

Taking Stock: testimony from the Canadian Media Guild

CBC / Radio-Canada cuts on the ground

- Watering down **news reporting and coverage**
- Diminishing **local programming**
- Damaging a critical **cultural incubator**
- Abandoning **sports**
- Losing **diversity**



Taking Stock

CBC has lost more than 2,107 positions since 2008.

That's not because we were too big and are now able to do things that much more efficiently.

It's not because we have less to do to serve the Canadian public with programming on multiple platforms in multiple languages. No.

CBC has lost 2,107 positions since 2008 because the Corporation has less money to work with – hundreds of millions of dollars less, between the government cuts, the loss of the local program improvement fund, and the drop in advertising revenue.

Public opinion does not support these cuts. An [Ekos survey done in December 2013](#), before the most recent cuts, indicates that 69% of Canadians favour maintaining or increasing funding for CBC.

CBC programming is made by people. When you lose people, you lose the time, effort, creativity and insight they put into the programming.

For Canadians, the losses are adding up.

Cuts to CBC are having a negative impact.

Watering down news reporting and coverage (p. 2 to 3)

Diminishing local programming (p. 4 to 5)

Damaging a critical cultural incubator (p.6)

Abandoning sports (p. 7)

Losing diversity (p.8)

CBC needs to be defended.

Watering down news reporting and coverage

“We still have the same number of newscasts to fill, we still have the same number of current affairs shows at the same length of time.

*So, what happens when you have the **same amount of airtime** to fill and you have **fewer people to fill it**? Well, what happens, and we've started seeing a lot of it, is a lot of important local stories don't get covered.*

*If someone locally is being taken advantage of, or is not being treated right by their government, **there may be no one who will tell that story** because you just don't get as much coverage.*

*I love my work at CBC, I love doing the accountability. So, I will miss that... **Is your politician representing your interests or his own?** That's as important to know in our communities as it is on Parliament Hill.”*

- [Joan Weeks, CMG, Sydney](#)

- CBC serves the **biggest news audience in Canada**, providing local/regional, national and international news, in English and French, on TV, radio, Web and mobile, from coast to coast to coast. No other media organization in the country does this. In fact, no other national media company has a station in the North or French-language stations outside Quebec.
- **Current affairs and long-form programming**, which is one of CBC's important contributions to Canada's media landscape, is taking another hit in this round of cuts.

The popular national *Sunday Morning* radio program will be reduced from 3 hours to 2 and will lose more of the precious few producers left in radio that do longer documentary pieces for radio. As well, the CBC's last radio field sound technicians are being cut this year.

On the TV side, we are concerned about further cuts to the documentary unit, which was already reduced in the last round of cutbacks. As in radio, specialized craft work is being eliminated.

- As **more positions disappear and jobs merge**, fewer people are expected to do more, often solo, to get a story out to audiences on all platforms and, sometimes, in more than one language. Several problems flow from this:

1) **Undermining a diversity of voices:** Many fewer perspectives feed into coverage of a particular issue or event, which reduces the quality and depth of the reporting;

2) **Too much focus on filling airtime, not enough on the issue being covered:** With extremely limited time to research, gather, and package a story for air -- and oftentimes without a team dedicated to shooting/recording, editing, writing and vetting an item -- people responsible for getting a piece to air can't waste time pursuing stories that might not pan out quickly. In this context, it makes sense to prioritize "easy" or "sure bet" stories at the expense of advancing more difficult items. This phenomenon can be seen across broadcast news. CBC could and should have the ability to do things differently;

3) **Watchdog roles compromised:** it takes time and resources to develop a story that holds the powerful to account. These cuts strip away more of the essential resources necessary to do this work across the country, both locally and nationally.

CBC's chief correspondent **Peter Mansbridge** [spoke recently](#) at the [Holding Power to Account: Investigative Journalism, Democracy, and Human Rights](#) conference in Winnipeg. Citing recent cuts to *Enquête*, Mansbridge noted: "We should be investing more in these programs, not cutting them."

Mansbridge also points out that the whole news operation is connected: "Cutting resources to a news service will eventually hurt every branch of the organization. It impacts the effectiveness of each of us to do our work. Our people, whether in daily news, investigative work or features, don't exist in a vacuum."

The CBC is ultimately accountable to Canadians, who rely on it for a light being shone on the halls of power;

4) **Less coverage, less precision, fewer audiences well-served:** As newsrooms and news programs merge, fewer audiences are well-served. With the merger of Edmonton and Calgary weekend news, the new program will have to hybridize its coverage. With the merger of the local and national radio newsrooms in Toronto, there will be a struggle to prevent coverage from either being too generic for a local audience or too Toronto-centric for a national audience. With fewer resources, fewer local stories relevant to a particular community – for example Calgary or Edmonton – will be covered at all. **These mergers are not about making news coverage better.** The only rationale is to save money;

5) **Stress, burnout, and low morale:** The latest cuts, added onto significant cuts in news since 2008, lead to stress and burnout for individual workers who take the burden of properly serving the public onto their shoulders.

News cuts by the numbers:

Total jobs cut in news across the country, represented by CMG: 130

Producers / Associate producers / hosts / reporters: 85

Videographers / editors / audio recorders: 45

News jobs cut in 2012: 88

Diminishing local programming: a step backwards

*“For years, **CBC was a 'lifeline'** for remote and isolated First Nations, and despite advances in technology that still holds true today.*

*While fair and unbiased in their coverage, **our local station**, through programs such as [Voyage North](#), has given **more attention to Aboriginal issues than most other media**. I would expect Canada's national broadcaster to promote that as opposed to cutting it.*

*Nishnawbe Aski Nation and many of our leaders have developed **excellent relationships with the staff at CBC Thunder Bay**, and these reporters and hosts have earned our respect through their dedication and professionalism while covering complex and sensitive issues. Such trust is not easy to establish.”*

- [Alvin Fiddler, Deputy Grand Chief at Nishnawbe Aski Nation](#)

- The **CBC 2015 plan put a renewed focus on serving local communities** after more than a decade of drift. The plan included continuing important expansion work begun with the new Kamloops, Kitchener-Waterloo and Hamilton stations. Because of the current cuts, the London radio station has been scrapped, leaving nearly half a million people without a local presence by their public broadcaster.
- **Some 100 positions are being cut from local and regional programming on all platforms across Canada** (outside Quebec). These cuts are piling on the challenges for already under-resourced **local stations and bureaus that struggle to produce original and relevant local programming** day in and day out.

In both radio and TV, there has been an **increased reliance** – a doubling in the last couple of years by some estimates – **on nationally syndicated material and interview subjects** for the local programs. This trend stands to accelerate this year, leaving local audiences with less content specific to their area.

- As with the unpopular 2009 cuts, when 800 positions were cut across the country, the **current cuts target local programming in smaller communities that are not well served by a range of private media:**

- **Thunder Bay** will [lose its afternoon radio program *Voyage North*](#) to a regional show produced out of Sudbury.
- **Windsor** may still have a local TV news program but the station is [losing its last four dedicated camera operators](#). (See above about what it means to lose videographers on the quality of news coverage).
- Broadcast [throughout the North](#), including Whitehorse, Yellowknife, Iqaluit, Inuvik and Kuujuaq, ***North Late Night*** [has been cancelled](#).
- **French-language TV programs produced outside of Quebec are being cancelled**, including *Caméra boréale* out of Regina.
- As noted above, **weekend news is being “regionalized” in Alberta**, eliminating the local TV newscast in Calgary.

Local cuts by the numbers:

Total jobs cut in local and regional CBC/Radio-Canada programming (outside Quebec): 100
(Not including some national news & administrative positions that support local programming)

Communities and regions directly affected by cuts:

- | | |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| - St. John’s | - Northern Ontario |
| - Labrador City | - Winnipeg |
| - Grand Falls | - Regina |
| - Cape Breton | - Calgary |
| - Fredericton | - Edmonton |
| - Halifax | - Vancouver |
| - Charlottetown | - Whitehorse |
| - Ottawa | - Yellowknife |
| - Toronto | - Iqaluit |
| - London, ON | - Inuvik |
| - Windsor | - Kuujuaq |
| - Thunder Bay | - Rankin Inlet |
| - Sudbury | |

Damaging a critical cultural incubator: radio music

*"I love Canadian roots style music and we are blessed in Ontario and the rest of Canada to have **an amazing talent base** from which new collectives are continually coming together to allow each of their creative genius' to flow in new and interesting ways.*

*In a world where most radio stations continue to replay the same songs we've heard, it seems forever, it is refreshing to be able to **tune into CBC radio, both 1 and 2** and get, at various times, airings of **new and emerging artists.**"*

- [Steve Tennant, Musical Musings](#)

CBC has a storied history promoting regional music and musicians from across the country that would have a hard time breaking through the commercial music scene.

This is one of the last areas in which CBC has played a significant role in supporting the arts across the country, especially through live music recordings and regional radio music programs.

Both live music recordings and regional music programming have been dealt a severe blow in this round of cuts.

- [Bandwidth](#), an Ontario CBC radio music show out of Ottawa has been cancelled; this loss has been [widely lamented on social media](#) & among Canadian musicians.
- Newfoundland's [Performance Hour](#) and several regional programs on *Espace Musique* have also been cancelled.
- Likewise, [In Tune](#), CBC's only weekly national classical music news show, has been cancelled.
- The last recording engineers at CBC are being cut, including those who work with the **Glenn Gould studio** in Toronto. Live music recordings will likely disappear.

Radio music job cuts by the numbers:

Jobs cut in CBC/Radio-Canada music programming across Canada (outside Quebec): 10

Abandoning sports

*“Should the CBC/Radio-Canada abandon amateur sport event coverage on television, it will have a **huge fiscal impact on the Canadian sports community.***

*It is proven that television coverage of amateur sports events has a **ripple effect on the future participation and success of Canada’s athletes.***

*Ultimately **we risk undermining Canada’s success as a sporting nation, something that all of us (including the CBC) have worked very hard to achieve these past few years in particular.”***

- [Bob Elliott, Sport Matters Group](#)

- After losing the broadcast rights for NHL hockey, following the loss of rights for other professional sporting events in recent years, the **CBC management is throwing in the towel**. CBC can’t compete for the major international brands like NHL and FIFA but it does have a creative team of people who love sports and broadcasting. These talented men and women should be involved in **reinventing sports programming for public broadcasting**.
- Instead, in this round of cuts, it is **gutting CBC’s legendary sports department**, handing over part of the Toronto broadcast centre to Rogers and announcing that **future CBC sports broadcasting will only be done on a break-even basis**.
- This is a dangerous strategy. Live events like sports are vital to the future of broadcasting and web streaming. That’s why commercial broadcasters are paying so much for sports rights.
- The public broadcaster plays a critical role in covering amateur sport and creating new ways engaging with Canadians through physical activity and sport. This is at risk of disappearing altogether. Public, not commercial, funding for this kind of programming is essential.

Sports job cuts by the numbers:

Jobs cut from the CBC sports department, represented by CMG: 35

(Not including positions in the marketing/revenue unit)

Losing diversity

*“It is not just jobs that are getting lost in all this but diversity. Considering cultural, gender and sexual orientation, [the Toronto editors] cut means a loss of diversity. **Fewer of those points of view will be part of our collective voice.**”*

- [Naomi Robinson, CMG Toronto](#)

- The thousands of people CBC employs across the country make **daily connections with CBC viewers, listeners and readers**. The people who work at CBC come from every walk of life, every political stripe, and every region of the country.

Even so CBC still has much work to do to truly reflect the diversity of Canada’s population in front of the microphone and in behind-the-scenes roles. And **every time there are cuts at CBC and the workforce shrinks, the CBC takes a step backwards** on this front.

- Because of CBC’s unique role in Canadian culture, news and broadcasting, CBC employees form trusted relationships with communities and groups of people that otherwise have little relationship with mainstream media. From connections with [remote indigenous communities across the North](#) to links with [francophones living in minority communities across Canada](#), CBC programming reflects important realities that are left out in commercially-driven broadcasting. With cuts to most of the only non-news French-language TV programs being made outside Quebec and to Northern programs, these connections will loosen.
- **Dozens of people who worked on contract at CBC have already left**. They are often people who are just starting in their career and/or bring a special talent to public broadcasting. Many are young people and people of colour.

Although broadcasting is known as a seasonal business where temporary jobs are common, **public broadcasting loses out when so many energetic and committed people are shuffled out the door** with little prospect of being hired back. Without the excuse of the constant spectre of cutbacks, CBC could be expected to make a commitment to these workers and benefit from their ideas and talents for public broadcasting in the 21st century. It is people who create the programming and losing people over the last five years has meant more repeated material and therefore less diversity of programming.



Hyperlinks referenced:

Ekos Survey - <http://www.ekospolitics.com/index.php/2014/02/the-end-of-the-cbc/>

Joan Weeks / Sydney -
<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=390943921044550&l=3217844609275718871>

Holding Power to Account: Investigative Journalism, Democracy, and Human Rights -
<http://winnipeg2014.com/>

Peter Mansbridge / draft notes, speech -
<http://www.cmg.ca/en/2014/06/16/mansbridge-speaks-on-importance-of-investigative-journalism-concern-about-cuts-at-winnipeg-conference/>

CBC's Voyage North - <http://www.cbc.ca/voyagenorth/>

Alvin Fiddler / Deputy Grand Chief, Nishnawbe Aski Nation – Letter
<https://pbs.twimg.com/media/Bpx4TWACIAALr03.jpg:large>

Jolene Banning / Thunder Bay -
<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=394616280677314&l=5497357034941088621>

Jack Vethaak / Windsor -
<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=394613454010930&l=7302565989081812213>

Allan Gofenko / Yellowknife - <http://www.cbc.ca/player/News/Canada/North/ID/2456207317/>

CBC's North Late Night cancelled - <https://twitter.com/oosenj/status/472604305669636096>

Steve Tennant on CBC's Bandwidth and Amanda Putz
<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=298071713693956&set=a.141314132703049.31055.100004733885333&type=1&theater>

CBC's Bandwidth - <http://www.cbc.ca/bandwidth/>

Storify on CBC's Bandwidth - <https://storify.com/MrMichaelLiew/bandwidth-signs-off>

CBC's Performance Hour - <http://www.cbc.ca/performancehour/>

CBC's In Tune - <http://music.cbc.ca/#/In-Tune>

Bob Elliott, Sport Matters Group, Letter to Hubert Lacroix -
http://www.sportmatters.ca/files/Hubert_Lacroix_letter.pdf

CBC / Radio-Canada cuts on the ground

Naomi Robinson / Toronto -

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=392755760863366&l=1064234398074199234>

CBC in Nunavut -

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=390224151116527&l=3456365884785949397>

Chantal Payant / Ottawa -

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=394621920676750&l=7590720125090525820>