

Digital steps offer renewed vitality for media serving Quebec's English-speaking minority

For immediate release

Montreal – April 12, 2016 – A series of pragmatic, cost-effective steps designed to rapidly help restore the vitality of news media serving the province's English-language community was presented to federal Members of Parliament today by the Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN).

The scope and size of the federal government's Canadian Periodical Fund should be substantially enlarged to actively embrace community-based initiatives in new media and online-only media, said Walter Duszara, secretary of the QCGN's Board of Directors. The Fund is currently focussed almost entirely on support mechanisms that benefit non-daily print periodicals and their offshoots, but recently took a modest initial step toward support for digital-only pilot projects.

Duszara was speaking at an Ottawa hearing of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, which is examining media and local communities. Given "the decline and in many cases the demise of traditional community media" that had long served the English official language minority across Quebec's regions a broad series of measures are now needed, said Duszara.

The QCGN proposals would stimulate formation of cooperative ventures, including the creation and growth of English-language community media hubs to serve outlying regions starved of local content, Hugh Maynard, a past chairman of the network and president of Qu'anglo Communications, told the committee. Two examples of this potential are fledgling websites GOGaspe.com and ValleyJunction.ca. Another promising potential regional project, in the Magdalen Islands, is currently stalled, but these measures could help it launch. It would establish a multi-media community information service to replace the defunct English-language community newspaper, The First Informer.

A steady erosion of conventional media in recent years, Maynard added, has diluted and weakened "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.” New, community-based media vehicles, Maynard said, would “supplement existing local coverage, and help replace locally relevant content where it has been thinned and often disappeared.”

Among other proposed steps, QCGN urged substantial restoration of federal-government advertising placements in community newspapers to near the levels of years past. It also proposed that a total of \$10 million be allocated annually, across the country, to minority community newspapers or their associations to support member services, sustainability, education, and recognition and retention of English- and French-language journalists.

The group also endorsed a 2006 recommendation from a Senate of Canada report on media 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. “The creation of a Community Media Foundation, like the Community Radio Foundation, would support community media across all platforms and new media ventures,” Maynard noted. These, he added, “would require evidence of community ownership or involvement to receive funding.”

The QCGN brief also examined Quebec’s current English-language media landscape and took note of dwindling resources that in recent years have dramatically reduced the scope and depth of news coverage provided by major newspaper and electronic-media providers.

“Free-flowing, wide-ranging information and opinion enables and nourishes democracy,” Duszara told the House of Commons committee. “These values are of even greater importance in situations characterized by minority linguistic and cultural status.”

“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 QCGN rejected, out of hand, any question of providing commercial financial subsidies.

The Quebec Community Groups Network is a not-for-profit organization bringing together 48 English-language community organizations across Quebec. As a centre of evidence-based expertise and collective action, it identifies, explores and addresses strategic issues affecting the development and vitality of the English-speaking community of Quebec. The group encourages dialogue and collaboration among its member organizations, individuals, community groups, institutions and leaders.

For further information:

Rita Legault, Director of Communications and Public Relations | rita.legault@qcgnc.ca
Telephone: 514-868-9044, ext. 223, cellular: 514-912-6555