A Lifelong Civic Learning Pathway for Canada

Proposal from the Civic Education Working Group

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Why civic education, and why now

Education is a key line of defence against anti-democratic values, practices and behaviours.

It is essential to advancing and protecting human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

1

The moment is urgent

Democratic norms and institutions are under growing pressure, and many Canadians, particularly young people, are uncertain what democracy means and why it matters.

2

Learning must last a lifetime

Canadians need opportunities throughout their lives to build the knowledge, skills and attitudes to exercise, protect and strengthen democratic rights and freedoms.

3

It happens everywhere

This learning takes place through both formal education and informal settings: libraries, community groups and online.

Our proposal

The question from the survey findings

What should a civic education coalition coordinate to strengthen civic education across Canada?

Our answer

A nonpartisan, lifelong civic learning pathway

It would identify the democratic knowledge, skills and competencies Canadians need at different stages of life to participate meaningfully in a culture of democracy.



Why a pathway is needed

Provinces and territories have important foundations in place, such as Ontario's citizenship framework and compulsory Grade 10 civics course. But civic education in Canada remains:

1

Fragmented

Approaches vary considerably across provinces and territories.

2

Limited in scope

Formal civic education largely ends with secondary school, with few pathways for adults, newcomers or informal learning.

3

Without a shared framework

There is no common understanding of the democratic knowledge, skills and competencies Canadians should acquire throughout their lives.

4

Difficult to assess

Civic knowledge and competencies are not systematically measured through provincial assessments.

What the pathway would achieve

A common reference point

For organizations, educators and governments across the country

Inform decision-makers

Show what Canadians need to learn from K–12 into adulthood and where curricula fall short; make the case for continued public investment

Strengthen existing programs

Help organizations, educators, libraries and community groups see where their work fits, avoid duplication and collaborate

Guide funders

Direct investment where it is most needed, toward initiatives that complement each other

Establish success measures

Develop clear indicators of civic knowledge and skills

Three-year plan: outputs

1 Year 1 — Develop the pathway

- Landscape map of who does what, for whom and where
- **Draft pathway and competencies**, with a shortlist of indicators
- Preliminary assessment of coverage and gaps

2 Year 2 — Test and improve

- Publish **Pathway 1.0**
- Pilots in 2–3 settings, e.g. a school board and community organizations
- Indicators tested, with a baseline measurement

3 Year 3 — Embed and scale

- Release **Pathway 2.0**
- Continue pilots in 3 settings/iterative learning
- Initiate pilots in 3 new settings
- Professional development module for educators
- "State of civic learning" report
- Case to provincial ministries on civic assessment

Dependencies: a Pathway Steering Committee, and funding, particularly for a Pathway Director from Year 1.

Why three years? One year of work alone is unlikely to produce lasting impact. We have chosen to be bold and realistic about what long-term, systemic change truly requires, with each year building on the last.

Three-year plan: expected outcomes

1 Year 1 — Develop the pathway

- A shared draft definition of the democratic knowledge, skills and attitudes Canadians need
- A clear picture of who is doing what, and the gaps
- A coalition with an agreed membership and mandate

2 Year 2 — Test and improve

- Pathway endorsed by coalition members and partners
- Early uptake in program design
- Decision-makers aware of the pathway
- Funders begin using it

3 Year 3 — Embed and scale

- At least one province, territory or school board uses the pathway in a curriculum review
- At least one school board uses the indicators in its own assessment
- More coordinated funding

Beyond Year 3: the long-term aspiration

- More consistent civic learning opportunities across Canada
- Democratic citizenship embedded throughout K–12 education, and into adult learning
- Civic knowledge and skills reflected in provincial assessments
- Recognized professional development and, potentially, accreditation for educators
- Measurable improvements in Canadians’ democratic knowledge, skills and participation

Estimated three-year budget

Cost area	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Pathway Director (full-time, incl. benefits)	$125K	$125K	$125K
Pathway development: mapping, research and writing support, design, French translation	$50K	$20K	$20K
Consultation, convening and working group	$40K	$30K	$25K
Pilots (2–3 sites) and pilot evaluation	—	$150K	$300K
Indicators, baseline and "state of civic learning" report	—	$50K	$45K
Educator professional development module (bilingual)	—	—	$50K
Communications and publishing	$10K	$10K	$20K
Administration (~15%)	$34K	$58K	$88K
Total	**~$259K**	**~$443K**	**~$673K**

Three-year total

~$1.38M

Funding can be secured year by year, beginning with Year 1

- Planning estimates, to be refined with partners and funders
- Excludes in-kind contributions from Steering Committee members and partners
- Financial and governance arrangements to be determined

How the work will be led

Open to all organizations · Sign up at your table

Pathway Steering Committee

- Oversees the pathway's development
- Holds partner relationships and represents the coalition
- Engages decision-makers, election agencies and funders

Significant · Years 1–3 · Members also take on one other role

The one funded position

Pathway Director

- Leads pathway development and landscape mapping
- Leads consultation across regions and communities
- Manages the project day to day
- Reports to the Steering Committee

Full-time · Years 1–3

The pathway would be developed independently, with input from across the field, rather than by any one existing organization.

How your organization can take part

Alongside the Steering Committee, organizations can take on:

Landscape contributor

Share information about your programs for the landscape map

Light · Year 1

Consultation host

Host a consultation with your networks, region or community

Moderate · Years 1–2

Pathway working group

Help shape and review drafts, and keep the pathway balanced, rigorous and representative

Moderate · Years 1–2

Program pilot partner

Test the pathway with one of your own programs

Moderate to significant · Year 2

Francophone and Quebec partner

Bring in francophone educators and help adapt the pathway in French

Moderate · Ongoing

Connector

Introduce us to school boards, faculties of education, libraries, election agencies or Indigenous organizations

Light · Ongoing

Data and evaluation contributor

Share evaluation data or methods to help shape the indicators

Light to moderate · Years 1–2

Communications partner

Share the coalition's narrative and results through your channels

Light · Ongoing

Sign up at your table. Steering Committee members also choose at least one other role. We will also seek partnerships with Indigenous organizations and faculties of education.