

Chasing down CBC's strategy: from the one-page plan set out in CBC's 2019 licence renewal applications, to the 53-page Strategic plan approved by CBC's Board of Directors in March 2019

A research note by FRPC: March 2020

In spring 2019 the CRTC invited CBC to apply to renew its radio and television licences and to discuss the possible regulation of CBC's online programming services that currently operate without CRTC oversight due to an exemption order. CBC submitted its licence renewal application at the end of the summer, and in the fall answered questions from the CRTC about the application.

When the CRTC asked how CBC has met the objectives set by Parliament in Canada's broadcasting policy, CBC relied on a document entitled *Your Stories, Taken to Heart*. It said on 9 October 2019 that

[*Your Stories, Taken to Heart*](#) outlines CBC/Radio-Canada's new three-year strategy. It builds on the success of our existing services and, in particular, of our digital transformation, but now aims to deepen audience engagement across all platforms.¹

Clicking on the link provided by CBC's response led to this URL: <https://cbc.radio-canada.ca/en/vision/strategy/your-stories-taken-to-heart>. A news release issued by CBC on 22 May 2019 described the document presented at that link as "[t]he full plan".²

The CRTC published CBC's renewal application on 25 November 2019, and invited comments from the public. The deadline for these comments to be filed with the CRTC was 20 February 2020.³

Altogether the CBC's licence-renewal application refers to its 'strategic plan' or its 'strategy plan' at least sixteen times, suggesting that this plan has a role to play in what CBC does in the next several years:

30 September 2019, Supplementary Brief	DM#3720734	1 time
9 October 2019, Application form - answers	DM#3733727	11 times
30 October 2019, Answers to request for additional information	DM#3754953	4 times

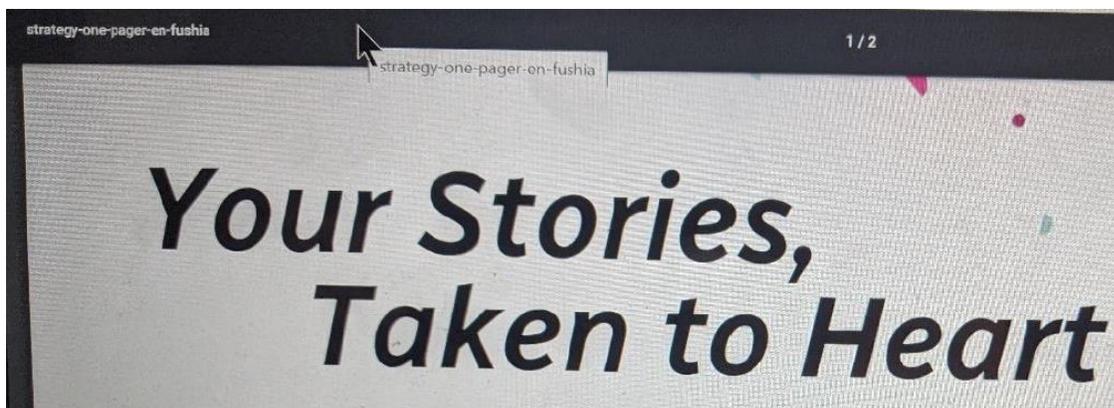
The link provided in CBC's application to [*Your Stories, Taken to Heart*](#) leads to a online document entitled *Your Stories, Taken to Heart*⁴ that listed five priorities and amounted to five printed pages. The website page included a clickable invitation to "Read our strategy (PDF)", which in turn led to a [two-page PDF](#) again entitled "Your Stories, Taken to Heart". The URL of this PDF suggests that *Your Stories, Taken to Heart* is CBC's 2019 strategic plan, and its subtitle describes it as "Our new three-year strategy May 2019". A pulldown menu on the page says, "strategy-one-pager-en-fushia", hinting that a plan longer than one page may exist:

¹ DM#3733727 – Response – 9 October 2019 – 2019-0282-5_CBC_Application_Form_TV_and_Radio_EN-Final.doc, at p. 16, Answer (to Question 1(b)).

² <https://cbc.radio-canada.ca/en/media-centre/strategy-2019>.

³ The deadline was originally 13 February 2020, but was extended by one week to 20 February 2020 through *Notice of Hearing*, Broadcasting Notice of Consultation 2019-379-1 (Ottawa, 28 January 2020), <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/2019/2019-379-1.htm>, at para. 3.

⁴ <https://cbc.radio-canada.ca/en/vision/strategy/your-stories-taken-to-heart>.



In the remainder of this document we refer to the 2-page PDF as CBC's Strategic Plan Summary.

On 29 November 2019 Friends of Canadian Broadcasting (FCB) asked that the CRTC require CBC to disclose its complete strategic plan, on the basis that it constitutes a “roadmap” for CBC management.⁵

On 28 January 2020 the CRTC denied FCB's request, on the grounds that CBC had provided a significant amount of additional information, including financial information:

Commission staff has sent questions to the CBC/SRC in relation to its strategic plan. In response, the CBC/SRC has provided significant additional information on the public record of this proceeding. This information can be relied upon by any intervener in formulating its submissions. The Commission notes that other CBC/SRC financial information and corporate documents are available in the public domain and may be referenced by interveners in their submissions. In light of this, the Commission denies FRIENDS' request for the disclosure of a full and complete three-year strategic plan.⁶

On 4 February 2020 the Forum wrote to CBC under the *Access to Information Act* to request a copy of the strategic plan that, according to its 2018-2019 *Annual Report*, had been approved by CBC's Board of Directors in March 2019.

CBC received the Forum's request on 7 February 2020, and emailed a redacted copy of the plan to the Forum on 9 March 2020.

CBC's March 2019 Strategic plan

The materials received by the Forum consisted of a 106-page PDF document and cover letter. The 106-page PDF consists of 53 pages in English and 53 pages in French. The entire document appears to be a copy of a Powerpoint presentation presented to CBC's Board of Directors on 20 March 2019.

⁵ DM#3761220 – Procedural Request – Friends of Canadian Broadcasting – FCB Procedural Request re CBC Renewal.pdf, (Toronto, 29 November 2019), at 1 – 2. See “Procedural Requests”, <https://services.crtc.gc.ca/pub/instances-proceedings/Default-Default.aspx?S=C&PA=B&PT=NC&PST=A>.

⁶ CRTC, Broadcasting Commission Letter addressed to Daniel Bernhard (Friends of Canadian Broadcasting), (Ottawa, 28 January 2020), https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/2020/lb200128.htm?_ga=2.249503431.1932118928.1583772757-1211976415.1582553073.

The title on its first page is “Your stories, taken to heart Our strategic plan”, suggesting that it is a longer version of the 5-page *Your Stories, Taken to Heart* document and the 2-page Strategic Plan Summary referenced in CBC's application and posted on CBC's website.

The English-language 53-page Strategic plan includes 11 title pages and a list of its contents, leaving 41 pages of content. Half – 20 of the 41 slides with content – of the slides have been redacted: Slide 25 is entirely redacted, 5 slides are partially redacted, and the other 14 slides are almost totally redacted.

Page	Description of contents	Level of redaction
1	Title page	None
2	“Our strategic plan” - list of contents – 9 conditions for success, Financials, Measurement, Strategy governance and Communications strategy	None
3	Executive summary	Partial
4	Description of “Canada’s Unique Situation”	None
5	“The new challenges we face”	None
6	Section title page: “Mission, Vision, Values”	None
7	Mission	None
8	Vision	None
9	Values	None
10	Section title page: “Strategic Priorities and Initiatives”	None
11	Strategic imperatives	None
12	Five strategic priorities	None
13	1. Personalized digital services (lists 3 bullets of text)	None
14	2. Engaging with young audiences (lists 3 bullets of text)	None
15	3. Prioritizing our local connections (lists 3 bullets of text)	None
16	4. Reflecting contemporary Canada (lists 2 bullets of text)	None
17	5. Taking Canada to the world (lists 2 bullets of text)	None
18	Section title page: Conditions for success	None
19	“Strategy is about choices”	Partial
20	“Conditions for success” - leveraging “the contribution of core enablers: people, commercial revenue; and technology” => “commercial revenue” does not appear in CBC's application; - adopting “specific incentives and business practices that drive our people, culture, and processes to deliver programming and content that puts [sic] audiences first” (p. 20)	None
21	Page listing 9 “Conditions for success”	None
22	CBC's business approach	Almost total
23	Commitment to innovation, or “Continuous innovation”	Partial
24	“3.1 People strategy” – subtitle page	None
25	Entirely redacted	Total
26	“3.2 Revenue strategy” – subtitle page	None
27	“Revenue strategy” – 3 points and 10 sub-points	Almost total
28	“Revenue strategy” – 3 points and 10 sub-points	Almost total
29	“3.3 Technology strategy” – subtitle page	None
30	“Enable business strategy”	Almost total
31	“Technology strategy” – 5 priorities and 14 activities	Almost total
32	“3.4 Additional Strategic Considerations” – subtitle page	None
33	“Infrastructure approach (real estate)”	None
34	“Environmental approach”	None
35	“4. Financials” – subtitle page	None

36	"Funding of strategic initiatives"	Almost total
37	"Funding of strategic investments Total budget – including incremental and redirects"	Almost total
38	"5. Measurement" - subtitle page	None
39	"Measuring our return on investment" 1. impact on Canadians' perceptions of their public broadcaster 2. impact on audiences 3. impact on revenues	None
40	"Measurement framework"	None
41	"Measurement framework"	Partial
42	"Impact of our strategy"	Almost total
43	"6. Strategy Governance" – subtitle page	None
44	"Strategy governance"	None
45	"Strategy governance"	Partial
46	"For decision"	None
47	"7. Appendix" – subtitle page	None
48	"Radio-Canada – Strategic initiatives"	Almost total
49	"Radio-Canada – Strategic initiatives"	Almost total
50	"Radio-Canada – Strategic initiatives"	Almost total
51	"CBC – Strategic initiatives"	Almost total
52	"CBC – Strategic initiatives"	Almost total
53	"CBC – Strategic initiatives"	Almost total

Comparing CBC's Strategic Plan Summary and the 53-page Strategic plan approved by CBC's Board of Directors in March 2019:

The Forum undertook a quick comparison of the Strategic Plan Summary and the 53-page Strategic plan approved by CBC's Board of Directors, and – apart from the fact that half the material in the 53-page Strategic plan is redacted, while none of the Strategic Plan Summary is redacted – noticed five differences between the summary and the longer plan.

First, the 'business priority' identified in the Strategic Plan Summary is presented in the 53-page Strategic plan as a two-page "Revenue strategy" with 20 components. CBC's renewal application does not mention or discuss CBC's "Revenue strategy".

Second, the Strategic Plan Summary identifies the same five priorities for its English-language and French-language services. The 53-page Strategic plan then offers 13 descriptions of how these priorities will be achieved. When the 53-page Strategic plan sets out the "total additional investments" that will be required to achieve these priorities in 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22, however, it sets out 18 different elements for CBC, and 28 different elements for Radio-Canada. It is unclear how much additional investment CBC's Board believes that CBC will obtain, the source of its additional investment, and whether the different elements for the English-language and French-language services of the Corporation will receive different levels of additional investment.

Third, while the Strategic Plan Summary lists 5 "key metrics", the 53-page Strategic plan lists three key metrics, one of which ("production") is not included in the Strategic Plan Summary.

Fourth, the Strategic Plan Summary says that it will put communities first and 'prioritize its local connections'. The 53-page Strategic plan then states that CBC "will strengthen our connection to

Canada's regions by re-imagining our local/regional offerings across multiple platforms". It is unclear how CBC intends to 're-imagine' its local services, its local/regional radio and television stations and/or its local/regional programming.

Last, the 53-page Strategic plan mentions "redirects" in the context of CBC's total budget, a word that is not used in either the Strategic Plan Summary or CBC's English-language renewal application. It is unclear whether the Board has approved a redirection of CBC's current budget, and if it has, what parts of CBC's current or proposed services will gain or lose funding.

Details of this comparison are set out below.

1. CBC's 'business priority'

The 2-page Strategic Plan Summary lists and describes five "priorities to better serve Canadians".

1. Customized digital services
2. Engaging with young audiences
3. Prioritizing our local connections
4. Reflecting contemporary Canada, and
5. Taking Canada to the world.

It then shows another, unnumbered priority beneath this list: "Business priority", which refers to earned revenue and new revenue opportunities:

We will increase the revenue we earn and find new revenue opportunities to fund the things that are important to Canadians and ensure our financial health. *This won't change who we are or what we offer, but it means thinking in new ways, and that's what this strategy is all about.*

[italics in original text]

The 53-page Strategic plan lists the same five priorities as the Strategic Plan Summary, but does not include the "Business priority". While two slides discussing "Revenue strategy" are almost entirely redacted, they include six points with 20 sub-points.

CBC's English-language renewal application does not use the phrases, "revenue strategy", "strategy for revenue", "strategy for revenues". While acknowledging that advertising revenues are declining in general,⁷ It does suggest, however, that it intends to increase its commercial revenues:

CBC/Radio-Canada has been providing programming to Canadians over both traditional and digital platforms for more than two decades. This hybrid approach has not required any regulatory action by the Commission. However, the expansion of platforms has placed considerable pressure on the Corporation's resources. **CBC/Radio-Canada is pursuing all available opportunities to increase its commercial revenues and will continue to do so over the next licence term.** The Corporation will also continue to put audiences first while operating in a financially responsible manner when fulfilling its statutory mandate so that it may keep serving Canadians using the most appropriate and efficient means possible.⁸

⁷ DM#3733727, at p. 82, answer to question 34(g).

⁸ DM#3733727, p. 14, answer to question 7(a) and (b), bold font added.

2. 53-page Strategic plan suggests different activities for meeting CBC’s 5 priorities

The English-language and French-language Strategic Plan Summaries list the same 5 priorities

1. Customized digital services
2. Engaging with young audiences
3. Prioritizing our local connections
4. Reflecting contemporary Canada, and
5. Taking Canada to the world.

The 53-page Strategic plan lists different numbers of activities for CBC and for Radio-Canada for implementing the priorities, however. For example, while ‘customization of digital services’ is described by 3 bullets in the 53-page Strategic plan, the Appendix to the 53-page Strategic plan setting out strategic initiatives and financing by year lists 11 bullets for Radio-Canada and 6 bullets for CBC:

Strategic Plan Summary	53-page Strategic plan, pages 13-17: description	53-page Strategic plan, Appendix – CBC	Strategic Plan Summary	53-page Strategic plan, Appendix – Radio-Canada
1. Customized digital services	3 bullets with text	6 bullets	1. Personnaliser nos services numériques	10 bullets
2. Engaging with young audiences	3 bullets with text	3 bullets	2. Captiver les jeunes auditoires	5 bullets
3. Prioritizing our local connections	3 bullets with text	3 bullets	3. Prioriser nos liens avec les regions	6 bullets
4. Reflecting contemporary Canada	2 bullets with text	4 bullets	4. Incarner le Canada d’aujourd’hui	6 bullets
5. Taking Canada to the world	2 bullets with text	2 bullets	5. Faire rayonner le Canada dans le monde	1 bullet
Total: 5 strategies	13 activities	18 bullets		28 bullets

3. Different metrics in the 53-page Strategic plan

The Strategic Plan Summary lists 5 “key metrics”: digital reach, engagement, brand value, diversity and revenue.

The 53-page Strategic plan refers to measurement, but mentions only one of the five metrics listed by the Strategic Plan Summary – “revenue”. Slide 3 says that “Performance will be measured with a streamlined KPI framework that includes audience engagement, production and revenue metrics”. Where ‘audience engagement’ may encompass digital reach, engagement, brand value and diversity, it is unclear what ‘production’ addresses or includes.

4. 53-page Strategic plan suggests that CBC regional or local programming will be ‘re-imagined’

The Strategic Plan Summary says that it ‘puts audiences, individuals and communities’ first (“Putting audiences, individuals and communities first”). Its third priority is to ‘prioritize its local connections’:

This is the heart of our connection with Canadians. We will strengthen this connection with significant local and regional content that is relevant to people in their communities, and bring those communities to the rest of the country.

The 53-page Strategic plan refines this description, by suggesting that CBC will be 're-imagining local/regional' programming across 'multiple platforms'. Slide 12 says that

[i]n 2022, CBC/Radio-Canada will strengthen our connection to Canada's regions by re-imagining our local/regional offerings across multiple platforms, to better meet each communities' needs.

The unredacted text in the 53-page Strategic plan does not explain what CBC means by "re-imagining its local/regional offerings across multiple platforms".

CBC's English-language application, meanwhile, states that CBC does "not anticipate making changes to the nature of our regional/local television and radio programming" (DM#3733727, at p. 40, answer to question 20). Several pages later, on the other hand, CBC implies that it will increase local content:

Looking forward, CBC/Radio-Canada intends to develop a greater local presence and greater community connection across the country using digital platforms. This will enhance the service to the regions and enrich the overall national offering since this local/regional programming will be accessible digitally across Canada and will also feed into national programming on both traditional and digital platforms. The enhanced reliance on digital media will also enable the Corporation to increase its engagement with Canadians by means of a variety of interactive features.

(DM#3733727, p. 43)

5. 53-page Strategic plan suggests CBC is planning to re-direct funding

The 53-page Strategic plan mentions "New strategic investments" at slide 36, and "redirects" at slide 37. Its unredacted text does not define these terms.

Neither the Strategic Plan Summary nor CBC's English-language renewal application mentions "new strategic investments" or "redirects".

Conclusion

The Forum subsequently asked the CRTC, through a procedural request, to post the CBC's redacted 53-page strategic plan. The CRTC denied this request on [22 July 2020](#) because "the redacted PowerPoint presentation does not contain any new pertinent information for this process", and "the redacted PowerPoint presentation is available on FRPC's website and has been since March 2020".