



Canada's Centre for
Digital Media Literacy
Le centre Canadien de littératie
aux médias numériques

Written Submission for the Government of Canada's Pre-Budget Consultations in
Advance of Budget 2024

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By: MediaSmarts



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Recommendation

1. That the Government of Canada allot permanent and stable funding to organisations, like MediaSmarts, with a specific purpose and focus on increasing Canadians' digital media literacy including through a national digital media literacy strategy.



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Introduction

Media is all around us. Our digitally connected world is constantly changing how we play, learn and interact with each other. That's where digital media literacy comes in. To survive and thrive in a digital age, we all need to know how to access digital media, and how to use, understand and engage with it to our full potential.

[MediaSmarts](#) is Canada's centre for digital media literacy; we are a not-for-profit charitable organization, and our vision is that all people in Canada have the critical thinking skills to engage with digital media as active and informed digital citizens. To achieve this goal, we advance digital media literacy in schools, homes, and communities; develop and deliver high-quality Canadian-based digital media literacy programs and resources; and conduct and disseminate original research that contributes to the development of our programs and resources as well as informs public policy on issues related to digital media.

Digital Media Literacy

Digital media literacy is [essential to an informed and engaged populace and electorate](#). Canada is especially in need of a coordinated approach that moves beyond *only* access and skills-based understandings of digital media literacy towards critical, inclusive, ethical, social and reflexive practices essential to fostering digital well-being, active engagement, and digital citizenship.

Digital media literacy is the ability to critically, effectively and responsibly access, use, understand and engage with media of all kinds. Our model of digital media literacy has three elements: the competencies that a media literate person should be able to do; the key concepts they should understand; and the topics they should know. More information can be found in our February 2022 report, [From Access to Engagement: Building a Digital Media Literacy Strategy for Canada](#).

Through our programs, people in Canada learn to become active, engaged and informed digital citizens who know how to:

- a. Think critically about the media they're consuming.
- b. Stay safe and act appropriately online
- c. Protect their privacy
- d. Manage risk and limit harm
- e. Recognize what's true and what's not
- f. Know when they're being sold to

We also know that digital media literacy is essential to combat mis/disinformation. Disinformation has been proven to affect outcomes of elections around the world through reaching an audience vulnerable to a message, energizing and/or suppressing voters, setting the agenda, and infecting or delegitimizing legitimate news. Given the current and ongoing conversations about election integrity and mis/disinformation in Canada, we believe that the Government of Canada must all the more be focused on increasing Canadians' digital media literacy.

Digital Media Literacy requires investment

At MediaSmarts, we have been proud to run, [Young Canadians in a Wireless World](#) (YCWW), Canada's longest running and most comprehensive research study on young people's attitudes, behaviours, and opinions regarding the internet, technology and digital media. Since 1999, we have surveyed over 20 000 parents, teachers, and students. Our most recent report, [YCWW Phase IV: Trends and Recommendations](#), is based on surveys administered online to 1 058 youth across Canada from October to December of 2021, as well as 79 students who participated in a classroom-based survey and 979 youth who participated in a general population survey.

Some of the pertinent findings of this report include the following:

- Three quarters of participants said they have their own smartphone.
- Only 14% of younger participants (under 13 years old) **do not** have an account on any online platform.
- About two thirds of participants said they talk online to people they have never met in person.
- 63% of youth mistakenly believe that the presence of a privacy policy means a website will not share their personal information with others.
 - o Participants' responses also revealed a lack of confidence in their knowledge of how search engines operate and a poor understanding of how the online corporate business model works, echoing findings on young Canadians' understanding of online privacy policies.
- Of the 46% of youth who did not use privacy settings, 25% said they did not do so because they did not know how.

We share these data points to illustrate the simple point that for youth in Canada, online and offline are not distinct realms, but are equally present in their lives. And it is fair to hypothesize this is true for all ages. There is a real and present need for permanent and efficient investment to support all Canadians, and especially youth, to better understand their lives online and to develop their sense of digital citizenship.

The Impact of Investment

Despite the lack of permanent and stable funding from the public sector, MediaSmarts has a long history of providing services and tools in support of Canadians' digital media literacy. We believe that programs like the following are just scratching the surface of the impact that our organisation can have, if the Government of Canada will act in Budget 2024 to provide a pathway to permanent funding towards our organisation.



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Research and Evaluation

Beyond the YCWW series mentioned above, we lead research projects on a wide range of digital media literacy issues, including:

- [Digital Empowerment and Literacy Skills for Survivors of Technology-Facilitated Violence.](#)
- [Reporting Platforms: Young Canadians Evaluate Efforts to Counter Disinformation.](#)
- [Algorithmic Awareness: Conversations with Young Canadians about Artificial Intelligence and Privacy.](#)
- [Young Canadians Speak Out: A Qualitative Research Project on Privacy and Consent.](#)
- [Young Canadians Pushing Back Against Hate Online.](#)
- [The Digital Well-Being of Canadian Families.](#)

MediaSmarts has been researching digital equity and inclusion in Canada for decades, and specifically how digital media literacy is critical to addressing these challenges and can help close the digital divide. Our most recent project on this topic (February 2022); [From Access to Engagement: Building a Digital Media Literacy Strategy for Canada](#), included an environmental scan of existing national and international digital media literacy strategies, key informant interviews with Canadian and international experts working on digital and media literacy frameworks, and a symposium event with experts, community partners, and key stakeholders to discuss building a national digital media literacy strategy for Canada.

Educational Programs

Since its first conception as a clearinghouse of media literacy resources, MediaSmarts has been delivering educational programs that support parents, teachers, and youth themselves – as well as academics, journalists, and policymakers – in developing digital media literacy. Our programs have ranged from one of the world's first educational games on online safety and privacy, to videos that have been seen by millions of people. Our programs include the following.

- [Access, Use, Understand & Engage: A Digital Media Literacy Framework for Canadian Schools](#)
- [Media Literacy](#) and [Digital Literacy 101](#)
- The [DigitalSmarts](#) program
- [My Voice is Louder Than Hate](#)
- [#ForYou: A Game About Algorithms](#)



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Engagement and Awareness

Raising public awareness of the importance of digital media literacy is one of MediaSmarts' key mandates. We develop extensive awareness campaigns, receive coverage in major media outlets across the country, and our social media channels provide educational digital media literacy content to people across Canada.

MediaSmarts disseminates and promotes our bilingual educational resources and research through a multi-faceted communications approach. This includes social media promotion via our English and French channels on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok and Post totaling over 31,000 followers; promotion via our e-newsletters to over 8,000 subscribers; outreach to over 1,500 key education contacts across the country including school board and ministry contacts; and engagement with MediaSmarts' 100+ dedicated Teacher Champions, who act as ambassadors for media literacy in their schools.

Public Awareness Campaigns include:

- [Break the Fake](#)
- [Check First. Share After](#)
- [Cyberbullying](#)
- [Media Literacy Week](#)
- [Digital Citizen Day](#)

Our Recommendation

That the Government of Canada allot permanent and stable funding to organisations, like MediaSmarts, with a specific purpose and focus on increasing Canadians' digital media literacy, including through a national digital media literacy strategy.

For too long, the Government's approach to supporting Canadians' digital media literacy has been, at best, inefficient. In a world where most essential services and communications occur online, we, at MediaSmarts, posit that the distinction between online and offline is no longer pertinent: it is all part of our daily life. Yet, the Government of Canada has not dedicated resources or made commitment to developing a comprehensive digital media literacy strategy, this requires permanent and stable funding to achieve and support it. Canada was once a world leader in media literacy, and we have now fallen woefully behind many other nations and jurisdictions.

Hence, we urge the Standing Committee on Finance to demand that the Government of Canada take action in Budget 2024 to provide permanent and stable funding to organisations, like MediaSmarts, with a specific purpose and focus on increasing Canadians' digital media literacy, and lead the development of a national digital media literacy strategy.

We respectfully ask the Standing Committee on Finance to invite us to participate in its study of this consultation and in advance of Budget 2024, through Fall 2023. We would be pleased to attend to share more about our work, and the urgent need for permanent and stable support from the Government of Canada towards organisations like ours.



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For more information, please contact:

Kathryn Ann Hill

Executive Director
MediaSmarts

E-mail: KHill@mediasmarts.ca