STRATEGIC PLAN 2014-2021

CANADIAN COMMISSION FOR UNESCO

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Canadian Commission for UNESCO

Canada Council for the Arts

Conseil des arts du Canada

PREFACE

The Canadian Commission for UNESCO connects Canadians with the work of UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. It aims at creating a society in which Canadians share knowledge and learn from each other, locally and globally, in order to build peaceful, equitable and sustainable futures. It does so by supporting collective reflection, identifying priorities and facilitating concerted action in the fields of education, science, culture, communication and information to address some of the most complex challenges facing humanity. Recognizing that this mandate can only be fulfilled by engaging a broad range of partners, a spirit of cooperation is at the core of the Commission's work.

The Commission's previous strategic plan, *Refreshing the Spirit* (1999), outlined a new vision for the Commission by updating its mission, functions, and the roles of members and identifying ways of addressing interdisciplinary issues. Fifteen years later, a rapidly changing environment calls for a reassessment of how best to benefit and serve Canadians. Calls to involve the Commission in an increasing number of issues and provide support to a multitude of activities underline the need to establish clear priorities that build on its strengths and past successes and that focus on activities of the highest value for Canadians. Limited resources also underscore the necessity of abandoning activities better performed by other players or that have limited impact.

This Strategic Plan is intended to guide the evolution of the Commission and to frame its work by reaffirming its foundational principles, identifying overarching priorities, strategic objectives and actions, as well as developing performance measures. It is aligned with the timeframe and objectives of UNESCO's Medium-Term Strategy 2014-2021 and contributes, within its means, to the renewal of the United Nations system and the implementation of its post-2015 Development Goals. It is based on the functions of the Commission established in its Constitution and is aligned with the Strategic Plan of the Canada Council for the Arts. The Plan seeks to engage Canadians more concretely in the important work of UNESCO, and demonstrate the value of that work to Canadians.

I. A Time of Change, a Time for Change

Canadian society is undergoing profound change. Shifting demographics, including an aging population, are creating unprecedented needs; the commingling of different cultures is leading to new challenges on shared values; deepening concerns about socio-economic inequalities and environmental transformations, including climate change and loss of biodiversity, call for new approaches. In parallel, the enhanced engagement of civil society is redistributing powers of influence and modifying the traditional role of government.

Additionally, technology has altered innumerable aspects of life, including the way in which people act and relate to each other.

At the international level, the increasing number of inter-governmental and non-governmental players has raised questions about the role and impact of the entire United Nations system. Bureaucratic complexity and occasionally disappointing results have tended to undermine trust in the traditional multilateral system, including the United Nations. Boundaries between the local and the global are fast fading in a highly connected world. Threats to global ecosystems and shared natural resources, including oceans, further underscore the critical need for coordinated approaches. Rapid advances are occurring in the fields of sciences, education, culture, communications and information with profound implications for individuals and societies throughout the world.

The challenges are interconnected, and so too must be the responses. It is our collective responsibility to actively develop innovative and creative ways to address these challenges and governance systems that take account of emerging realities and needs. This will require new thinking and the engagement of a broad range of stakeholders from different sectors of society to jointly identify locally applicable and globally appropriate actions.

II. UNESCO and the Canadian Commission for UNESCO: Roles

> “Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed.” – UNESCO Constitution (1945)

Who We Are

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is one of 18 specialized agencies of the United Nations system. UNESCO was established in 1945, in the aftermath of the Second World War, with the mandate to promote a genuine culture of peace through international collaboration and intellectual co-operation in the fields of education, the sciences and culture. Canada was one of the 26 founding members. The Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD) represents the Government of Canada at UNESCO through its Permanent Delegation, which promotes Canadian interests and advances Canadian positions. Since 2006, in accordance with the Agreement signed by the governments of Canada and Quebec, the government of Quebec is officially represented within the Permanent Delegation of Canada to UNESCO. It now has an opportunity to bring forward its views on issues under its jurisdiction, in particular in the sectors of culture and education.

To support the fulfilment of UNESCO’s mandate, Member States are encouraged to establish National Commissions, whose role is “to involve in UNESCO’s activities the various ministerial departments, agencies, institutions, organizations and individuals working for the advancement of education, science, culture and information”[1]. This can involve direct participation in UNESCO activities or, alternatively, local initiatives related to the general objectives of UNESCO. National Commissions engage in outreach to, and mobilization of, partners. They allow for broad public engagement, which is essential to achieve the ambitious goal of contributing to the building of peace, the eradication of poverty, sustainable development and intercultural dialogue. In 1957, the Government of Canada assigned to the Canada Council, a federal Crown corporation, oversight responsibilities for this mandate and directed it to establish a Canadian Commission for UNESCO. The Commission is governed by an Executive Committee, made up of a President, Vice-President, Past-President, the Chairs of the three Sectoral Commissions (see below), three members elected by the Commission, and representatives from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, the Department of Canadian Heritage,

Our Values

The Canadian Commission for UNESCO is committed to:

- A global perspective that recognizes the interdependence of all peoples
- Broad-based knowledge and an interdisciplinary approach to addressing issues
- Freedom of expression that respects a diversity of views
- Continuous learning, creativity and innovation in meeting emerging challenges

the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, the Government of Quebec and the Canada Council for the Arts. The Canada Council provides the Secretariat for the Commission and the head of the Secretariat, the Secretary-General, is a member of the Canada Council's Executive Management Group as well as the Commission's Executive Committee. The Canada Council's arm's length relationship with government provides impartiality to Commission members in their collective endeavours.

Members of the Commission represent a wide array of Canadian organizations and individuals committed to advancing UNESCO objectives and advising on its programs. They include governmental organizations at the federal, provincial, territorial and municipal levels, professional associations, non-governmental organizations, and academic institutions from all regions of the country. Three Sectoral Commissions (in education, the natural, human and social sciences, and culture, communication and information) are a primary means of consultation, liaison and evaluation of UNESCO program activities.

[1] Charter of National Commissions for UNESCO

What We Do

In essence, the Commission brings Canadian perspectives to the international stage, particularly to UNESCO, and facilitates the implementation of UNESCO objectives and program activities in Canada. The Commission thus serves as a forum for reflection and a catalyst for collective action. Commission members influence, provide insights, and share best practices in an approach that is interdisciplinary, intercultural and intergenerational.

This interconnectedness is critical to the Commission's capacity to be resourceful, innovative and relevant. It constructively informs the impartial advice and recommendations that the Commission provides to the Canadian government on issues of major global concern. In its continuing efforts to balance continuity with change in the fulfilment of its mandate, the Commission is committed to working collaboratively, creatively and with a view to ensuring maximum benefit to Canadians.

III. Overarching Priorities

Inspired by UNESCO'S core mission, **three overarching priorities** are considered fundamental and relevant in the Canadian context to the Commission.

Fostering Peace

A commitment to peace is the foundation of UNESCO's creation and ongoing mission. UNESCO's fundamental objective – supported by National Commissions in the mandated areas of education, science, culture and communication and information – is building peace in the minds of men and women.

Peace is more than the absence of military conflict and inter-regional and community strife. It is the cultivation of an environment in which individuals from different backgrounds and with different ways of seeing the world can respectfully discuss and resolve differences. The Commission is dedicated to fostering inclusive dialogue and meaningful engagement with and among Canadians – to giving voice to all.

Encouraging Sustainable Futures

Healthy ecosystems are essential to life. UNESCO's approach to sustainability recognizes that ensuring a balance between the environment and development is not just about conservation and economic prosperity. The future of humanity and the world depends not only on economic capital and natural resources, but on our collective ability to understand and anticipate change, and address the human and social dimensions of development. Sustainability is critically dependent on education, the sciences, cultural diversity and heritage, social inclusion, technology and communication.

The Commission uses its convening role to advance holistic and global perspectives that manifest responsibility for the well-being of others, including future generations.

> “Sustainable development may be defined as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”
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> — World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987

Striving for Equity

The Canadian Commission for UNESCO strives for equity in its approach to promoting fairness to all regardless of gender, ethnicity, race, culture, language, age, sexual orientation or ability. It does so by encouraging the contributions and expressions of individuals from a broad range of backgrounds and by providing opportunities for genuine dialogue and exchange.

Gender equality in particular has received international attention as a universal human right essential to development. It has been a global priority for UNESCO for many decades and is explicitly recognized in the United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*. The latter was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948 and ratified by Canada in 1981.

The Commission also strives for regional and inter-generational equity in its partnerships and initiatives. Bringing together multiple voices enhances its ability to reflect current realities and identify collaborative and democratic approaches to complex problems. The full participation of everyone in global conversations is a prerequisite to peace and sustainable futures.

Bringing UNESCO to Life in Canada: Some Key Successes of the Commission

- North-South research collaboration enhanced by supporting UNESCO Chairs in Canada
- World Heritage valued and promoted by profiling Canadian sites and ensuring Canadian participation in the Memory of the World program
- Local community engagement and learning about sustainability through UNESCO Biosphere Reserves
- Anti-discrimination and anti-racism best practices promoted through a coalition of Canadian municipalities
- Active participation of Canadian youth through the Youth Advisory Group and UNESCO Associated Schools in Canada
- Support of freedom of expression and freedom of the press by organizing exhibits, presenting awards and supporting projects related to the safety of journalists

IV. Strategic Objectives and Actions

The following six strategic objectives and related actions have emerged from extensive discussions among members of the Commission and are directly aligned with the Commission's functions as defined in its Constitution. They flow from the overarching strategic priorities and reflect UNESCO's strategic objectives relevant to Canada. The strategic objectives and actions are interdependent and should be viewed as a cohesive and interconnected whole guiding the work of the Commission over the next seven years.

1. Strengthen the work of facilitating and implementing UNESCO program activities in Canada

To ensure relevancy, the Commission must assess issues of concern to Canadians and adapt its work accordingly. It needs to focus on UNESCO-related issues and activities that are of value to, and have the greatest impact on, Canadians.

Actions:

- Determine, in collaboration with members and partners, UNESCO programs of high value to Canadians that are consistent with Commission priorities and resources and Canadian governmental objectives.
- Undertake a thorough and critical review and evaluation of existing programs delivered by the Commission.
- Develop plans, with appropriate timelines, to align Commission activities accordingly.

2. Broaden efforts for effective and strategic Canadian participation in UNESCO program activities outside Canada

Canadians have made, and have the potential of continuing to make, valuable contributions to UNESCO's international activities. The Commission will strengthen its role in creating opportunities for Canadians to share their expertise and knowledge, and to deepen their involvement in UNESCO, thereby encouraging mutual learning.

Actions:

- Collect and analyze information on UNESCO-led international initiatives and events with the view to enhancing the participation of Canadians.
- Develop means of identifying and encouraging Canadians with expertise and interest in contributing to UNESCO's activities abroad and sharing their international experiences with the Commission's members.

3. Strengthen engagement strategies with members and partners

One of the greatest assets of the Commission is the diversity and expertise of its members and partners. The Commission will harness their expertise, knowledge, energy, and resources to inform its work, expand its reach and enhance its contributions to UNESCO and to Canadians.

Actions:

- Strengthen opportunities for sharing knowledge and collaboration across disciplines, sectors and generations, through in-person exchanges among members as well as through new communication and information technologies.
- Review and update the membership (including partnerships) to meet overarching priorities and strategic objectives.

4. Enhance its expert role in providing advice to government

With its broad membership and unique arm's-length relationship to government partners, the Commission is well positioned to provide timely and valuable advice. It will work to improve existing advisory and knowledge-sharing mechanisms by taking into account the realities of Canada and Quebec as a whole.

Actions:

- Critically assess the Commission's advisory function in order to maximize the value and impact of advice to government.
- Collaborate with governmental partners to improve processes for generating and presenting advice to the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development.

5. Reinforce its role in the development of existing and future UNESCO programs and proposals

The Commission will play a more active role in influencing existing and future UNESCO programs and activities. It will do so by creating frameworks for program development and prioritizing programs that align with Canadian interests and priorities.

Actions:

- Develop a framework to clarify decision-making, processes and objectives related to sustainable program development at UNESCO, including the sun-setting of programs that are no longer relevant.
- Review and prioritize a range of options related to existing and new programs in the context of the policy environment.
- Enhance the Commission's contribution to future-oriented thinking in relation to UNESCO initiatives.
- Contribute to strengthened collaboration within the global network of UNESCO National Commissions.

6. Enhance organizational capacity and performance

The conditions under which the Commission will operate over the next seven years, and beyond, may change in unpredictable ways. It is therefore important for the Commission to enhance its organizational capacity to be adaptive and flexible. Strategies will be implemented to improve its culture of collaboration and learning, governance, planning functions, internal and external communications, and performance management.

Actions:

- Review and update the Commission's governance framework (including its Constitution and By-laws), operational policies and organizational structure. Recommendations from internal audits will also be taken into account.
- Introduce a performance measurement framework that is outcomes-based and has effective reporting mechanisms.
- Enhance the Commission's future-oriented thinking and capacity to adapt, including professional development of staff.
- Enhance collaboration between the Commission and the Canada Council for the Arts.
- Strengthen internal and external communications (especially with Commission members and partners), including the use of social media and other emerging information technologies.

WHAT WE HEARD

The Canadian Commission for UNESCO has been consulting with stakeholders about its future directions for the past two years. Some 200 members of the Commission provided advice on its future at the 2012 and 2013 annual general meetings. The document "Reflections on Future Directions of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO" (February 2013) summarized views expressed at the 2012 annual meeting as well as the perspectives of the Executive Committee and the Commission Secretariat. Adopting new issues-based approaches and prioritizing the North both surfaced as strong interests.

In early 2014, members of the Commission's three Sectoral Commissions, representing approximately 130 organizations and individuals, were surveyed on a draft version of a new strategic plan. The results showed that a substantial majority of respondents believed that the priorities and objectives point in the right direction. They also recommended that the top-ranking roles for the Commission should consist of coordinating activities in Canada (including UNESCO networks) and facilitating the expression of diverse points of view. Respondents also emphasized the importance of enhancing the Commission's internal capacity and supported partnerships as an effective way of fulfilling the Commission's mandate. The membership confirmed its willingness to play an active role in implementing the Strategic Plan.

V. Implementation

The overarching priorities, strategic objectives and actions are designed to provide high-level guidance to the Commission and will be complemented by annual operational and budgetary plans, reports and impact assessments.

In addition, schedules with clear timelines will be developed to ensure harmonized implementation of all actions. An interim report on the Commission's activities will be prepared in 2017 to assess their impact and introduce course corrections as needed. This date coincides with the 60th anniversary of the Commission (and of the Canada Council for the Arts) and the 150th anniversary of Canada; it is an appropriate time for reflection, especially given the rapid pace of change in the Commission's environment.

VI. Strategic Plan 2014-2021

Canadians and other citizens of the world aspire to a future characterized by peace, sustainability and equity. The *Strategic Plan 2014-2021* of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO is designed to address this aspiration and demonstrate the Commission's value to Canadians by fostering effective collaboration among its members, partners and UNESCO in the areas of education, science, culture, communication and information.

For more information, please visit:
www.unesco.org and www.unesco.ca