

Advancing Canada Coalition

56 Sparks Street, Main Floor, Ottawa, ON Canada K1P 5A9

February 14, 2020

Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada
The Office of the Prime Minister and Privy Council

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing on behalf of the Advancing Canada Coalition, a volunteer group of Canadianists committed to advancing multilateralism and a better understanding of Canada around the world. We would like the government to create a program, modeled on the previous Understanding Canada Program, to increase the number of people who know our country and can advocate for Canada abroad.

Supporting a network of thought leaders and academics outside of Canada who understand our nation could be a significant platform for advancing our interests. In a world of change, academic diplomacy and the study of Canada abroad will well position Canada. The existing (and now shrinking) network was based on the development of Canadian content that exposed students and university teachers around the world to the Canadian experience. It has been exceptionally cost effective because most expenses are willingly born by foreign universities. The value to Canada, to our profile, to the flow of foreign students to Canada, and to the enrichment of our universities and scientific establishments through cross fertilization has been impressive.

The previous Understanding Canada program successfully created a network of 7,000 scholars and thought-leaders in 55 countries and advanced an understanding of the Canadian approach to such issues such as culture, trade, security, prosperity, gender equality and the environment.

The program achieved this by disseminating information about Canada and supporting Canadian studies and related programs in universities around the world. These programs created a cohort of academics and individuals who could speak about Canada and the Canadian Experience to international media and governments, strengthening relationships by nurturing understanding and trust. For a very modest budget, the Understanding Canada program has had a significant impact.

We believe that the Government of Canada should play a key role in advancing an understanding of Canada around the world through education, research and cultural diplomacy.

More recently a, **Senate Report identified support for our initiative.** The most significant recent development *was the inclusion of a recommendation that support be restored for Canadian Studies Abroad* in the Report prepared by the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, entitled “Cultural Diplomacy at the Front Stage of Canada’s Foreign Policy” and released in June by the Committee Chair. The eighth and final recommendation of this Report reads: **The Committee recommends that Global Affairs Canada support the creation of a modernized Canadian Studies program that would contribute to knowledge about Canada in the world.** The report may be seen and downloaded at <https://sencanada.ca/en/committees/aeafa>.

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Our proposal

Such a program would be relevant to the current world environment within which Canada finds itself. The new expanded program could seek the following objectives.

1. **Create a Cohort of Thought-leaders with an Understanding of Canada** - Consistent with the previous program, the focus should be on high-quality scholarship, which advances thoughtful and relevant dialogue on Canada and its place in the world. The program funding would be seen as a vehicle to advance dialogue and scholarly research on Canada among academics and thought leaders who would be natural topic experts accessible to not only the Canadian government but governments around the world and media covering developments in Canada.
2. **Incite the Thought-leaders to actively promote Canada** –The program will help fund Canada-focused dialogue and academic scholarship aligned with issues of concern to Canadians and citizens in other countries including but not limited to: international trade, defense and security, culture, literature, the environment and natural resource issues, democratic renewal and gender/diversity issues.
3. **Advance Collaborative Scholarship and Dialogue with a New Canada-focused Virtual Think Tank** – This would include placing more emphasis on a collegial experience and a new virtual space focused on Canada and its place in the world and a proactive social media presence. The program could include a virtual platform to share research and literature among program funding recipients on Canada and to be an independent, evidence-based resource, which will be the international, go-to, source for understanding Canada.

This approach would involve building a program which incorporates the previous core Understanding Canada program, but which is enhanced to be more global in scope, which better leverages technology and social dialogue. We expect that this new and exciting initiative could be launched for a modest investment of about \$8 to \$10M Canadian.

We believe this program would strengthen knowledge of Canada and its values abroad and our important role in an ever-changing world.

As you continue your deliberations on the federal budget, we believe that this is a very worthy initiative to support. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at nik@nanos.co or 613.234.4666 x237.

Thank you, in advance, for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely
ADVANCING CANADA COALITION



Nik Nanos

cc. Hon. François-Philippe Champagne
Hon. Bill Morneau, Minister of Finance

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Professor Université du Québec à Montréal
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