



Written Submission for the  
**Pre-Budget Consultations**  
in Advance of the  
**2023-2024 Federal Budget**

## Recommendations

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

**Recommendation 2 - Local Journalism Initiative:** We recommend that the Government of Canada increase funding for the Local Journalism Initiative to \$20 million annually, and ensure the funding is not time limited. This program has already had a significant impact in providing Canadians with valuable local news and information. There are hundreds of journalists serving news deserts across Canada (which are increasing at an alarming rate) but uncertainty and underfunding are preventing the program from realizing its full potential. Permanent funding at \$20 million a year would provide a key antidote in the fight against disinformation.

## About

The Association des radiodiffuseurs communautaires du Québec (“ARCQ”), l’Alliance des radios communautaires du Canada (“ARCC”), and the National Campus and Community Radio Association/Association nationale des radios étudiantes et communautaires (“NCRA/ANREC”) represent 84% of Canada’s licensed 200 or so community radio broadcasters. The Community Radio Fund of Canada distributes support on behalf of commercial broadcasters and the federal government to community, campus and Indigenous broadcasters.

## Introduction

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

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

Unfortunately, misinformation is being widely spread throughout social media channels, putting a greater onus on traditional media to reach Canadians with factual information. There is no question that quality and trusted local news and information are key to the fight against disinformation.

Campus and community radio stations are a pillar of broadcasting in Canada with unique access to underserved communities both urban and rural. Throughout the pandemic, our members delivered accurate public health information to Canadians in at least 65 different languages. The sector is made up of thousands of people committed to ensuring broadcasts meet rigorous standards. As many as nine and a half million Canadians<sup>1</sup> in over 150 communities listen regularly at least once per month to community radio and for many, it is their only source of live, local information.

Campus and community stations are critical to serving Official Language Minority Communities and multicultural communities that otherwise have no access to media in their native languages. Whether French or Polish, Arabic or Korean, campus and community radio stations serve a vast array of minority communities in their own language. From Cree, to Inuktitut, to Ojibwe, these radio stations are also an integral part of many Indigenous communities in Canada. Not only do they provide important information in an array of languages, but they foster deep cultural connections with the communities they serve and are also products of Canadian communities to have access to reliable, local information in order to counter the alarming rise of internet-based disinformation.

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

Margaret Sullivan, author of "Ghosting the News" says the following: *Studies show that people who live in areas with poor local news coverage are less likely to vote, and when they do, they are more likely to do so strictly along party lines. To put it bluntly, the demise of local news poses the kind of danger to our democracy that should have alarm sirens screeching across the land.*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://archive.ncra.ca/listener>

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

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

This submission proposes two concrete measures the Government of Canada can support which would come at a minimal cost to the government, but would have a massive impact on all community broadcasters. This would equip them to continue serving Canadians by providing a reliable and consistent source of accurate information coming from the people they trust.

## **COMMUNITY BROADCASTING FUND / FONDS DE LA RADIO COMMUNAUTAIRE**

As public and private broadcasters increase their focus on major urban centres and newspapers cease to operate at an alarming rate, regional and rural markets which are home to more than 30% of Canadians are in critical need of support.

Community broadcasters have existed for generations in these parts of Canada, some for more than a hundred years. These broadcasters continue to be in a unique position to fill that void today and for the foreseeable future.

C-11 An Act to amend the Broadcasting Act,<sup>2</sup> could receive Royal Assent this fall. In it, there is a new definition of the community element which acknowledges that community radio "...reflects both the diversity of the communities being served, including with respect to the languages in use within those communities and to their ethnocultural and Indigenous composition, and the high engagement and involvement in community broadcasting by members of those communities, including with respect to matters of public concern..." and that "...through collaboration with local organizations and community members, are in the unique position of being able to provide varied programming to meet the needs of specific audiences...".

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

Broadcasting programming in more than 65 different languages, these are the stations where the diaspora that has come to Canada can hear Canadian news in their language. Where they can connect to information from their homes, and where they can simply hear the sounds of their language.

Community broadcasters are innovators in the digital space. They were among the first to adopt live streaming, they are podcasting in huge numbers, and they are a trusted brand among their listeners on all social media channels. The fight against disinformation dictates that these stations occupy all of these spaces. They are leaders in digital community building and in ensuring that social media can be used to support the community. They are limited only by training, their ability to keep up with technology, and ultimately funding to fully leverage the digital space.

On the other hand, they have a responsibility to stay on analog towers. If Fiona taught us anything there is still an important role for AM and FM transmitters when the power goes out. Many of the communities these stations serve have little to no broadband or even cellular connectivity. A recent study has shown that AM/FM is still the way most Canadians consume

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.parl.ca/legisinfo/en/bill/44-1/c-11>

audio programming at 39% with Youtube coming in second at 14%.<sup>3</sup>

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

The more than 230 community, Indigenous, and campus stations in this country play a critical role in the communities that make up this country. As we see local news outlets closing at an alarming rate, as we see private broadcasters abandoning markets which aren’t profitable, and as Canadians are increasingly overwhelmed by global content and disinformation, we need to provide support for community-based broadcasters.

As requested by MP Chatel during our presentation to FINA, we will be providing the full proposal for the Community Broadcast Fund in a separate submission.

**Recommendation: Establish the Community Broadcasting Fund**

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<sup>3</sup> Radio Connects “Radio on the Move” July 2022

## **EXTEND AND INCREASE THE LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE**

The Local Journalism Initiative has been an overwhelming success. It has had a material impact on the creation and support for journalism that covers the diverse needs of underserved communities across Canada. Community and campus radio stations have served these communities for decades and the LJI has had a strong impact on local stations and on our democracy.

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

The program was funded for 5 years and is therefore set to expire in April 2024. We wholeheartedly support the permanent extension of the program and see the increase to \$15.4 Million as the floor. We recommend increasing the annual allocation to \$20 Million for the program.

As we see local news and information eroded on a regular basis, the void is being filled by increasingly unreliable sources of information and promoted by social media algorithms that have been demonstrated to have a negative impact on our society and democracy writ large. The void in local news and information has resulted in a full third of US citizens who believe their election was stolen, horse medication flew off global shelves as an antidote to COVID because of one statement by an uninformed US president, and a grand total of about a dozen accounts are responsible for more than 80% of the vaccine disinformation available on social media<sup>4</sup>.

Additional funds need to be placed into three areas.

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

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

### **Recommendation #2 - Extend and expand the LJI.**

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2021/05/13/996570855/disinformation-dozen-test-facebooks-twiters-ability-to-curb-vaccine-hoaxes>

## IN CONCLUSION

We are proposing two inexpensive commitments that will have a material impact on the lives of Canadians in ways that are core to the values we believe in.

Because each of these stations is not-for-profit as a condition of their licence, every dollar invested in these stations is reinvested in the community.

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



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