

Brief to the Standing Committee  
on Canadian Heritage

**Nurturing Media Vitality in  
Quebec's English-speaking  
Minority Communities**

Presented by the  
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## **Introduction**

The Quebec Community Groups Network, or QCGN, is a not-for-profit representative organization. We serve as a centre of evidence-based expertise and collective action. QCGN is focused on strategic issues affecting the development and vitality of Canada's English linguistic minority communities, to which we collectively refer as the English-speaking community of Quebec.

Our 48 members are also not-for-profit community groups. Most provide direct services to community members. Some work regionally, providing broad-based services. Others work across Quebec in specific sectors such as health, and arts and culture. Our members include the Quebec Community Newspaper Association (QCNA).

English-speaking Quebec is Canada's largest official language minority community. A little more than 1 million Quebecers specify English as their first official spoken language. Although 84 per cent of our community lives within the Montreal Census Metropolitan Area, more than 210,000 community members live in other Quebec regions.

## **Media Landscape**

English-speaking Quebecers have consistently signalled that access to information in their own language is both a need and a priority.<sup>1</sup> In a world awash with English-language information through CNN, Time magazine and Hollywood movies galore, this may appear a bit of a contradiction. But the crucial nuance is that English-speaking Quebecers need a full flow of information in their own language about their own local and regional communities. This is becoming increasingly more difficult to achieve and maintain on a consistent basis because of two elements:

- the francization of daily life in Quebec; and
- the decline and in many cases the demise of traditional community media.

English-speaking Quebecers have historically enjoyed access to a variety of local and regional media. That history has now been disrupted by the same disturbing trends in media

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<sup>1</sup> Community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN) Community Vitality Survey, Final report by CROP, issued April 2010. Full text of report available on request. Among other subjects, the survey examined perceptions among a representative sample of 3,195 English-speaking Quebecers aged 18 and over of the degree to which English-language media represented their local communities. Results were broken out for each of 15 regions across Quebec.

that have given impetus to these hearings. The very existence of long-established media institutions deeply rooted in our communities now appears endangered. A significant number of these institutions have already disappeared. Others have been transformed, mostly not for the better.

News media currently serving English-speaking Quebec include:

- two daily newspapers (The Montreal Gazette, which also has a significant digital presence, and The Record, based in the Eastern Townships);
- more than four dozen community newspapers, of which 30 belong to the QCNA and some of which are ‘inserts’ in French-language community newspapers;
- three network television stations with major websites (CBC, CTV and Global) along with City TV;
- Community TV – which is enjoying a recent revival in Montreal, if not elsewhere in our community outside that city;
- radio stations that provide news and current affairs (CJAD, CBC);
- eight community and campus radio stations (two are campus, and two of the community stations are bilingual); and
- a variety of online-only media outlets, such as MTL Blog, and some serving as ‘community hubs’ in rural regions to fill the vacuum left by the demise of traditional community newspapers.

## **The Legacy of Print**

It is difficult to believe in the current embattled context. But for many years the English community in the Montreal region and beyond was served by three daily English-language newspapers. The Montreal Herald, founded in 1811, was shut in October 1957. The Montreal Star had been the region’s dominant English-language daily. It began in 1869 but was closed in September 1979. The Gazette, founded in 1778, flourished following the demise of the Star but has been stripped of considerable breadth and depth of coverage in recent years, before and after its inclusion in the Postmedia network. For traditional print, the business model appears broken. Reporting resources have inexorably dwindled, in successive waves.

New print publications have appeared, only to fail and ultimately fall. The tabloid Montreal Daily News was published briefly by Quebecor, in 1988 and 1989. Alternative weekly newspapers — the Montreal Mirror and Hour, offering significant news coverage but largely focussed on culture — arose, faltered and then disappeared. In the Quebec City region, the Quebec Chronicle-Telegraph had been struggling, after a distinguished history, and more recently has undergone something of a revival. The Huntingdon Gleaner closed in June 2015 as a stand-alone newspaper, after 152 years of covering its community, and is now an insert

in the middle of a French-language weekly in nearby Valleyfield-de-Salaberry. In October 2015, The West Island Chronicle and The Westmount Examiner, each by then only a shadow of their former selves, ceased publication entirely. In sum, regional community newspapers have struggled (becoming inserts), dwindled and in many instances perished.

## **Situation Overview**

A vibrant, healthy and diverse media serves to inform, encourage, embody and advance public debate. It also provides a core indicator of the civic health of its community. Free-flowing, wide-ranging information and opinion enables and nourishes democracy. Local media that accurately reflects the community it serves is essential to help sustain democratic values and provide a framework for our communities to evolve.

These values are of even greater importance in situations characterized by minority linguistic and cultural status. One of the policy roles and mandates of Canadian Heritage is embodied in its explicit commitment to the enhancement of the vitality of the English linguistic minority community in Quebec (a mirror of its commitment to the French linguistic minority community outside Quebec). That commitment extends to “supporting and assisting” development. Ensuring access to information and news in the community’s own language is an important and indeed a fundamental element of any such commitment, we would contend.

It is in this context that we are addressing you. **Our challenge, as English-speaking Quebecers, is to find ways to foster, support and encourage quality media content that is local and relevant even as news consumers now turn to digital sources in ever-greater numbers.**

Details are available from multiple sources, but it must be recognized that dwindling reporting resources at The Montreal Gazette are among the most obvious subjects of concern for our communities. Similarly, staff cuts at BellMedia have led, among other developments, to the high-profile elimination of a full-time CJAD Quebec Bureau reporter in fall 2015. While the CBC is no longer cutting, its prospects were somewhat diminished until the recent federal budget. In private television, the three private over-the-air stations in Montreal (Bell’s CTV/CFCE, Shaw’s Global, and Rogers’ City TV) appear to be in difficulty; figures indicate that for the first half year of 2014-15, they registered half-year revenues of \$4.0 million and costs of \$9.4 million.

Accurate staffing figures for local media are difficult to obtain. Carmel Smyth, president of the Canadian Media Guild, has told this committee that since 2008, by the guild’s estimates, cuts have resulted in over 16,000 job losses in Canada’s media. Statistics for Quebec,

specifically in our case for English-speaking Quebec media, are not readily available but it is safe to say that they are at least commensurate.

The empirical evidence is compelling.

It must be noted that many English-speaking Quebecers regularly follow local news coverage through French-language media. This is particularly the case in regions where no local English-language media exists. French-language media have not been sheltered from prevailing readership and fragmentation trends.

### **Financial Pressures Continue to Intensify**

Revenue trends are clear, and in some instances shocking where figures are available. Quarterly financial results announced by Postmedia last Thursday are indicative. Expressed as percentages on a year-over-year basis, these amount to double-digit shrinkage. Print advertising revenue, excluding the Sun chain, was 18.3 per cent below that of a year earlier. Classified advertising, once a newspaper-revenue staple, has virtually evaporated. Consumers have abandoned the placement of ads in for-profit newspapers because Craigslist, Kijiji, Lespac and similar services allow them to buy and sell items, rent apartments, etc. for free.

Importantly, revenue for a sector which had been seen by some as the salvation of “traditional” print media — digital — is actually declining as well, in absolute terms, for sites operated by media companies with roots in print. The latest quarterly decline for digital revenue at Postmedia was 4.2 per cent<sup>2</sup> on a year-over-year basis, excluding its Sun newspapers acquisitions. For the most recent six months, the company’s digital revenue drop was even sharper, amounting to 5.7 per cent, or \$2.6 million.

Simple appearances and the number of websites may convey an apparently ample and burgeoning growth and availability of online content. This is deceptive; much content, of course, is overwhelmingly non-local. Vast swaths offer little value — devoted to fluffy celebrity fare, various forms of click baiting and aggregation (and re-aggregation) of news from other sources.

Among the possibilities for alternative sources of revenue for traditional media, long the backbone of local and community-based reporting, web paywalls have proven largely problematic. Also, so-called “native advertising” or “sponsored content” — where editorial-

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<sup>2</sup> Postmedia Reports Second Quarter Results: <http://www.postmedia.com/2016/04/07/postmedia-reports-second-quarter-results/> (Accessed April 7, 2016)

type stories are directly underwritten by a specific advertiser —carries its own set of ethical and content issues.

However, it should be noted that after a hiatus of nearly 20 years, encouraging steps have been taken to revive English-language community TV in Quebec. Since September 2015, Videotron has been broadcasting 20 per cent of its MAtv schedule in English. This percentage roughly reflects the demographic weight of English speakers in the Greater Montreal area. In addition, Bell Media has established a video-on-demand community channel (TV1) for its Fibe service, in Quebec City and Montreal. This service could be considered regional, because programming is produced in both locations. Some of that content is available on YouTube, for community members who are not Fibe subscribers.

Beyond news and current-affairs programming, the Anglophone Minority Incentive (AMI) fund in the Canadian Media Fund has been allocated an additional \$500,000 this year, to \$4.5 million. This support is expected to assist in the production of more than \$50 million of new English-Quebec dramas, documentaries and children's shows for the 2016-17 TV schedule.

### **Impact of staff cuts in traditional media already obvious, but full toll yet to be assessed**

Simply measured, our newspapers are much skinnier than in years past. Editorial content has dropped proportionate to sharply diminished display advertising. Some advertisers — notably major car brands —continue to advertise heavily in traditional media. But small businesses and entrepreneurs are going digital, shifting their ad dollars to the web, Facebook and Google in particular, for more efficiency. It is commonly said that each \$7 of revenue disappearing from print is replaced with just \$1 of digital revenue.

Your Committee, of course, is already acutely aware of the effects on substantive content — to date — of the successive waves of editorial-staff downsizing. But it bears repeating; traditional media that provides the backbone for solid, day-to-day local reporting has been gutted and not adequately replaced in other forms of media. The drop in variety and depth of stories has been devastating. Inexorably, circumstances have fostered superficiality, and a steady narrowing in range and depth of coverage. For instance, detailed, thoughtfully prepared newspaper-style obituaries for prominent local individuals who were not political figures these days have become few and far between. With few exceptions, obituaries now are limited to wire-service filler, largely profiles of freshly deceased American luminaries for which copy is readily available at little cost. Such a trend in local and regional media, the venue for community memory, is both telling and dispiriting.

Day-to-day coverage of small and medium-sized municipal government is another area that has been largely emptied, except for cases of scandal or corruption crackdowns. There are many sources for international news, but there are no other journalistic sources to which citizens can turn to for authoritative information about important issues in our own backyards.

In both small and large-scale media, erosion of staff required to produce quality content continues. Yet another round of wholesale layoffs and/or buyouts — in Postmedia for the print/digital sector and BellMedia in broadcasting/digital operations — has in recent months again shaken the pillars. The full effects have yet to become apparent.

Relentless narrowing continues of a community resource that serves as the primary conduit for public information, particularly local news. Any trust among the public that issues important to smaller communities will be fully examined, discussed and aired is being rendered ever more fragile. The public silence that has largely surrounded this hollowing out — and let us note that these hearings are a notable exception — would have been unimaginable a decade ago. Recall, for instance, the furor that followed the announcement of the so-called ‘national editorials’ by what was then the CanWest chain in late 2001, one element that led to the creation of the Senate inquiry of that era into media.

Much more serious, fundamental and profound structural change confronts us now than was the case 15 years ago. Much is already a *fait accompli*. We are presenting several proposals, simultaneously acknowledging that actions taken cannot be allowed to interfere with or compromise traditional freedoms of the press. You no doubt will agree that this is a difficult and complex issue, without simple solutions.

To adequately assess the situation on an ongoing basis, all parties require a better measure of what community resources we have lost already, and a way to properly monitor likely losses in years to come. The QCGN thus recommends that appropriate federal resources be earmarked to monitor, on an annual basis, the change in number, type and location of reporting, editing and other media jobs linked to each media enterprise, across the full print, broadcast and digital spectrum. It should be noted that the Government of Canada’s Canadian Industry Statistics covering employment in the Information and Cultural Industries is far broader, and does not currently provide such information in sufficient granular detail.

These media-outlet figures should be compiled on a full-time-equivalent basis and reflect, as well, whether each position is considered permanent or freelance. Using records provided by each enterprise, a comparable historical record should be established, going back about a decade. Historical and current figures can be then analyzed with an official language

minority lens to properly evaluate the long-term impact of these changes on the vitality of our communities.

### **Impact on Quality and Quantity of Community Coverage**

Another structural change has also been imposed lately that requires closer examination. Postmedia, publisher of The Montreal Gazette, is the media player with the largest footprint in the daily-newspaper sector across Canada and the dominant press player in English Quebec. It has taken a step replete with ramifications, largely centralizing copy-editing and production work for most of its newspapers in a single location. (Such stories are also posted onto its newspaper-linked websites.) Story choices and the staff to produce each story have also been significantly reduced. People making many of these choices no longer live in our communities, given that Postmedia now aggregates national and international news in a separate section. For English-speaking Quebecers in Montreal and region, that section is included in The Gazette and explicitly branded as a National Post product. But the section is designed and produced elsewhere. The repercussion on local journalism jobs has been drastic. Given current trends, this approach may well prove a harbinger of further, future centralizations. It should be noted that such a standardized national/world news section is, with an identical approach, packaged with Postmedia's daily newspapers elsewhere in Canada. While this no doubt provides substantial economies of scale, the cost to discerning readers, especially in official language minority communities, cannot be ignored or discounted.

This structural change should also be considered from a longer-range perspective. Not many years ago, all of Quebec's major English-language media stationed legislative journalists in both Ottawa and Quebec City. As a matter of course, issues including the impact of legislation were reported, examined and assessed specifically for and from the perspectives of English-speaking Quebecers. But the number of voices providing breadth of such coverage has been decimated.

With regard to the parliamentary press gallery at the National Assembly, the impact of convergence on TV and radio coverage has been dramatic. Staff and coverage levels have been sharply reduced. For instance, the CBC English Service once operated a National Assembly staff of four — one producer plus one reporter each for TV and radio in addition to a camera person. Now, one reporter must handle both TV and radio, without help from a producer. For Bell Media, a single reporter remains to generate both TV and radio stories. In the past, a TV reporter covered for CTV and a radio reporter provided coverage specifically for CJAD. At the Canadian Press bureau, English-language reporting staff was cut from two to one to none. Copy from Presse Canadienne reporters is now being translated into English for distribution on the CP network, along with stories from The Gazette's solo National



Assembly reporter. As a result, far fewer stories of specific interest to and impact on Quebec's English-speaking population are being produced. In addition, the Globe and Mail and the Toronto Star both chose not to replace their National Assembly reporters. So, because of this, many fewer political-news stories are also being produced explaining Quebec news from an Anglophone perspective to the rest of Canada.

Here on Parliament Hill, meanwhile, specific newspapers long operated their own parliamentary bureaus, producing a fuller range of political news tailored for their own communities. That national news was controlled, assigned, edited and placed by editors in each city who were sensitive (as well as sensitized) to the interests of their readers. Now, not only is the number of reporters and columnists way down, but the locals are no longer clearly in charge. The levers of decision-making have largely been moved elsewhere. Elimination of local-newsroom-produced stories is also apparent in the Business, Entertainment and Sports sections of The Gazette.

The imposition of similar economies of scale is, of course, also abundantly apparent across the broadcast sector. For our communities, elimination of a Quebec City radio reporter specifically assigned to Montreal's CJAD Radio marked a particularly disturbing watershed. In private television, use of the "green screen" technique now allows a Toronto studio to host some local Global TV newscasts for Montreal. And even where English-language weekly newspapers have been 'saved' by their new French-language owner newspaper chains, i.e. The Gleaner, an increasing amount of the content consists simply of articles translated from the French-language newspaper into which it has been inserted. Often, at that, the translations into English leave much to be desired.

At the CBC, the Quebec Community Network's radio broadcasts to English-speaking Quebecers off the Island of Montreal were the first and hardest to be hit by cutbacks as regional newsrooms outside Montreal were targeted. CBC once had an English-language radio reporter on the Gaspé Coast, and threatened more than once to eliminate the Sherbrooke bureau along with significant regional programming. For Montreal, a steady cadence of CBC cuts included the halving of Radio Noon on CBC Radio One to one hour from two (it is the only regional weekday radio program to be broadcast over the whole province, which even then does not include the Outaouais region which is covered by Ottawa). It is a condition of licence for the CBC to spend not less than six per cent of its national English-language programming budget in Quebec. The CRTC also expects that CBC English-Quebec independent production will not fall below 12 per cent of CBC's national independent production budget.

Coverage of issues with a unique impact on Quebec's English-speaking population — the kind of in-depth, day-to-day coverage that can realistically come from no other source than

local or regional media — has been thinned out and is endangered. Fewer and fewer beat reporters remain, provided with adequate time and resources to develop in-depth expertise and stories. Education and health care, both governed provincially and often in turmoil, spring immediately to mind among core community-specific issues. There are others. Will such coverage continue to erode? This appears inevitable.

**It is in this context that we propose possible remedies — or at least ways to limit the damage.** Any question of providing commercial financial subsidies instantly raises an intractable set of fresh problems and obstacles, and must be rejected out of hand. Traditional boundaries governing government interaction with media ownership must remain in place, and must be respected.

However, clear opportunities exist for you to **encourage and foster development of new, community-based media vehicles to supplement existing local coverage, and help replace locally relevant content where it has been thinned and often disappeared.** These ventures could be seeded so that they will have a chance to bloom in sometimes surprising and unexpected ways, including the digital sector. In some instances, they could help existing local media grow, or in some cases establish a digital presence. In a pattern familiar to the digital and technology industries, some are likely to ultimately fail. But in the process they could provide quality local content, allow budding journalists to develop their expertise and experience, and perhaps inspire successor projects with more long-term viability. After all, history does teach that lessons from failure are always the most instructive.

Thus, we propose **a substantive broadening of the Canadian Periodical Fund support mechanism to fully include and actively embrace new media and online-only media.**<sup>3</sup>

We note from earlier testimony before the Committee that the Canadian Periodical Fund already offers financial assistance for print media producers to establish digital apps. Thus, Hebdos Québec, a non-profit group representing French-language weekly papers in Quebec, has been enabled to launch a new mobile app for its independent Quebec weeklies, for smartphone and tablet users. Of the group's 32 weeklies, 24 are expected to become available via the free tablet app by September 2016.<sup>4</sup> It would be only natural for Quebec's English-language weeklies to be provided similar necessary assistance take the same step.

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<sup>3</sup> One of many policy recommendations included in Journalism in Crisis, Bridging Theory and Practice for Democratic Media Strategies in Canada. This compendium of papers, produced by scholars, journalists and media activists, is scheduled for May 2016 publication by University of Toronto Press.

<sup>4</sup> Hebdos Québec launches Mon Journal Local mobile app : <http://newspaperscanada.ca/news/cpf-launches-new-funding-program-digital-periodicals/> (Accessed April 11, 2016)

More recently, it should be noted, the Canadian Periodical Fund took a small — but rather significant — first step into the digital-only sphere. It announced a new pilot project to encourage the development of digital periodicals. The new program offers very limited assistance, up to \$5,000 in start-up funding for digital-only periodicals.<sup>5</sup>

We welcome this initiative. But, it is clear, the future is online and the Fund must move very rapidly indeed to fully embrace new media and online-only media, to place assistance for the latter on the same footing as has long been the case for its traditional print periodicals.

Such a substantive further broadening of the mandate of the Canadian Periodical Fund — to fully embrace the digital-only sector — would clearly require a concomitant increase in the overall financial resources allocated

It would also open up further possibilities for collaboration between Quebec's official language minority communities and major institutions such as the CBC and universities and colleges. For example, many journalists get their start working for the CBC before moving on to other media; CBC acts as a de facto training ground. Providing the CBC and other local media with resources for (paid) internships in conjunction with university journalism and communications programs would at least help to get some reporting boots on the ground and open the door for a new generation to become active in local and community media.

In addition, the portion of the Canadian Heritage Strategic Fund that has traditionally been allocated to the development of official language minority community radio stations to fund feasibility studies and 50 per cent of equipment purchases has been left largely unchanged since its inception in 1988. This fund could be reoriented to include new community media ventures, without excluding community radio. Indeed, in 2008 Canadian Heritage financed the development of an innovative micro community radio station network,<sup>6</sup> which included recognition by the CRTC that regulations could be adapted to respond to this innovative approach.<sup>7</sup> However, there was no follow-up funding at the national or regional level, and no capacity or resources in the communities for further development and implementation.

**Cooperative ventures**, whether involving traditional or community media, similarly offer a promising venue. One example, using traditional media, is offered by the MTL After Dark

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<sup>5</sup> CPF launches new funding program for digital periodicals <http://newspaperscanada.ca/news/cpf-launches-new-funding-program-digital-periodicals> (Accessed April 11, 2016)

<sup>6</sup> Micro radio stations are an alternate approach to community radio broadcasting that operate at very low power in rural and remote areas, have limited production facilities and are linked via the Internet to share programming with other micro stations via a central server. They could provide limited local programming mixed with programming obtained from networked production centres, and programming would vary at the discretion of the community operator of each station.

<sup>7</sup> Broadcasting Regulatory Policy CRTC 2010-499, articles 159-161.

project, a collaboration between the Department of Journalism at Concordia University and CBC Montreal. A small-team approach allows stories to be developed with text, audio, video, photography, infographics and maps. These local packages, staffed by graduate and undergraduate journalism students, are then carried by CBC Montreal.<sup>8</sup>

Any financing for such projects should be channelled through third parties. In this vein, the 2006 Senate report on media recommended that **the definition of charitable foundations be broadened, to allow not-for-profit media to be included in this part of the federal tax regime.** In the view of the QCGN, the time for such a step to be taken is long overdue.

Imaginative partners/participants would include journalists equipped with digital savvy, with something of a business plan and the drive to create their own niche (and a source of income). For many, it would offer an initial step in their post-schooling career, in a sector where pathways to permanent employment are now severely constrained in our minority community and others.

Two examples of this potential are the fledgling “community hub” websites GOGaspe.com and ValleyJunction.ca. These were started by local individuals in their respective communities (Gaspé and the Chateauguay Valley). They are multi-purpose online community web services, a “hub”, for information and events for and about the communities they serve. Taking advantage of the Internet and social media tools, they aim to inform and thus involve residents directly in all that is going on in their community.

Community organizations can post stories and reports about their activities. The hubs also provide classified ads, announcements and one-stop calendar listings for community events, along with sections for business advertising, personals and legal notices. Such hubs can also take advantage of digital publishing, to provide up-to-the-minute news and information from citizen feeds, and keep everyone connected through links to websites, Facebook and Twitter.

Information and community connections are available from these websites, but no (or little) ‘news’ of the more traditional type of reporting to which communities have previously been accustomed, via community newspapers. Other financing sources could broaden these initiatives. With an entrepreneurial approach, multiple sources could be packaged for specific projects. **The use of crowdfunding would in some instances provide an additional lever effect for financing.** Canadian Heritage has already taken a leaf from that book, with its acknowledgment that successful crowd-funding campaigns will provide an

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<sup>8</sup> Concordia University/CBC series explores Montreal’s stories after sundown: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/montreal-after-dark-concordia-university-1.3514475> (Accessed April 7, 2016)

important way for it to evaluate applicants for its new digital-only pilot project in the Canadian Periodical Fund sphere.

Such projects might nurture some very useful and surprising ongoing results. It is instructive to remember that the VICE media group, now a significant media-industry player, arose from a subsidized program in Montreal, a print publication which it is said was to have been called Voice until a printer neglected to use the letter 'o.'

### **Buttressing Local Media**

Our focus is not just on digital, of course. Federal government spending on advertising in newspapers has fallen sharply in recent years. According to one report, this figure has plunged to \$357,000 for 2014-15 from roughly \$20 million about 10 years ago. Four out of five Canadians continue to read a newspaper at least once a week. Room clearly exists to substantially restore government ad placement with an emphasis on newspapers that cover local news. It would be expected that a significant proportion of the additional revenue provided would be used to sustain and enhance local editorial content.

But there is a much more significant step to take. CBC/Radio-Canada receives \$946 million a year and an additional \$60 million annually has been promised, about a \$1-billion total. Much of that stabilized funding should be used to restore local coverage in the regions. Minority language community newspaper associations have recommended that one per cent of that \$1 billion, or \$10 million, be allotted equally among minority community newspapers or their associations to support member services, sustainability, education, recognition and retention of English- and French-language journalists. Such an avenue could be explored with a view to supporting the survival of local media that is critical to the vitality of official language minority communities.

This suggestion by the QCNA and its Francophone counterparts is a good one that we believe could be broadened. The creation of a Community Media Foundation, like the Community Radio Foundation, would support community media across all platforms and new media ventures, such as the ones suggested above. Such projects would require evidence of community ownership or involvement to receive funding. This approach could be twinned with a paid-internship fund, to enhance the participation of journalism and media technician students in support of such initiatives. This latter idea could be structured as a government summer jobs or internship program such as Young Canada Works, in both official languages.

## **Development of a Spectrum of Digital Alternatives (Social Media)**

A remarkably broad variety of community journalism models are emerging.<sup>9</sup> Harking to a recurring theme, however, these are vulnerable to faltering or even failure. In the United States, so-called hyperlocal news projects established and operated by the Washington Post, the New York Times and the Gannett chain have all been shut.<sup>10</sup>

Among the longer-lasting digital alternatives in Canada is The Tyee, in operation on the West Coast since November 2003. From a content point of view, the site is outstanding. It is both instructive and sobering to note that, according to its website, it does not generate any profits. A more recent version of such a digital project is the Canadaland venture in Toronto. Financing there also appears challenging. Ricochet is another promising if perilous online venture, launched and conducted on the proverbial shoestring. The lesson is clear. Magic solutions do not exist. Nor, of course, is it productive or realistic to seek them. But these types of projects, in particular those conceived to focus on linguistic-minority communities, would clearly benefit from the substance broadening, referenced earlier, of the support mechanisms offered by Canadian Periodical Fund .

### **Citizen Journalism**

Any citizen journalism is to be encouraged. Particularly at times of crisis, the media ecosystem's news stream provided by Twitter and other social media provides a valuable service. But this should be viewed strictly as supplemental. There is no free lunch, and citizen journalism does not necessarily feature objectivity or comprehensiveness as a core value. It would be foolhardy to rely on citizen journalism for any steady supply of the type of meat-and-potatoes reporting vital to local communities that is needed, a breed of reporting underpinned by continuity and a dedication to objective research. Citizen journalism is by nature more episodic and can't always be counted on to reflect shared understandings and community history.

### **Specific Considerations: Urban Versus Rural Communities**

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<sup>9</sup> With partnerships and young reporters, Chicago's City Bureau builds a collaborative community newsroom: [http://www.cjr.org/united\\_states\\_project/chicago\\_city\\_bureau.php](http://www.cjr.org/united_states_project/chicago_city_bureau.php) (Accessed April 7, 2016) Coverage of similar ventures is available through that website, under what the Columbia Journalism Review has named the United States Project.

<sup>10</sup> Journalism in Crisis (ibid)

Broadband continues to be limited in the regions, as indicated by a freshly issued CRTC map produced in conjunction with a new hearing on basic telecommunications services.<sup>11</sup> Thus, digital choices provided to citizens in rural areas continue to be restricted. Rollout of full and affordable broadband access across rural locations remains a necessity. The commitment by the current federal government in its recent budget to spend \$500 million on enhancing rural broadband over the next five years is encouraging, but these promises have been made by previous governments of various political stripes without much effect. It is therefore essential to reinforce the notion that accessible and adequate broadband services in rural communities is an important if not an essential instrument of development for official language minority communities.

We must also not ignore the demographics. Many older citizens who are most accustomed to print and television are effectively shut out of democratic discourse when it is carried out through such digital means as Twitter and Facebook. Those who lack the requisite digital skill set are simply locked out of enhanced access to knowledge and information in encyclopedic quantities. More than one quarter of Quebec's English-speaking citizens are seniors. The decline of print largely orphans those who are unversed in or uncomfortable with emerging technologies.

The Council for Anglophone Magdalen Islanders (CAMI) recently completed a development project to determine the feasibility of establishing a multi-media community information service to replace their defunct community newspaper, *The First Informer*.<sup>12</sup> Of particular concern was the need to be able to serve the senior population, while at the same time taking advantage of digital technologies and the willingness of the regional French-language community radio station to collaborate. The study demonstrated that a community combination print-digital-radio news and information service was well suited to serve the needs of the isolated community and financially viable on an operational basis. However, the organization hasn't been able to generate the necessary investment funds, nor find qualified personnel to run the service. Our proposals in this brief have been conceived to overcome precisely such obstacles.

Local news poverty is a particular issue for English-speaking Quebecers who live outside major media centres, in this instance Montreal. We await results for the Local News Research Project being conducted at Ryerson University's School of Journalism, which is focused on documenting local news poverty in communities outside Canada's major media centres. As a first step, the project has launched a crowdsourced map to document gains,

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<sup>11</sup> Broadband Internet Service Coverage in Canada: <http://www.crtc.gc.ca/eng/internet/internetcanada.htm> (Accessed April 8, 2016)

<sup>12</sup> Communications Planning and Development for the English-speaking Community of the Magdalen Islands - Phase 1 – Feasibility Study, August 2014

losses, service increases and service reductions at local online, radio, television and newspaper outlets.<sup>13</sup>

### **Outlook for Next Five to 10 Years**

The ultimate fate of the latest trend adopted by mainstream or so-called legacy news organizations — using a customized tablet edition to channel digital media — remains unclear. In Canada, the approach is now exemplified by La Presse+ in Montreal and, with the Star Touch product in Canada's largest city, at the Toronto Star. We note that Postmedia tried a customized tablet approach across many of its newspapers, but in light of slow market acceptance quickly killed it. The cutback of La Presse at the start of 2016 to a single print edition each weekday (except Saturday) — and thus its bold elimination of Monday through Friday print editions — can easily be read as an indicator of a possible future trend, one to which The Gazette in Montreal might not prove immune. Such a development, along with the effects of a potential restructuring at Postmedia alluded to in its most recent quarterly financial report, would raise even more serious issues for The Gazette's readership base, our linguistic minority community.

### **Foreign-Ownership Rules Merit Another Look**

The QCGN is not taking a firm position on the question of foreign ownership of print media. However, we suggest the subject of foreign ownership across the board merits a thorough and expert review, in light of indications that Google and Facebook are collecting two thirds of the digital ad dollars spent in Canada with little to no local-community investment in return.

### **Summary and conclusion**

The essential challenge is to find ways to assist local and community media to survive and thrive in a context of significant, rapid — and indeed constant — financial and technological change. We must acknowledge that is difficult and no doubt unrealistic to believe that the current trend in erosion of traditional community media can or will be fully reversed.

But careful students of history know that the unexpected result and the unanticipated consequence can be both formative and formidable. After all, the development of the Internet itself began as a U.S. government military project.

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<sup>13</sup> New research project examines local news poverty <http://localnewsresearchproject.ca> (Accessed April 7, 2016)



We believe the recommendations outlined in this brief will help lay the groundwork to encourage a fuller spectrum of healthy community media for the digital era, especially as it impacts the official language minority community in Quebec.

Our proposals have been conceived through an official language minority lens with a double goal, so that:

- the quality and breadth of public information for our communities would be improved; and
- implementation would provide opportunities for bright, imaginative and entrepreneurial journalists and media technicians, and encourage the initiation and evolution of innovative approaches.

Our recommendations have been framed in a pragmatic, cost-effective way, to help revitalize media in our local communities by filling in at least some of the gaps where coverage and depth has been lost. Filling these gaps is, at a minimum, required to provide official language minority communities with a level of news and information about their own communities that they have repeatedly said they are lacking or find deficient.

Relatively modest in scope, these solutions could be rapidly implemented through modifications or additions to existing programs. As noted, some preparation and development work has already been undertaken.

Lastly, we respectfully underline that these recommendations also offer a relatively rapid payback in that the range and quality of information provided to the English-language minority in Quebec would improve. We believe similar solutions could also be considered for implementation outside Quebec.