



DIGITAL SKILLS ACCESS

FOR

ALL CANADIANS

Digital Skills Access for ALL Canadians:

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DIGITAL SKILLS ACCESS FOR ALL CANADIANS:

Goals of the Community-Access Media Fund

The Canadian Association of Community Television Users and Stations has proposed in several fora the need for the creation of a Community Access Media Fund (CAMF) to:

- fulfill the objectives of the Canadian Broadcasting Act with respect to community media by enabling Canadians to access both traditional and new media platforms
- to participate meaningfully in both local culture and public discourse, and by extension with Canadians across the country through content sharing
- to acquire digital skills, to enable them to participate fully as citizens, producers, and entrepreneurs in the new digital economy.

The fund would:

- a) Bring access to multi-platform digital media training, production and distribution hubs within reach of at least 90% of Canadians (all communities over 10,000, and regional services in areas where populations are more sparsely distributed).
- b) Make sure that Canadians in all regions can enjoy a comparable level of service and access.
- c) Build on and enhance existing facilities wherever they exist.

Services of a Digital MultiMedia Access Centre

It is our vision that digital multimedia access centres should offer the following services:

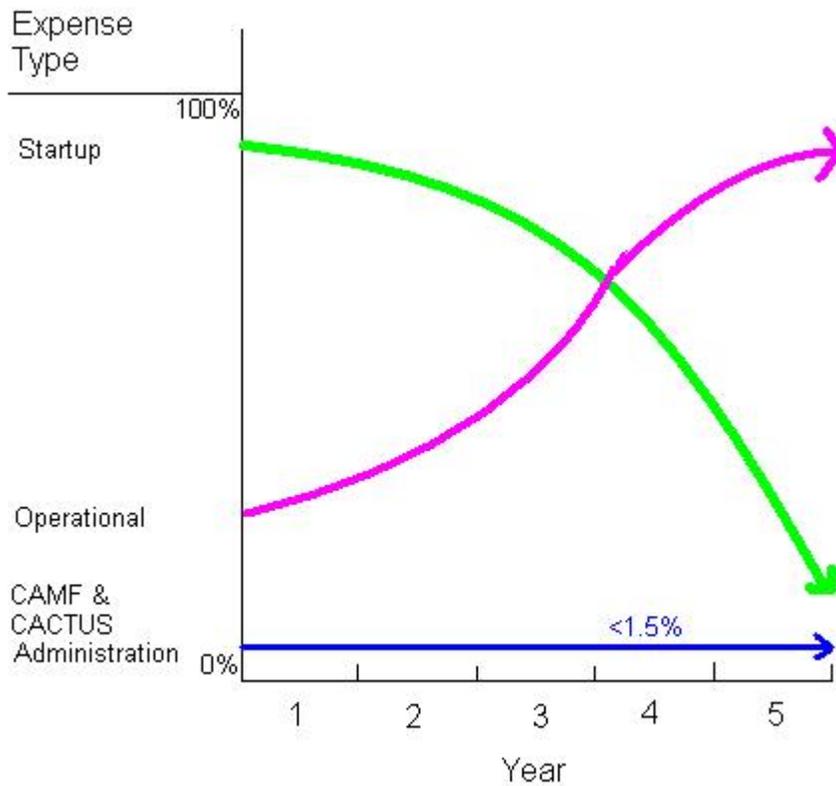
- Digital literacy skills training, including general computing skills, and the ability to both find and create content (text, audio and video) on new media platforms. This does not necessarily imply training in particular software packages (since there will always be new ones), but introductions to representative applications, models, and principles for integrating multimedia content on new platforms. The emphasis will be on high-end, leading edge, data-rich, graphic and multimedia applications, since introductory computing skills are available already through a range of highschool, college, and other courses and organizations.
- Equipment access and loans to enable community members to pursue multimedia digital content creation both on site and off site throughout the community. Skills will be learned and applied in a production environment, with direct benefit to the community.
- Multiplatform distribution and archival facilities for content produced by the community, including traditional broadcast platforms, the Internet, and wireless and mobile platforms. The output of the centres will be “digital townhalls” for communities country-wide.
- Access to these services for all community users, including local government and agencies, not-for-profit organizations, individuals, and the small entrepreneur.

Operating Principles of the Community-Access Media Fund

The goals enumerated on page 3 lead to several operating principles:

- 1 In order to establish a comparable level of service in small communities as in large communities, relatively more has to be spent per capita. There is a minimum budget necessary to access transmission networks, establish training facilities, and to purchase computers, digital and production equipment.

Sample budget ranges for a small and a medium-sized community are provided below.
- 2 In granting funding to a given community, the target should be that the access centre's budget from all sources should meet the minimum budget levels established by CAMF for a community of that size. This means that funding can be directed more heavily to regions that might currently i) have no service or infrastructures from which a digital skills and access centre could be developed and ii) less potential for alternate sources of funding from municipal, provincial, or other sources.
- 3 The long-term size of the fund is determined by estimates of on-going operational costs at full capacity (approximately 250 access centres country-wide). Publicity and community education about the existence of the fund, how to apply to it, and how to manage such centres will take time, however (not all within a single calendar year). Therefore, money expended in the early years will be primarily start-up expenses, but as the total number of access centres approaches the target, the fund will reach a steady state where it is almost all being used to meet the operational needs of existing centres. A break-down by year of this process and a graph represents this evolution visually below.



4 Because the infrastructure for digital skills and media training is currently at a low level, the fund in its first and early years should concentrate on:

- Building on existing community infrastructure and expertise
- Developing best practices at these and selected new centres in the first year (preferably one large community and one small community per region), which can serve as models and regional training centres to help communities in surrounding areas get established in subsequent years.

Sample Budgets for Multimedia Digital Access Centres:

Smaller Communities: 10,000 to 30,000 people

There are eighty-five communities with populations between 10,000 and 30,000 in Canada. Our estimated start-up and operational costs for media centres in these communities are set out below:

Small Community Estimate	
Startup Costs	
Digital multi-media production equipment	\$304,500
Mobile digital skills and production lab for community outreach	\$50,000
Internet lab	\$6,000
Office equipment and furniture	\$2,000
Transmission and network infrastructure	\$100,000
Engineering consultancy	\$20,000
Total	\$482,500
Yearly Operational Costs	
6-8 staff (manager, community outreach co-ordinators/trainers with different media specialties, technician)	\$350,000-\$450,000
Repairs (parts)	\$10,000
Materials	\$30,000
Rent or mortgage, building maintenance	\$25,000
Professional fees	\$3,000
Total	\$418,000-\$518,000

Larger Communities > 30,000 people

There are eighty-six communities of over thirty thousand people in Canada. Our estimates for multimedia access centres these communities are set out below.

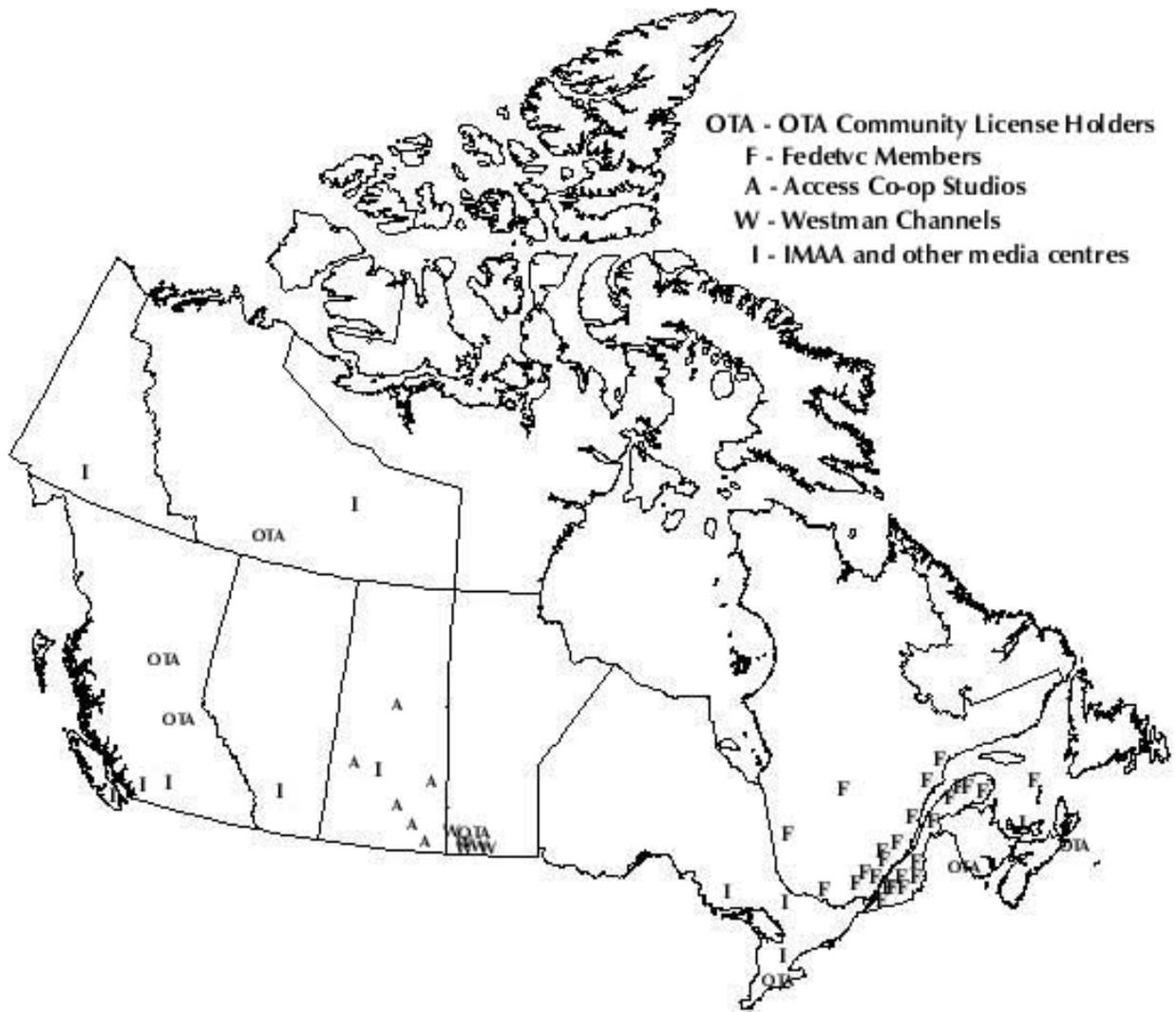
Large Community Estimate	
Startup Costs	
Digital multi-media production equipment	\$379,500
Mobile digital skills and production lab for community outreach	\$100,000
Internet lab	\$10,000
Office equipment and furniture	\$6,000
Transmission and network infrastructure	\$100,000
Engineering Consultancy	\$20,000
Total	\$605,500-\$671,500
Yearly Operational Costs	
8-11 staff (manager, community outreach co-ordinator/trainer(s), technician)	\$450-600,000
Repairs (not including labour)	\$20,000
Materials	\$40,000
Rent or mortgage, building maintenance	\$50,000
Professional fees	\$3,000
Total	\$563-713,000

Existing Organizations that Could Be Upgraded to Digital Multimedia Access Centres:

At present, there are:

- Approximately 40 community-owned and operated television channels, with varying degrees of digital and HD readiness, that currently reach 2.5 million Canadians. Their mandates would have to be expanded to include Internet labs with general digital literacy skills training programs.
- At least 12 members of the Independent Media Arts Alliance (IMAA) that are interested to pursue a digital skills and multi-media training centre model. IMAA is a national association of media arts organizations including film and video production co-operatives. These organizations already offer training and equipment support to their communities, but lack broadcast. Some are already pursuing distribution on new-media platforms. These 12 are situated within reach of an additional 4 million Canadians.

The locations of these two categories of organizations are shown in the following map.



- In addition, there are 138 low-power community radio licence holders whose signals reach over 75% of Canadians¹. Some of these may be interested in expanding their mandates to include television and new media. Many already use

¹ Sources: the web site of the National Campus and Community Radio Association and the submission to CRTC public policy review 2009-418 by the NCRA, ARC du Canada, and ARC du Quebec.

new media components and understand that media convergence affects community as much as it does mainstream media.

- There are also over 3,000 “CAP” sites, where free Internet services are offered in public places such as community centres and libraries. Some of these already offer some training in media production and Internet skills and could evolve into full digital multimedia access production and distribution centres.

We therefore propose that non-profit community organizations that are already enabling digital literacy and media production be targeted for upgrades to become full digital multiplatform access centres within the first year. Communities that have no such existing facility would be targeted for the establishment of new centres in subsequent years.

Sample Roll-Out

The following table shows how this might roll out in the first three years of the fund, assuming that CAMF receives the full \$113,000,000 it needs to achieve its mandate:

Year 1:	
Infrastructure grants and upgrades to existing independent community-based digital and media organizations.	
Estimate per facility	
General equipment upgrades (could include digital and HD)	\$100,000
Addition of transmission and network access infrastructure	\$100,000
Addition of Internet access terminals, web-streaming, on-line program archives	\$20,000
Addition of radio broadcasting for communities that don't have it and want it	\$32,500
ESTIMATE OF TOTAL UPGRADES PER FACILITY:	\$252,500
ESTIMATE OF TOTAL UPGRADES	\$20,705,000
Supplement staffing for existing 82 community-based media organizations:	\$18,450,000
Fund management and national co-ordination:	\$1,500,000
New facility start-ups, including year 1 operational costs: 32 small, 32 large	\$72,345,000
Total Year 1:	\$113,000,000
Year 2:	
Operational costs for 48 existing large facilities (>30,000) :	\$28,224,000
Operational costs for 98 existing small facilities (<30,000)	\$45,864,000
Fund management and national co-ordination:	\$1,500,000
New facility start-ups, including year 2 operational costs: 28 large	\$34,310,400
Total Year 2:	\$113,000,000
Year 3:	
Operational costs for 76 existing large facilities >30,000	\$44,688,000
Operational costs for 98 existing small facilities (<30,000)	\$45,864,000
Fund and national association:	\$1,500,000
New facility start-ups, including year 3 operational costs: 10 remaining large	\$12,265,000
7/24 additional facilities in cities > 500,000	\$24,530,000
Total Year 3:	\$113,000,000

In year 4, the remaining additional facilities in cities > 500,000 would be complete and attention would be shifted to setting up additional training and production facilities in communities < 10,000 that are not within easy reach of a facility serving 10-30,000.

In actual fact, the setup rate in the first year of the fund might be slower than projected, due to the need for promotion and education about the purpose and availability of the fund monies. A more realistic estimate is that by the end of year 5, the fund would be mainly dispensing operational monies, monitoring performance of existing channels, and setting up additional outreach facilities in communities < 10,000.

For More Information:

For more ideas regarding the proposed goals, structure and operating principles of CAMF including:

- a proposed board composition for the fund
- the proposed board composition for the community-based non-profit organizations who could apply to the fund, and
- how information about the fund might be disseminated and co-ordinated nationally,

... please contact CACTUS.