



FEDERATION FOR THE
**HUMANITIES AND
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Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences

2026–2030 Strategic Plan: Inflection Point



Letter from the President and CEO and Board Chair

To the Federation community and to colleagues across the humanities and social sciences in Canada,

We are at a pivotal moment for the humanities and social sciences (HSS) community. For nearly a century, and for 30 years as a unified national organization, the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences has worked to sustain the HSS in Canada. This Strategic Plan: *Inflection Point* marks not simply a continuation of that work, but its next chapter.

Our disciplines and community face continual pressures across both our postsecondary ecosystem and Canadian society. Yet, within this lies the opportunity for a critical inflection point. More than ever, our disciplines are being asked to do more of what they do best: to make sense of change, interpret complexity, and bring evidence-based and human-centred understanding to the questions we, as Canadians, are facing together.

Inflection Point sets out how we will meet that call. The strategy invigorates the national infrastructure and coordination required to bring HSS knowledge into Canadian life with conviction and standing. At its core is a renewed understanding of the role our disciplines must play, and of the Federation's responsibility to steward that role across the country.

Over the period from 2026 to 2030, we will focus our collective efforts in three directions by:

- **Amplifying impact through advocacy and public engagement** by bringing HSS expertise into policy conversations and public life.
- **Strengthening the community through capacity building** by supporting scholars and leaders to engage, collaborate, and lead nationally.
- **Reimagining new ways of convening** by evolving Congress and developing flexible, year-round opportunities for meaningful exchange.

These directions are informed by cross-cutting commitments:

- **Advancing equity, diversity, inclusion, and decolonization (EDID)** as a foundational condition for equitable participation and representative leadership.
- **Promoting access and visibility in both official languages** and supporting broader Francophone mobilization.
- **Enhancing operational excellence** by delivering infrastructure that is accountable, responsive, and built for long-term sustainability.

Inflection Point is also an invitation to collectively choose to meet this moment with purpose. An inclusive, democratic, and prosperous Canadian future requires us to show up boldly where we are needed—a responsibility carried by scholars, leaders, institutions, and collaborators alike. The Federation's role in the years ahead is to provide the leadership and coordination that make this collective work possible.

We invite you to read this plan in that spirit: as a shared commitment, built from experience and reflection, and oriented toward a better future that our scholarship makes possible.



Let's meet this moment together.

Karine Morin

President and CEO

Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences

Dr. Barrington Walker

Chair, Board of Directors

Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences

Introduction

The Federation's new strategy defines a clear vision for its future and, in turn, that of the humanities and social sciences (HSS) community in Canada. It responds to emerging sector challenges and embodies our community's collective ambition.

Our previous strategic plan, released in 2016, focused primarily on advancing the Federation's member relationships and reinforced Congress as an essential space for scholarly exchange. Building on that foundation, our new strategic directions look outward to the broader ecosystem in which academia and public life intersect.

Informed by consultations across our membership and the wider community, this new strategy recognizes the pressures facing the HSS today. These include widespread questioning of the relevance of HSS education and research, as well as undervaluing the cultural understanding they provide. Moreover, public debates around "theoretical" versus "practical" education have eroded public recognition of the essential role HSS disciplines play in fostering social cohesion and democratic citizenship.

These perceptions have informed policy decisions that threaten the sustainability of many HSS programs in postsecondary institutions. In fact, across Canada, we have witnessed new constraints on postsecondary institution funding, resulting in austerity measures, including program closures. These challenges are compounded by broader societal issues like political polarization, the erosion of shared civic values, and misinformation—areas where HSS scholarship provides critical guidance and solutions.

In the face of these challenges, our role is more critical than ever. The Federation must extend its reach and impact beyond its flagship event, the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences, and engage more visibly across postsecondary education, the policy landscape, and society at large. This will require expanding our focus and operations, with an openness to experimentation and adaptations. It will also entail changes that enable the Federation to respond more effectively to regional and linguistic circumstances and priorities. To that end, we will evolve with purpose and



agility as an organization that exists to amplify scholarly voices, advance the value of HSS inquiry, and enhance the influence of HSS scholars and leaders on policy and society.

Grounded in three interconnected strategic directions, arranged in order of priority, and supported by two enablers, this strategy provides a framework for the Federation's next phase, carrying forward a rich historical legacy and balancing continuity with evolution to ensure that this vital work endures for decades to come.

Over the next five years (2026 – 2030), the directions outlined below will be flexibly pursued, adjusting as circumstances evolve. In setting this new course, the Federation affirms the importance of ongoing engagement with our community to ensure that our efforts remain responsive to emerging and changing needs.

Vision

An inclusive, democratic, and prosperous society advanced by humanities and social sciences knowledge of peoples, cultures, institutions, and social change.

Mission

To promote humanities and social sciences scholarship and leadership through advocacy, capacity building, and knowledge exchange.

Strategic directions

Strategic direction 1: Amplify impact through advocacy and public engagement

Our advocacy approach is based on communicating the unique value of HSS disciplines to several audiences: policymakers who control funding decisions, institutional leaders who shape academic priorities, media who influence public discourse, and citizens who benefit from HSS scholarship. We will promote our disciplines by proactively demonstrating how they address Canada's most pressing challenges, including Truth and Reconciliation, democratic participation, social cohesion, and cultural understanding. Our advocacy and public engagement will also aim to reflect the realities of both English- and French-language research communities and respond rapidly to emerging issues. They will cultivate networks and alliances to build long-term support across the country for HSS and their contributions to society.

Description

Position the Federation as an authoritative champion of the HSS, ensuring key audiences recognize and support the vital contributions of these disciplines.



Key actions:

- **Extend strategic influence in national policy circles:** Position the HSS as essential contributors to national policy discussions and decision-making.
- **Engage with institutional and provincial advocacy networks:** Collaborate with existing regional and institutional advocacy actors across Canada to advance the interests of HSS scholars and students.
- **Develop agile policy intelligence and response:** Establish a rapid-response system to monitor, analyze, and address emerging policy opportunities and threats affecting HSS disciplines.
- **Build evidence toolkits:** Create data-informed policy briefs and impact stories that members can deploy for recruitment and to advocate for funding support from government, the private sector, and postsecondary institutions.

Strategic direction 2: Strengthen community through capacity building

Our capacity-building efforts will support the diverse needs of our community. As a Federation representing HSS scholars and their allies, engagement will be thoughtfully tailored across contexts, disciplines, career stages, and linguistic considerations. Working with and through our institutional members, we will expand support for graduate students, postdocs, and early-career researchers. At the same time, we will create networks that facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration across disciplinary boundaries, recognizing that many of our most significant challenges require interdisciplinary solutions. Additionally, as many members are themselves advocates of the HSS, we will develop opportunities to build advocacy and leadership skills among current and future leaders, such as department chairs, deans, and other senior administrators.

Description

Foster a connected, skilled, and resilient HSS community by creating meaningful opportunities for knowledge sharing, professional development, and peer support.

Key actions:

- **Nurture leadership capabilities for HSS leaders in institutions:** Build capacity among current and future institutional leaders through structured and targeted professional development opportunities.
- **Empower scholarly association leadership:** Equip scholarly association leaders with the tools, knowledge, and information needed to navigate the challenges their associations are currently facing effectively.
- **Strengthen member initiatives:** Fund and amplify members' initiatives that promote francophone participation; enhance accessibility, equity, diversity, and inclusion; and advance decolonization.



- **Support emerging scholars:** Expand networking, mentorship, and professional development opportunities, along with career resources specifically for graduate students, postdocs, and early-career researchers, with targeted support for equity-denied communities.
- **Foster excellence in French-language scholarship and research:** Help reduce barriers facing French-language scholars engaged in research and, as part of the Federation's programs, ensure equitable participation and recognition of French scholars.

Strategic direction 3: Reimagine new ways of convening

For over 90 years, Congress has served as the Federation's flagship gathering, bringing together thousands of academics, institutional members, and scholarly presses in an annual showcase and exchange of HSS research. While Congress remains valuable, the evolving needs and realities of our community demand innovative approaches to convening. We must rethink how the Federation fosters intellectual relationships, teamwork, and public involvement.

This shift will require adaptation both internally and from our members, as well as experimentation with new convening models that prioritize inclusion and impact over tradition. We will pilot regional events that bring scholarly discourse closer to communities across Canada, develop thematic gatherings that address urgent interdisciplinary challenges, and intentionally leverage virtual platforms to supplement rather than replace in-person events. We will create spaces where bilingual, cross-disciplinary engagement generates innovative solutions and deepens the relationship between scholarship and societal impact.

This approach does not abandon Congress; instead, building on its rich legacy, we will plan a reimaged Congress model that will remain a unique convening to celebrate the humanities and social sciences.

Description

Redesign Federation programming to create more inclusive, impactful, and sustainable opportunities for knowledge sharing and community engagement.

Key actions:

- **Reimagine Congress:** Create a more open, accessible, bilingual, and sustainable event, within a broader suite of convening activities.
- **Launch pilots as part of a suite of Federation-convened activities:** Pilot new events that create academically rigorous and accessible opportunities for scholarly convening and that explore regional, thematic, interdisciplinary, and/or cross-sectoral considerations.
- **Leverage virtual engagement opportunities:** Build robust, intentional virtual programming that enhances member connection and learning, and complements in-person gatherings.
- **Engage the public:** Further integrate public-facing events into Congress and other convening activities, with a focus on amplifying HSS scholarship in both English and French



that is relevant, accessible to public audiences, socially impactful, and exemplifies the value of HSS disciplines.

- **Design inclusive convening:** Hold events that are accessible, bilingual, and diverse through universal design, financial support, and culturally responsive programming.

Strategy enablers

Two foundational enablers will underpin every aspect of our strategy. Each includes a set of cross-cutting principles that guide decision-making, collaboration with members and other partners, and program design. Rather than functioning as standalone priorities, these enablers amplify and reinforce our strategic directions.

Advancing equity, diversity, inclusion, and decolonization ensures that our work authentically represents and serves the full spectrum of HSS communities, while enhancing operational excellence builds the infrastructure and capabilities necessary to deliver sustained, measurable impact. Together, they create the conditions for the Federation to fulfill its mission of promoting the HSS' role in advancing a more inclusive, democratic and prosperous society.

Enabler 1: Advance equity, diversity, inclusion, and decolonization

Description

Embed principles of equity, diversity, inclusion, and decolonization across all Federation activities to guide decisions.

Principles:

- **Meaningful participation:** Ensure Federation governance, programming, and funding reflect and support diversity across the HSS community.
- **Barrier removal:** Identify and mitigate obstacles (e.g., linguistic, geographic, financial, technological) through early planning, accommodation, and support for under-resourced and historically excluded communities.
- **Diverse and decolonial knowledges:** Strengthen space for knowledge systems from Indigenous, racialized, disabled, and other equity-denied communities by promoting diverse methodologies and languages, and supporting approaches that honour Indigenous sovereignty.



Enabler 2: Enhance operational excellence

Description

Cultivate internal systems and capabilities that enable effective delivery of strategic priorities while ensuring accountability and continuous improvement.

Principles:

- **Accountability and strategic resource allocation:** Establish data collection, analysis processes, and reporting mechanisms to track progress and ensure staff expertise and financial resources have the greatest impact on strategic priorities.
- **Robust organizational policies and practices:** Continue to proactively evaluate and improve policies and practices that support the identification and removal of systemic barriers to participation in Federation activities.
- **Modern digital infrastructure:** Use integrated, bilingual digital platforms, databases, and virtual tools to facilitate coordination and engagement among association and institutional members.
- **Impactful communication:** Elevate the Federation's communications strategy to amplify Federation transparency and visibility, and showcase member expertise and achievements for existing and new audiences.



Methodology

This strategic plan was developed in collaboration with Higher Education Strategy Associates (HESA) between March and October 2025, aiming to set a course for the Federation amidst a rapidly changing environment within and beyond the Canadian postsecondary ecosystem. This involved a multi-stage, multi-channel consultation and data gathering exercise to shape a future for and with our community, engaging stakeholders across roles, institutions, and points of connection with the Federation.

Key informant interviews: In late winter 2025, HESA conducted a total of eight (8) group and individual interviews with Federation staff, executives, and Board members to assess the current state of the Federation and expectations regarding the strategic planning exercise.

Environmental scan: Concurrently, HESA developed an environmental scan focusing on three key areas: emerging issues, including institutional pressures and the changing relationship between the public and scholarship; the state of the sector, including the changing research environment and the impact of technological and social change; and knowledge dissemination, including open access and public knowledge sharing. These insights provided the foundation for the next stage of engagement.

Survey: A survey and the environmental scan were sent to the Federation's membership and key interest holders (institutions, associations, affiliates, scholarly publishers, sponsors, and other partners), ensuring input from a wide range of perspectives, to validate findings from the environmental scan further and to identify priority challenges and opportunities related to the role of the Federation and of Congress. The survey was active between April 23 and May 12. It received 69 responses.

Focus groups and interviews: HESA gathered additional input through a series of 13 HESA-facilitated, in-person and virtual consultations between May and July. These focus groups included nearly 90 participants. Moreover, 21 interviews were conducted with institutions and four interviews with members of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC).

Together, these sources of evidence directly informed the Federation's strategic plan. Moreover, HESA compiled its findings into a report submitted to the Federation in October.

It is also important to note that the Federation collected additional input related to Congress through the work of the "Reimagining Congress Task Force," which conducted its work during the summer of 2025, adding a complementary and program-specific channel of consultation.

Plan development and finalization: In August 2025, HESA presented the community's perspectives to the Federation's Board, which further discussed potential models of membership organizations and their respective focus. Through this workshop, key strategic directions were identified.



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A draft strategic plan underwent several rounds of revisions and adjustments from October to November and was approved in December, incorporating a wide range of evidence and input gathered throughout its development.