



Family name, Given name

Dell, Colleen

## Summary of Proposal

The summary of your proposal should indicate the challenges or issues to be addressed; the overall goal and objectives of the proposed partnership; and the breadth of the partnership, and the meaningful engagement of the partners involved.

The complex relationships between humans and animals have significant impacts across individual, communal, familial, and societal levels with profound implications for human isolation, mental health, and animal wellbeing. Yet, these associations are not well understood. While the social sciences have traditionally focused on the human-animal bond (HAB) as a favorable phenomenon, these relationships are embedded in broader societal contexts. They entail both benefits (e.g., emotional connectedness) and challenges (e.g., access to veterinary care) -- a range of social, economic, and spiritual phenomena we term human-animal connection (HAC). HAC's implications have become increasingly visible, due to recent events such as the surge in pandemic pet adoptions and poorly resourced wildfire pet evacuations. In response to community identified needs, our team of researchers, partners, and community members, led by our Chair, will establish a Network for Human-Animal Connections Research & Collaboration to grow capacity in an emerging field, attuned to Canadian interests and informed by theoretical, methodological, political, and ethical insights developed through grant activities. We will mainly focus on dogs, the most extensively studied domesticated animal.

As the Partnered Chair in HAC, Dr. Colleen Dell will direct and anchor the Network; as Canada's top HAC scholar, she brings 25+ years of experience in partnership-building and research development. Dell has assembled an impressive roster of 71 researchers; 29 government, academic, and community organizations; 19 individuals with lived and living experience; and 250+ animals. Our cross-cultural, transdisciplinary Network will 1) comprehensively study and share how connections between humans and animals shape cross-species experiences across individual, family, communal, and societal levels and 2) enhance benefits and address challenges in these experiences. Centering HAC, we will expand beyond HAB's focus on individuals to examine animals' roles in human socialization, their lived experiences, and the influence of colonial state systems in supporting and disrupting multispecies relationships. Applying a One Health Social Science approach aligned with Indigenous and other relational worldviews, we will depart from an anthropocentric lens to explore interspecies connection as a means of promoting mutual wellbeing. Our Objectives and Focus Areas were developed through 6 participant surveys, numerous meetings, and meaningful partner engagement, which also shaped our Network's commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and decolonization.

Our Network will strengthen transdisciplinary collaboration in the HAC field through 5 Objectives: i) facilitate connections between academia, communities, and government; ii) consider how to centre animals' perspectives; iii) create opportunities for transdisciplinary social-scientific research; iv) implement knowledge mobilization; and v) build, support, and mentor student and others' careers. To facilitate HAC knowledge creation and mobilization, we will work across 5 partner-identified Focus Areas supported by a transdisciplinary research team: i) Social Capital, exploring family ties, identity, and social support; ii) Wellbeing, with attention to mental health, substance use, and stigma; iii) Social Systems, addressing isolation, suffering, and social structures; iv) Decoloniality, integrating history, culture, and more-than-human perspectives; and v) Ethics, examining rights, risks, and responsibilities. Our Network will generate new, critical understandings of how HAC shapes human and animal experiences and provide tools to ensure positive, supportive, and mutually beneficial multispecies relationships across all levels of society.