



NEWS FOR THE REST OF US

Canadian Content in a Digital World
A Submission to the "Canadian Content in a Digital World Consultation"

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Thank you for the opportunity to participate in these Canadian Heritage Consultations. As one of Canada's first digital-only online publications, we strongly encourage the Department of Canadian Heritage to consider developing new funding programs which will result in stable funding for Canada's digital content creators, and to strengthen and expand the funding programs which already exist.

First, some background on rabble.ca:

rabble.ca was established in 2001 as one of Canada's first online national newsmagazines. Major online publishing activities include curating and creating content for blogs, columns, news items, event lists, reviews, polls, discussion boards, podcasts and video.

rabble's mission is to amplify marginalized voices and provide space for reflection and debate on the issues that affect the daily lives of people in Canada and around the world; to act as a catalyst for positive social change; to cultivate emerging media; and to practice ethical, independent, progressive journalism.

Fifteen years later, rabble.ca is well established as a free site featuring news and views on Canadian and world issues. Our target audience is anyone interested in Canadian news, with a particular focus on news which is important to civil society organizations.

rabble.ca is one of Canada's most visited independent online-only news magazines, regularly exceeding 300,000 unique visitors a month. We have also been recognized by the Canadian Online Only Publishing Awards as a finalist for 3+ years, and a silver medalist for best on-line news site in 2012.

rabble.ca has also pioneered the development of on-line work teams, proving that an online magazine can be published on a daily basis without a physical office, and with staff and contributors working from their own spaces across the country. With an editorial, administrative and technical staff of 13 part-time workers and a modest budget of under \$500,000 per year, rabble.ca is also a model for sustainability in the digital publishing world. Our staff works in their own offices across the country,

connected by video conferencing, phone, email and online workgroup applications where we can respond to each other quickly.

rabble.ca has well developed and long standing partnerships with many organizations including The Council of Canadians; Centre for Policy Alternatives; labour unions; and individual supporters, many of whom contribute funds to support us. We have worked with and featured content from hundreds of not for profit and community organizations across the country. We also have partnerships with community media organizations including the National Campus and Community Radio Association; The Canadian Association of Community Television Stations and Users (CACTUS); Open Media; and the Toronto Media Network.

We are also participants in the research process of the Community Media Working Group, and we contributed to its historic November 2015 Community Media Convergence. Though not a community media organization in the strictest sense of the term, rabble.ca is similar to community media because we do not make clear distinctions between readers and contributors. Our mission is to draw on the real energy of passionate, engaged Canadians and power of the Internet. Many of rabble.ca's contributors have strong ties to community media organizations, and we frequently look to the citizen journalists at community television and radio stations for our content.

As with community media, rabble.ca blurs the lines between readers and contributors, providing a needed space for issues, a place to explore political passions and an opportunity to expand ideas. This is the direction that media is moving on a global scale. The distinction between "professional" media producer and community/citizen creator is no longer a sharp dividing line.

Thus, we concur and support the conclusions of the Community Media Policy Working Group, which has also made a submission to these hearings. When you review the extensive research of this group, know that rabble.ca also supports their conclusions wholeheartedly and encourage you to provide support for community media and citizen journalism as outlined in their submission.

We also support the idea developed by the Canadian Association of Community Television Stations and Users (CACTUS) to establish community media centres where people can learn to become creators. We have never had better, faster, more inexpensive technology to share dynamic stories that connect with people in a new way. Yet, there is a compelling need for community based organizations which can help citizens develop their capacity to tell stories in ways that connect with the broader world. Though we hear stories of creators who work in isolation in their metaphorical garrets, in reality, much of the best content is created by people who are engaged with others.

For these reasons, we support the idea of citizen-engaged, community based media.

For the rest of this submission, my intent is to explore the questions raised by the Canadian Content in a Digital World Consultation which are of specific concern to rabble.ca in a digital publishing environment.

The question which I have chosen to answer is:

How do we support Canadian creators and ensure they can thrive in the digital environment?

Response:

Because rabble.ca's mission is to blur the lines between readers and creators, our site features content created by both "professional" media makers and citizen/community journalists. We encourage the Department of Canadian Heritage to recognize that media is not just an "industry" anymore, and that many people are creating media who would not define themselves in "industry" terms. Our media landscape should also be redefined in ways that break through the traditional industrial paradigm.

Traditionally, there has been minimal funding for content creation to non-profit and community media organizations. We urge you to expand the eligibility criteria to funding programs such as the Canadian Media Fund to make it possible for non-profit, non traditional, citizen and community media organizations to apply for a greater range of funding.

An example of a new creative funding mechanism developed in the past few years is The Community Radio Fund of Canada. Because of the willingness of the CRTC to direct Canadian Talent Development Funds to the community radio sector, this fund has re-energized on air radio programming at local stations across the country. The Fund has made new projects possible which would not have happened otherwise. The growth of the audio documentary form is something which is now being re-energized, thanks in large part to funding which stations has received through the Fund.

There are many other creative ways to expand funding which can be explored. We encourage the Department of Canadian Heritage to look beyond what funding models exist today, and look at new possibilities for funding of the online content creation sector, and community/citizen/alternative media in general.

Therefore, we ask the Department of Canadian Heritage:

i) to create a training fund which would enable online publishers to develop new writers, videographers, audio artists and interactive storytellers, especially from groups of people who are traditionally marginalized and under-represented in the media.

We concur with the conclusions of the Community Media Working Group that the following elements need to be included in any new strategy for media production support in Canada:

- Offering media and digital literacy training at the neighbourhood level. Access to skills training locally is crucial given the fast pace of change of digital tools, and can include training in web design, audio and video production, gaming, and the use of social media for self-promotion.
- Outreach to marginalized groups to make sure they have equal access to such training, and that it is offered in culturally appropriate and accessible contexts (for example, on reserve, or in minority languages).
- Offering a safe space and a supportive community where creating a platform for dialogue, free speech and inclusion of minority views is prioritized.

Though rabble.ca is a national publisher, we feel strongly that a strong community sector makes our publication stronger. If these community media centres were established, rabble.ca would partner with local organizations to create and source content, thus increasing the range of voices which we can

present on our site. It would also increase the pool of qualified, capable storytellers which would be available to other media as well.

ii) funding for special online projects - there is no dedicated fund to create special projects for online media. We look at sites such as NFB Interactive to see the amazing documentary and creative projects which they have developed. We see many possibilities for rabble to create content in this way, specifically crafted for the online environment. We support the establishment of a new funding stream which would enable organizations such as ours to create fund new content which uses the unique capabilities of the internet to tell stories.

iii) support for digital publishers - expand the funding available to Canada Periodical Fund to enable digital only publishing organizations to apply to more sections of the Fund. It is encouraging to see that Digital Publishing is eligible in some categories of the Fund. However, most of the funding available currently is for traditional print magazines. With the rapid changes in the publishing environment, more and more publications are going to be digital only. It is important that funding programs at the Department of Canadian Heritage develop in a way which recognizes this huge change.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the national dialogue about Canadian culture in a digital age. We look forward to hearing the results of your consultation.

On behalf of rabble.ca

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Victoria Fenner', written in a cursive style.

Victoria Fenner