



FEDERATION FOR THE
**HUMANITIES AND
SOCIAL SCIENCES**

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Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences

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Introduction

Our world is changing fast. From climate change to pandemic recovery, huge global shifts require us all to have the right skills, knowledge and understanding to navigate an uncertain future.

Today's employers are looking for graduates with sophisticated communications skills; an ability to work with, understand and adapt to other people; and critical-thinking, analytical and problem-solving abilities. These skills help businesses grow and thrive. They are also the hallmarks of an education in the social sciences and humanities.

The value of the social sciences and humanities, however, goes well beyond jobs and the workforce. These disciplines discover, preserve and mobilize knowledge about Canada, the world, and ourselves – including our history, languages and cultural heritage. They strengthen our democracy. They also address big challenges, including reconciliation, global populism and yes, COVID-19.

In short, the social sciences and humanities are exactly what Canada and the world urgently need today and into the future.

Knowledge for a rapidly changing world

Almost overnight, COVID-19 made most of us more reliant than ever before on our modems and mobile devices. Our growing lists of virtual meetings and digital purchases are a reminder of the dramatic effects technology is having on companies, consumers, and entire industries.

While the pandemic may be accelerating the changes in our economy, it did not create them. For years, many experts have been predicting that automation driven by artificial intelligence will not only eliminate much of the repetitive physical work done by people, but also many routine cognitive tasks. What will remain – and likely grow in value – is what people do that cannot be reduced to an algorithm, including creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, leadership, empathy and other relational skills. These are central to the research of our scholars and integral to the education our students receive.

The same is true in the public sphere. Along with an explosion of social media, we have experienced a surge in “fake news,” fragmentation, and polarization. Not only do these trends pose a threat to our democracy, but also, as we have seen, in the midst of a public health crisis they are a danger to peoples' lives and well-being. Researchers investigating these trends can help us contain their risks, while they also help form the engaged, informed citizens we will need to resist the threats of the “post-truth” era.

This is increasingly true of many of society's most pressing issues: they are much more than technical challenges and resolving them will require much more than technical knowledge. COVID-19, for one, continues to be rigorously studied within the health sciences, but the quality of our pandemic response has depended every bit as much on the contributions of sociologists, economists, political scientists, and historians, among others. The same is true of other major, public challenges: if it involves people, it involves the humanities and social sciences.



In Budget 2022, the federal government must take action to ensure that we have the knowledge and skills to address the complex challenges facing Canadians today. To that end, the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences makes the following recommendations.

Recommendations

1. Fundamental research and the balance of funding across disciplines

Recently, the Government of Canada has taken steps to improve our country's long-term competitiveness by reinvesting in our research system, including the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. Budget 2022 must continue in this direction.

In 2018, the federal government announced the largest multi-year investment in fundamental research in recent history, and modestly increased the share of overall research funding directed toward the humanities and social sciences. It was an important first step toward correcting the negative effects of many years of underinvestment.

The years of inadequate investment were especially hard on the humanities and social sciences, as governments all too often excluded these disciplines from new programs and funding opportunities. This is an error Canada cannot afford to repeat, considering the vital role of these disciplines in meeting the needs of an increasingly complex, knowledge-driven and service-oriented society.

2. Open science, online learning

COVID-19 has forced institutions around the world to shift more of their activities online. As part of its recovery strategy, the federal government can help build the capacity of Canada's universities and colleges to give all students equitable access to online education and grow international and domestic enrollments as online learning evolves. These investments can improve access to online courses in rural, northern, and remote communities, including for many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, and create new opportunities for students to participate regardless of disability, physical distancing, work or family requirements.

The government should also commit to an Open Science strategy for federally funded research, as recommended by the Chief Science Officer and the February 2020 *Roadmap for Open Science*. Lowering barriers to research will benefit students, fuel innovation and economic growth, and put knowledge in the hands of more people working to solve global challenges.

An immediate priority is to help more Canadian researchers publish open access books, which can be found, read and shared by any person in the world with internet access. A modest federal investment would vault Canada to the forefront of open access book publishing and help build a vibrant Canadian publishing sector for the digital age.



3. Supporting reconciliation with Indigenous peoples; and equity, diversity, and inclusion

In Canada and around the world, we have recently witnessed a growing awareness of social and racial injustice, including systemic discrimination, police violence, and anti-Black, anti-Indigenous, and anti-Asian racism. The growing public conversations around these issues have led to demands for action and emphasized the importance of working with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples to support reconciliation and confront the effects of colonialism.

The need to address these issues is even more urgent as a result of COVID-19, which has compounded many of our society's most serious inequities.

This is a time for federal leadership. The federal government should increase investments in Indigenous education and support equity, diversity and inclusion in all aspects of Budget 2022. It should also fund new scholarships, bursaries, and research grants, and use these to create more opportunities for members of equity-seeking groups, including Black and Indigenous scholars and graduate students.

Conclusion

Scholars in the humanities and social sciences make vital contributions that support Canada's prosperity and competitiveness. Although the federal government has taken many worthwhile steps in recent years, it must take further action now to support Canada's COVID-19 recovery and build a more equitable, sustainable, and prosperous future.

About the Federation

The Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences promotes research and teaching for the advancement of an inclusive, democratic and prosperous society. With a membership now comprising over 160 universities, colleges and scholarly associations, the Federation represents a diverse community of 91,000 researchers and graduate students across Canada. The Federation organizes Canada's largest academic gathering, the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences, bringing together more than 8,000 participants each year. For more information about the Federation, visit www.ideas-idees.ca.