

CANADIAN CULTURE ONLINE

A Charter for the Cultural Citizen Online



FINAL REPORT OF THE CANADIAN CULTURE ONLINE
NATIONAL ADVISORY BOARD



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The Honourable Liza Frulla
Minister of Canadian Heritage

Dear Minister:

On behalf of the members of the Canadian Culture Online National Advisory Board, I respectfully submit our final report.

From the outset, in March 2002, when the Board was struck, we saw our task as urgent and our purpose to be clear – to provide the government with an agenda of action to help Canadians enjoy a Canadian cultural presence on the Internet. The urgency was owing to the rapidly evolving Internet and Canadians' engagement with it. As well, your department had already put in place funds and activities under its strategy for Canadian Culture Online (CCO), among the more prominent of which were preparations to launch the *Culture.ca* gateway.

We delivered our interim report in June 2003. It presented a vision statement to guide our work and that of CCO, and it made recommendations to the Minister on standards, content and the gateway. The Minister's reply lauded the usefulness of the vision statement, agreed to take into consideration recommendations on increased program funding and, with respect to *Culture.ca*, hoped that ongoing discussions with the Department would address some of the Board's concerns.

We wrote to the Minister in May 2004 to draw urgent attention to the insufficient federal funding for new media production in Canada – specifically, Telefilm's Canada New Media Fund – and to call for an assurance of support for the research and development components of CCO beyond the current fiscal year. The Minister's subsequent reply was noncommittal. We reiterate: at this stage, the purpose of public investment is to give Canada's fledgling new media industry a fighting chance at developing a presence in online content. Existing levels of public support fall woefully short, putting at risk progress achieved and public investment in infrastructure already made.

In deciding our board's legacy, we returned to a more broad consideration of federal involvement in online culture. We asked ourselves to shine "searchlights" three to five years into the online future to try to illuminate goals for Canadian public involvement and as well, expectations of Canadians as cultural online citizens. In looking to the digital frontiers explored particularly by youth, we resisted being entrapped by "how things used to be." This we do know: if Canadians wish to be distinctive and prominent players in the digital world, playing "catch up" with the rest of the world is not an option.

Our objective for our final report was to give the federal government a way to measure public involvement in terms of its ability to fulfill the needs and aspirations of Canadians online. Accordingly, we maintained a productive dialogue with your officials regarding *Culture.ca* and followed its launch. We continued to consult a diversity of stakeholders who create, share and shape Canadian culture. Assisted by the members of its original sub-committees, the Board explored several questions: What activities are characteristic of the online cultural citizen? Is there a role for public support to foster a more conducive environment? Do Canadians want access to Canadian cultural content? Can technology and tools empower Canadians to conduct those activities and participate in online "communities of interest" in meaningful ways? Can cultural institutions familiar to everyday life connect to the virtual world in ways that will advance their own contribution? What of the governance and editorial policies of digital public spaces, in particular, *Culture.ca*?

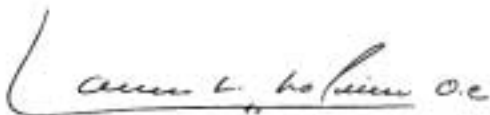
This thinking brought clarity of purpose to our final deliberations. Put succinctly, this board saw itself as an advocate for the Canadian cultural citizen of the future. On the Board's behalf, I am proud to present a Canadian Charter for the Cultural Citizen Online. We also put forward a deliberately limited number of recommendations to begin to realize the Charter, and to align the governance and editorial policy of *Culture.ca* with it.

I hope that your government will endorse the Charter, a first and crucial step, and act on our recommendations. To do so would be the mark of a forward-looking government in preparing and expressing a confidence in Canada's cultural citizenship of the future. If online engagement is the way of tomorrow for Canadians, let the work begin today, but boldly; timidity is of no assistance to this future of possibility.

With the production of this final report, the Board has fulfilled its mandate. I wish to take this opportunity to express gratitude on behalf of the other members for the opportunity and privilege to have served the government in this capacity. The Board also wishes to thank the members of the sub-committees for their valuable contributions.

Finally, the Board believes this kind of multi-stakeholder advisory body is of particular value in a rapidly evolving environment such as the cultural Internet. The Board suggests that in two to three years, the Minister strike a similar body to assess progress in the implementation of the Charter and the recommendations in this final report, and to consider possible new directions of public policy.

Yours sincerely,



The Honourable Laurier L. LaPierre, O.C.
Chairman of the Canadian Culture Online
National Advisory Board

On behalf of the Canadian Culture Online National Advisory Board members:

- Ms. Kathy Baldwin
- Ms. Denise Chong
- Mr. Hervé Fischer
- Ms. Carol Geddes
- Mr. Roger Gervais
- Mr. Leif Storm Kaldor
- Ms. Roma Khanna
- Mr. Pierre Langelier
- Ms. Noni Maté
- Mr. Ron Wakkary

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A CHARTER FOR THE CULTURAL CITIZEN ONLINE

Introduction

1. The Minister of Canadian Heritage constituted the Canadian Culture Online National Advisory Board at a pivotal stage. Ever growing numbers of Canadians spend ever more time online, with ever more global cultural content on offer. This is happening even as the human and technical infrastructure of the Internet evolves, and as new media producers participate in an emerging, high-risk industry.

2. As a board, we are exhilarated by the possibilities. We see Canada's cultural citizens being empowered by being connected. We acknowledge that the policy issues are uncharted and complex, but decision makers must make early crucial decisions with alacrity.

3. We cannot reiterate too strongly that where Canada does not act, foreign competitors will fill the void and in all facets, from infrastructure to cultural content. We call on the federal government to demonstrate visionary leadership, to open the door to cultural possibilities that Canadians both online and offline want to be a part of and want to make happen.

Advocating on Behalf of the Cultural Citizen

4. The Board came to an understanding of what makes new media and the online world, especially the Internet, unique from other forms of culture. The distinguishing feature is that a diverse and participatory audience actively contributes by shaping, expressing and creating culture in ways and to degrees not experienced before offline.

5. To ensure a vibrant future for Canadian culture online, the most important role for the federal government is to enable and protect a notion of Canadian cultural citizenry in that medium. To that end, the Board has drawn up a Canadian Charter to articulate the democratic and full participation of Canadians in a culture influenced increasingly by online engagement.

6. To uphold the Charter is to commit to maximizing the potential of Canadian participation. The Charter is the *raison d'être* for public involvement, and it serves as the central guiding instrument for the federal government to deliver the potential of culture online to Canadians. It provides the metrics to assess the quality of, and accessibility to, Canadian content; to guide the public fostering of Canadian innovation in human skills and technological tools unique to Canadian culture online and targeted at its sustainability; and to set the parameters for public online spaces and publicly funded web sites, including the development and direction of *Culture.ca*.

7. The realization of the Charter is central to the success of investments by federal government departments and by its cultural and other funding agencies that address the needs of Canada's cultural online citizenry. The Charter sets the context for public initiatives to allow Canada to occupy and claim a place in cultural cyberspace.

A Charter for the Cultural Citizen Online

Canadian cultural expression contributes to a shared understanding and identity of ourselves as citizens, and to a shared vision of the country we call Canada. Our participation in activities and our cultural engagement online transform us into cultural citizens online. As citizens, we have a sense of claim on public virtual spaces, regarding them as cultural “commons” that belong to all Canadians.

- The defining characteristic of cultural citizenship of the online generations is to be found in the dynamic of active participation.
- The cultural citizen values Canadian culture for its diversity, including its defining origins in Canada's Aboriginal cultures and in the two founding nations, and as shaped by the addition to memory of Canadians' individual cultural heritages and other forces that animate Canadian society.
- Cultural citizens go online to actively engage. Their initial purpose may be to learn, to inform, to create, to entertain or to be entertained, to exchange or to reach an audience, or any combination of these. However, the fullest engagement is interactive.
- The cultural citizen expects and enjoys the possibility of choice of content, in particular, content that is Canadian, and he or she is empowered by the exercise of choice.
- The cultural citizen's ability to express a distinctive Canadian voice depends as much on the content of online activities as on the technological processes and tools to conduct those activities.
- The cultural citizen, individually and/or by way of communities of practice and communities of interest, enjoys a sense of democratic ownership of public virtual spaces.

Essential Elements to Begin Implementation of the Charter

8. The federal government must conceptualize the operation of the Charter and make it a reality for Canadians. It must assess its online strategies and related programs in that context. The Board takes only some first steps in that regard in this report. We address and make recommendations on some essential actions that should be taken now with respect to funding of content, tools and innovation; to the establishment of a new agency; and to a governance structure and editorial policy for *Culture.ca* that respects the Charter, fundamental political and cultural values, and the specificities of digital technologies.

Funding

A commitment to public funding

9. Cultural policy in Canada is premised on a public role that includes the provision of adequate public funding. The question is, “What is adequate?”

The question is crucial in the context of Canadian culture, given that it is a minority voice on the North American continent, but also one on which our Canadian identities are dependent. Cultural policy in the context of culture online is ill-conceived if supported by a level of public funding that is only “adequate.” The prevailing commercial logic of the Internet is the dictum of the world's great economic and technological power, our neighbour to the south. If this logic is played out, American culture will increasingly dominate online spaces, putting Canadian culture, especially English-Canadian culture, at risk.

10. It is naive to hope that Canadian online cultural producers can assert themselves, or even survive, based on the logic of revenue generation and profit. Therefore, the public sector in Canada, unquestionably, must be involved in funding. The Board's view is that what constitutes adequate funding is a level *that will permit innovation*. That crucial role of the federal government – to ensure that the

Canadian cultural sector has the capacity to innovate – will give meaning to and make provision for the role the Charter gives to the citizen.

11. While broadband networks may connect more Canadians to each other, they also have the perverse effect of opening the door to domination by foreign content, which could happen all the more rapidly if Canadian content is a limited choice. Lamentably, in Canada, both federal and provincial governments have given priority to the “pipes” – hence allowing the penetration of foreign product – while paying far too little attention to the funding of our own cultural content. Granted, the task of extending broadband access, particularly to remote and northern areas, is far from finished. Nonetheless, the Board hopes to see a rebalancing of government policy by way of ever increasing emphasis on content production.

12. The Board urges the government to express confidence in Canadian culture online eventually taking its place as a fully mature industry. It must be restated that to assert a culture is to rely on an industry that seeks to raise capital, operate in a market and look for an audience. This is as true for cultural industries producing traditional products as for those with high technological content such as digital products.

A new agency

13. The Board calls on the federal government to more explicitly acknowledge the importance and future of online culture and, as well, the need for innovative administrative approaches. The future of the “home-grown” industry and the vibrancy of online culture depends on a federal government that can envision this culture beyond the emerging stage. Online culture cannot and will not progress to its potential unless it is accorded attention from government *equal to that of traditional sectors of expression* producing such cultural products as books, music, television and film.

14. At present, the federal government houses its online programs in the Department of Canadian Heritage under CCO, which funds mainly public- and institution-based participation, and at Telefilm Canada, in the Canada New Media Fund. The Board’s view is that programs for existing cultural institutions, acting in partnership with the Department, function best if administered by

the Department. The Board holds a different view regarding other funds under CCO and the Canada New Media Fund. We address the governance of *Culture.ca* separately.

15. The federal government can send a clear, strong signal of encouragement to the online industry by establishing a new separate agency to house those other funds at CCO, the Canada New Media Fund and future funding initiatives. The Board sees confusion in having the online cultural industry under the guardianship of Telefilm, an agency dedicated to film, when the specificities of new media and film are entirely different. Moreover, because funding for film dwarfs that for new media, the public perception is that the federal government is less committed to new media.

16. The Board recognizes that the government may have reservations about establishing a new agency. First, the trend in federal administration is toward fewer and smaller independent crown agencies. Second, the various funds are comparatively small, although the Board argues that these funds will grow. The abiding consideration is the need to recognize that new media is a unique medium and genre at a strategic point in its development.

17. Establishing a new agency would be consistent with the government’s strategy of a “wired” Canada. A new agency would help harness the potential of the investment in broadband infrastructure. To reiterate, the impact of more capacity is potentially perverse – irreversibly so – unless there is Canadian content in sufficient quality and quantity to fill those pipes. Any such new agency should have a seat on the boards of agencies such as CANARIE.

18. The role of this new agency would be, in essence, to preserve Canada’s chance of a place in international cultural cyberspace. Besides administering funds, it should monitor the evolution of technologies, markets and user audiences, as well as the intense international competition in this field. The Board envisages that applicants for its funds would be from the private sector or would represent cross-collaborations with the public sector and that their submissions would be based on established criteria and vetted by rigorous evaluations. The agency should also strategically monitor and analyze technological developments, evolving business plans of Canadian companies and commercial actors, and changing social and cultural habits of Canadians.

A program to support strategic innovation

19. At this stage of the industry's development, every investment by Canadian producers of online culture is high risk. These producers are engaged in investment, research and development, and innovation. Business models are at best nascent and unsupported by the relatively tiny Canadian domestic market. These producers are pioneers in technological upheavals and in social and cultural practices that are still volatile and developing. The inescapable reality, however, is that it is very rare for them to make money from online production.

20. Without these pioneers, the field of culture online in Canada would be open to further rapid and pervasive expansion of American culture. Since self-financing is largely an improbable prospect and private-sector risk capital passes them by with disregard, government must support these pioneers.

21. A new program should be established to support innovation in content and digital tools. Such a "high-risk, low-threshold" fund would be aimed at projects that would otherwise not proceed because they hold little or no hope of an immediate return on investment or offer no assurance of profitability. It would support innovative actions, pilot projects and experiments needed by the industrial dynamic. These "beta" models play an exploratory role in the dialogue between innovative content and social use. The aim is to finance active online innovation, with the federal government acting in partnership with private industry and expert laboratories.

Culture.ca

Governance at arms' length

22. Thus far, the establishment and management of *Culture.ca* has been entrusted to the Department of Canadian Heritage. This was entirely legitimate and desirable for the establishment and launch of a public service that respected basic Canadian values, assumed the inevitable risks, and involved an investment at levels probably unthinkable for private industry. In observing the preparations, planning and launch of *Culture.ca*, the Board sought to take lessons learned, regarding it as a precursor of its definitive implementation.

23. Beyond the launch phase, maintaining the governance of *Culture.ca* at the Department would be inconsistent with the Charter. The Charter underscores the importance of the dynamic of democratic participation, which relies on the interactivity of many private and public entities, including individual Canadians who are at once creators and consumers, performer and audience.

24. The Board concluded that it is timely to look at alternative models of governance that provide greater autonomy from government. In *Culture.ca*, Canadians are dealing with a new cultural medium related to a specific technology, but which involves specific social usage and content. The desirable model, therefore, would permit the deployment of more private partnerships within the cultural industries while at the same time maintaining the values of a public service.

25. The expertise required for addressing the challenges of digital technologies and for managing online cultural production do not *a priori* fit the mandate of any government department. Furthermore, given the high degree of competition with which an evolving *Culture.ca* will have to contend, its implementation team must be able to count on technological and commercial expertise coupled with the professional experience of industry. Harnessing such expertise and experience goes beyond the scope of a government department.

26. It would be unthinkable in our modern democratic society that, say, a public television network should be under the direct, exclusive guardianship of a government department. The same is true of *Culture.ca*. Apart from issues of political philosophy raised by such guardianship, the success of *Culture.ca* involves expertise, human resources and financial partnerships that fall within the realm of private industry. The ambitious nature and complexities of *Culture.ca*, together with the role required of creators, cannot be underestimated. So while the Board recognizes the legitimacy and quality of the work accomplished to date by the Department, it believes that the best interests of the future development of *Culture.ca* lie with its administration being at arms' length.

27. To carry this out, the Department should strike an *ad hoc* group of experts and representatives to help establish a form of governance consistent with the Charter. That group should represent the

broad public interest, giving voice to the expectations of users and industries and the diversity of Canada's cultural communities. It should formulate recommendations on *Culture.ca*'s institutional profile and the wording of its mandate. To maintain the dynamism already garnered with progress made on *Culture.ca*, such an *ad hoc* group should submit its conclusions quickly so transference can be completed promptly.

28. The future governing board of *Culture.ca* should take the *ad hoc* group's recommendations and make adaptations according to the particular parameters of new information and communications technology. The Board's early opinion is that *Culture.ca* cannot be, say, a WebTV or an online cultural magazine. Rather, its technology and its mandate imply a complexity of another order entirely. To respect the Charter, a public site such as *Culture.ca* should embrace an interactivity and ownership – even partial appropriation – by cultural citizens. The Board emphasizes that what is important is to position *Culture.ca* as both a “mass media” and a “self-media.”

29. The public interest may be served with oversight by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) of certain aspects of the future operation of *Culture.ca*. The new governing body would presumably make decisions and set parameters regarding technological standards, financial policies and advertising. Its mandate may include quality monitoring, promotion and acceptance of standards, as well as encouraging democratization of access, including the sharing of tools. More generally, the federal government should consider whether the CRTC should exercise any regulatory responsibilities with respect to the medium of new information and communication technologies. The Board notes that thus far, the CRTC has shown neither inclination nor initiative to act in that respect.

Editorial policy

30. In considering editorial policy beyond the launch phase of *Culture.ca*, the Board had opportunity to focus on the difficulty of developing a digital medium that is simultaneously a mass medium and an individual one. What role should be allocated to data developed by the institution (push) and to that stemming from individual parties, which the institution should encourage (pull)? And how

should one govern and administer not only freedom of individual expression on the platform, but also the quality of individual contributions, without which both the mandate and the dynamic of *Culture.ca* would be threatened? This may be the first time that government has been called upon to find a model of editorial policy for such a medium. Existing models are partially applicable, but none can be replicated. Rather, a new relationship must be designed that will ensure the optimum success of this innovative medium without acting as a brake, while limiting the possible perverse effects of too much flexibility.

31. The success of *Culture.ca* and its dynamic will depend on the active involvement of cultural institutions, citizens, virtual communities and communities of practice. *Culture.ca* will have to constitute a technological platform offering shared resources and tools. The editorial team will have to encourage a sense of active ownership by, and participation of, citizens, cutting across all demographics, including age. At the outset, editorial policy should give priority attention to young people, but without engaging in positive discrimination, thereby acknowledging the legitimacy of the involvement of other age groups and offering content that meets their expectations. Today's new digital media will quickly become popularized and once the digital divide between the generations has been bridged, the greater attention to youthful generations will probably no longer be justified.

32. Democratic culture is of necessity diverse, contradictory and evolving; such is the very essence of its richness. It is often on the fringes that dynamism and creativity appear. In the development of this new digital culture, the role of artists and creators will be particularly important. The creator's work is at once part product and part creative process, which, by its very nature, demands online creative and performing space. The editorial team will thus have to encourage the involvement of artists and creators from every point of the compass.

33. The Board draws particular attention to, and emphasizes the complexity of, the issues that go into the making of editorial policy. Some issues, among others, to take into consideration are:

- culture and memory – a culture without memory is unthinkable;

- the natural and ever increasing fragmentation of the content of and audiences for new information and communications technology;
- the choices between what remains online and what is archived;
- the need to maintain an attentiveness both to democratic access by users (including in the technological dimension of the diversity of standards and available bandwidth) and the democratic diversity of multimedia content;
- the problems of the durability of online digital content, which is infinitely more numerous, multiple and volatile than the content of traditional media;
- maintaining an ongoing dialogue with a marketing and promotion team.

34. Visionary and sound editorial policy presupposes a great deal of professional expertise and flexibility in choices made to blend current general interests with democratic values and quality standards. New content, new aesthetics, new social practices, new business models and new partnerships combine with an acceleration in the tempo of society and institutional linkages that are more than ever intercultural, intergenerational and international. This combination constitutes a challenge for an editorial policy and for the team responsible.

35. Editorial policy will have to take into account the production of new professional and institutional

content, and also individual content, and – in itself an unprecedented challenge – the animation and constant renewal or updating on a permanent basis of all this simultaneously available content. In *Culture.ca*, Canadians are no longer dealing with a linear program and with a daily schedule based on succession. Rather, we have an architecture that must be clear and transparent and that must allow for extreme flexibility and “arabesque” in navigation between the thousands of items of content that are permanent and simultaneously accessible.

36. Editorial policy must encourage interactivity between online and offline cultural communities. Local and community cultural institutions and organizations, particularly those in the performing arts that have audiences gathered in physical locations, are often isolated from similar organizations and from institutions of other creative disciplines. As well, they often have limited resources and performance windows. In that respect, the federal government could do much to make use of publicly funded research networks (i.e., CANARIE) to advance the connections, partnerships and collaborations, and innovations of institutions on the ground. The government can play a proactive bridging role by making available the resources of internationally competitive research networks in Canada, with the intent of providing the environment and synergies to create new and uniquely Canadian forms of expression. The design and applications of such networking, however, should be developed from the ground up.

Recommendations

The Canadian Culture Online National Advisory Board makes the following recommendations as essential first steps to uphold and implement the Charter:

1. The federal government should create a new government agency dedicated to the support and financing of the production of interactive cultural digital content.
2. The mandate of the new agency should be to invest in and promote Canadian organizations, industries and actors engaged in research and innovation and/or in the creation of Canadian interactive digital cultural content and tools that will enable and empower Canadians to access and use that content. The agency should assume responsibility for existing and future funding programs, excepting those providing for content production by the Department of Canadian Heritage in partnership with federal cultural agencies.
3. A strategic fund should be established to support Canadian projects at the frontiers of innovation, including pilot projects to develop content and tools for which there are no established business models.
4. The Department of Canadian Heritage should strike an *ad hoc* group to prepare for the prompt transference of *Culture.ca* from the Department to a mechanism of governance at arms' length. That *ad hoc* group should undertake preparatory work on an editorial vision, one that addresses issues of the quality and specificity of Canadian cultural content in all its diversity, and that promotes a sense of ownership by cultural institutions, communities of practice and individual Canadians.
5. The federal government should act to put the resources of research networks to the benefit and use of local and community performing arts and other cultural institutions and organizations in order to network them and to assist their design of network application projects.

Canadian Culture Online National Advisory Board

MEMBERS

Chair
The Honourable Laurier L. LaPierre, O.C.
Senate of Canada

Ms. Kathy Baldwin
Superintendent
Miramichi School, District 16

Ms. Denise Chong
Author and Playwright

Mr. Hervé Fischer
Artist and Philosopher

Ms. Carol Geddes
Writer and Filmmaker

Mr. Roger Gervais
President and Director General
Centre international pour le développement
de l'inforoute en français

Mr. Leif Storm Kaldor
Director and Producer
Zoot Capri Entertainment Inc.

Ms. Roma Khanna
Vice-President, Interactive
CHUM Television

Mr. Pierre Langelier,
Senior Partner, Groupe INSPIRA Inc.

Ms. Noni Maté
Co-Director
7th Floor Media

Mr. Ron Wakkary
Associate Professor
Simon Fraser University

OBSERVERS

Mr. Namir Anani
Director General
Canadian Heritage Information Network
Canadian Heritage

Mr. Andrew Bjerring
President and CEO
CANARIE

Dr. Paul Cappon
Director General
Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC)

Ms. Mary Carman
Associate Assistant Deputy Minister Spectrum,
Information Technologies and
Telecommunications
Industry Canada

Ms. Caroline Davis
Assistant Deputy Minister
Indian and Northern Affairs Corporate Services

Dr. Peter A. Hackett
Vice-President Research and Technology
Development
National Research Council of Canada

Mr. Earl Hong-Tai
Director Western Region, New Media Sector
Telefilm Canada

Mr. Mostafa Zommo
Director General, eServices Branch
Canadian Heritage

Sub-Committees

MEMBERS

Mr. Pierre-Yves Blain
Director, Coordination and Development
New Media, CBC

Mr. François Boulet
Internet Director
Digital Archives and Service
Radio-Canada - New Media

Ms. Denise Chartrand
Vice-President, Destina.ca

Ms. Denise Chong
Author and Playwright

Ms. Tanya Claessens
President, Kutoka Interactive (SODEC)

Mr. Wayne Clark
Principal, Unlimited Digital Communications

Dr. Ann Davis
President, International Council of Museums
Nickle Arts Museum

Mr. Hervé Fischer
Artist and Philosopher

Ms. Carol Geddes
Writer and Filmmaker

Mr. Roger Gervais
President and Director General
Centre international pour le développement
de l'inforoute en français

Mr. Earl Hong-Tai
Director, Western Region, New Media Sector
Telefilm Canada

Mr. Mark Hyland
Director of Broadband and Digital Services
CBC Television

Mr. Leif Storm Kaldor
Director and Producer
Zoot Capri Entertainment Inc.

Ms. Roma Khanna
Vice-President, Interactive
CHUM Television

Mr. Pierre Langelier
Senior Partner, Groupe INSPIRA Inc.

Mr. Douglas MacLeod
Director, eduSourceCanada

Ms. Alice Mansell
President
Mansell Design Group

Ms. Noni Maté
Co-Director
7th Floor Media

Ms. Marianne McLean
Senior Planning and Policy Officer
Library and Archives Canada

Ms. Hélène Messier
General Director, COPIBEC

Mr. Maurizio Ortolani
New Media Producer, National Arts Centre

Mr. Ryan Payne
Student, Co-Founder and Lead Partner
of Lush Concepts

Mr. Walter Stewart
Director, Business Development
Canadian & Global Co-ordinator
SGI Grid Strategy

Mr. Stephen Stohn
Executive Vice-President, Epitome Pictures Inc.

Mr. David Vogt
Professor, Learning Technologies,
University of British Columbia

Mr. Ron Wakkary
Associate Professor, Simon Fraser University

OBSERVERS

Ms. Susan Baldwin
Senior Director, Operations, CANARIE

Mr. Yuri Daschko
Director, Multimedia Learning Group
Industry Canada

Ms. Lois Hawkins
Assistant Deputy Minister, Information
and Strategic Services Division, Alberta Learning

Ms. Patricia Young
Manager, Professional Programs
Canadian Heritage Information Network
Canadian Heritage

Mr. Vladimir Skok
Director
Culture.ca and Canadian Cultural Observatory
Canadian Heritage

Department of Canadian Heritage

CANADIAN CULTURE ONLINE NATIONAL ADVISORY BOARD SECRETARIAT

Ms. Quân Lisa Pham
Manager
National Advisory Board Secretariat

Ms. Julie Tousignant
Coordinator of Sub-Committee

Ms. Karen Moyle
Coordinator of Sub-Committee

Ms. Silva Tanguay
Coordinator of Sub-Committee

Ms. Sylvie Léveillé
Administrative Assistant

MINISTERIAL REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. Ted Bairstow
Director General
Canadian Culture Online

Mr. Alain Clavet
Director
Research and Planning
Canadian Culture Online