

Summary of the Evaluation of the LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE 2019-20 to 2021-22



Overview of the LJl



Launched in May 2019, the **Local Journalism Initiative (LJI)** supports the creation of original civic journalism* to address the diverse needs of underserved communities across Canada.

*Civic journalism is the collection, investigation and dissemination of information for the public, undertaken by a professional journalist who follows a recognized code of ethics. This information may cover the activities of the country's civic institutions or subjects of importance to society.



LJI funding is available to eligible* Canadian media organizations to **hire journalists** or pay freelance journalists to **produce civic journalism for underserved communities**. The content is **freely shared** with other Canadian news organizations to **promote wide distribution of credible news**.

*Eligible applicants are press agencies, private news organizations, or non-profit news organization operating in written press, community radio, community television, or online news services.

The objectives of the LJl are to:



support the creation of original civic journalistic content for underserved communities.

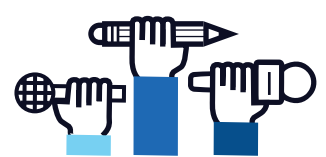
Underserved communities are:

News deserts - Communities where citizens do not have access to journalistic information about local issues and institutions because there are no daily or community newspapers and other media, such as community radio or television.

Areas of "news poverty" - Communities where there is limited access to journalistic content about local issues and institutions through a daily newspaper or public or private broadcaster.



promote employment and news coverage that reflects Canadian diversity.



preserve the independence of the press.

To preserve editorial independence, the Initiative is administered through a **further distribution funding model** where funding is provided through multi-year contribution agreements to **Administrator Organizations (AOs)**.

Relevance

LJI is helping to alleviate some of the challenges in the industry including a large decline in local news organizations, financial difficulties, and the shortage of qualified journalists in rural and remote areas.



- Local journalism is important to Canadians. It plays a vital and unique role in Canadian communities, supporting transparency and democracy, trust in journalism and social cohesion.
- However:
 - there are **gaps in local news coverage in communities across Canada**, a trend that has worsened over time.
 - with the rise of new digital technologies and technological platforms, **Canadians consume news differently and there is growing misinformation and disinformation online**.
- Local news organizations are trying to adapt and need further support to survive in this new digital age.

Overall, the Initiative is aligned, designed and implemented in ways that support government priorities for:



- Canadians to have **access to diverse and trustworthy Canadian content**.
- Inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA), as well as reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. **It supports journalists** serving groups across Canada **that are frequently underrepresented** in the news media, such as Indigenous, ethno-cultural, 2SLGBTQI+ and Official Language Minority Communities.
- However, **challenges remain for journalists of underrepresented communities** and there are gaps in Indigenous communities' access to local journalism.
- New resources were provided** during the COVID-19 pandemic to support local journalism in underserved communities.

Effectiveness



Despite the relatively recent launch of the LJl, there is evidence that it is achieving expected short-term results and contributing to its longer term results of increasing news consumption.

Early results demonstrate that the Initiative has been effective in:

- creating local news and civic journalistic capacity in established news organizations
- making news available in some underserved communities, mostly in news poverty areas
- improving the coverage of underrepresented groups and the hiring of journalists from diverse cultural backgrounds



Obstacles to the achievement and reporting on results include:

- challenges related to journalistic capacity
- gaps in the creation of local news and civic journalistic presence, specifically in news deserts
- performance measurement challenges including inconsistencies in data collection among AOs

Efficiency

Overall, its delivery appears efficient with a further distribution funding model through AOs that is well-designed to maintain the independence of the press.



- The **cost to deliver** the LJl has been relatively low and stable.
- AOs have some good practices in place **but there are some challenges to delivery** that include inconsistencies in certain approaches, capacity and reporting, as well as transparency of application and selection processes.
- **Since LJl is demand driven**, funding allocation across the country varies and gaps remain in some areas, such as news deserts.
- **While the service standards were met most of the time**, AOs and some news organizations point to some improvement needed with timeliness in receiving funding.
- There are questions related to **optimal composition of AOs**.
- Allowing **further flexibilities in eligible expenses** and **promoting multi-year funding** for journalists and allowing start-ups could better support attraction and retainment of journalists in underserved communities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this evaluation, it is recommended that the Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Cultural Affairs Sector, should:

1

Improve LJl reach and impacts in underserved communities, in particular news deserts and Indigenous communities, by addressing key program barriers to the creation of local civic news including:

- clarifying eligibility of funding for news organization startups;
- strengthening the ability of the LJl to support journalist recruitment and retention; and
- increasing support for local digital news organizations.



2

Reduce challenges in the LJl delivery model by:

- further examining the composition of AOs; and
- strengthening capacity and consistency of AOs, particularly, related to the transparency of funding decisions and content on portals.



3

Improve PCH accountability in monitoring, oversight and reporting of the LJl, which uses a further distribution funding model, by ensuring:

- a clear performance measurement strategy that better reflects the theory of change and information needs; and
- consistent data collection and reporting across all AOs to be in compliance with PCH's reporting requirements.

