for “**Breaking Barriers**,” its 2023–24 accessibility plan, which contains formal metrics across a range of operational activities with defined objectives and impact measurements, including acknowledgement of circumstances where no current system of measurement exists. The project also includes a feedback portal through which members of the audience can report where and how they lack accessibility to the CBC/Radio-Canada’s services. This is the kind of public engagement with which the organization could truly engage Canadians, here as well as with other forms of consultation (such as regional representation).

It’s clear that the CBC/Radio-Canada has the will and the ability to do more to cover the country holistically, given the mandate and adequate resources to do so. To make the organization’s content truly reflective and relevant to the diverse communities of Canada, this aspect of its programming, culture and organization needs a clear and cohesive strategy developed in the public interest — such as a broad demographic survey of the audience’s needs, as we recommend, would entail.

Based on our interviews and secondary research, these are some ways the CBC can improve its public perception for meaningful (not tokenistic) EDI:

- Prioritizing measurable, transparent and formal diversification of the upper management, governing boards and editorial team incorporating a range of identities: race, cultural background, language, education, expertise and other metrics.⁵²
- Encouraging journalists and editors of diverse backgrounds to bring their cultural

knowledge and lived experience into their reporting for more immersive storytelling.^{53,54}

- Seeking out members of a community or in proximity to report on stories that affect that community.
- Creating more opportunity for Indigenous programming to be managed by Indigenous people (affording sovereignty to Indigenous leadership on staff in developing and approving story ideas, for instance).
- Increasing research and documentation of underrepresented groups within the Corporation and proactive efforts to reflect the multicultural reality of Canada.
- Increasing and creating more opportunities for ongoing EDI training within the Corporation.⁵⁵

The most important factor in evolving the CBC/Radio-Canada in our view is to include the voices of Canadians — until now, relatively and regrettably left out of the discussion about the future of Canada’s national public media service. In subsequent sections, we explore some ways to do just that, and how to bring the CBC/Radio-Canada in line with what Canadians want and need it to be.

- 1 Public Media Alliance. “Public Media Worldwide.” <https://www.publicmediaalliance.org/about-us/what-is-psm/public-media-worldwide/>.
- 2 J.J. Sylvia IV, “Media System in Germany,” in *Introduction to Communication and Media Studies* (Fitchburg, Massachusetts: ROTEL (Remixing Open Textbooks with an Equity Lens) Project, 2024), <https://rotel.pressbooks.pub/comm-media-studies/chapter/9-6-media-system-in-germany/>.
- 3 Sue Gardner’s Blog. “About,” July 17, 2010, <https://suegardner.org/about/>.
- 4 Sue Gardner, “Public Broadcasting: Its Past and Its Future” (Knight Foundation, 2017), <https://knightfoundation.org/public-media-white-paper-2017-gardner/>.
- 5 Marshall McLuhan, “The Medium Is the Message,” in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, 1964, <https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/mc-luhan.mediummessage.pdf>.
- 6 Among all Canadians surveyed, 32% said there is no change in their current views; 12% said in light of Canada’s changing relationship to the US, the CBC/Radio-Canada is less important, while 12% had no response.
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3. Mandates: The Legal Blueprint for Public Media

What is a Mandate?

The day-to-day work of public media services like the CBC/Radio-Canada — which includes the specific content, the means of distribution and even the emphasis on news and entertainment programming — is determined by the high-level direction set by their mandates. The mandates for public service media vary according to the needs and culture of their jurisdictions. While many programming objectives, like Canada’s “to inform, enlighten and entertain” follow the premise of the BBC’s Royal Charter to “inform, educate and entertain,”¹ others variously prioritize information delivery and emergency preparedness (Sweden², Japan³), preserving a sense of national identity (Australia⁴, Italy⁵) or reflecting and connecting with all segments of the country’s diverse population (New Zealand⁶, Germany⁷).

Like the CBC/Radio-Canada, a number of public media services worldwide face new political challenges to funding and have seen audiences shift from traditional media channels such as television and radio to digital platforms, while undergoing significant demographic shifts in the makeup of their target audiences. Beginning in the late 1990s, the internet introduced vast streams of competing media from private and international sources, on an increasing number of new and digital platforms — as discussed in the next section (“**The Funding Fight**”), this has had an unforeseen impact on revenue as well as in audience behaviour and trust in media overall.

In order to survive these and other changes, many governments around the world have, or are currently adapting and updating their public service media mandates to focus on a variety of new priorities, from protecting cultural aspects of national identity, to relaying information to the public so that they may engage in democratic debate, to providing critical information during public emergencies.⁸

Below, we will discuss how public media mandates come to be, what they are meant to do, and how to keep them relevant. For clarity, we begin with the case in Canada: How did the CBC/Radio-Canada's mandate come to be, and what is its purpose?

The “Broadcasting Act”

Unlike a private, corporate or independent media service, the CBC/Radio-Canada's programming and methods of distribution are not determined by a single leader or market trends. They are determined by the “Broadcasting Act”, the legislation that created the current CBC/Radio-Canada and provides high-level direction as to its activities.

The “Broadcasting Act” states that, among other stipulations, that CBC/Radio-Canada should provide: “A public service essential to the maintenance and enhancement of national identity and cultural sovereignty” and a “Reasonable opportunity for the public to be exposed to the expression of differing views on matters of public concern and to directly participate in public dialogue on those matters including through the community element.”

As such, the CBC's mandate is holistic but also vague. The “Broadcasting Act” does not prescribe what content the CBC/Radio-Canada should produce nor the nature of the content — for instance, comedy shows over news — it emphasizes that “freedom of expression and journalistic, creative and programming independence” is protected by law.⁹

The full text of the “Broadcasting Act” (the part relating directly to the CBC/Radio-Canada — section III) appears on the Government of Canada's Justice Laws website (laws-lois.justice.gc.ca). The CBC/Radio-Canada maintains a shortened version of this mandate on its own [website](#):

“The ‘Broadcasting Act’ mandates that we ‘provide a wide range of programming that informs, enlightens and entertains.’ The Act further states that our programming should:

- ▶ ‘Be predominantly and distinctively Canadian;
- ▶ Reflect Canada and its regions to national and regional audiences, while serving the special needs of those regions;
- ▶ Actively contribute to the flow and exchange of cultural expression;
- ▶ Be in English and in French, reflecting the different needs and circumstances of each official language community, including the particular needs and circumstances of English and French linguistic minorities;
- ▶ Strive to be of equivalent quality in English and in French;
- ▶ Contribute to a shared national consciousness and identity;
- ▶ Be made available throughout Canada by the most appropriate and efficient means and as resources become available for the purpose; and
- ▶ Reflect the multicultural and multiracial nature of Canada.”

The CBC/Radio-Canada has a regulator: The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC). The CRTC’s responsibilities include regulating Canada’s broadcasting and telecommunications sectors in the public interest, which includes all TV services and radio stations, as well as internet, cellphone and telephone service providers.¹⁰

In 2023, an update was added to the “Broadcasting Act” to regulate Canadian content quotas for online streaming services; this is known as the “**Online Streaming Act**.” The Act (Bill C-11) included updated directives for the CBC/Radio-Canada to serve the needs and interests of Canadians of all diverse ethnicities, abilities and backgrounds, as well as being “adaptable to scientific and technological change.”¹¹ However, the CRTC does not have full oversight to the CBC’s digital activity — perhaps, notably, because the CBC/Radio-Canada does not have a legislative requirement to *create* digital content in the form of podcasts, on a website, or via social media channels. That’s why the significance of its 1991 parent legislation, the “Broadcasting Act,” keeps coming up. It was written before consumers used the internet. Yet the fact of a public media service creating online content is a given; in 2024, the CBC News online’s digital audience share was 21%, and 26% for ICI-Radio-Canada online.¹²

Mandate Modernization in Canada

In late 2023, the Honourable Pascale St-Onge, former Minister of Canadian Heritage, indicated the federal government’s intention to conduct a mandate review for the CBC/Radio-Canada.¹³ For many public media experts and CBC scholars, the decision was long overdue. In May 2024, the Ministry **announced the appointment** of an expert advisory panel to guide the process.¹⁴ In early 2025, the Department of Canadian Heritage released “**The Future of CBC/Radio-Canada**,” a set of recommendations intended to inform the modernization of the CBC’s mandate.

The findings of the Ministry and the expert panel, released in February 2025, take on critical issues of funding and public trust — both in states of decline that have left the Corporation’s survival a matter of public and political debate. These findings have been proposed as changes in legislation; future members of Parliament could take

Why Can’t We Just Be Like the BBC?

WE FIRST LAUNCHED this research project, “What Should the CBC Be?”, in 2023 as a series of formal interviews with media scholars and CBC/Radio-Canada experts, but also heard from a wide range of colleagues, friends, neighbours, and the general public. A common refrain among people who support the CBC but find it wanting was, “Why can’t we just be like the BBC?” Founded in 1922, the BBC is arguably the world’s most successful public media service and one of the world’s best known media brands. It produces content in more than 40 languages⁴³ and had a global reach of 47 million people in 2023.⁴⁴ In a media context of polarization and declining trust, the BBC earns notably high levels of bipartisan support, as the most popular news source for both Conservative and Labour voters in Britain.⁴⁵

Virtually any public service media outlet would aspire to achieve the reach and success of the BBC, and so would private media. The scale and popularity of the BBC, however, is hard for any other to replicate. The BBC is funded to the equivalent of over \$300 CAD per user annually⁴⁶; unlike the funding model of Canadian public media, however, and that of many countries, its revenue is earned through a license fee — effectively a technology tax on television owners

up the recommendations and pass amendments to the “Broadcasting Act” (1991).¹⁵

The recommendations in the review are what some might refer to as the lowest-hanging fruit on a list of measures that could help to bring the CBC/Radio-Canada up to the level of the world’s best broadcasters. None would involve five years of consultation to find out what kind of content Canadians are really asking for. The recommendation to double the current funding level could have a huge impact on the production value of the content the CBC creates. At the same time, in their current form, the recommendations likely wouldn’t address the areas that are top of mind for most Canadians: programming and the various platforms on which the CBC/Radio-Canada is available.

To discern a truly holistic cultural mandate for the CBC/Radio-Canada would take time, stakeholder input and some degree of public engagement or in-depth study of the country and its needs. The “Future of CBC/Radio-Canada” is the beginning of such a review — a one-year audit that has identified the biggest problems. The recommendations do highlight the need for “long-term predictable funding” that would be written into law¹⁶, and a suggestion to double the per capita contribution to its budget, as well as some other recommendations. However, as it stands, Canada still doesn’t have the full-scale demographic mandate review of the CBC/Radio-Canada it needed to find out how the CBC/Radio-Canada should evolve.

What do Canadians Want From the CBC/Radio-Canada?

In the fall of 2024, we surveyed over 2,000 Canadians¹⁷ to ask if they agreed with certain criticisms commonly made in opinion columns, online, and in interviews about the CBC/Radio-Canada. Responses were significantly split on a number of issues, showing perhaps how the CBC/Radio-Canada indeed means different things to different people. No single perspective emerges, other than the fact that 78% of respondents said they want to keep the outlet up and running, and 79% believe it to be as important or more important in the age of social media.

The debate of the past two years reflects an ongoing reality for the CBC/Radio-Canada, which is that the needs and nature of the organization are often debated most intensely around election

or people using their streaming service BBC iPlayer.⁴⁷ The license fee model is considered outdated in many jurisdictions, and even the BBC is exploring ways to evolve with alternative revenue models.⁴⁸

Though the BBC primarily serves a relatively small geographic area, consisting of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, it has a vast international audience as well. In Canada, the CBC/Radio-Canada serves a relatively small population for its geographical size, and creates content for a multilingual, multicultural local audience. It is stretched thin. It’s also more challenging, although clearly not impossible, to sell international audiences on “The Great Canadian Baking Show” the way its British originator did its original version. The CBC’s “Schitt’s Creek” won American Emmy awards in 2020 and 2021, out-performing the only other Canadian TV show that people around the world might likely associate with Canada — “Trailer Park Boys.”⁴⁹

It might be hard for the BBC itself to create the conditions for its success again. But the overwhelming influence of the BBC speaks to what audiences value in good public service media, and it serves as proof of concept with its: high production values, breadth of content on 20 national TV and radio channels, over ten international TV channels (including a range of news and cultural programming offered on a choice of platforms) and cultural significance.⁵⁰

periods — in the case of Canada’s political conversation since 2023, the nature of the organization is being debated if not wholly for political reasons then on a political calendar, even while 78% of Canadians want the CBC/Radio-Canada to continue. The current climate illustrates that political debate and opinion columns don’t necessarily reflect the views of most Canadians.

Reforming the Mandate Review Process

The first step in reforming the mandate of the CBC/Radio-Canada is formalizing and modernizing the mandate review process itself. To that end, we recommend the following policy changes to the way mandate reviews for the national public media service are currently conducted in Canada.

1. HOLD MANDATE REVIEWS MORE OFTEN

Currently, there are no real requirements about the frequency or nature of mandate reviews for the CBC/Radio-Canada. Consequently, the government has performed one major mandate review of the corporation in more than 30 years. Adjustments have yielded separate legislation through the years (2023’s “Online News Act,” for instance) but no comprehensive review has looked at the CBC holistically through the lens of how it best serves Canadians, until now. Likewise, nor is it clear how often the CBC/Radio-Canada’s mandate and funding requirements should be re-aligned.

This has multiple downstream effects: One of them is that the CBC/Radio-Canada’s annual budget is consistently unreliable and its annual debate in Parliament does not allow for meaningful long-term changes. (One of the primary conclusions of “An analysis of CBC’s financial history from 1937 to 2019,” a 300-page report on the CBC’s funding since its inception, says, “Parliament has often permitted Canada’s largest cultural institution to operate with insufficient resources to meet the requirements established by Parliament for CBC.”¹⁸) An April 2025 **campaign commitment** from Prime Minister Mark Carney’s Liberal government would make the CBC’s funding statutory, not parliamentary — meaning its budget would fall outside the parliamentary budget review process and it would not be subject to change year-to-year.¹⁹

Even if this proposed change addresses the funding crisis, it does not ensure regular, timed and thorough reviews of the organization and its purpose — reviews that would ensure the CBC/Radio-Canada not only meets the needs of its audience, but doesn’t have to defend its existence.

In many other countries, mandate reviews for public media take place independently from election campaigns, often scheduled every set number of years as a form of general maintenance and updating. The following public media services have put processes in place to ensure their mandate reforms follow a process that avoids political interference, and puts the focus of the changes on the needs of their audiences.

- **Sweden:** The mandates of public media services are implemented for eight-year periods, ensuring that they reflect contemporary technologies and media environments. The review is conducted by a parliamentary committee composed of representatives from all elected political parties, and is scheduled to avoid overlap with election cycles.²⁰

- **The United Kingdom:** The BBC Charter acts as a guiding document in terms of **governance and regulation**, and it is renewed every 10 years. “The Charter also outlines the Corporation’s governance and regulatory arrangements, including the role and composition of the BBC Board.” The government conducts a mid-term review, to assess how well the corporation is meeting its obligations at the half-way point of its Charter.

A scheduled review process such as we recommend, following the model established in the United Kingdom, Sweden and other jurisdictions (also involving representatives from all elected parties, or even representatives from each regional outlet), would protect the institution from perceptions of political interference as well as help the CBC/Radio-Canada better meet the particular needs and interests of Canadians.

2. PRESERVE THE CBC’S POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE

Another facet of the 2025 mandate review recommendations for the CBC/Radio-Canada is the need to keep the organization at arms’ length from the government to maintain its editorial independence. Although steps have been taken over the last decade to depoliticize the appointment of the president of the CBC/Radio-Canada as for all governor-in-council appointments, the fact is that the CBC/Radio-Canada president and board members are appointed by the political government.

To the extent that perception is reality, this independence could be further and formally strengthened through the implementation of best practices from other jurisdictions. The mandate review process in Sweden, for instance, avoids partisanship by including members of opposing political parties in its decisions. (The CBC’s 2025 mandate review was conducted by the Liberal government.)

In its 2025 mandate recommendations²¹ the Ministry of Heritage suggests modernizing the appointments of CBC/Radio-Canada’s board of directors: “The current process for appointing the CBC/Radio-Canada President and CEO, and members of the Board of Directors helps to protect the Corporation’s independence, but it is not inscribed in legislation. Furthermore, the government is more closely associated with it than in most other Western democracies.”

In addition to legislating a method of depoliticizing appointments to the CBC/Radio-Canada’s board of governance, in a future state the board would have formal regional and linguistic representation with two seats reserved for appointees with financial skills. Our interviews suggest this likely wouldn’t meet much opposition, especially to ensure francophone representation. The government could go one further and ensure that the skillset of the board includes people with experience in media or content creation.

Worldwide, several jurisdictions are considering the value of citizen or public engagement in the governance of their public media services, with potential relevance to Canada:

- **Finland:** In 2024, the Finnish government announced an update to the Act that governs the country’s public media service, YLE,²² in order to increase transparency with its funding and operations. This comes after a parliamentary working group was assigned to assess the corporation’s funding and public service duties in 2023. Once the update was announced,

the government consulted stakeholders in the fall of 2024 and the new framework is set to be passed into law in August 2025²³.

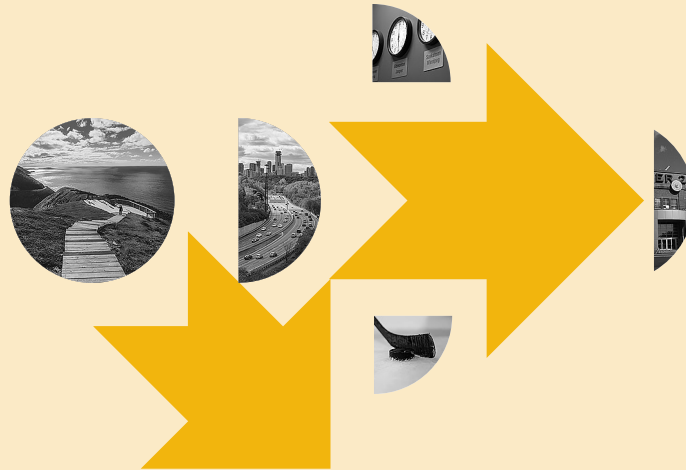
- **Germany:** Public media in Germany is divided into three main (regionally focused) outlets: ARD, ZDF and Deutschlandradio.²⁴ The country's public media mandate was reformed in 2022 after lengthy negotiations involving the heads of each federal state.²⁵ Each regional public media outlet is governed by its own local broadcasting councils who make decisions on programming and budget to best serve the needs of that region. These state governing boards are overseen by local citizen councils, and all are involved in federal decisions regarding public media legislation.
- **United Kingdom:** The BBC's mandate, known as the **Royal Charter**, is updated in full every 10 years, with a midterm review carried out by the government. The reviewed Charters are presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State and Culture, Media and Sport²⁶ (similarly to the way that Canada's Ministry of Heritage oversees our legislation). The reviews have been criticized as a form of government meddling with the public media service, and research and advocacy groups have been arguing for a reform that would involve participation from different regions and the public in decisions.^{27,28}

Germany's model points to the example of a mandate review that takes direction from the audiences it serves — including the very decision to conduct a mandate review. There is mention of public consultation in “**The Future of CBC/Radio-Canada**,” inasmuch as the Ministry proposes that the legislation “require that the Corporation include public consultation on issues related to its priorities and strategies in the context of its corporate plans.” However, the review did not reflect the form and scope of such consultation, nor how in-depth demographic market research of the CBC/Radio-Canada's audience should inform decision-making in the future.²⁹

Similar values are emerging in the UK with the call for a “People's BBC” by which citizens in all regions would have a say in its programming and editorial direction, as well as how the organization's funding is distributed. As argued by **openDemocracy**, “rather than just interacting with the BBC as passive audiences, [with the People's BBC model] most people would be involved in some way in creating it. They would participate in making decisions about how it was run — whether by electing decision-makers to represent them on regional boards, being part of public processes for commissioning programmes, or sitting on a panel to oversee the coverage of controversial issues in their area.”

3. RE-CONNECT WITH AUDIENCES

At its very heart, public media is owned by and for citizens. In a twenty-first century context, public consultations with stakeholders and viewers across all regions is necessary to ensure the CBC/Radio-Canada is responding directly to the communities it serves. In the end, the audience needs to be at the heart of the decision-making process. The mandate review process also needs to be transparent and inclusive.



Such a broad demographic survey or consultation could help cement the connection between funding — currently \$33/year per capita, potentially \$62 if the recent mandate review recommendations were implemented — and the CBC’s offerings. Without context, \$33 can seem like an expendable or unnecessary cost; with visibility to the cost of media creation, indexed to clear deliverables, it could seem like a bargain. Support for the CBC/Radio-Canada would rise if audiences perceived a direct connection between their needs and amendments and improvements to the CBC they see.³⁰

The following examples already in use in other international jurisdictions or within Canada reflect additional steps that can be taken in the process of forming or reforming core strategies for an organization like the CBC/Radio-Canada.

- **Citizens’ assemblies:** A citizens’ assembly consists of a large, randomly selected group of citizens brought together to discuss a given issue and provide a collective set of recommendations for a solution. The group is intended to represent the diversity of the wider population in background, interests and needs, and would mean the services provided by CBC/Radio-Canada were chosen by a democratic decision-making process. Citizens’ assemblies have already been used successfully by the Canadian federal government to provide policy guidance on online safety regulations in 2021 and 2022³¹. The method was also suggested as an official policy of the Liberal Party in 2023 to review ways to improve the country’s electoral system³². These citizen assemblies can be coordinated by independent companies, who engage with both public and private clients to help involve the public in their policy-making decisions.³³
- **Town halls:** Town hall meetings are traditional public gatherings where, in a political context, citizens are invited to ask questions or bring up issues to politicians or government workers. But they can show up in different places. For instance, the CBC Radio’s daily current affairs show “The Current” has employed this format to gather and share public opinion on specific issues as well as to gather feedback from the local communities in which the town halls were held.^{34,35} From 2016 to 2020,^{36,37} the CBC’s “The Current” staged a series of country-wide, public events to allow experts and citizens to convene and share

experiences on topics that affect their communities. These events collected testimonies from a wide range of Canadians and informed listeners of “The Current” of how a national problem often has drastically varied effects on different populations, and requires regional solutions.³⁸

- **Parliamentary committees:** A multi-party committee appointed to review the operations of the public media service, as seen in Finland³⁹ and Sweden⁴⁰, includes input from multiple sides of the political spectrum. This ensures elected representation from a variety of viewpoints as well as regions in the decisions being made to best serve the country.
- **Surveys:** In New Zealand, two independent research organizations⁴¹ conduct annual surveys of the population to measure how well public media outlets are performing against their mandate, the level of public trust in each outlet,⁴² and to look for additional audience needs that are not being met. (New Zealand has three different public media outlets: Radio New Zealand (**RNZ**), **TVNZ** and **Whakaata Māori**.) If implemented in Canada, this method could serve to reach members of the population who don’t currently feel addressed or represented by the CBC/Radio-Canada’s offering. Surveys could gather feedback from youth audiences, people in small or remote communities, or members of underserved minority identities, with questions designed to assess the kind and scope of journalism and programming needed — including what could be retired. Mandate reviews informed by this feedback and the kinds of responses received over time would be able to respond directly to specific needs of the audience it seeks to serve.

To Fix the CBC, Consult Canadians

Historically, the mandate for the CBC/Radio-Canada has only been revised in times of need, and although multi-year funding agreements have been proposed several times dating back to the 1950s, Canada still lacks a formal process to ensure regular updates and the continuous operation of the broadcaster over a multi-year period. Aligning the CBC/Radio-Canada’s mandate reviews to a formal schedule — as in the case of the BBC and several other public media services identified in our research — and distinguishing them from election periods would centre the audience’s needs and priorities in discussions of how the corporation should evolve. It would also help to make change incremental and intentional, rather than enacted out of urgency.

The issue is important because of the ever-changing range of people in Canada, their interests and needs from a public media service. Recent debate demonstrates the risks that can arise when a single body or organization proposes changes to the CBC/Radio-Canada without an up-to-date study of the audience, its technological requirements and media needs. In the current political context, and in the context of global policy trends, such a body should be non-partisan in nature.

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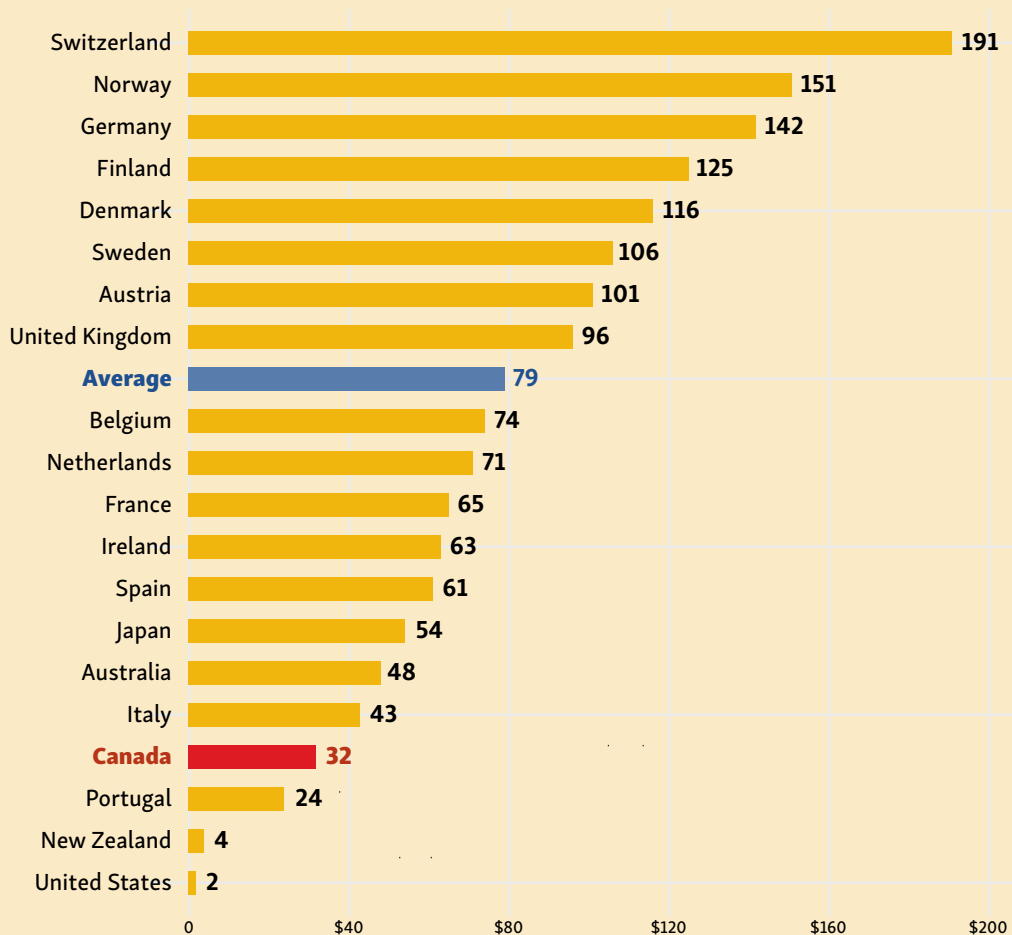
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Facts About Funding

What stands out from our survey of international public media outlets is just how relatively little Canada pays for an institution with the household recognition and prominence of the CBC/Radio-Canada. For 2024–25, the CBC/Radio-Canada is expected to receive \$1.38 billion from the Canadian federal government through parliamentary appropriations, ultimately funded by Canadians through taxes, a per capita spend of approximately \$33/year.² (This number fluctuates annually; in 2022, according to 2024 research, it was \$32.)

Among G7 countries, which include France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States,³ Canada is second to last in spending on public media. Only the United States spends less than Canada, and it has no real equivalent to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation or the British Broadcasting Corporation — national, multi-channel public media outlets designed to reach every citizen with a range of news and cultural programming.⁴

Per capita public funding for public service broadcasters (PSBs) in 2022 (C\$)



Source data: Nordicity, September 2024, via analysis of annual reports. Excludes any revenue from commercial sources, and excludes provincial educational broadcasters.

As is the case with some other publicly funded services — defence and health care come to mind — Canada has a public image as a country that spends, and spends generously, while our spending on public media is only generous and profligate in relation to the US, an outlier among advanced economies. A 2015 survey by Angus Reid revealed that half of Canadians **substantially overestimate** what the CBC costs them as taxpayers. In fact, the CBC/Radio-Canada is one of the worst-funded public media services among 20 Western democracies.⁵

This wasn't always the case. In 2020, the Forum for Research in Policy in Communications, a non-profit research centre, released "An Analysis of CBC's financial history from 1937 to 2019," a **248-page report** detailing the funding history of the corporation. For the majority of its first 50 years, the CBC was comparatively well-funded and funding allocations rose or fell in line with the performance of the Canadian economy. But the report found that "since 1985 public funding per capita for CBC's operations has decreased by 54%, from 14 cents per person per day, to six cents in 2019,"⁶ while the GDP experienced massive periods of growth (like 62% from 1997 to 2018).

Most of the corporation's current devaluation dates to cuts made by the Liberal government in the 1990s — conducted over two years, the cuts amounted to a 30% slash of the budget, as part of the government's deficit fighting agenda. Since 1985, the budget has been in a declining trend, with no meaningful instances of re-investment. Indexed to inflation, the CBC/Radio-Canada is now operating with a much lower budget now than it did thirty years ago. The \$808,450,000 budget it received in 1984⁷, indexed to inflation, would have been worth about \$2.03 billion in 2024.⁸ In fact, the CBC/Radio-Canada received approximately \$1.4 billion in base funding for parliamentary appropriations for 2023–24.^{9,10}

The mandate of the CBC/Radio-Canada, as defined in the 1991 “**Broadcasting Act**,” has not changed significantly. The world has changed, however. Canada's population size and demographic makeup, the shift in audience use of such traditional media channels as television and radio to digital platforms and the declining number of private and independent media all affect the role of the CBC/Radio-Canada in the country.

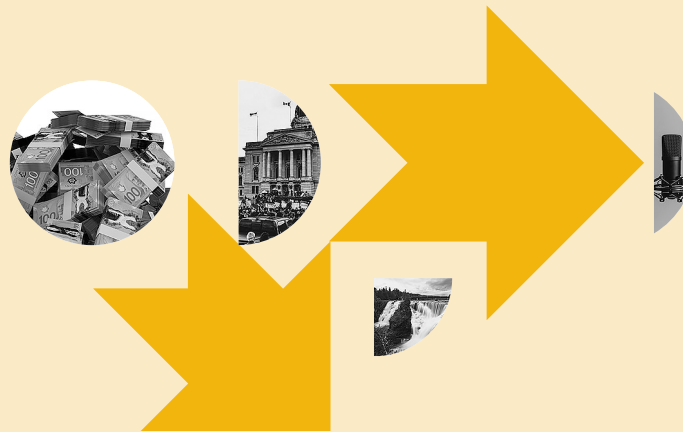
Why is this important? Canada is entrenched in a consequential, widespread debate about funding just as there is good reason to think that decades of insufficient funding may be significantly responsible for the level of support and approval the CBC/Radio-Canada receives from Canadians.

The CBC Has a Shrinkflation Problem

Given the correlation between public support and funding levels, it's hard not to conclude that what's happened to the CBC is a lot like the shrinkflation many of us have experienced at the grocery store over the last few years: If you try to create the same product on a tighter and tighter budget and cut corners, customers will eventually notice and critique the product. That doesn't mean people don't want breakfast cereal. To use a crude analogy, over the last few decades, the CBC has become like a value-sized box of cereal only two-thirds full and packed with filler. In this case, “filler” might refer to **Canadian derivatives of popular US programs like “Family Feud Canada,”** Canadian dramas produced on lower budgets than their US and international equivalents and other elements of the CBC's programming lineup that have drawn recent criticism.¹¹

It's not always true that the value of content can be measured by how much it costs. (The outsized budget of many a Hollywood flop would prove that point.) Amidst the decline of traditional media, grassroots initiatives have emerged out of need to make significant impact, as in the case of **Cabin Radio**, an independent newsroom founded by Yellowknife residents to cover local and regional issues like the 2023 wildfires.¹² However, it's a different task to create and distribute high-quality, comprehensive news and cultural programming at scale across the country in French and English, the way the CBC/Radio-Canada is mandated to do.

In light of the evidence to support a relationship between the relevance of public media, audience engagement and funding, a better question might be: what would the CBC be like if it were funded to the same level per capita as one of the world's leading public media services? This is one of the main recommendations of the “Future of CBC/Radio-Canada,” the **2023–24 mandate review** led by former Minister of Heritage Pascale St-Onge: to approximately double the current \$33 per capita



spending the CBC/Radio-Canada receives through parliamentary appropriations, bringing it closer to the average of about \$62.20 for a G7 country.¹³ Another important provision would be to make funding for the CBC/Radio-Canada statutory, following a model in use for certain research councils (including a portion of the funds allocated to the National Research Council)¹⁴ rather than leaving it up for annual parliamentary debate.

Around the world, countries that pay more per capita for public media services seem to receive higher levels of support from their audiences. Finland’s public media service YLE has the highest reported level of public trust globally, and it is funded by a 2.5% income tax with a maximum payment per person of the equivalent of just over \$250 CAD per year.

That’s not to say that if the CBC were funded to the level of the YLE, the BBC, France Télévisions or any of a dozen public media outlets with more support that everyone would rate it more highly, but funding is the single biggest data point in the current conversation about the outlet’s perceived success and cultural relevance. This report explores issues of trust in public media more in depth in “[Connecting with Canadians: Rebuilding Trust and Engagement](#).”

A case in support of this connection between funding and audience approval can be made domestically. Radio-Canada, which serves francophone audiences, notably sees higher levels of trust and support than the CBC does for the rest of the Canadian audience. As reported in “Bang for our Buck,” a 2025 report by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 78% of Francophones in Canada say Radio-Canada is their most-trusted news source and 67% of Anglophones in Canada say the CBC is their most-trusted news source.¹⁵ Approximately 22% of Canadians are Francophone.¹⁶

There are a range of potential reasons for the discrepancy in trust and support levels between the CBC and Radio-Canada. Trust is declining at a significant rate at English-language media outlets around the world, possibly due to the rise of misinformation and disinformation and the sheer volume of content put forth by US-based platforms Google and Meta.^{17,18} In contrast, trust tends to be higher in language markets whose audiences have fewer options outside their own borders. In Québec, which has both its own culture and language, audiences tend to consume and rely on locally-produced Québécois programming more than other audiences do in the rest of Canada for their respective regions.¹⁹

But it's hard not to follow the money (or funding, in this case). The annual operating budget for the CBC/Radio-Canada, which is structured as one organization, is internally allocated between Radio-Canada, which creates programming in French, and the CBC, which largely creates content in English as well as eight Indigenous languages.²⁰ The allocation of the budget between Radio-Canada and the CBC was approximately 55.65% (English services) and 44.3% (French services) in 2023–24.²¹ No former executives at the corporation that we spoke to thought it should be otherwise; in the words of a former Radio-Canada executive, “It costs a certain amount to run a national media service,” regardless of its audience size. As a thought exercise, it's interesting to consider how Canadians overall might feel if the CBC overall were funded to the same proportionate level of Radio-Canada — which according to napkin math is about \$79 per capita²², effectively in line with the per capita spending on public media of a European country like Belgium. That is also, according to a 2024 report by Nordicity, in line with the \$79 average per capita spend on public media among the 20 countries in the study.²³ It's also, of course, more than the \$62.20 per capita spending level for Canada recommended in the Ministry of Heritage's 2023–24 mandate review.

Just because the CBC/Radio-Canada is relatively poorly funded overall, that doesn't mean audiences want that to be the case. According to our [2024 survey](#), 57% of Canadians would maintain or increase funding to the CBC/Radio-Canada. Overall, 15% would reduce funding, while only 11% of Canadians would cancel or defund the CBC/Radio-Canada entirely. Given that 78% of Canadians across the board desire and support the CBC/Radio-Canada, audiences aren't debating the existence of the organization itself — they just want it to do better.

A useful re-direction for the current debate might be: Approximately 90 years after its creation, what is the CBC for? Despite the recent release of the federal government's approximately year-long mandate review, we are operating in something of a data vacuum. A regularly scheduled demographic study of the audience, as we suggest in “[Mandates: The Legal Blueprint for Public Media](#),” would determine the needs of Canadians and suggest an appropriate funding level to meet those requirements — akin to creating a budget in accordance with a living strategic plan.

The Issue with Advertising

The CBC/Radio-Canada is not funded entirely through taxes or parliamentary appropriations. It uses a mixed revenue model which includes public and commercial revenue, including advertising.

Advertising is either the ruination of the CBC/Radio-Canada's credibility or the vital architect of its financial self-sufficiency, depending who you ask.

Ads are typically shown on television broadcasts and with digital video content on the CBC's website. This means to find updates of breaking events, audiences may stream ads for services like life insurance or household soap.

The Ministry of Canadian Heritage's mandate review announcement in February 2025 suggested that raising per capita funding would enable the elimination of ads and paid subscriptions for CBC/Radio-Canada.²⁴

Across the country, our [own research shows that](#) 33% of Canadians agreed with the statement

that the CBC/Radio-Canada “shouldn’t have ads.” However, 27% disagreed. Forty per cent were neutral or unsure.

The business case for advertising on the CBC/Radio-Canada is not straightforward. Many experts (including the authors of “[Canada’s Communications Future: Time to Act](#)”) feel strongly that publicly-funded media shouldn’t have ads and especially certain kinds of ads, like [gambling](#). Pragmatists, including some past and current CBC executives, say it’s not realistic to be removing any revenue source from a Crown corporation that has been underfunded for years.

But the CBC/Radio-Canada’s primary function isn’t to cover its costs through commercial revenue just as it isn’t to emulate or backfill the needs of the private media industry (all reasons that have been cited, in recent years, as reasons to maintain or do away with advertising). The CBC/Radio-Canada’s mandate is to serve the public.

One thing we do know is that ads are a declining revenue stream. According to the CBC/Radio-Canada’s annual report for 2023–24, advertising brought in about \$430 million (of approximately \$1.9 billion operating expenses²⁵). Twenty years ago, that part of the pie was a lot more attractive. Now it’s a struggle for any media outlet — public or private — to make a significant income from ads. Over 80% of digital advertising revenue now goes to platforms like Meta and Google.

Maybe this is the most undramatic time in history to get rid of ads as a delineator between public and private Canadian media. In his 2025 campaign commitment, however, Prime Minister Mark Carney said ads would stay on the CBC. Ads may be a declining revenue stream, but they remain a source of independent revenue for the CBC/Radio-Canada. The move to do away with ads would need to be accompanied with a substantial increase in public funding.

The controversy about advertising points to a bigger question about access, democracy and the universality of the CBC/Radio-Canada’s content.

Match the Funding to the Mandate

The CBC/Radio-Canada needs to be funded at a significantly higher level to be able to deliver what Canadians want and need from it — including to restore a sense of trust with more of the audience. We believe the influence of funding has affected the CBC’s ability to fulfill a mandate, and in return, directly affected us as Canadians. In its 2025 mandate review the “Future of CBC/Radio-Canada,” the government recommends doubling the current level of per capita spending to reach the average for a G7 country. However, a more effective way to determine an appropriate funding level for the CBC/Radio-Canada would be to study more precisely what the audience is expecting in return. In addition, the funding levels need to be protected in legislation to ensure consistent operations at CBC/Radio-Canada, and to allow for the planning of multi-year projects with a guaranteed budget.

In the following section, we explore contemporary social and technological reasons for supporting a national public media service like the CBC/Radio-Canada beyond the scope of the current budget, and initiatives in place at successful public media services worldwide for building trust and engagement levels.

- 1 Despite the current political climate around funding for the CBC/Radio-Canada, there is historically little correlation between the political party in power and the level of funding the CBC/Radio-Canada actually was allocated. The CBC was founded by a Conservative government and the biggest cuts to date have been made by Liberals. See: Forum for Research and Policy in Communications (FRPC), “An Analysis of CBC’s Financial History from 1937 to 2019: We Tried to Follow the Money; Frodo Had It Easier” (Ottawa, February 2020), <https://frpc.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Public-funding-of-CBC-operations-2020-4-February.pdf>.
- 2 “Federal Budget Boosts Funding for CBC/Radio-Canada, Executives Say Significant Job Cuts No Longer Needed,” CBC News, April 17, 2024, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/federal-budget-cbc-funding-1.7175927>.
- 3 Global Affairs Canada, “Canada and the G7,” Government of Canada, https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/international_relations-relations_internationales/g7/index.aspx?lang=eng.
- 4 On May 1 2025, US president Donald Trump signed an executive order to cut funding to National Public Radio (NPR) and Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), two major American public media services. See: Qasim Nauman, “Trump Signs Executive Order Seeking to End Federal Funding for NPR and PBS,” The New York Times, May 2, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/02/us/politics/trump-funding-npr-pbs.html>.
- 5 Nordicity, “International Comparison of Public Funding for Public Service Broadcasting, 2018,” <https://site-cbc.radio-canada.ca/documents/vision/strategy/latest-studies/Nordicity-analysis-of-government-support-for-public-service-broadcasting-april-2020.pdf>.
- 6 Forum for Research and Policy in Communications (FRPC), An Analysis of CBC’s Financial History from 1937 to 2019: We Tried to Follow the Money; Frodo Had It Easier (Ottawa, 2020), <https://frpc.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Public-funding-of-CBC-operations-2020-4-February.pdf>.
- 7 Ibid., 224.
- 8 “In 2023, the Canadian federal government’s funding for CBC/Radio-Canada was 37% lower in real-dollar terms when compared to 1991.” See: Nordicity, “International Comparison of Public Funding for Public Service Broadcasting 2022,” <https://site-cbc.radio-canada.ca/documents/vision/strategy/digital-future/1-international-comparison-of-public-funding-for-public-service-broadcasting-nordicity-september-2024.pdf>.
- 9 “Federal Budget Boosts Funding for CBC/Radio-Canada, Executives Say Significant Job Cuts No Longer Needed,” CBC News, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/federal-budget-cbc-funding-1.7175927>.
- 10 Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, “CBC/Radio-Canada Annual Report 2023–2024,” June 27, 2024, <https://site-cbc.radio-canada.ca/documents/impact-and-accountability/finances/2024/annual-report-2023-2024.pdf>, 42.
- 11 John Semley, “CBC Programming Used to Be Adventurous. Why Has It Bowled to Lazy Ideas and Copycat Shows?,” Toronto Star, February 1, 2025, https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/cbc-programming-used-to-be-adventurous-why-has-it-bowed-to-lazy-ideas-and-copycat/article_99326ef2-dcd7-11ef-bb30-d3a351ca6409.html.
- 12 “We went to 24-hour-a-day live reporting updates... We became pretty much the central clearinghouse for information.” See: Andrew Phillips, Edward Greenspon, and Alison Uncles, “The Lost Estate: How to Put the Local Back in Local News” (Public Policy Forum, February 2025), <https://ppforum.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/LostEstate-LocalNewsCanada-PPF-Feb2025-EN.pdf>, 23.
- 13 Presented during the early 2025 proroguing of Canadian parliament, these and other recommendations were presented as a set of guidelines to Canadians and the incoming government rather than an immediately actionable set of directives. See: Department of Canadian Heritage, “The Future of CBC/Radio-Canada,” 2025, <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/corporate-publications/general-publications/future-cbc-radio-canada.html>.

- 14 National Research Council Canada, “National Research Council Canada’s 2023–24 Departmental Results Report,” Government of Canada, December 17, 2024, <https://nrc.canada.ca/en/corporate/planning-reporting/national-research-council-canadas-2023-24-departmental-results-report>.
- 15 Geoff Bickerton, “Bang for Our Buck: Comparing Public Service Broadcasting Funding in 19 Countries, Including Canada” (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, February 2025), <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/news-research/bang-for-our-buck/>.
- 16 According to a 2024 report by the Department of Canadian Heritage, 84.1% of the country’s francophones live in Quebec, while an additional one million francophones live elsewhere in Canada. See: Department of Canadian Heritage, “Some Facts on the Canadian Francophonie,” Government of Canada, May 30, 2024, <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/official-languages-bilingualism/publications/facts-canadian-francophonie.html>.
- 17 “Trust in the news has fallen, across markets, by a further 2 percentage points in the last year, reversing — in many countries — the gains made at the height of the Coronavirus pandemic.” See: Nic Newman et al., “Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2023” (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.60625/RISJ-P6ES-HB13>.
- 18 Public Policy Forum, “The Shattered Mirror: News, Democracy and Trust in the Digital Age,” (Ottawa, 2017), <https://ppforum.ca/publications/shattered-mirror-news-democracy-trust-digital-age/>, 28.
- 19 With the arrival of international streaming platforms like Netflix who offer subtitled or dubbed content made around the world, this truism is changing.
- 20 As of June 2024 the CBC broadcast in Dehcho Dene Yati, Dënesųtiné (Chipewyan), Eastern Cree, Gwich’in, Inuktitut, Inuvialuktun, Sahtu Got’ine Godi, and Tłıchq (Tlicho). This programming is discussed in more detail in this report in the section “Public Media and Public Safety.” See also: “CBC/Radio-Canada Celebrates National Indigenous History Month,” CBC/Radio-Canada, June 13, 2024, <https://cbc.radio-canada.ca/en/media-centre/national-indigenous-history-month-june-2024>.
- 21 “Operating expenses for the year ended March 31” in Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, “CBC/Radio-Canada Annual Report 2023–2024,” 39.
- 22 Half of the \$1.4B budget divided by 22% of the population of 40.1M is \$79.3 per person.
- 23 Nordicity, “International Comparison of Public Funding for Public Service Broadcasting 2022.”
- 24 Marie Woolf, “Heritage Minister Proposes Almost Doubling Public CBC Funding, Ending Advertising and Subscriptions,” *The Globe and Mail*, February 20, 2025, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-heritage-minister-proposes-almost-doubling-public-cbc-funding-ending/>.
- 25 Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, “CBC/Radio-Canada Annual Report 2023–2024,” 26, 33.



5. Public Media and Public Safety

Asked about the relevance of the CBC/Radio-Canada, most Canadians would probably begin by considering the content they've engaged with recently: television, radio, podcasts and digital news.¹ Understandably, news broadcasts, social media feeds and flagship cultural programs like “**The National**,” CBC’s nightly English television news broadcast, and “**Tout le monde en parle**,” Radio-Canada’s highly popular current affairs show, are the most visible aspect of the CBC/Radio-Canada. But the mandates for national public media services worldwide include a range of directives that extend beyond programming.

Amidst such global factors as the climate crisis, public health emergencies, changing geopolitical relationships, the rise of online misinformation and disinformation and the decline of traditional media, there are increased expectations of public service media to act as an element in an arsenal of a country’s national security measures. In response, many countries are updating or formalizing aspects of the mandates for their public media services that deal with these contingencies and other times that it becomes necessary to reach the population with a single, consistent message.

As Canada has learned from recent experience, when faced with the sudden outbreak of a forest fire, a public health emergency, or other imminent threats to our lives and livelihoods, the key to keeping Canadians safe is making vital information available in a timely manner. As we consider the possibility of the CBC being “defunded” or rendered ineffective through budget cuts, the policy implications of leaving Canada underserved from a communication standpoint must be highlighted.

In this section, we will explore the role of public media in supporting public safety across a few key areas: response to natural disasters and other emergencies brought by the rising influence of the climate crisis, clarity of information and messaging in times of crisis, and connecting the country in the face of threats to public safety and democracy.

Natural Disasters and Other Emergencies

In many countries, the mandate of public service media includes an obligation to inform the population about potential threats to public safety, including natural disasters such as the raging wildfires that have led to evacuations and even deaths in parts of Canada and California over the last few years. In Australia, a country with dense urban centres and a vast and sparsely populated interior, public media outlet Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) played a crucial role in covering the devastating forest fires in 2020, keeping all residents informed with over 670 emergency broadcasts, including several instances of on-the-spot reporting only moments before the crew themselves had to be evacuated. This role in emergency preparedness was made all the more vital by the dwindling local media coverage across the country, leading many to rely on ABC to fill the gaps.

New Zealand's public broadcaster RNZ (New Zealand's independent public service multimedia organisation, founded as Radio New Zealand in 1995) sees its primary role being “to connect and inform” the nation², and that the public media service is a “designated Civil Defence Lifeline Utility in accordance with the Civil Defence Emergency Management Act 2002.”³ Like Canada, New Zealand's public media strives to serve its audience with content that supports and revitalizes Indigenous languages and culture,^{4,5} as well as a spread-out geography of remote and distinct communities. The country recently announced a \$12M NZ (almost \$10M CAD) investment to strengthen news content via a free digital platform to build engagement with online audiences, to expand regional coverage of local issues, and to strengthen RNZ's Māori and Pacific content to make sure the public media service is able to provide services to as many New Zealanders as possible, including the creation of a new emergency information service.

Some regions and countries, such as Japan, have always had an element of emergency preparedness and public safety in their public service media mandates because of the risk of natural disasters such as earthquakes and tsunamis. Other jurisdictions, like Sweden, are adding them now in response to the emergence of new geopolitical, environmental and technological conditions. Efforts to leverage public media to save lives aren't limited by international borders; the BBC's Media Action office, with funding from the Norwegian Development Cooperation Agency (Norad), launched a project in 2019 to invest in environmental reporting programs in Indonesia⁶ to facilitate climate communications with wider audiences.⁷

In Canada, the climate crisis has heightened the need for emergency preparedness measures in response to such natural disasters as wildfires, earthquakes and floods. As recognized by the 2024 report by the Canadian government (“Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy”), “communities in the North are often impacted by major wildfires. In 2023, more than half of the population of the Northwest Territories had to be evacuated.”⁸

As of spring 2025, the CBC/Radio-Canada has no stated objectives in its mandate to provide services in emergency situations. The Canadian government recognized the role of emergency messaging in its February 2025 mandate review recommendations for the organization: “Given the growing global instability and the increasing threat of climate change, the Minister proposes that an objective be added to the Act which would support the distribution of reliable public communications during emergencies.”⁹ Presented during the proroguing of Canadian parliament, the recommendations take

more of the form of a wish list to Canadians and the incoming government, rather than an immediately actionable set of directives. However, these recommendations formally identify and prioritize defence and security as part of the responsibilities of the CBC/Radio-Canada, planting a stake in the ground for future work.

Threats to the funding for the CBC/Radio-Canada pose a direct threat to Canada's information climate and thus, the safety of Canadians, especially those living in communities without reliable media and/or those unlikely to pay for private media. According to our research, rural Canadians are less likely to be satisfied with local media coverage. News deserts¹⁰ — areas with insufficient media coverage, or where residents' "critical information needs" remain unmet¹¹ — are also more likely to affect older Canadians. Survey data reveals that people over 45 are less likely to pay for media, i.e., private or independent news, than younger audiences.¹²

Inaction in this area is likely to have consequences not just for Canadians affected by wildfires and smoke, but for infrastructure and planning — effectively plunging the country into crisis management mode instead of harm avoidance.

Case study: Forest Fires

In collaboration with the Centre for Media, Technology and Democracy, the Re.Climate research group at Carleton University and the Climate Action Against Disinformation Coalition tracked the sources of false information during wildfires in their 2024 report "Flame Wars: Misinformation and Wildfire in Canada's Climate Conversation."^{13,14} Social media accounts from influential right-wing and anti-establishment groups blamed arson by green terrorists and the government for the fires, which further fueled a distrust in the media in the moments when accurate information was critically important. "The chaos affected political leaders managing the crisis, firefighting, evacuation routes and residents making decisions about the safety of their families and communities," the authors concluded.

The previous year, Re.Climate had analyzed 12,000 stories published in the Canadian media about wildfires and climate change¹⁵ and found that "the relationship of wildfire misinformation to wider patterns of climate denial was rarely discussed."¹⁶ According to the report, only 16.5% of wildfire coverage even mentioned climate change, Indigenous peoples were not well represented in media reports despite being heavily impacted and regional coverage was "hugely disproportionate" to the actual size and impact of the fires (the Northwest Territories experienced the second-largest wildfire crisis that year and evacuated over 20,000 people, but received only 13% of the national coverage).

During the evacuations from this wildfire that tore through Yellowknife and surrounding areas in August of 2023, there was a distinct lack of media presence on the ground. The staff at CBC North, headquartered in Yellowknife, along with local news desks in Yukon and Nunavut,¹⁷ were instructed to leave the area, and almost all the reporting on the firefighting efforts came from outside the evacuation zone¹⁸. While locals relied on crowdsourced information from callers to local radio station Cabin Radio for highway conditions and access to resources, it led others to ask why CBC reporters weren't able to get specialized emergency training to remain on the scene in such scenarios.^{19,20}

To meet the challenges presented by the climate crisis and rising natural disasters head on, Canadians need a modernized public media service on which they can rely during these emergencies, not only



Fires in BC in 2022 and floods in New Brunswick in 2018. Like the tragic events at Portapique, NS, access to timely and trusted information is vital for public safety.

for accurate, up-to-date information, but for localized coverage that centres the people most affected, and national reporting that puts these crises in the broader context of climate change, to be better informed and prepared for future extreme weather events. As the country's national public media service, CBC/Radio-Canada offers both the opportunity and carries an obligation to offer this service for Canadians.

Case study: The 2020 Portapique, NS Emergency Response

On April 18, 2020, an active shooter went on a rampage that would leave 22 people dead around Portapique, NS.²¹ A 2022 inquiry into the event looked into why the police initially took to social media to inform the public in a series of posts that were later confirmed to be inconsistent, incomplete and out of date.

During this mass casualty event, which stretched out over 13 hours,²² Nova Scotians tuned into local radio stations including CBC Halifax for updates, but the emergency broadcasts were unable to supply the critical up-to-date information listeners sought because journalists did not have it themselves. One of the victims, Kristen Beaton, had heard of the active shooter from the news several hours before leaving for work, believing that the danger was contained in a different area of the province.²³

"Many have pointed out that internet service is spotty in central and northern Nova Scotia, and Twitter use is not widespread" reported the CBC in a 2022 article, "**Police in N.S. were offered control over public alerts years before mass shooting.**" During the Portapique mass casualty event, the province's emergency messaging system was not activated; at the time, active shooters were not included in the list of defined risks,²⁴ but the decision not to use it has been criticized.

By all accounts, the event (which involved a perpetrator dressed in the uniform of an RCMP officer and driving the replica of an RCMP vehicle²⁵) was unprecedented. It demonstrates that in a crisis, even public officials can lack clarity around the best reliable mechanism for distributing vital, urgent information. A crisis, whether an overwhelmed police force or an environmental disaster, and a vulnerable or uninformed media also creates the perfect storm to place lives at risk.

In hindsight, the lack of coordination around emergency messaging demonstrates lack of clarity among public officials about the best way to inform the public — social media (privately owned

infrastructure subject to algorithmic changes that affect the type of news users see), traditional media and the province's emergency messaging system.²⁶ Changes were made to the emergency response protocol in Nova Scotia in 2021 to allow the police to use the province's Alert Ready system in future.²⁷

That's not to say that public media services like the CBC/Radio-Canada — or the regional outlets Télé-Québec, TFO and TVO — are the only or ideal solution in a crisis: Public media is part of an emergency communication network that includes official streams (press conferences, releases and statements from government and other agencies), social media and emergency alerts.²⁸ The Portapique shooting reflects not a failure of media, let alone public media, but the failure of a system in which media plays a formal part.

In a context of media decline, and an increasingly polarized and misinformation-laden social media environment, the media's ability to be an effective partner in emergency messaging is uncertain.

Service Disruptions and Communication Networks

The potential for systemic communications failure in different parts of Canada or among certain populations is partly the result of circumstance. As recently as two decades ago, there was a radio in most homes able to broadcast breaking news at regular intervals throughout the day. Now, many people rely on mobile phones for access to news and communication, a form of technology that can be neutralized during power blackouts and disruptions to service. In times of crisis, many rely on television news and radio. As Senator Percy Downe brought to Canadian Parliament in February 2023, CBC TV broadcasts were cut on Prince Edward Island for several days during the COVID-19 pandemic due to lack of resources. "The only locally produced TV news in the province of Prince Edward Island is CBC," said Downe. "This cannot be repeated when there's another crisis...all Canadians were desperate for information, and we were counting on the CBC."²⁹

As in the case of the Portapique, NS mass casualty event, historic deployment of the current emergency alert system suggests a lack of clarity and consistency around when alerts are issued and what constitutes a benchmark for issuing an alert.³⁰ Emergency alerts also provide limited context, often requiring users to seek additional sources to make informed localized decisions about recommendations such as to evacuate or take shelter.

During a June 2021 "heat dome" considered the "deadliest weather event on record in Canada" more than 600 people died in B.C. There was no activation of the emergency alert system for unspecified but potentially similar reasons to those of the Portapique, NS tragedy: an unclear threshold of need to issue an alert.

Follow-up reporting suggests that alerts alone wouldn't have saved everyone; in such an emergency, those most vulnerable are very young children and older people (also those less likely to have internet access for news.)³¹ "People did not die because they didn't have enough communications materials. People died because they were unable to escape the heat," said Gabrielle Peters, a disabled writer and policy analyst. More people, too, live alone, and may not have had the resources to respond.³²

Extreme weather and other threats illustrate the importance of communications networks in keeping communities safe. Such examples illustrate the need for coordinated protocol between official

channels (press releases and conferences led by government and official agencies), emergency alerts and the media to keep citizens informed³³. News deserts, areas of inconsistent and patchy coverage (i.e., where no reliable internet access exists) and the decline of professional media — meaning the number of journalists is insufficient to cover the country in emergencies — contribute to threats to public safety, of heightened importance given the rise in likelihood of natural disasters and other need for emergency preparedness measures.

Where Local Journalism Makes a Difference

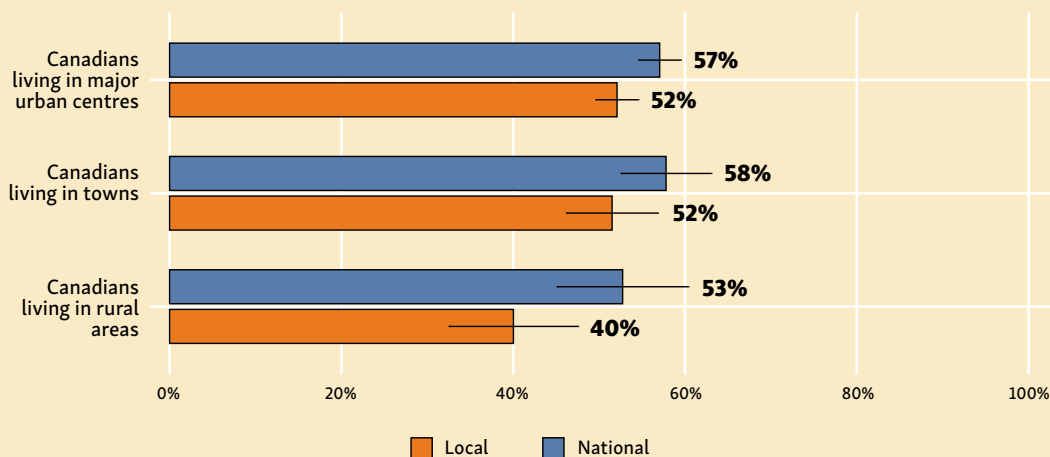
The decline of journalism itself is one of the most significant aspects of the threat to Canadian public safety, especially in rural areas. In our national survey, “**Do We Need the CBC?**,” we asked Canadians where they would seek information in response to a range of urgent, but plausible scenarios. Most people selected reliable local media as their preferred source of information. This stood out, especially as the 2024 survey was conducted in the wake of Meta’s 2023 news blocks, which saw professional news removed from its platforms Facebook and Instagram.

Yet in many parts of Canada, either no reliable local media service exists or there is no high-quality media alternative to the CBC/Radio-Canada.³⁴

About half of our survey respondents were dissatisfied with the quality of their local news options, even in cities. Responses were more pronounced outside urban areas, with only 40% “somewhat satisfied” or “satisfied” with their local news coverage.

How satisfied are you with local and national news coverage?

Percentage reporting “Somewhat satisfied” or “Satisfied”

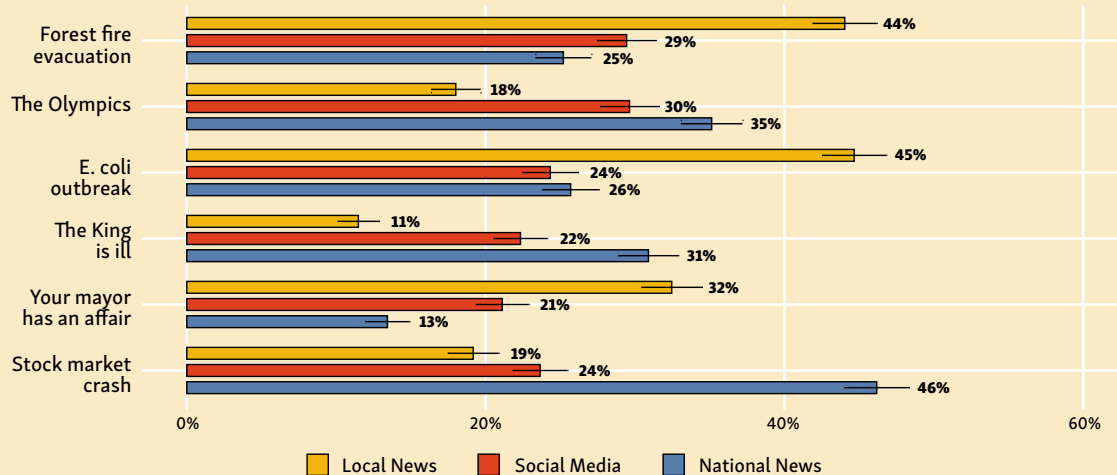


To emphasize the significance of public service media is not to say that public service media is the only way, or the best way, to cover the country in times of crisis. In the case of the wildfires in the Northwest Territories in 2023, local radio station Cabin Radio took advantage of its loyal following and transformed itself into a 24-hour call-in show to spread information:³⁵ “We became pretty much

the central clearinghouse for information,” said Ollie Williams, head of the community station. In a healthy media climate, audiences find multiple sources of information and perspective among independent media, private media, nonprofit media and public media services. Canadians should be able to consult a variety of local, regional and national sources of information.

For each scenario, where would you go to learn more?

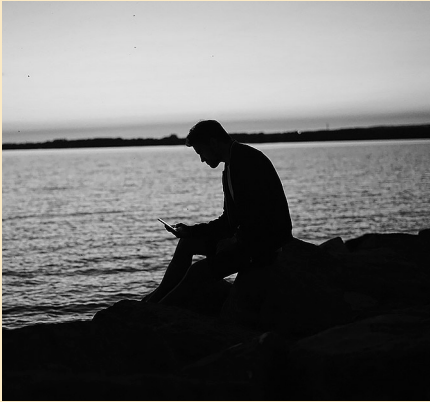
Percentage selecting each news source (selecting all that apply)



Marked by closures (as defined in the section below) and as more than half of Canadians are inadequately served by local media options,³⁶ the Canadian media climate is not healthy. The CBC/ Radio-Canada currently stands as the only option or the best available option in a number of communities.³⁷ There is a strong case for securing and expanding its mandate to include national security-related responsibilities. And to formalize and sustain a core function of public media as keeping the population informed, as the Canadian government has recommended, might be the shortest distance between two points. To keep Canada safe, we might not just need to maintain and protect the CBC that we have. The future might entail *more* public media, not less.

Information Sovereignty

The quality of Canada’s information climate is threatened in two significant ways. The first one is the disparity in quality and comprehensiveness of media coverage across the country, as explained above — Canada is in an almost unprecedented period of media decline.³⁸ As the **Local News Research Project** at Toronto Metropolitan University has found, 529 local outlets in the country have died over the last 17 years; 406 others have started, but of these, only 278 remain in operation.³⁹ The decline of professional media leaves a dent in the comprehensiveness and accuracy of messaging about important issues; in this case the absence of reliable or local media creates an imbalance. Sources of misinformation and disinformation would not be as large a threat if they were offset by equivalent or greater reliable sources.



Through digital or traditional media channels such as radio, Canadians “need access to accurate, diverse, trustworthy information that is presented without political bias.”

In 2023, Meta banned all news on its Canadian platforms. The response was a sharp drop in the number of news articles seen by Canadians⁴⁰ as well as in the amount of content created by some media outlets. The Media Ecosystem Observatory (a sister organization of the Centre for Media, Technology and Democracy) released a report on the effects of the blackouts: “A healthy news industry is a critical part of any democracy: people need access to accurate, diverse, trustworthy information that is presented without political bias. Due to the ban, the Canadian information ecosystem is less able to facilitate that access and many Canadians are simply unaware.”⁴¹

The prospect of Canada as a country where some have access to high-quality information while others don’t presents a communications and logistical scenario that leaves the entire population at risk. The Canadian government recognized this in its proposals from the 2025 **mandate review for the CBC/Radio-Canada**, which include a recommendation to make Canada’s national public media service responsible for “the distribution of reliable public communications during emergencies... This addition would contribute to mitigating risks caused by the circulation of false or misleading information.”

The second threat to Canadian information sovereignty (referred to as “risks caused by the circulation of false or misleading information” in the proposed policy) is more malign. Misinformation and disinformation, foreign interference and AI-generated content can be deployed to disrupt the peace, as evidenced in the case of wildfire coverage or public health emergencies. For example, in 2025, a surge of measles infections in Canada was linked to low vaccine rates as a result of misinformation about the risks of vaccination.⁴² With a mortality rate of 1 in 3,000 cases for that disease, the severity of the problem is evident.⁴³

The emergency preparedness context underscores another role for the media: to hold leadership to account. In a strong democracy, the media does not simply reproduce information released by public officials, but rather reflects responses to such policies. In the case of the convoy protests, a wildfire, or the Portapique shooting, media coverage helped to reflect public concerns; it can lead to public inquiries and in some cases, policy change.

Looking into the role of foreign interference in Canadian democracy and elections, Marie-Josée Hogue, commissioner of Canada’s Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference released in early 2025, concluded: “It is no exaggeration to say that at this juncture, information manipulation (whether

foreign or not) poses the single biggest risk to our democracy. It is an existential threat.”⁴⁴

We can surmise some of what might happen because of what has happened in Canada already.

During the 2022 convoy protests in Ottawa, which included a lengthy (illegal) occupation and acts of civil disobedience, social media enabled organizers to monetize misinformation about vaccines and the function of government.⁴⁵ The impact and longevity of the convoy protest, which occupied Ottawa for approximately three weeks — and which was rooted in relatively simple demands against vaccine mandates in a minority of truckers and soon spread to a list of vague, but severe grievances against the Canadian government — reflects the strength of social media as a tool of mobilization and civil unrest.⁴⁶

According to research published in the *European Journal of Communication* in 2022, “People who use and trust information on social media are more likely to believe false news and conspiracy theories, which has been linked to a ‘spiral of distrust’. The more citizens perceive the traditional mainstream media to be dishonest and inaccurate, the more likely they are to turn away from it to various alternative sources, commonly through social media, that adhere less to standards of established journalism. This can intensify beliefs in false information.”⁴⁷

Studies have shown that “misinformation and extreme ideas tend to spread faster online”, often fueling hostile reactions when faced with disagreements.⁴⁸ Some researchers theorize this is because these online movements can “provide a powerful component of social belonging,”⁴⁹ in the absence of any other unifying source of reliable information for their community. There’s no way of knowing whether stronger local media in each of the communities that created convoy protestors would have offset extremist messaging with more neutral facts about the Canadian electoral system (and indeed, the safety and efficacy of vaccines). The protests took place, however, in a context of disinformation, declining media coverage across the country, misinformation and declining trust.

Military and Economic Threats

The CBC’s mandate “to inform, to enlighten, and to entertain” was enacted a century ago to fight the perceived threat of cultural takeover by the US, in the form of radio.⁵⁰ As former Prime Minister R. B. Bennett informed the Canadian parliament in 1932: “This country must be assured of complete Canadian control of broadcasting from Canadian sources, free from foreign interference or influence. Without such control, radio broadcasting can never become a great agency for the communication of matters of national concern and for the diffusion of national thought and ideals, and without such control it can never be the agency by which national consciousness may be fostered and sustained and national unity still further strengthened.”⁵¹

In his speech, the then-prime minister made reference to American popular music with unsuitable lyrics influencing young Canadian teenagers. Today, the threat to Canadian sovereignty might be framed in the context of the dangers of foreign interference in Canadian elections, or US President Donald Trump’s ongoing threats to annex Canada.

Canada is a large, relatively undefended nation whose reliance on neighbours and post-Cold-War agreements had until recently made the threat of military or other invasion seem like legends from the distant past.⁵² It might seem like an old Cold War threat to invoke Canada’s geographical location

between Russia, and the United States. Each of these traditional rivals, as well as China⁵³, has a military footprint in the North, along with a number of other countries. Experts have been documenting⁵⁴ the militarization of the North by China, Russia and the United States for years.

The world of even 20 years ago, when borders were borders and postwar alliances were unquestioned, is eroding rapidly through the growth of authoritarian regimes and the spread of misinformation and disinformation via online platforms which have no borders. France recently issued a 20-page “survival manual”⁵⁵ of safety information for citizens in the case of military and natural disasters, and Japan has considered the tensions between neighbouring Taiwan and China and publicized their evacuation plans to aid Taiwan in the event of a conflict⁵⁶. Many countries also acknowledge the key role that public service media can play in these efforts.

In 2024, the Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs released “**Canada’s Arctic Foreign Policy**,” a strategy document that addresses the point openly: “Northerners understand how close a neighbour Russia is. Canada must be clear-eyed about the implications of its geographic proximity to Russia.”

The paper acknowledges the intertwined role of communication and culture in keeping territories safe: “Security in the Arctic includes community security, research security, economic security, security against disinformation and any other form of interference and physical and digital infrastructure security.”⁵⁷ And finally, “Strong and resilient local communities are vital to national defence.”

There was a time when cultural sovereignty was an argument for keeping the CBC: the creation and maintenance of a unique Canadian identity, one distinctive from that of the United States. US President Trump’s repeated threat to “annex” Canada as a 51st state puts a literal spin on the need to keep Canadians connected wherever they live.

The connection between nationalism and public safety is an interesting one, and in light of Canada’s distinctive history, a potential minefield. French sovereignty, Indigenous sovereignty, and the experiences of immigrants from all over the world rely on recognition and support for different voices and arguably different needs.

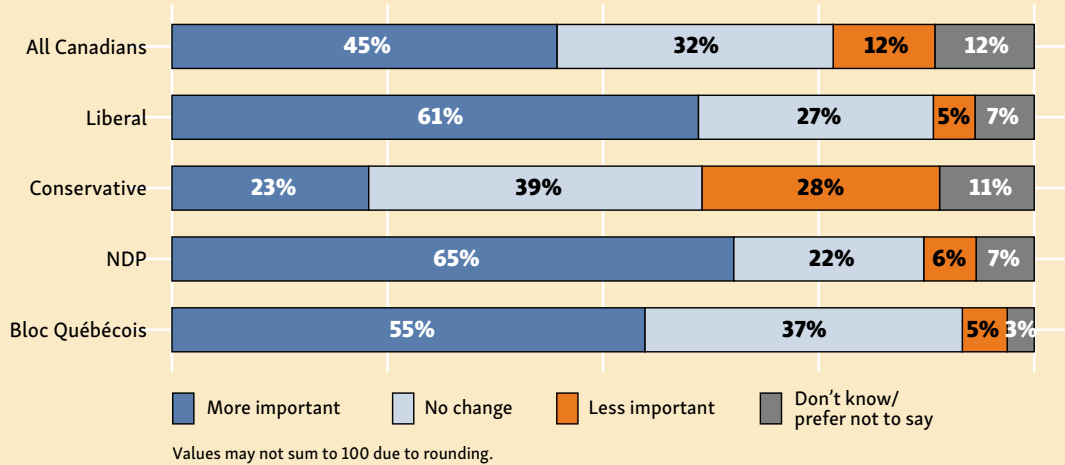
And yet, the challenge of Trump’s America has put nationalism on the table for Canadians, including those who might usually be resistant to participating in a shared vision of the country. In its mandate, the CBC/Radio-Canada is called to reflect Canada to citizens, regardless of age, region or political identification. A 2019 Nanos survey reported that a majority of Canadians “have high trust and confidence in the CBC to protect Canadian culture and identity,” much higher than confidence in the government and private broadcasters to do the same.⁵⁸

In spring 2025, during the Canadian federal election, we asked survey respondents: “In light of Canada’s changing relationship with the US, do you think it is more or less important to keep the CBC/Radio-Canada?” Forty-five per cent of Canadians said it was “more important.”

The CBC/Radio-Canada may not be the best way or the only way to keep the country together. The problem, as ever, is that declining private and independent media leaves the country without common information sources. What preserving the CBC/Radio-Canada would mean to democracy is to save the most likely or most easily remediable piece of the information climate — like rescuing one core thing from a burning building.

Public media services may be a “path of least resistance” media option, but as free services distributed

In light of Canada's changing relationship with the US, do you think it is more or less important to keep the CBC/Radio-Canada?



through a wide range of channels (digital, radio, television, etc.), they can reach people less likely to seek out alternate sources of information through other channels.⁵⁹

Why Misinformation Matters

In 2024, NATO researchers released “Russia’s Information Influence Operations in the Nordic — Baltic Region,”⁶⁰ which tracks the influence of misinformation and disinformation in Iceland in particular. “While some citizens have the motivation and resources to seek out and understand high-quality information, others can lack the same motivation and resources. Research suggests that factors such as political interest, education, age and political preference have become increasingly more important predictors of news media consumption,” they wrote.

The authors also noted the effect of a diminishing media climate on the quality of the information being reported in Iceland, revealing how a declining media climate is a public safety concern:

“Icelandic journalists usually work under immense pressure and do not have time to work on their stories properly. The watchdog role, then, is often not really carried out by the journalists. Instead, special interest groups, opinion leaders, and members of the public can put issues on the agenda, and they are frequently allowed to say what they want in news reports, somewhat unfiltered. One group says one thing, and someone from another group says the complete opposite. The journalist disseminates the material to the public, and then the story is usually over. What is often lacking is input from the journalists themselves, in-depth analysis and critical questions.”⁶¹

In Iceland, the same now-common conditions for journalism everywhere affect the ability of journalists to be objective, critical and comprehensive. The same conditions — overstretched staff, an opinion-driven media climate — can be found in many, if not most Canadian newsrooms and supports an argument for publicly funded media. In an opinion-driven, non-professionalized media

environment, the burden of breaking news and fact-checking falls to larger, better-resourced outlets. The CBC/Radio-Canada, which employs more journalists than any other outlet in Canada, often reports facts and shares video footage cited in media coverage created by other outlets.

Language and Cultural Sovereignty

A primary argument for doing away with or substantially changing the CBC is that private media can replicate its strengths. “The CBC provides opinions and coverage that are widely available in a competitive media marketplace,” states the “Defund the CBC” petition on the Conservative Party of Canada’s website that ran throughout its 2023–24 campaign.⁶²

Public media services (the CBC/Radio-Canada, TVO, TV5, the Knowledge Network, etc.) and private media services also have different primary goals. As Senator Marty Klyne argued to the Senate in December 2024: The “market-failure view” that the “CBC should only do what private media won’t...fundamentally misunderstands the purpose of public broadcasting. While private media aims to generate profit, public broadcasters serve the public good. The CBC doesn’t just fill gaps; it creates a shared national experience.”^{63,64}

The argument that the free market takes care of itself falls apart outside urban centres and certain types of programming. Sports, entertainment, special events and other kinds of content are more likely to be self-supporting through revenue earned through advertising, or subscription services that offer exclusive access. Meanwhile, public health information, everyday democratic processes like city council meetings and other kinds of civic content can be seen as vital to society, but hard for private media to monetize. The sheer presence of private media cannot be assured at times when the public needs it most.

While the areas of interest and audiences for different outlets vary — a sports outlet is unlikely to comment on political news unless it involves an athlete — it’s safe to say that private and independent media’s implicit primary obligation is to support itself financially. Public media, by nature, can cover topics that would be financially unprofitable or speak only to a select audience — such as community sport, local theatre and issues of interest to linguistic or cultural minorities — out of public interest. As Senator Andrew Cardozo writes: “Public broadcasting performs functions that private media cannot.”⁶⁵

This was a known variable during the COVID-19 pandemic: “We are seeing audiences turn to public media in record numbers for the trusted news and reliable information that is our hallmark — and that has become a matter of life and death,” stated the members of an eight-nation **Global Task Force** comprising Australia, Canada, France, Germany, New Zealand, South Korea, Sweden and the United Kingdom, in public media during the pandemic.⁶⁶

Without public media, it’s unrealistic to expect independent or private media to be able to provide comprehensive, accurate reporting on a range of issues, including the operation of bureaus in “unprofitable” (read: low-population) areas. Furthermore, “citizen journalism” is not a reliable replacement for the work of professional media in a true crisis where lives depend on verification of fact, journalistic ethics, technical tools for use in the packaging and distribution of content or to maintain a sheer “boots on the ground” presence in the face of poor climatic and other environmental circumstances.



Timely information is critical for Canadians everywhere. Members of 1st Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment receive arctic field training in Nunavut in 2019. A sailor on the bridge of the HMCS Harry DeWolf in 2025.

The CBC/Radio-Canada is additionally required to be non-partisan through its mandate,⁶⁷ and its editorial independence from the government is protected by law.⁶⁸

The principle of allowing the free market to run its course indicates comfort with leaving some Canadians unprotected in an emergency.

An area of particular significance on this issue is language. Around the world, public media services play a specific role in jurisdictions with more than one official language. In countries which, like Canada, have more than one official language (Switzerland, Belgium), public media is de facto situated to reach everyone regardless of where they are, or the size of the linguistic population.

The requirement of public media services to broadcast in multiple languages in some jurisdictions relates to an overarching mission to inform and unify the population in times of crisis. In Sweden, which has five official minority languages other than Swedish,⁶⁹ public media services must report in Finnish and Sámi, and Radio Sweden's reach to remote and localized audiences is how the organization defines itself as a “unifying force” amidst the “deteriorating security situation” in Europe, according to the **most recent public service investigation** conducted by a parliamentary committee⁷⁰ that guides that country's periodic mandate review of public media services.⁷¹

The issue of language clearly has particular relevance for Canada as a bilingual country. Although approximately 22% of the Canadian population is francophone, Radio-Canada is a national media service — according to Statistics Canada, one million French-speaking Canadians live outside the province of Québec.

The Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (**APTN**) is a national media outlet that reports on issues affecting Indigenous people and communities in several Indigenous languages, in many cases providing the only professional media coverage of specific issues. However, this content — even if it addresses social, economic and environmental issues of importance to all of Canada — does not reliably reach a broad national audience. **Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy** makes a commitment to Indigenous language sovereignty: “Indigenous languages, such as Inuktitut, are essential to the preservation of Indigenous culture and the well-being of Indigenous Peoples and communities. Canada will therefore enhance its efforts to work with its Arctic and northern Indigenous partners to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and best practices related to Indigenous language assessment, monitoring and revitalization.”

The CBC currently creates content in eight Indigenous languages, mostly in the North: Dehcho Dene Yatı, Dēnesųhıne (Chipewyan), Eastern Cree, Gwich'in, Inuktitut, Inuvialuktun, Sahtu Got'ine Godi, and Tłıchų (Tłıchų).⁷² According to the CBC/Radio-Canada itself, the choice to distribute in those languages is “historical, based on our objective to serve/reach people in those regions in their language.”⁷³ The budget for programming in these eight languages is traditionally allocated from the CBC (“English”) operational budget, not Radio-Canada’s.

As it stands, the CBC/Radio-Canada is an important hub and connector of people in different communities. To substantially reduce the CBC’s budget, as Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre committed to do while campaigning to become prime minister, or even just a failure to maintain, would threaten the ability to continue to create programming in those languages.

Indigenous experts point out that the eight languages currently served by the CBC are not proportionally representative of the population of Indigenous people: Cree and Inuktituk are the most commonly spoken Indigenous languages in different parts of the land, and are a fraction of potentially hundreds of Indigenous languages spoken across the territory served by the CBC. We include this context as an example of the role of the CBC/Radio-Canada in reaching audiences who may not be addressed by other media, let alone in the audience’s Indigenous language.

We May Need More Public Media in the Future — Not Less

The conditions of shrinking media coverage, declining trust, and political polarization overlap at a time when Canadians are uniquely vulnerable to misinformation and disinformation and rising threats from natural disasters such as floods and wildfires — or milestone events such as “The Big One,” Vancouver’s long-anticipated major earthquake — not to mention invasion, occupation or attacks by foreign powers.

National public media services like the CBC/Radio-Canada are only as effective in fulfilling their mandates insofar as they reach everyone about the right issues when it matters. This is particularly critical when the reasons for informing and connecting the audience extend beyond programming. Efforts to modernize the CBC and the Canadian media climate should centre this core aspect of democracy that reliable media can fill — to keep the population informed. When it comes to emergency preparedness, the needs of Canada are changing, and the CBC/Radio-Canada may need to be structured to serve the country in ways it hasn’t had to in the past.

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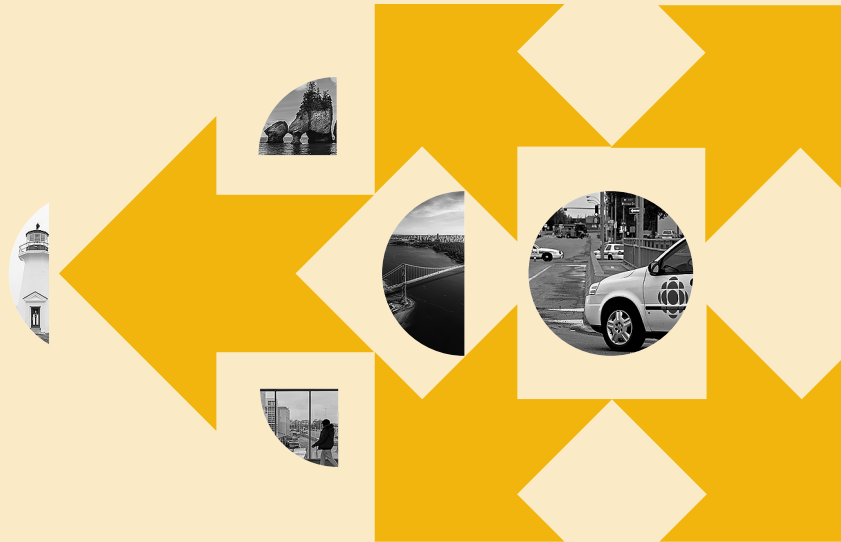
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6. Connecting with Canadians: Rebuilding Trust and Engagement

Trust in public service media is declining worldwide.¹ The CBC/Radio-Canada, typically amongst Canada's most trusted news outlets, is equally affected by this trend. In 2023, trust was significantly higher for Radio-Canada than for the CBC, with 72% of respondents indicating they trust Radio-Canada and 58% indicating trust in CBC² — yet trust in both outlets combined fell by over 17% from 2018 to 2022.³

The decline of trust in media is attributed to a variety of factors all related, one way or the other, to the way that we consume content and communicate with the rise of digital culture. Media internationally has been significantly impacted by social, economic, political and technological changes, which while producing benefits have also weakened media systems.⁴ These include the rise of “news deserts,” or areas without adequate media coverage;⁵ an algorithm-driven social media environment that has contributed, over the past decade in particular, to the polarization of opinion;⁶ the rise of populism and populist movements;⁷ and the proliferation of online misinformation and disinformation, which has driven attempts to discredit journalism and reporting.⁸ The **Reuters Institute's “Digital News Report,”** released annually, has shown consistently that unregulated digital media ecosystems have disrupted “the relevance and legitimacy of professional news sources from the public's point of view.”^{9,10}

Trust is a measure of the success of a public media service because, as discussed in “**The Funding Fight**,” trust, funding and engagement are interrelated factors in the perceived relevance of public media services and the public's willingness to support them. One of the greatest challenges faced by public media, according to Mervyn Warner, the Public Media Alliance's former finance manager, is public media's “inability to command the support of citizens by conveying to them, in simple terms, what the benefits of public media are.”¹¹

According to the Public Media Alliance’s 2017 report “**Funding Public Media**,” “the most limiting factor [for garnering additional funding] is arguably the lack of a clear understanding by governments and the public as to the importance and purpose of public media and why it should be preserved and sustainably funded.”¹² Declining trust makes it hard to argue for the funding that would arguably make the CBC a more relevant, vital public service.

The connection between trust, public support and engagement is recognized in the federal government’s 2025 mandate review of the CBC/Radio-Canada: “There is a direct link between a public broadcaster’s level of funding and its performance.”¹³ A major proposal among the federal government’s recommendations for the CBC/Radio-Canada is the suggestion to double the organization’s current funding levels of \$33 per capita annually bringing Canada more in line with the average of \$62 with its G7 counterparts.

But while “**The Future of CBC/Radio-Canada**” proposes that an increase in funding will lead to a higher “level of citizens’ trust in its services,” we have seen evidence that the causality in this relationship is the reverse: The more people trust their public media service, the more they are willing to pay. Many countries have a far higher allocation for their public media services (like Finland, Sweden and Denmark) via a personal income tax or a public media fee applied to every citizen. These payments are collected “under the belief that public radio and television play a key public service role, and must therefore be funded collectively, regardless of individual use.”¹⁴ Finland, Sweden and Denmark also consistently rank high in global studies of trust in news media.¹⁵

In Canada, arguably many of the CBC/Radio-Canada’s shortcomings could be addressed if it were given more resources to invest in such projects as expanding local community coverage, digital innovation and higher quality programming in general. But in order to do so, the Canadian people must first be convinced of the value of the product they are paying for. In terms of shoring up support for the CBC/Radio-Canada, re-establishing public trust comes first.

We examined scenarios and case studies within Canada and internationally and found that public trust can be positively impacted by various proactive measures taken at both local and federal levels. These are initiatives that the CBC/Radio-Canada, its regulator the CRTC, and the leaders of future mandate reviews for the outlet can consider based on the success of these initiatives in other jurisdictions. Public understanding of journalistic practices and standards, transparency in editorial as well as governance decisions, and a direct connection between the audience and the newsrooms are all ways to build trust and accountability. As “**The Future of CBC/Radio-Canada**” states broadly, “restoring the public’s trust requires strengthening transparency, improving the quality of journalism and ensuring that public broadcasters’ content reflects the diversity of viewpoints and social realities.”¹⁶

In this section we will explore how three specific commitments — media literacy, increased transparency and audience engagement — have actively strengthened trust in other jurisdictions, as well as how the implementation of such ideas might play out for the CBC/Radio-Canada.

Media Literacy

The CBC/Radio-Canada is far from the only professional media outlet or even public media service worldwide to be accused of political bias¹⁷, false information and shoddy journalism^{18,19} — these are features of an increasingly polarized media environment.

Media literacy, an emerging part of many education curricula, teaches critical thinking skills and an understanding of how journalism works to give people the ability to identify biases in the media and to responsibly disseminate the information they are reading or watching.

Low media literacy fuels social conflict and distrust in credible information, which is an issue that should be in the best interest of the government itself to take on (as discussed in the section “**Public Media and Public Safety**”). As the CBC/Radio-Canada is mandated to report with the highest of journalistic standards, Canadian society at large would benefit from a population with the savvy to distinguish between facts and fake news, and a public media service they can trust.

In Ontario, the **Association for Media Literacy** is a not-for-profit association operating under the Ministry of Education that helped the province to become one of the first jurisdictions in the world to have requisite media studies courses included in every English-language curriculum.²⁰ The Québec Education Program also includes media literacy as one of its broader life skills taught in secondary school along with health, career planning and environmental awareness.²¹ However, in Canada, education programs are determined by provincial governments, meaning that the mandated courses and resources created are not made available nation-wide, leading to an inequality in knowledge sometimes vital to how we navigate our lives.

- **Germany and Austria:** Media literacy campaigns are undertaken by public institutions, NGOs and government authorities (like the Ministry of Family Affairs in Germany, and the Ministry of Education in Austria).²² The programs produce resources and free workshops aimed at both young and older audiences, as well as working journalists and media companies. Public events like the **Campfire Festival** in Düsseldorf focus on bringing citizens, journalists and researchers together for media training and discussion.²³
- **Iceland:** The country implemented a Media and Information Literacy program in 2021, whereby the national curriculum for secondary schools includes a mandatory understanding of responsible consumption of media and information (upon graduating grade 10):^{24,25} “In order to reach the public, it was necessary to build trust towards the importance of media literacy for the public, to empower people as responsible participants of the digital world.”²⁶
- **Finland:** We include Finland as an example of a jurisdiction where the population is willing to pay a personal tax for the services provided by its public media outlet, YLE. Finland has the highest reported level of public trust globally in its public broadcaster, and implemented a **media literacy education system** in 2019 to combat distrust of media and to foster resilience against disinformation. The system acknowledges the need for a systemic effort to promote civic literacy so that all Finland citizens are empowered to

critically disseminate false information and participate in informed discourse. The program encourages the government to play a role in protecting the “integrity of the information space,” where disinformation undermines trust issues concerning public health, elections and other information vital to the safety and cohesion of society at large.²⁷ In Finland, every citizen making over €14K must pay a 2.5% tax on income annually to support public media (YLE), with a cap of €163 per year. Companies also pay up to €3,000 depending on their earnings. As long as the funds collected through the tax remain distinct from the national budget, the model can ensure minimal government interference. The public media is funded directly by the public and, therefore, remains independent and accountable.

As digital spaces have disrupted audience loyalty and trust in traditional media, other jurisdictions are responding with education programs designed to help people think critically about the news they receive. Canada, which has been the site of much debate and legislation about online harms, has largely abdicated its responsibility for misinformation, disinformation and artificial intelligence at a policy level. The country needs a national strategy for media literacy that brings together educators, journalists and media experts with students of all ages, to build a healthier media ecosystem for all.

Broad media literacy efforts shouldn’t necessarily fall on the CBC/Radio-Canada. As trust and polarization are issues for private media and as well as for public media, government-led initiatives to promote media literacy could generate benefits to the industry overall, not to mention other institutions — as in the case when vital public service information must be communicated. Media literacy programs in Canada could be administered through educational programs developed at the federal level or through outside agencies. Organizations within Canada are already established with similar goals,²⁸ and more broadly, government policy could make media literacy a more explicit part of academic curricula, as we see in Iceland.²⁹ The CBC/Radio-Canada will benefit, just as all media benefits, from the critical thinking skills of its audiences.

Journalistic Transparency

The CBC/Radio-Canada has faced heavy criticism for the payments and bonuses awarded to upper management and board members while the corporation itself suffered budget cuts and job losses.^{30,31,32} What this points to is a lack of understanding and faith in the way decisions are made at the corporation with public funds, and why.

The priorities and processes of journalism are often not well-understood by non-journalists. That’s why some leading media organizations are incorporating public engagement as part of their trust and revenue strategies. In late 2024, leaders from the Globe and Mail, the Toronto Star, the CBC/Radio-Canada and Britain’s the Guardian — all news organizations of prominence to Canadians, with formal editorial policies dedicated to maintaining audience trust — convened at a Canadian Journalism Foundation event to discuss how to debunk common “media myths” that fuel a lack of trust in the mainstream news.³³ The main issue, all agreed, is that there is a lack of familiarity in the general public of how journalism is made, and the standards and ethics to which the institutions are strictly bound.

Our own research has found many efforts being made by media outlets locally and internationally

to increase transparency both in the boardrooms and the news rooms, aimed at building trust through honesty and accountability.

- **Ireland:** After a financial scandal in 2023 involving the misappropriation of funds by the executive board and management, Ireland's public broadcaster **RTÉ** faced heavy criticism for losing the trust of much of its audience. New leadership overhauled the board of governors and promised a new culture of accountability and transparency to regain public trust and ensure the scandal would not be repeated. These measures included external reviews of finances, a registry of conflicts of interest between upper management and contractors, and a publicly elected member of RTÉ's staff to sit on the board with the executives.³⁴ The new director Kevin Bakhurst said in 2023 of these decisions that "as custodians of public money, our financial integrity must be on a par with our editorial integrity."
- **The Globe and Mail:** Sandra E. Martin, the standards editor at The Globe and Mail,³⁵ argues that newsrooms have a responsibility to be transparent and accessible to their public. She regularly publishes editorial letters explaining behind the scenes of how the newspaper functions, in response to questions solicited from readers, describing her job as "the conscience of the newspaper."³⁶ To address questions about bias, the Globe published an explainer³⁷ on how their algorithms affect the selection of news articles that readers see. Other editorials explain the outlet's policies towards AI³⁸, war reporting, anonymous sources³⁹ or a review of an issue involving a reported story. The Globe and Mail is following in a tradition set by the New York Times⁴⁰ and the Washington Post in the 2000s in its response to concern about misinformation and journalistic bias. Although US news media is palpably in a state of transition,⁴¹ the role of public editor or standards editor is now generally seen as a best practice in newsrooms worldwide, including in Spain, Sweden, the UK and the US, as the Reuters Institute reported in May 2025.⁴²

In early 2025 the Corporation named Basem Boshra as the new senior director of journalistic standards and public trust⁴³ to act as the "journalistic conscience" of the organization. The **CBC News Editor's Blog** also publishes similar explainers every couple months, discussing issues like harassment of journalists,⁴⁴ AI guidelines⁴⁵ and impartiality when covering the Middle East.⁴⁶ But what the Globe and Mail has done is to proactively and publicly address criticisms as a branding mechanism, putting their transparency efforts at the forefront and inviting further comment with their editor. The CBC/Radio-Canada is making the right moves but the efforts are lost unless it puts its standards editor or ombudsperson front and centre to invite a conversation. By definition, a "blog" suggests an initiative undertaken outside the newsroom, its content less serious or authoritative than the journalism it seeks to contextualize.

The CBC/Radio-Canada is aware of the need to engage meaningfully with the public,⁴⁷ but has a way to go in being demonstrably transparent and communicative about its journalistic processes and values. In recent years, the BBC, for example, has released **viral videos** to express the organization's

commitment to battling disinformation⁴⁸ as a part of a continued brand identity effort designed to protect its reputation as a world-class media service.⁴⁹ BBC journalists are telling the story of the BBC and therefore, Britain, in a way that the CBC/Radio-Canada is either not used to doing or has lost comfort with doing — but heightened authenticity and transparency may be the way for the CBC/Radio-Canada to find its way back into the hearts of most, if not all, Canadians. Given that 78% per cent of Canadians say they want the CBC, the country is already mostly there.

The Corporation is also facing criticism for its lack of transparency over certain financial issues,⁵⁰ and for removing the comment sections on many of its online articles — although reportedly a decision made due to a lack of the required resources to mediate the discussions, this was perceived as discouraging any feedback.^{51,52} Newsroom transparency can be supported through many levers, such as the explanation of editorial decisions, to the communication of ethical standards, to responsiveness to feedback,⁵³ and the CBC/Radio-Canada has the opportunity to be transparent in more ways than one. Our interviews with experts — and even journalists — reflect that the CBC does not always seem transparent to audiences in the sense of the stories it selects and why. As Martin writes, “that connection and accountability to readers are essential to building credibility and trust.”⁵⁴

For the CBC/Radio-Canada to become visibly accountable to Canadians, its audience research and the way it makes decisions needs to be more transparent, clear and accessible. Legislative updates to the mandate of the CBC/Radio-Canada should consider how this consultation should be effected — through the CRTC (but through an expanded and modernized mandate), by an outside body or citizen council to be determined or by the CBC/Radio-Canada itself.

Audience Engagement

The closure of local journalism outlets in many communities affects citizens’ trust in media overall. In “[The Lost Estate: How to put the local back in local news](#),” a 2025 report on local journalism by the Public Policy Forum, the editor of the small paper *The Eastern Door* in Kahnawake, Québec sums up one of the biggest advantages of having local journalists in communities: “People see us at the grocery store or the bank. That’s why they trust us.”⁵⁵ The Poynter Institute found in 2017 that Americans trusted local news a full 20 percentage points more than national news,⁵⁶ results similar to those found by the Pew Research Center in 2024.⁵⁷ The majority of these respondents agreed that this trust came from the connections that the journalists had with their communities.

The CBC/Radio-Canada is mandated to serve and represent all Canadians, and has no end of strategies and projects to try to reach as many communities as possible. However, the scope of these efforts is always limited by funding and resources, with budget cuts and job losses affecting smaller newsrooms and specialized reporting disproportionately. The organization’s overall funding has declined since the 1990s — a trend that is mirrored in its declining levels of public trust.⁵⁸ As the CBC News Editor’s Blog itself reports, there are “more than 30 towns and cities in Canada with populations greater than 50,000 that have no CBC presence.”⁵⁹ The challenge for CBC/Radio Canada therefore is to close the distance between journalists and their audiences without always having physical “boots on the ground.”⁶⁰

The following case studies demonstrate the way that media outlets in other jurisdictions are engaging with their audiences, having meaningful dialogues and building trust between their journalists and the communities they report on.

- **Switzerland:** In recent years, Switzerland’s public media service SRG-SSR has undertaken a number of public consultations to better understand **audience expectations** vis-a-vis public service media and their appreciation of **SRG-SSR’s output**. SRG-SSR has further partnered with the CBC/Radio-Canada, RTBF (Belgium) and ZDF (Germany) to launch a **Public Spaces Incubator** initiative. This partnership aims to develop and test tools that encourage **accessible and meaningful online conversations**. This is a positive example of a CBC/Radio-Canada public engagement initiative, made possible and even boosted by international collaboration. It raises a corollary point: One of the effects of declining or insufficient funding is the inability of the organization to invest in innovation projects outside day-to-day operations.
- **New Zealand:** Each year, RNZ’s board of governors **surveys the audience** to measure RNZ’s perceived performance against its **Charter**, using metrics such as perceived importance of public broadcasting, the value of their programming and trust, in order to keep the public informed and provide balanced coverage, respecting cultural diversity.
- **Germany:** German regional public service media outlets have their own governance boards (broadcasting councils), which can operate independently from other states so that the media aims to serve the specific needs of that region. The major national outlets, ARD, ZDF and Deutschlandradio, are currently **proposing citizen councils** to oversee the governance boards, to ensure that each regional audience has a say in the direction their broadcaster takes. In April 2024, ARD, ZDF and Deutschlandradio released a manifesto calling for a **reform of public broadcasting**, and proposed creating new supervising bodies made up of randomly selected citizens, modelled after a “citizens’ assembly” (a concept discussed in the section “**Mandates: The Legal Blueprint for Public Media.**”) Since the broadcasters are funded (or essentially owned) by licence fee payers, the manifesto suggests that they must be involved in the direction and content of their media, so that “public service broadcasting [can] regain acceptance and fulfil its purpose in democratic discourse.”

The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, which oversees broadcast and telecommunications licensing in Canada, holds **public hearings** every five years to consult on the CBC/Radio-Canada’s license renewal — a process created to decide whether to approve the corporation’s internal strategic plans. These plans are developed after feedback is collected through surveys and pursuant to the CBC/Radio-Canada’s **regulatory obligations to the CRTC**.

However, these surveys — which measure the performance and effectiveness of the CBC/Radio-Canada — are conducted by the Corporation itself, and do not provide comprehensive feedback to the public about how the CBC/Radio-Canada is performing within the context of the country’s media landscape.

If a model like Germany's were adapted for Canada, audiences in different provinces or regions could help inform the Corporation of the distinct needs of Canadians living in different communities and guide programming decisions to fit. This could also help to truly nationalize and deepen the connection between the audience and the CBC/Radio-Canada — without the expense of putting a bureau in every centre. This would help the CBC/Radio-Canada in fulfilling its mandate to serve all Canadians.

The Importance of Accessibility

Canada can seek out guidance and cooperation from its international counterparts to develop strategies to bolster public trust in media, while adapting them to this country's specific media environment. Frameworks for media literacy projects and educational materials are resources that do not need to be invented from the ground up. However, in countries where this is successful, as in Germany and Austria, public media services have broad national and international support from the government and work in tandem towards a common goal of educating the public.

Modern media methods include communicating with the audience more directly than the CBC/Radio-Canada has been asked to do in the past — as seen by the number of private media services such as the New York Times⁶¹ and many independent media outlets in Canada that have adopted this modern media practice as a way to build membership and revenue. The CBC/Radio-Canada has the opportunity to directly address concerns over bias, false information or corruption through proactively disclosing its processes.

As noted in the "**The Shattered Mirror**," an analysis of the Canadian media ecosystem published in 2017, "the digital revolution has made for a more open and diverse news ecosystem...it has also upended the model of journalistic 'boots on the ground.'"⁶² While it may be an impossible feat for CBC/Radio-Canada to base a journalist in every community in the country, in the digital age where platforms can act as forums for discussion between journalists and audiences, there is no reason for these community connections not to be made virtually. Connection between journalists and audiences can be made in person, or spaces can be made online for meaningful discussion and feedback from the community. Either via digital platforms or by involving members of the public in decision-making, the CBC/Radio-Canada should be considering accessibility as the key in building trust between audiences and newsrooms.

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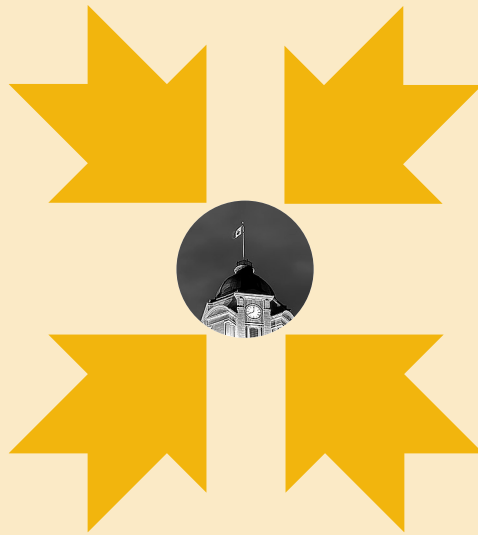
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7. Conclusion and Core Recommendations

The CBC/Radio-Canada plays an important and currently irreplaceable role in supporting the communications and information infrastructure of Canada. According to our research, 78% of Canadians want to see their national public media service continue, especially if it addresses major criticisms. However, years of underfunding and outdated public policy have led to lower trust and engagement levels among some audiences, especially in English Canada. This disengagement has taken place against a context of mainstream media market failure and new threats to Canadian sovereignty.

Making the CBC/Radio-Canada into the best public media service it can be does not come with a list of isolated solutions. Every facet of what it does affects and is driven by other forces, so funding, mandate and governance-based solutions must be considered holistically, at the core of which is the understanding of what the Corporation is made to do: to serve all Canadians. The following is a summary of our main proposals, based on the past two years' worth of study of best practices for public media in Canada and elsewhere in the world. These recommendations are made with a view to strengthening the CBC and to making it more relevant so it can become the public media service Canadians not only need, but want.

1. Match the CBC/Radio-Canada's Funding to its Mandate

Canada currently funds its public media service to a much lower level than most of its international counterparts, and has been doing so for decades. Despite this, the CBC/Radio-Canada has still managed to deliver news and content across all provinces and territories in multiple languages, tries to invest in innovative digital and social projects, and remains an essential service in the eyes of the majority of Canadians. With additional investment, it could be beloved. Today, the CBC/Radio-Canada is one

of the oldest and largest public media services in the world. But if we want the CBC/Radio-Canada to become a better public media service, we need to pay for it, and support its worth.

In order for the CBC/Radio-Canada to rise to the level Canadians need and expect, additional funding has already been proposed, and promised by the current government. But funding increases should not be arbitrary. The exact amount citizens pay through taxes should be determined through fully transparent public consultations and a comprehensive demographic review of the audience and its needs, both of which can also guide the ways in which the funding is spent to best serve Canadians. Just as in the private sector where budgets are based on objectives and deliverables, the CBC/Radio-Canada's budget needs to be indexed to the scope of its mandate and its ability to perform its role as Canada's national public media service, which for at least a generation has not been the case. Long term, guaranteed funding can allow for multi-year projects to develop within the Corporation, in order for it to evolve along with the needs of its audiences.

2. Update the Mandate for a Modern Canada

The CBC/Radio-Canada's mandate was reviewed from 2024 to early 2025. As of July 2025, no changes have been proposed or made to the "Broadcasting Act." Based on our research, the following legislative changes will help to keep the CBC/Radio-Canada up to date in better serving all Canadians:

- a) **Implement timed and timely updates to the mandate of the CBC/Radio-Canada.** The CBC/Radio-Canada's mandate needs scheduled updates and a formal process by which the mandate is reviewed routinely to ensure that the updates are made in response to the changing needs of Canadians, and not due to political pressure.
- b) **To fix the CBC/Radio-Canada, consult Canadians.** Canada's population is constantly changing — demographically, geographically and socially — and its public media service needs to follow and respond to these trends. Regular and in-depth demographic reviews of the audience should be established to determine the kind of content Canadians require and the way they need to receive it. The CBC/Radio-Canada should be implementing public consultations about its operations that are truly made public, along with action items and a strategic plan for sharing. To ensure the audience is being properly and fairly consulted, certain actions need to be taken. Models for this form of consultation in other jurisdictions and even in other aspects of Canadian public policy include nation-wide town hall meetings, citizens' assemblies and comprehensive surveys of the public.
- c) **Prioritize public safety.** Canada faces security threats from domestic and international disruptions every day. As recommended by the federal government's February 2025 mandate review,¹ the CBC/Radio-Canada needs a formally defined role as a resource for information in the case of a range of scenarios, be it a climate emergency, a pandemic or threats to the

sovereignty of Canada wherever they may come from, including invasion, military occupation or terror attacks. The fight against fake news and foreign interference is waged from the ground up, with local journalists telling the stories of real people with the trust of the communities behind them. Investment in communications sovereignty will help build a stronger Canada. A stronger connection to local communities is a key unifying force, one which builds trust in public service messaging when needed, and which also underlies the CBC/Radio-Canada's current mandate.

3. Make a Media Service for All

The CBC/Radio-Canada is no longer universally accessible to all Canadians. Young audiences have moved online, Canadians in small towns don't get coverage (or reception) and demographic minorities don't feel adequately represented. The CBC/Radio-Canada can only hope to reflect and serve all Canadians if everybody is able (and willing) to tune in. That includes people of different ages and political identities.

The biggest reason for this lack of coverage is that the CBC/Radio-Canada no longer serves the audience comprehensively, and in a way relevant to their needs. We highlight three areas of focus for the CBC/Radio-Canada to continue investing in to maximize its reach and impact to all Canadians:

- **Make digital advancements.** Mandate reviews need to formally look at the evolving digital climate and direct the CBC/Radio-Canada to increase technological innovation and provide tailored digital content for online audiences.
 - ▶ Annual budgets for the corporation need to be indexed to services required.
 - ▶ A future study could explore the cost/benefit analysis of taking the CBC/Radio-Canada entirely digital, against the cost of providing additional infrastructure to Canadians currently without reliable internet access.
- **Invest in local journalism.** The Corporation needs more localized presence in communities, which could be achieved through easier digital access between journalists and community members, or through partnerships with smaller, local media outlets. The CBC/Radio-Canada could hire more local journalists and open more regional stations with more funding, but when that's not an option, it should be considering alternatives like collaboration and increased virtual communication with communities.
- **Create meaningful representation.** The CBC/Radio-Canada can go further in its efforts to properly represent and serve Canada's ever-expanding demographics. This largely means defining and establishing formal diversity, equity and inclusion goals at the Corporation and sharing this with the public; strategic plans need to provide specific, measurable and inclusive targets. Improving the culture of inclusion inside and outside the corporation can also mean encouraging journalists to bring their cultural knowledge and lived experience into their reporting, allowing for Indigenous sovereignty over reporting that involves

Indigenous communities, and increasing research and audience feedback on how well the Corporation is meeting its EDI objectives.

4. Build Trust and Transparency with Audiences

The most important thing that the CBC/Radio-Canada needs to fulfil its duty as a public service to Canadians is to earn their trust. Trust in public service media is declining worldwide,² and the CBC/Radio-Canada is reflected in this trend. The more people trust a service, the more they support it and are willing to pay for it. Canadians, the government and the CBC/Radio-Canada should all be looking for ways to boost this metric in order to maintain a healthy media landscape in general. The rise of online misinformation and disinformation heightens the importance of a large public media organization like the CBC/Radio-Canada — and our research shows that 79% of Canadians agree that it is equally or more important than it used to be.³

Trust is earned when the audience knows they can hold the Corporation to account and that their criticisms are heard. A few key ways to build trust and engagement at the CBC/Radio-Canada:

- **Transparency and accountability:** The CBC/Radio-Canada needs to build transparency between journalists, governance structures, and the rest of Canada to ensure that Canadians are getting exactly what they're paying for, and more. Audiences need to be able to understand the editorial processes in use as well as the values that go into decisions inside the newsrooms. At the moment, efforts are too buried (as in response to a controversy posted in an editor's "blog") and offset from the main news stream.
 - ▶ The CBC/Radio-Canada should implement more proactive disclosure in its financial decisions (as part of telling the ongoing story of the organization and its priorities), and to address concerns publicly about changes it is making. In a notable example in Ireland, a financial scandal prompted the RTÉ to put a staff member on the executive board to ensure full accountability and integrity to the public.
 - ▶ The Corporation should consider making the editorial standards editor and editorial leadership much more publicized, accessible and responsive to feedback. (That doesn't mean the organization acts at the behest of feedback; it connects and evaluates audience feedback against its publicly defined and legislated goals.)
 - ▶ To establish provincial or regional citizen councils for the CBC/Radio-Canada (per Germany's model) could then inform the Corporation of the distinct needs of Canadians living in different communities and guide programming decisions to fit. It would also help to re-nationalize and localize the CBC/Radio-Canada, thus adding to the strength of the media service and the country.
- **Governance and political independence:** While protected by law, the CBC/Radio-Canada's editorial independence from the government should be more visible and transparent. The Corporation is founded upon the principle that it is free of political

influence, but while the governing board members are still appointed by the government, in the words of the recent federal government mandate review, this can “negatively influence citizens’ perceptions about the CBC/Radio-Canada’s independence.”⁴ To that end, the corporation and government can take the following steps:

- ▶ Reform structure and skills matrix for the board. Regional, cultural and professional diversity needs to be seen from the newsroom to the boardroom.
- ▶ Formally depoliticize the appointment of the president and the board, such as through appointments made by CBC/Radio-Canada staff, fully independent bodies⁵ or even recommended by the public. For instance, the board of directors could appoint the president, while the board could adhere to a more formal skills/regional matrix.
- **Invest in media literacy.** We suggest a comprehensive reworking of our understanding of what public service media is, and the value of the service it provides to Canadians. This includes consultation with, and communication of, that value to Canadians. In many markets with trusted public media services, media literacy is implemented as a measure of boosting citizens’ ability to think critically about information and the messages put forth in the overall media climate. Canada could benefit from nation-wide media-literacy programs designed to ensure that wherever they live or whatever their means, every Canadian has the skills to responsibly disseminate the information they are presented with. These efforts can also include public awareness campaigns, events and workshops, or be explicitly part of public school curricula in support of healthy media habits that span an ecosystem comprised of public, private and independent media and serving a range of audiences. A higher media literacy level overall can help to build a more well-informed democratic society in Canada, and hold the entire media ecosystem to account.

Final Thoughts

The CBC/Radio-Canada is doing a good job with what it has — a surprisingly good job, given its diminishing resources and the increased expectations placed on it in recent years. The fact that 78% of Canadians want it to continue is a testament to the role the organization plays in the country’s communications and cultural fabric. But the CBC/Radio-Canada may have reached the limit of how it can survive, let alone thrive, without significant investment and reinvention. Recent suggestions for the CBC/Radio-Canada have focused on funding; however, funding, mandate and connection to Canadians are intertwined. In a global context, the need for public media is increasing, not diminishing. The reason to address the CBC/Radio-Canada through the lens of public service relates to the future of Canada itself. Now more than ever, Canadians need a much stronger voice in the shaping of their national public media service.

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- 4 Department of Canadian Heritage, “The Future of CBC/Radio-Canada.”
- 5 Currently an Independent Advisory Board makes recommendations to the Governor in Council to appoint board members, but this practice is not yet guaranteed by legislation to ensure that government decisions are in keeping with the recommendations of the advisory board. See: Department of Canadian Heritage, “The Future of CBC/Radio-Canada.”

Acknowledgements

Dozens, if not hundreds, of people contributed to the success of this project. This report and our findings could not have been achieved without the contributions and perspectives of the following experts: Chris Alexander, Mike Ananny, Edward Boyd, Heaton Dyer, Rick Harp, Karyn Pugliese, Sylvain Lafrance, Andrew MacDougall, Pacinthe Mattar, Colleen McCool, Jennifer McGuire, Fenwick McKelvey, Emilie Nicolas, Mattea Roach and Takara Small.

Jessica would particularly like to thank Jennifer McGuire, Rick Harp, Ted Boyd and Sylvain Lafrance for their support and dedication to improving the Canadian media landscape. Emma would like to thank Colleen McCool for her extraordinary research assistance in finding international precedents with relevance for the Canadian public service media climate.

With additional thanks to Ian Alexander, Shelley Ambrose, Monica Auer, Matthew Barraclough, Heather Conway, Sue Gardner, Matthew Gray, Sequoia Kim, Lilian Le, April Lindgren, Mark Lloyd, Anthony (Tony) Manera, Duncan McCue, Christian Nissen, Kristian Porter, Helena Rea, Anya Schiffrin, Ian Scott, Christine St-Pierre, Catherine Tait, Rebecca M. Vogan and Connie Walker.

Thank you to the Ministry of Canadian Heritage and the Department of Canadian Heritage, 2023–25.

The CBC/Radio-Canada did not ask to be studied by a team of academic researchers, but handled our questions about the organization with unfailing grace and attention. In particular, we thank Claude Gallipeau, Shaun Poulter, Jon Medline, and Robert Doane for their time and expertise.

The CBC/Radio-Canada is a much-studied organization. We thank the many public media scholars in Canada whose work and insights have provided important historical information and perspective to this generation of researchers. Wherever possible, we have credited these original sources throughout the report.

And finally, our thanks to Taylor Owen, who saw the value of a new national research project on public service media before it became a widespread policy conversation, and whose cheerful willingness to challenge longstanding assumptions informed and supported our approach.