



National Dialogue on Canada's Futures: Turning Hope into Action in a Turbulent Age

Project Brief

Project synopsis

The Dialogue will help Canadians imagine positive futures for our country and find pathways we can follow to make those futures real. It will seek common ground among Canadians on the underlying principles, identities, and moral commitments that can enable Canada to pursue broadly shared well-being in a time of environmental, social, economic, and technological turbulence. It will consult Canada's diverse communities, particularly groups that have had, to date, little chance to express their voice in national conversations. And it will identify concrete strategies, policies, and actions that can allow us to create together the positive futures we imagine.

The challenge

A convergence of powerful forces—from the COVID-19 pandemic and AI-empowered automation to increasingly extreme weather, growing inequalities, and declining forest and fishery resources—is upending livelihoods and communities across Canada and tearing at our social fabric.

Simultaneously, as a nation we are wondering how we should respond to the climate crisis and navigate the rapidly unfolding energy transition this crisis is forcing upon us. Yet almost all Canadian policy discussions and responses to these unprecedented challenges—whether federal, provincial, or municipal—are framed as narrow, technical matters of infrastructure investment, fiscal and tax policy, and regulatory changes.

Such responses are vitally important, but they do not directly engage with the wrenching “human” aspects of our converging crises—the fears and hopes they evoke, the moral quandaries they raise, the declines in trust and quality of life they cause, and the challenges to our systems and national identity they pose. Technical responses will fall on fallow ground without a broad conversation about how we are to live together cooperatively in a radically changed world.

What are our ambitions for our families, for our communities, and for Canada as a whole? What is our vision for a just, equitable, resilient, and flourishing society in the coming turbulent decades? How can that vision work within the hard constraints of our rapidly shifting climate and economic reality? How will we better share among ourselves the staggering costs and extraordinary opportunities the coming

challenges present? And what is our responsibility to people beyond our borders harmed by climate and other crises?

In Canada, these questions are rarely being asked, and they are certainly not being answered. If they are not effectively addressed in the near future, our country could fracture and split apart.

Project components

The following project components, outcomes, deliverables, and timeline constitute a preliminary outline for the National Dialogue on Canada's Futures that will continue to be shaped by ongoing consultations with the project's Advisory Group and a diverse range of communities across Canada.

We envision the Dialogue having three main components or "pillars":

(1) National online conversation. We will build an online national conversation between one million Canadians. The conversation will take place largely on a civic engagement platform and a branded project website, strengthened by a strong social media presence that leverages the engagement capacity of project partners. The online national conversation will also serve as the primary vehicle for polling and data collection, which will be used to shape the development of scenarios for the community dialogues. It will feature contributions from a diverse group of storytellers, poets, visual artists, and musicians that will seek to capture and shape the evolving conversation around our hopes and fears for possible Canadian futures. The engagement platform, website, and social media presence will collectively serve as the portal for users to engage with thought leaders and each other and to share their own creative content.

(2) Thought leader speaker series. A group of five to ten Canadian thought leaders with recognized expertise and experience related to the topics of values, system transformation, decolonization, justice and equity, economics, sustainable futures, and civic participation will deliver a series of keynote speeches, moderated conversations, and TED-style presentations across Canada. The series will be broadcast on a variety of platforms, including television, streaming services, and social media. Thought leader events will occur over the course of the public-facing rollout of the project to drive attention towards the community dialogues and the broad online national conversation—and to maximize opportunities for thought leaders to engage with, and respond and contribute to, the evolving conversation around scenarios and collective values. Thought leaders will have the opportunity to interact with each other and with the public through interviews, podcasts, roundtable discussions and participation in community dialogues.

(3) Community dialogues. Over the course of three to six months, a group of expert facilitators and engagement specialists, in partnership with post-secondary institutions and community organizations, will conduct approximately 50 structured two-to-three-day conversations across Canada with groups representing a broad cross-section of Canadian society. Each dialogue will involve 20 to 25 participants and will centre on a discussion of various scenarios for Canada's future produced by scenario-

development specialists based on national polling data and other inputs including the online civic engagement platform. Through this exercise, participants will better understand how their hopes, fears, and values shape their interests, thereby creating and constraining the menu of desirable Canadian futures. Through dialogue with other participants, they will also learn about the preferred futures of other Canadians outside of their “echo chamber,” identify areas of common ground, and develop specific policies, solutions, recommendations, and actions that will help Canada chart a courageous course in an age of turbulence.

Audiences

Over the course of the Dialogue, we will engage with one million Canadians 14 years and older, including individuals who are:

- statistically representative of the Canadian population;
- familiar with democratic processes like virtual townhalls, participatory budgeting processes, social activism, etc.;
- unfamiliar with deliberative democratic processes;
- representing a diverse range of socioeconomic, education, ethnic, religious, and ideological backgrounds;
- thought leaders; and
- community leaders working towards justice, equity, reconciliation, and the improved well-being of their constituents.

Project outcomes

Participation outcomes. Through their participation in community dialogues and the broad online national conversation, one million Canadians will:

- better understand how their hopes, fears, and values create and constrain the range of acceptable and desirable futures for Canada—both for themselves and others;
- consider the nature and extent of the sometimes-inescapable tradeoffs between key goals and look for as yet unseen win-win outcomes that can broadly benefit Canadians; and
- gain experience participating in democratic processes and become supporters of robust civic engagement.

Analysis outcomes. Through a largescale deployment of surveys and innovative methods for measuring public sentiment, values, and priorities, the Dialogue will:

- collect non-attributable data on values, value shifts, hopes, fears, and acceptable and unacceptable futures;
- identify mechanisms for building trust, shifting values, and identifying common ground; and

- develop insights that can help researchers identify high-leverage intervention points to accelerate a just net zero carbon energy transition.

Societal outcomes. Collectively, the three project components will:

- create a shared experience of national introspection and learning;
- contribute new methodologies that can be used in other instances to reinforce Canada’s civic infrastructure; and
- provide Canadians with a healing experience and an opportunity to build empathy “at scale.”

Action outcomes. Emerging from the community dialogues, participants will co-design:

- desirable and undesirable scenarios for Canada’s future and
- concrete pathways, strategies, solutions, and other actions that can help steer Canada towards desirable and away from undesirable scenarios.

Legacy outcomes: At the conclusion of the project, it will have generated broad support for:

- continued Canadian mass deliberation around complex issues that are difficult and contentious, in aid of new democratic practices to find and implement just solutions to critical national problems.

People and organizations

Core Organizations (university level, institute/initiative level, alphabetical)

Royal Roads University (RRU)
 Cascade Institute (CI) (RRU)
 Simon Fraser University (SFU)
 SFU Public Square (PS) (SFU)

Partner Organization

Office of the Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia (OLGBC)

Project Team (alphabetical)

Amanda Campbell (OLGBC)
 *Thomas Homer-Dixon (CI, RRU)
 Scott Janzwood (CI, RRU)
 * Janet Webber (SFU, PS)

Project Manager- tbd

Project Lead- tbd

*Core Organization “leads”

Advisory Council (alphabetical)

Amanda Gibbs, Manager of Engagement, Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation

David Jamieson, Chief Scientist, Environics

Peter McLeod, Principal and Founder, Mass LBP

Ruth Mojeed Ramirez, Founder and Chief Equity Officer, The Inclusion Project

Marilyn Taylor, Professor, Leadership Studies, Royal Roads University

Frances Westley, Professor Emeritus, University of Waterloo

Deliverables

National online conversation deliverables

- Engagement from 1 million users on the digital platform/website and social media.
- Online publication of creative content (storytelling, poetry, music, visual and multimedia art, etc.).
- Detailed data (from polling and other transparent data collection methods) on beliefs, attitudes across a wide range of topics pertaining to Canada’s futures (e.g., polarization, Canada-US relations, economic transition, climate change).
- Videos and blog posts communicating data analysis and data visualizations to participants throughout the process to shape the conversation.

Thought leader speaker series deliverables

- 5-10 keynote speeches, moderated conversations, or TED-style presentations across Canada.
- Interviews, podcasts, op-eds, and blog posts connecting thought leaders with each other and with participants and general public.

Community dialogues deliverables

- 30-60 community dialogues held across Canada with 750-1,500 participants.
- Detailed scenarios for Canada’s future and pathways, solutions, actions, and recommendations to get us there.

Final deliverables

- Interactive, digital “report” summarizing all project deliverables (including testimonials, artist interpretations of project outcomes, interviews with participants, expert analysis, and commentary).
- Communication and Public affairs strategy, including national media coverage and the publication of op-eds, interviews, podcasts, and other content.
- Publicly available repository of tools, methods, and other resources for engagement specialists.

Timeline

The Dialogue will roll out in six overlapping phases. All tasks will be jointly led by Public Square (SFU) and the Cascade Institute (RRU) unless otherwise specified.

Phase 1: Project development, fundraising, and staffing (November 2021 – August 2022)

- Expansion and diversification of Advisory Group (November 2021 – June 2022)
- Hiring and onboarding Project Manager (November 2021 – May 2022)
- Vice Regal presentation (February 2022)
 - Vice Regal consultations with key communities and facilitated connections with diverse regional institutions or potential partners (May-September 2022)
- Consultations with Canadian university chancellors (May - June 2022)
 - Partnership development with other Canadian PSEs (Summer/Fall 2022)
- Fundraising and building project partnerships (November 2021 – December 2022 and ongoing)
- Scientific Advisory Team formed and convened (April – August 2022)
- RFP processes (July - September 2022)
 - Website development RFP and vendor hire (Summer/Fall 2022)
 - Online Platform RFP and vendor hire (Summer/Fall 2022)
 - Scenario Planning RFP and vendor hire (Summer/Fall 2022)
 - Engagement provider RFP and vendor hire (Summer/Fall 2022)
 - Polling partner RFP and vendor hire (Summer/Fall 2022)
- Evaluation Methodology Development – created in consultation with Advisory Committee and 3rd party (Summer/Fall 2022)
 - Evaluation provider RFP and vendor hire (Summer/Fall 2022)
- Hiring and onboarding Project Lead (October 2022 - March 2023), **funding dependent

Phase 2: Public-facing launch and polling (October 2022 – January 2023)

- Website/platform public launch (October 1, 2022)
- National polling and data collection (October 1 – December 31, 2022)
- Online publication of creative content (October 1, 2022 – December 31, 2023)
- Thought leader speaker series (October 2022 – April 2023)

- Rolling out the public engagement strategy, including national media coverage and the publication of reports, op-eds, interviews, podcasts, and other content.

Phase 3: Data analysis, scenario development, and facilitator training (November 2022 – March 2023)

- Data analysis and preliminary scenario development (November 2022 – February 2023)
- Community Dialogues Facilitator training workshops (March 2023)

Phase 4: Community dialogues (April - June 2023)

- Conducting 30-60 dialogues coast-to-coast

Phase 5: Development and dissemination of final deliverables (July – December 2023)

- Publication of interactive, digital “report” (by December 1, 2023)
- Communication and Public affairs strategy, including national media coverage and the publication of op-eds, interviews, podcasts, and other content (July – December 2023)

Phase 6: Evaluation, legacy fund and capacity building (September 2022 – December 2024)

- Documenting processes, methods, and tools developed and piloted over the course of the project and making them widely available in the public domain (September – December 2023).
- Evaluating project success and reporting to funders and other stakeholders (September – December 2023).