

Citizens Research Forum

Preamble

Dear Alberta neighbours and expats,

The plan I am presenting here is designed to create a functional Citizens Research Forum Society, with provisional leadership in place by January 1, 2024. My suggestion is that after testing our processes, operations, and bylaws for a shakedown period of 6 - 8 months, we elect the inaugural Board of our new Society.

I must first address the obvious.

I cannot have an executive role in this organization and expect it to be seen as unbiased and objective.

I tear a strip off the current Government on a regular basis. I expect I will also feel the need to keep doing that, as is my right in this wonderful country, and a bit of a latent natural talent it turns out.

I will be relinquishing control of the formation of the Society to the ten upstanding and distinguished community members as our Volunteer Organization Committee as soon as I can rope 9 more of you into it. I don't expect that to be too hard or take too long.

We are looking for people who have done hard stuff in large volumes.

Honestly, this shouldn't be that hard. By design, it avoids confrontations. More below.

I do offer to serve at the Committee's pleasure in whatever advisory capacity or management function they can't otherwise find for this cheap. My preferred titles would be either Trouble Shooter Emeritus or Emotional Support Guru (the secret has been revealed to me by the universe to be cookies)

Thank you all for volunteering, along with so many others. This is a meaningful purpose.

We are doing a valuable service for our neighbours, our communities, our families, and their families.

There is intense interest in what we are doing and much support coming in.

Feel good about it. I do.

With no more preamble, my first cut at what we should be doing, how we can do it, and how we can pay for it.

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Plan for Formation and First Election of Directors v 1.0 November 5, 2023

Citizens Research Forum Society

Mission: The Citizens Research Forum Society is a nonpartisan volunteer society, dedicated to providing unbiased and factual information in a way that is most useful to our fellow voting citizens, of all political perspectives.

Goal: To remove harmful propaganda and agitprop, foreign and domestic, from our discussion of public policy matters. In doing so, we will create public spaces online and in person where normal standards of decorum are expected and enforced.

Vision: We share an understanding of matters, and respect for each other, even if we can't agree on every point.

Organization:

The Society will adopt and act according to a set of bylaws. Brad Odsen, KC has volunteered as the first member of the Volunteer Organization Committee and Chair of the Charter and Governance Committee during Formation of the Society.

Proposed Governance structure would be overseen by a Board of elected Directors.

Those Directors will be responsible for recruiting and appointing knowledgeable Research Board Chairs and Board Members who will be responsible for organizing research into meaningful areas.

I estimate that 30 Research Boards should cover the gamut of public affairs. One of the first things that needs to be addressed is that number and kind of Research Boards needed.

ASIDE: I believe that people overestimate the amount of research and intellectual horsepower at work inside of Government. I can't think of a Department I'm familiar with where there might be more than 1 - 2 true experts. If we can assemble them 10 at a time, with thousands of research volunteers to help them out, we are in a different league of inquiry from anything done by any Government I know. Maybe human history. Fun to think about.

Principal Methods of Inquiry, Reporting and Opinions

I model the methods I have in mind on the work I did as a regulatory analyst at the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board. My job involved summarizing the arguments of utility companies and consumer advocates, with background information for context or required knowledge, for Board members to come to understanding and a conclusion on any given issue.

I envision us providing this type of information, laying out all options fairly and understandably, to all our neighbours through online and other means.

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With this type of enquiry, no judgement on the merits of any position needs to be made. That is left up to each citizen.

All we need to commit to as a Society is to follow a good set of practices for verifying information sources, identifying misinformation, and seeking out the BEST arguments for and against positions.

This is what is known as a STEEL DOG enquiry, where the best arguments for a position are presented. Of course, the best arguments against those positions must also be included, as well as an evaluation of evidence.

It is a continuous exercise in critical thinking for all involved.

And there is no incentive (nor opportunity) for feet stomping, bot amplification or bad tempers.

Just looking for the facts, Jack.

Sorry. I forgot.

I meant Elon.

Major Task: Codify a method of standard enquiry and create a website/app that enables input of arguments and evidence from citizens, corporate representatives, political parties, and Government.

Which takes me from how to where.... at least online.

I believe it is critically important that we create an online space that is quarantined from for-profit social media. No fake accounts. No bots. No data collection for advertising.

The world isn't that bad outside Thunderdome.

I say let them keep it and make the Forum the place where serious people come to learn the reality of things and discuss solutions, not memes.

That is how we make the most out of things socially, economically, and culturally for our Province.

Major Task: Scope, plan, cost, and secure funding for internet infrastructure for the Forum at scale.

The participation of thousands of people in the Society allows us to do something that hasn't been done before, create a legacy of standardized data and enquiry that best prepares them for future success.

I am going to outline four mammoth projects that we can only do with many hands, that would provide an enduring mission for the Forum and a lasting part of the legend that's Alberta.

1. A standardized data architecture for public accounts, publicly available statistics, demographics, etc. that will enable year to year objective measures of Government financial performance, and ultimately cross Government comparisons.

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2. A plain language explanation of each of the parts of all laws on the books, in as many languages as needed.
3. A detailed history of laws, precedent setting legal cases, regulatory decisions and the context of the politics and conditions of the time.
4. Once every two years, publish a document that looks ahead 100 years at the risks and opportunities that face us. Use good scenario planning techniques to look at the worst cases. Use our imaginations together to look at ways new ways to prosper.

I propose these things not because they are easy, but because they are hard.

But not with your many hands.

That is the magic we can create together.

Outside of these things as proposed, are there other roles for the Forum?

I believe there are at least two areas that need further discussion.

1. Supporting public interest journalism and journalists. Ideally, the Forum becomes the de facto source for information that is useful and - hopefully - interesting. But the realities of journalism in the modern era are bleak. I put forward for consideration that the Society may wish to find a way for journalism to be supported as part of the Society's search for truth.
2. The Forum should be prepared to engage legal defenses of impingement of either voter rights or freedom of access issues.
 - a. In instances where both the entirety of a Research Board and the entirety of the Board of Directors believe that the Forum should make a statement in the public interest, there should be an extraordinary circumstances clause where we break the ordinary rules.

Oversight of Political Parties, Candidates, and Third-Party Agencies

I think we need to provide the healing power of sunlight on the backgrounds and statements of our elected representatives at all levels.

I envision people in every riding that can assist in identifying, investigating, and reporting on candidates locally and third-party activities locally.

I envision a Research Board dedicated to monitoring party platforms, positions, and adherence to rules publishing regular reports on these matters.

Community Building

It will be difficult to heal some of the divides that have been pried open in our Province.

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I submit that dedicating some efforts to just being nice to each other again could go a long way.

Paying for it All

I have already been approached about grants for the Society, but I am more inclined to look for recurring sources of revenue. A grant or a program lasts until funding runs out. A good business plan lasts forever.

Within the gated confines of the Forum allowing advertisers to pitch to our members WITH THEIR PERMISSION and only as goods or services are needed, might be worth \$30 a click.

T-shirts work too.

I have just grazed over all these topics. I know there must be many questions in your mind, I don't have the answers - yet - but I know WE do... Thank you so much again, for stepping up.

Next Steps

I am organizing five Committees.

1. Volunteer Organization Committee - acting Board until Society Charter, including Chairs of each of the Formation task force subcommittees and six other members. The more experience and integrity that you can bring to any of these roles, the easier it will be to attract more like-minded heavy weights to the tasks at hand. Don't be modest. Now is not the time.
2. Society Charter, Bylaws and Governance subcommittee- *Chair Brad Odsen KC*
3. Communications and Outreach subcommittee- *Chair vacant*
4. IT and Logistics subcommittee- *Chair vacant*
5. Revenue Model Options and Funding Applications - *Chair vacant*

If you have the experience, time, and appetite to Chair one of these three subcommittees, please contact me at Dave@citizensresearchforum.com.

If you are interested in one of the other six positions on the VOC please also contact me directly.

What I would ask of each and every one of you absolute Alberta beauties, in the areas that concern you, who do you listen to?

Are there experts, academics, agencies that you think should be involved in the Forum.

If you could all reach out to those knowledgeable people and encourage them to sit on our Boards, from every sector and profession, man the things we can do.

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Tell your friends. All are welcome. Everyone gets fair treatment. No bots.

Once we've got the Chairs in place, we will get you to volunteer for the real work.

Watch this space.

Let's do this thing.

Dave (DK) Gray

St. Albert.