

THE CON VER SAT ION

2023-24 Annual Report



**Mobilizing
Canadian knowledge
around the world**



THE CONVERSATION

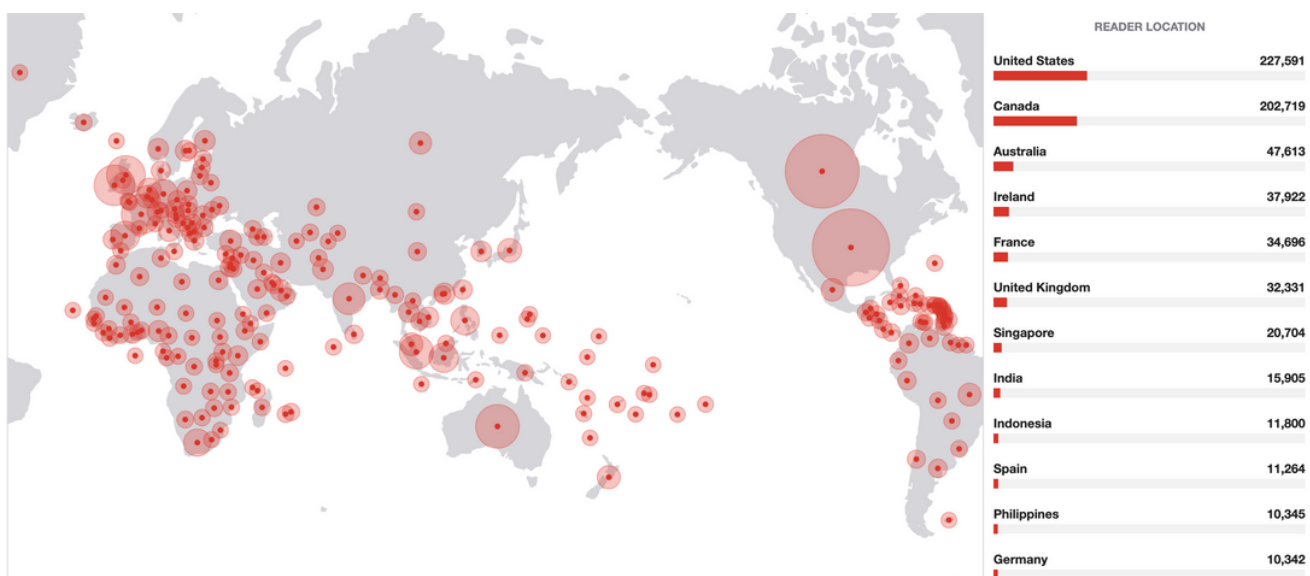
Share knowledge. Inform decisions.

University of Guelph's global reach

UNIVERSITY
of GUELPH

Your highlights in 2023 include:

- University of Guelph articles reached 776,722 pageviews.
- 34 articles published by 36 academics.
- 73% of pageviews of articles were from countries outside Canada.
- The most-read U of G article written by Maleeka Singh, Maria G. Corradini, Robert Hanner and Sujani Rathnayake reached more than 87,000 pageviews.



Mobilizing knowledge to millions of people

The Conversation Canada's mission is to share knowledge to help people make informed decisions. Over the last seven years, The Conversation Canada and its French-language counterpart, La Conversation Canada, have published more than 9,000 articles by 7,000 Canadian academics. These articles have been viewed more than 215 million times – and 70 per cent of the audience comes from outside of Canada.

The publication has become a valuable knowledge mobilization vehicle for Canadian academics who want to share their research and expertise with the general public across Canada and around the world.

These are incredibly difficult times for the academic sector in Canada. Our society is rife with misinformation. Academics are being pilloried by agents of disinformation who stand to profit by the continued disparagement of science, research and expertise.

On top of that, we are witnessing a catastrophic collapse of the media landscape in Canada. What happens to a civil society when its traditional suppliers of trusted and accurate news and information disappear? That's why The Conversation Canada is needed now more than ever.

The Canadian academic community is fortunate to have its very own journalistic vehicle. As for-profit media outlets contract, The Conversation Canada has plans to expand its coverage and grow.

We are also diversifying our sources of revenue. After a six-year battle with the Canada Revenue Agency, we are about to receive charitable status. That will allow us to approach foundations and other private-sector funders for new funding. Reader donations this year will approach \$90,000.

The return on investment all universities receive from their membership with The Conversation Canada provides real value. Besides being able to educate the public by publishing research-based articles in the form of explanatory journalism, our member authors have access to a suite of readership metrics which, in turn, are often used for grant applications that require a knowledge mobilization plan.



Philip Steenkamp
Chair
Academic Journalism Society

President and Vice-Chancellor
Royal Roads University

Staff at The Conversation/La Conversation Canada also conduct regular workshops for our members to educate researchers on how to use journalism as an effective form of public scholarship.

We welcomed three new members in 2023 – Mount Royal University, the University of Northern British Columbia and Adler University. When this publication began in 2017, it had only 14 university partners. Today, 45 universities across the country are supporters.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Academic Journalism Society, we thank all of our university partners for your continued support.

Board of Directors



Annette Trimbee
MacEwan University



Lori Campbell
University of Regina



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Philippe Beauregard
Concordia University



Alfred Hermida
UBC

Raising the profile of informed journalism

We took our first tentative steps to bring The Conversation to Canada in late 2014. From the start, we saw the project as an intervention in the media landscape.

Two of our main aims as co-founders were to help infuse more evidence-based news analysis and commentary written by academic experts and edited by experienced journalists into the news available for Canadians through a novel not-for-profit model.

It was also, as we wrote at launch in 2017, to contribute to repair of prior harms and ways of being a journalist by extending the newsroom to include diverse faculty members and a wider news agenda than the conventional narrow window of public discourse, recognizing the increasingly vital role of universities and scholars as trusted sources of expertise globally.

Ten years on from those initial conversations, The Conversation Canada has become a significant media publisher, helping to raise the visibility, profile and impact of informed journalism.

Its role has become more relevant as structural changes are fundamentally altering the social, political and economic contexts for journalism, from the power of platforms to the rise of mis/disinformation to the decline of commercial media in Canada.

Its success has come with some challenges. It has taken years for a novel not-for-profit journalism organization such as The Conversation Canada to be accepted by regulators and boundary makers. After a prolonged process, we expect to receive charitable status in the coming months. The organization has however not yet received Qualified Canadian Journalism Organization (QCJO) status as set out in the Income Tax Act, which provides access to government labour tax credits.

At issue is the interpretation of who is a journalist, and therefore who qualifies for government funding. The issue underlined the headlines in 2023, particularly as the federal government, news publishers and the big tech platforms clashed over Bill C-18, also known as the Online News Act.



Mary Lynn Young
Co-Founder

Professor, School of Journalism,
Media and Writing
University of British Columbia



Alfred Hermida
Co-Founder

Professor, School of Journalism,
Media and Writing
University of British Columbia

Designations like these are controlled by industry insiders and historic systemic ways of being and doing. The openness of officials, journalism leaders and media scholars to new conditions and generosity of spirit are key to supporting change and experimentation, in our case, with non-commercial models in a country served by mainly commercial media, aside from the CBC.

The financial strains on the commercial media sector have become ever more apparent over the past 12 months. Even profitable media and telecom conglomerates such as Bell have cut costs and laid off thousands of journalists. The CBC has not been immune from layoffs.

The contribution of The Conversation has become more critical, as one of the 150 digital-born journalism organizations launched in Canada since 2000, exploring what journalism can and should do in this country.

Back in 2018, the Public Policy Forum noted that “examples such as The Conversation highlight the roles that post-secondary institutions can play in strengthening journalism and local news.” Those words have gained greater resonance since then.

A decade after we first started talking about bringing The Conversation model to Canada, it has shown there are ways to contribute to transforming the journalism ecosystem.

The far reaching impact of our work

Over the last year, the staff of The Conversation Canada and La Conversation Canada conducted almost 50 workshops with our partner universities. I did many of these workshops myself and they are – without a doubt – one of the best parts of my job.

The workshops are one of the top membership benefits for our university partners. Our workshops offer advice on how authors can best explain their research and expertise in a way that can be interesting to a non-academic audience. We meet with a wide range of academics – early career PhD candidates, postdocs, fellows and all the way up to senior professors – to talk about their research and how that knowledge can become an article for The Conversation.

As a journalist, I always come away from the workshops so impressed by the number of good stories the researchers have to tell. But we realize writing for The Conversation (and other media outlets) is a completely different skill set than publishing an academic paper in a research journal. That's where our unique model comes to the fore – combining academic knowledge with journalistic expertise.

Our talented team of editors work with hundreds of academics every year. These one-on-one partnerships draw on the strengths of the academics (deep knowledge of a subject matter) and editors (an ability to present complex issues in a way that can be understood by the general public).

Something special often happens at the workshops. We often hear from academics who have published with us previously. They tell their academic colleagues that the editing process was a positive experience. And they mention how many times their articles were viewed – large numbers compared to the citations they receive in research journals.

And more and more, we hear stories about the wide-ranging impact of their articles. At a workshop last May, John Gradek of McGill's aviation management program told the group that after publishing an article on problems in the airline industry, he was asked to testify at a House of Commons committee. His testimony led to regulatory changes.



Scott White
CEO|Editor-in-Chief

John's experience was one of many "impact" stories I heard over the last year. Some authors told me they received book offers as a result of their articles. Others have received major public scholarship awards at their university. A vast majority have been contacted by other media outlets to comment further on the topic of their article. And most importantly, most of our authors believe writing for The Conversation has been a positive benefit to their career.

Measuring impact is one of the major initiatives we've been undertaking over the last year. We have our own analytics that can measure how many times our stories have been viewed. And we use third-party tools to better understand audience behaviour – including how "deep" readers get into an article; how much time they're spending reading and what are the most popular stories with our most loyal readers.

Why is all this information important? Understanding why and how readers interact with our stories allows us to give our authors and university partners better insights into what topics and research resonates with the public.

Measuring impact tells us how the work of our authors is making a real difference in society, be it by helping people make more informed decisions or whether the stories are reaching policymakers and other government officials.

As we celebrate our seventh anniversary in 2024, The Conversation is committed to expanding its mission of providing trusted, research-based information. It's an honour to work with our university partners to make this happen.

We provide a real impact on authors' careers



65%

are subsequently contacted by Canadian media



26%

are subsequently contacted by International media



69%

agree publishing in The Conversation is useful to their career



12%

are asked to collaborate on research



26%

have discussions with students about their articles



13%

are asked to speak at or attend conferences



6%

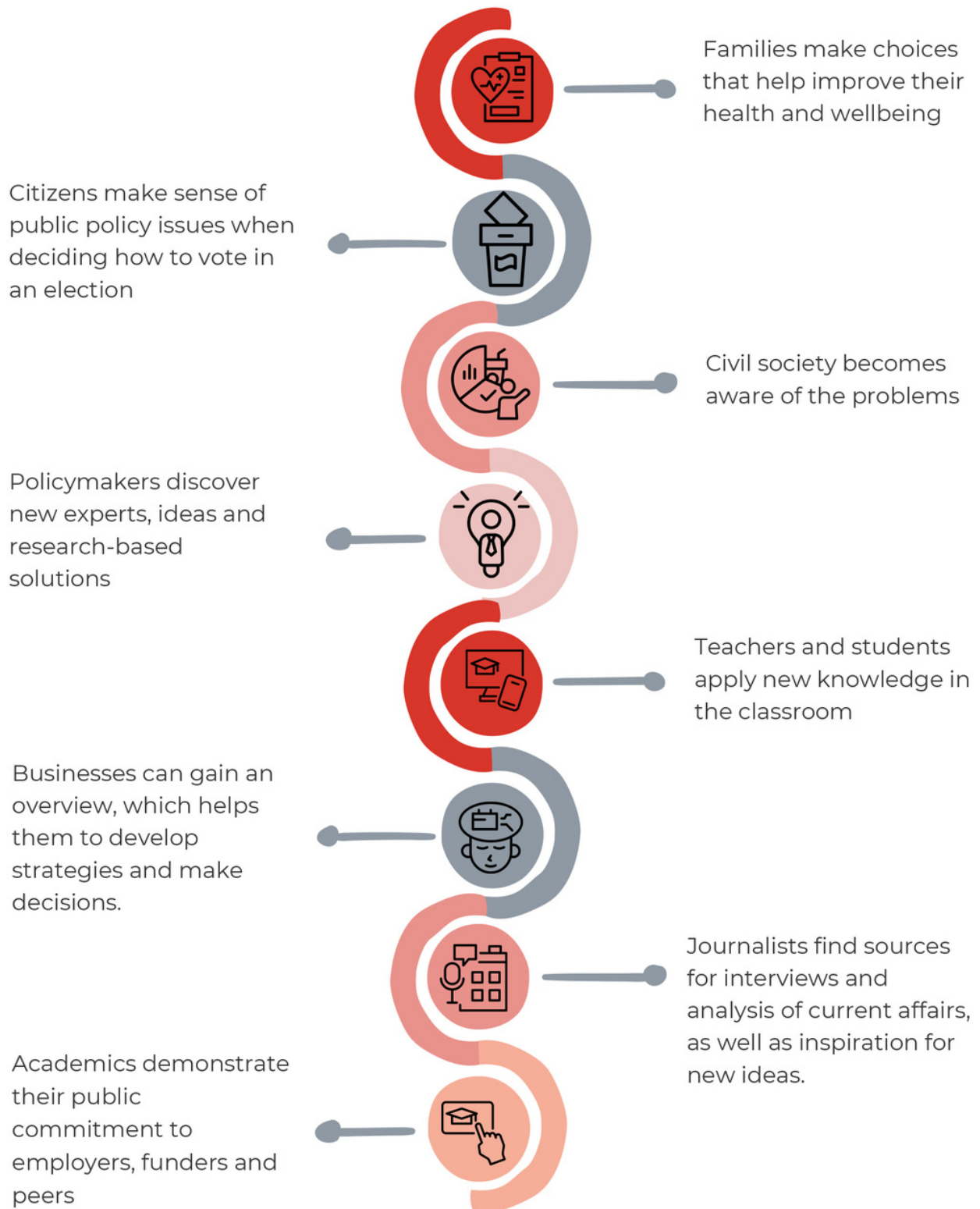
are contacted by government



8%

are contacted by business

How our articles can impact society



The impact of our public scholarship

“SSHRC-supported research in the social sciences and humanities expands knowledge and builds understanding of people and societies. This research explores social, cultural, technological, environmental, economic, and ethical dimensions of our past, present and future in ways that, when shared broadly with the public, helps explore our own humanity and better informs policy and decision-making. The Conversation Canada is a unique and effective vehicle for social sciences and humanities scholars to share their insights beyond academia in a clear and succinct manner to increase research impact, strengthen our communities and improve lives.”



Ted Hewitt
President

Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council



Mario Pinto
Vice-President
Research & International
University of Manitoba

“We are in the midst of a necessary culture shift within academia to engage the community-at-large on the impacts and relevance of knowledge creation. Public engagement is a significant responsibility for academics and can bridge the communication gap with those seeking to access academic research. The Conversation Canada is an excellent tool for researchers and academics to engage with the public and build trust on behalf of their institutions within their communities.”

“After publishing our new research in The Conversation Canada, my co-authors and I immediately noticed an increase in our Altmetrics score. This indicated that not only were people reading our article in The Conversation, but the article was pointing many people to our original research paper. This was a great way to give our new research added exposure to the general public and other academics in our field.”



Xiaodan Pan
Associate Professor
**Dept. of Supply Chain &
Business Technology Management**
Concordia University



John Gradek
**Supply Management &
 Aviation Management**
 McGill University

“After writing articles that explained problems in the aviation sector, the federal cabinet ministers that were implicated in the policies and procedures in aviation had their staff follow up with me for a discussion on the rationale for my conclusions and recommendations. I was subsequently invited by the House of Commons Committee on Transportation to present rationale for my articles and to answer very pointed questions on recommendations I was making in the articles. The committee’s report referred to my testimony to base their recommendation for change. This is a great example of policy change through media distribution.”

“Following my story in *The Conversation* (‘Should you trust your boss? Your lover? Here’s how to measure it’) I was invited to four local Rotary Clubs to speak. I was also invited to speak at one Rotary Club in Whitehorse. I saw these opportunities as the epitome of knowledge mobilization! They were fun, I was contributing to the local community in ways that mattered to some, and I was forming positive relationships with Rotary members during those lunches. This all occurred because several Rotarians saw the article in *The Conversation*.”



Tory Handford
Chair
School of Education
 Thompson Rivers University



Brian Doucet
Canada Research Chair
Urban Change and Social Inclusion
 University of Waterloo

“My articles in *The Conversation* have brought my research into important conversations that make and shape cities, and connected me with key decision makers, and those fighting for better cities. Through writing in *The Conversation*, my work has become much more impactful within these debates. Equally important, the connections I have made with community partners as a direct result of this writing have been essential to developing strong research partnerships both inside and outside academia.”

“*The Conversation* has been indispensable to disseminating my research and expertise—indeed, it has opened up my writing to audiences far beyond what I had ever imagined. As an Indigenous academic, there have been extensive barriers to publication and engagement as a public intellectual. I first wrote for *The Conversation* as a doctoral student. Since then, I have published numerous articles that have been read almost 220,000 times and appeared on several podcast episodes. No other outlet has given me the support and audience like *The Conversation*.”



Veldon Coburn
Associate Professor
Faculty Chair
Indigenous Relations
Initiative
 McGill University

THE CONVERSATION

Connecting Canadian researchers to the whole world



The Conversation has nine separate editions – in multiple languages – based in Canada, the U.S., U.K., France, Spain, sub-Saharan Africa, Indonesia, Brazil and Australia/New Zealand. Being part of a global network is a distinct advantage for Canadian authors and their universities.

538,126,425

Combined audience of all editions in 2023

32,403,135

The Conversation Canada/
La Conversation Canada's audience in 2023

77%

of our readers
come from outside
of Canada

28%

of our readers are
in the United
States

12%

of our readers are
in France

11%

of our readers are
in the U.K. and
Ireland

What our audience is telling us



Researchers at Toronto Metropolitan University have been conducting surveys of our readers and authors for several years. Their most recent English-language reader survey was taken in January 2024.

The Top 5 most important reasons why people read The Conversation:

- Editorial independence;
- Expert analysis of current events;
- The authority/expertise of authors;
- The clarity of writing;
- The Conversation has no commercial agenda.

Readers were also asked to compare The Conversation Canada to other media outlets. Many said we were like the CBC and The Guardian, but most chose the word “none” – meaning we are seen as being unique among the splintered media landscape.

Don't Call Me Resilient, our podcast hosted by Vinita Srivastava, looks at current events from an anti-racist perspective. It has been named an “Editor's Pick” by Apple Podcasts and is one of the top-ranked podcasts in the News Analysis category with more than 200,000 listens and downloads. Since launching in 2021, we have produced 50 episodes featuring 90 academics. A recent survey of listeners found 80% said they have taken some action based on listening to an episode, 77% said they learned something new and/or were exposed to new opinions and 50% said it caused them to have more empathy for the people centred in the story.



Membership Benefits

As a not-for-profit, The Conversation Canada's goal is to collaborate with universities to make more academic knowledge free to read and republish. Together, we work collaboratively to fight misinformation and to fill the gaps that are widening in traditional journalism. Your membership benefits include:



- Eligibility for researchers and academics to publish with The Conversation and La Conversation.



- Access to a large and diverse global audience that turns to The Conversation for trusted information.



- Training for academics via customized workshops from The Conversation's editorial team.



- Detailed metrics and author dashboards providing information on republishing and readership.



- Access to 20,000 global republishers – 50% of The Conversation's views come via other media outlets.



- Eligibility for authors to appear on one of our podcasts: Don't Call Me Resilient or The Conversation Weekly.



- All articles are promoted to our +25,000-member newsletter and other media newsrooms.



- Only member university media teams receive "callouts" from our newsroom when we are seeking experts to write.

THE CONVERSATION

Thank you to our partners
There would be no conversation without you

