



## 2011-2015 Strategic Directions: March 2014 Discussion Paper

Presented to the Board of Directors of the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences



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## Introduction

In the wake of large-scale consultations and lengthy executive committee discussions, in 2011 the Federation adopted an ambitious strategic framework to improve its performance in three areas of focus:

- Its relations, in particular with its members;
- Its influence, especially with the federal government;
- Its financial framework, to eliminate a worrying structural deficit.

Unlike past strategic plans, the 2011-2015 plan has been implemented. The Federation has also made considerable progress toward these objectives<sup>1</sup>. The Board of Directors and the Secretariat have 21 months to strengthen our foundations and achieve many of our operational goals.

This discussion paper gives an overview of progress achieved, and asks certain questions about the Federation's internal and external problems. The Board of Directors must determine:

- adjustments (if any) to the current strategic framework objectives;
- key issues the Board of Directors must address to determine the next strategic framework;
- a consultation process and time frame for developing the next strategic framework.

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<sup>1</sup> To learn more about the operational plan, please see the attached *Smart Sheet* document.



## Ideas can... achieve great things

### Strategic Goals

In the 2011-2015 strategic planning exercise, three strategic goals were adopted to guide the Federation's actions. These are as follows:



### 1.0 Improve communication with our members

There is clear consensus that the Federation is on the right track regarding communication and services for its members. However, much work remains to be done.

For knowledge dissemination, the Congress is the best organized and most powerful tool at our disposal. Each year the Federation draws together some 7,000 to 9,000 delegates (researchers, students, academics, informed citizens, etc.) for a week of incomparable knowledge sharing. There is no bigger occasion in Canada for members of our community to meet and network, and the Congress is known beyond our borders as an initiative that enriches the scientific community. There is also no doubt that the Congress is the Federation's best opportunity to become known among its members and throughout the community. It is often the gateway to the Federation for students, researchers and academics who may not otherwise have been acquainted with it. However, the challenge is to ensure the Congress remains associated with the Federation, as many participants tend to go home with no further knowledge of the Federation or its other activities.

The Congress has grown increasingly popular in recent years, drawing a large number of eminent researchers, lecturers and policy makers.

However, within the Federation there are questions about the place of the Congress in its programming. As it is no doubt the project that ties up the largest number of our human and financial resources, it is agreed that the Congress should serve as a kind of pinnacle or end goal, a gathering of eminent persons and institutions in the Federation's efforts to disseminate knowledge in Canada.





In recent years the Federation has developed an interesting platform on its Web site, through its regularly maintained blog and the online posting of Congress and *Big Thinking* presentations.

Directly relating to the improvement of knowledge dissemination, we should note the Awards to Scholarly Publications Program (ASPP) and the vital role it plays in the publication and dissemination of scientific works in Canada. A change in visual identity and an extra media relations effort have raised the ASPP's profile by elevating it to the level of Canada's major scholarly awards. However, the Federation is still hard pressed to find a sponsor for the ASPP, which would raise its profile even further.

It is important to note that the Federation had also planned to establish links with existing humanities research project databases, though this was abandoned once the scope of the task became evident.

With regard to member relations, the Federation has taken steps to improve the way it communicates and the services it offers. However, these efforts are relatively recent, and it is hard to assess the long-term impact of this course change. The Federation offers members a certain range of services (i.e. database management, support and advice for the financial management, administration and governance of member associations, and access to the Federation's large network to help members showcase their work to a wider range of partners). However, few members are aware of or benefit from these services. The recent hiring of a stakeholder relations officer has, among other things, helped establish regular contact with members and facilitate discussions between members and the Federation.

With regard to governance, the Federation underwent important changes during the period in question. In 2013, after an extensive consultation and study process, the Federation adopted a new structure for its Board of Directors. The old structure, based on an absolute representation model, was cumbersome and expensive and concentrated power into the hands of very few members (usually the executive committee), with the rest of the Board members having little involvement. The new model, adopted in March 2013, is based on a search for specific skills to help the Federation more effectively fulfill its mandate. The Federation now has a much more engaged Board of Directors, and a work culture with common and less conflicting goals. Since it now recruits members for their portfolio of specific skills, the Federation can rely on the expertise of board members in a broader range of sectors than in the past.

The Federation wants to continue this new involvement of its members and its Board by, among other things, making it easier to hold events in partnership on university campuses and allowing them to help identify, recruit and retain new members.

## 2.0 Increase our influence with Canadians

To fulfill its mandate, the Federation must expand its scope of activities to a broader public than in the past. It has taken steps in recent years to promote the benefits of social innovation and engaged scholarship for the common good of Canadians. To this end we should note, among other things, the "Campus Community Collaboration Initiative", the holding of a round table at the University of Guelph in 2012, the holding of round tables in the presence of the Governor General at the 2012 and 2013 Congresses, and the holding of a Parliament Hill special event on social innovation in February 2014.



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The Federation also understands the vital importance of solid and engaged partnerships with other organizations with similar missions. That is why it maintains close relations with the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, the Royal Society of Canada, Imagine Canada and the Public Policy Forum, among others. Of course, all Federation activities and programming would be impossible without its renewed partnership with the SSHRC. To a lesser extent, the Federation has developed new partnerships with other government or largely state-funded agencies (CIHR, Innovation Canada, CIFAR, Genome Canada, NFB, etc.). In recent years, it has also modestly re-invested in important international partnerships (ACLS, etc.) and the development of working relations with various ministers and senior officials.

Lastly, as a spokesman for the humanities and social sciences community, the Federation is pleased to play a role in making representations to political bodies (i.e. submission of a pre-budget consultation report in partnership with Mitacs and ACUC, etc.). The Federation also had a hand in drafting the Quebec Declaration on Social Innovation.

The Federation understands the vital role of the media as a vehicle for its message. That is why efforts in recent years have included the creation of an active blog on the Federation Web site and the publication of editorials in the Globe and Mail and The Hill Times. These actions have helped the Federation establish its reputation as a spokesman in major social discussions that concern research, education and learning in the humanities.

The clear success of the Federation's visual identity review exercise (new logo, slogan and Web site, greater social media presence, etc.) has done a great deal to improve the way we present ourselves to our members and partners.

The *Big Thinking* conference series is no doubt the Federation's best tool for showcasing eminent members of the social science and humanities community. That is why it has turned it into a travelling series in recent years, by, among other things, holding a special conference at Banff during the Royal Society of Canada's annual meeting. During each Congress, the Federation also organizes an edition of the series that goes beyond academic lecturers to showcase society's great thinkers and draw a link with the academic community. To ensure the *Big Thinking* conferences can reach a wider audience, they are now filmed and posted on the Federation's Web site.

Given the success of the *Big Thinking* special conferences, it is agreed that the Federation must continue to take this extraordinary initiative on the road. Many in the Federation also see the holding of *Big Thinking* conferences across Canada as an affordable way to share its benefits with members outside the National Capital Region. Lastly, we should note that the Federation wants to continue expanding its target audience beyond the boundaries of Parliament Hill and put greater focus on, among other things, the Capital's academic community and universities.



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### 3.0 Ensure our Financial Stability

Of the Federation's main objectives, financial security may seem incidental or obvious. However, it is important to remember that it underlies the success of all the organization's other initiatives. The Federation has made enormous progress in this area in recent years, especially with the elimination of its structural deficit.

As the Congress is the Federation's biggest commitment, it is reasonable to believe its financial success remains a priority. In recent years, significant efforts have been made to achieve a balanced and renewable budget for the Congress (fee schedule review, active search for major sponsors, etc.). For example, the Federation expects a revenue of some \$100,000 in sponsorships for the 2014 edition. But nothing is taken for granted, and it is still looking for a major media sponsor.

The Federation has taken steps to find sponsors in recent years, especially for the *Big Thinking* and ASPP conferences. In 2013 it concluded an initial financial partnership with Google to hold a conference on the theme of online security. However, these are one-time partnerships, made possible only by the specific theme addressed in the conference. As noted earlier, the Federation is still looking for a permanent financial partner for the ASPP. To increase its chances of finding sponsors in years to come, the Federation will rely more on members of its Board of Directors.

With regard to funding, the Federation is continuing to look for partners to co-sponsor research projects. To this end, it proposes to become more involved in major projects with the potential to attract and engage a greater number of partners. However, an in-depth assessment will help identify a greater number of potential funding sources. The Federation also needs to step up its efforts by directly approaching foundations to establish viable financial partnerships.

For some years now, the Federation has deployed resources to increase its number of institutional members. These efforts have paid off with the arrival of two new members in Alberta, two in British Columbia and one in Quebec. This is no small feat, given the climate of austerity in which many Canadian universities operate. This austerity remains a considerable challenge for members from smaller institutions, whose limited funding often forces them to make tough choices. The Federation has lost two of its institutional members in recent years. It is currently working to bring them back into the fold, and keeping a closer eye on our members' situations to prevent this from recurring.

In 2013, the Federation adopted an important change regarding the composition of its membership. Aware of the changing world of education and training, it decided to open its doors to institutional members from colleges. While this decision has been put into effect, no college has yet become a member. Efforts must be made to identify, recruit and retain these new members. Lastly, the Federation recognizes its efforts in recent years to recruit and retain institutional members, and now seeks to expand its membership by identifying and recruiting new association members.

Lastly, the organization would not be so financially healthy were it not for constant efforts to regularly review its operating costs and investment strategy. Regular cost reviews and budgeting have helped reduce some of its financial expenses. A recent restructuring has also made it possible to reallocate resources so the Federation can operate more efficiently.





To maintain its financial health, the Federation recently conducted a review of its database. Lastly, it has implemented a plan to help simplify investments and improve its financial picture.



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## Ideas can... take us into the future

In the 2011-2015 strategic planning exercise, there was a major discussion on the foundations of the Federation's strategic direction. To this end, its vision and mission (among other things) were studied and reviewed. While its vision and mission statements remain relevant and current at the end of this exercise, it is normal and healthy that the Board of Directors review the Federation's vision and mission to develop a new strategic framework for 2016-2021.

### **VISION**

*By working to promote fairness, diversity, knowledge, excellence and innovation, the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences is making a tangible contribution to the creation of a free and democratic society.*

Question for the Board of Directors: Does this hopeful vision accurately reflect the Federation's desire to extend the values of the social science and humanities community to society at large?

### **MISSION**

*The Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences supports research, knowledge, creativity and education, and promotes a better understanding of the national and international contributions of the humanities.*

Question for the Board of Directors: Is the mission statement (a key part of any strategic planning exercise) still a good benchmark for the Federation's activities?







## Ideas can... lead to reflection

To prepare for the strategic planning session, Board members are invited to reflect on the following questions and issues:

What are the most important changes affecting the Federation and its members?

- in the world of federal politics?
- in the world of research?
- in the world of education?
- in relations between society and post-secondary institutions?
- in funding for universities and research?
- in a digital knowledge society?

What do we need to know to determine an appropriate role for the Federation in view of these trends?

### Strategic Directions

1. Are the three areas of focus still relevant?
  - a. Does the current plan have clear objectives? Are they too visionary and far-reaching, or not enough?
2. What is the state of our relations with members?
  - a. Institutional? Association? Francophone?
    - What do we need to know about our members to determine our next objectives?
3. What is the vision of the Congress for 2020?
  - What do we need to know about our members and partners to determine our next objectives?
4. What is the vision of the Awards to Scholarly Publications Program for 2020?
  - What do we need to know about our members and partners to determine our next objectives?
5. What are our communication and advocacy goals for 2020?
  - What do we need to know about our members and partners to determine our next objectives?
6. The Federation is in a good financial position. However, it has relatively few means to invest in new activities. What are our financial goals for 2020?
  - a. Do we need to review our membership fees? Congress registration fees?
  - b. Do we need to hold funding campaigns?
  - c. Who are the Federation's potential new funding partners (foundations, corporations, etc.)?
    - What do we need to know about our members and partners to determine our next objectives?





## Conclusion

The current Strategic Framework has been the result of a good consultation exercise in 2011, which had a direct impact on engaging our membership and reinforcing the Federation's governance structures. The governance reform we went through is the direct result of these reflections done in 2011. The current Strategic Framework has laid a solid ground for the future; the next strategic exercise will offer an opportunity to further strengthen our relationship with our members and for the Board of Directors to fully take on its strategic role. The Board must now determine the process and key questions to address during this fundamental exercise.

The Federation is currently in a good position, particularly in terms of its relationship with key partners, but there is still important work that lies ahead in order to support a knowledge based society to be more dynamic, prosperous, just and democratic.



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## Appendix 1 – Operational Plan

2011-2016 Operational Plan	
Task Name	Status
<b>1. Improve the Ways We Communicate and Connect With</b>	Yellow
1.1 Improve Knowledge Dissemination	Yellow
1.2 Raise the profile of the Awards to Scholarly Publications	Green
1.3 Link with Existing Databases of Research Projects in the	Red
1.4 Expand Services to Members	Yellow
1.5 Make Better Use of the Board of Directors to foster	Red
<b>2. Increase our influence among Canadians</b>	Green
2.1 Promote the contribution and benefit of social innovation	Green
2.2 Articulate policy positions on issues relevant to Canadian	Yellow
2.3 Improve the depth, sophistication, integrity and reach of our	Yellow
2.4 Become a leading voice for broad societal discussions	Yellow
2.5 Continue to expand the influence and impact of Congress as	Yellow
2.6 Increase the profile and reach of Big Thinking and expand	Green
2.7 Develop partnerships with like-minded organizations and	Green
2.8 Develop a new Communications and web plan that builds	Green
<b>3. Ensure Financial Sustainability</b>	Green
3.1 Recalibrate Congress fees, revenues and costs to achieve a	Green
3.2 Pursue sponsorships for key activities such as Big Thinking	Yellow
3.3 Find partners to co-sponsor research projects consistent with	Red
3.4 Increase our membership base	Yellow
3.5 Engage in regular review of operational costs and	Green
Support to Congress 2014	Green





## Future of Congress/Futur du Congrès



## Goals/objectifs

- Research dissemination/ dissemination de la recherche
- Dialogue & débat
- Networking/Réseautage
- Trigger national conversations/ Démarrer les conversations nationales
- Membership “renewal” for associations/ “renouvellement” des membres des associations

## Audience/Auditoires

- **Scholars / Chercheurs**
  - Established & emerging/ établis & émergents
  - Canadian & globally connected/ canadiens & internationaux
- **Attentive public / Public averti**
- **Decision makers / Décideurs**
- **Local community / Communauté locale**



## Where are we? Constat Strengths/Forces

- Institution intellectuelle (83 years)
- +70 associations
- Popular with young scholars/ populaire auprès des nouveaux chercheurs
- Growing media coverage/ couverture médiatique croissante
- Economies of scale & professional secretariat
- Networking/réseautage
- High satisfaction rates/ haut taux de satisfaction

## Where are we? Constat Weaknesses/ Faiblesses

- Non-descript brand/ peu connu du public surtout au Québec
- Inter-disciplinary programming/ programmation inter-disciplinaire
- Quality control variation/ variation de la qualité
- Programs not integrated/not searchable
- Website/App can't offer full information/ Site web & app ne sont pas complets
- Complex fee : no passport
- Low international participation/ faible participation internationale





## Ideas can... transform Congress/ Les idées peuvent... transformer le congrès

In 5 years, should Congress be more:

- Interdisciplinary
- International
- Engaged with Canadians
- Open to the community
- Digital
- Known (new name?)

Dans 5 ans, le congrès sera-t-il plus:

- Interdisciplinaire
- International
- Engagé
- Ouvert
- Numérique
- Connu (nouveau nom?)



## How/comment ?

### Some ideas

- Members led symposium on the theme
- Simplified or single fee
- Integrated database
- Associations with strong international links hosting their international conference
- Leveraging Federation int'l partners
- Innovations: DHSS; Storytellers; Knowledge Fair; Cultural programming

### Quelques idées

- Colloques axés sur le thème organisés par les membres
- Frais simplifié ou unique
- Base de données intégrée
- Associations avec des liens internationaux reçoivent leur conférence internationale
- Relation plus fructueuse avec partenaires internationaux
- Innovations: Humanités numériques; Histoire à raconter; expo savoir; programmation culturelle

## Next steps/futures étapes

- Discussions just beginning/ Les conversation ne font que commencer
- Scope for change already exists/ Changements possibles maintenant
- New directions to be integrated in 2016-20 strategic plan/ Nouvelles directions dans le cadre stratégique 2016-20
- Align means & ends/ Aligner moyens & objectifs

Ideas  
can... | Les  
idées  
peuvent...



CONGRESS 2013 | @THE  
OF THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES | EDGE

CONGRÈS 2013 | @LA FINE  
DES SCIENCES HUMAINES | POINTE



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## Appendix 3 – Progress and Challenges as perceived by employees

On 30 January 2014, the Federation held a day of reflection with its employees regarding our Strategic Framework 2011-2016. We asked employees « Of what are you most proud since you've been at the Federation » and « what has been your biggest challenge in the past years. » Below are the answers :

What progress are employees most proud of?

- Stronger organization (Board and secretariat) with more cohesive and clearer priorities
- Working to engage members directly (still a work in progress)
- Rewriting many key documents for the planning of Congress and future Congress hosts
- Making over the outward faced elements of the ASPP – now understandable and defensible
- Creating a new team at the Federation due to restructuring
- Expanding big thinking on the Hill and getting BT sponsors
- Creating structure around major policy initiatives at the Federation
- Maintain a professional attitude amongst a challenging partner and executing Congress 2014
- Maintain consistency with ASPP re: relationships with applicants and publishers
- New Federation branding
- Dig the Federation out from years of deficit position to strong, stable financial situation allowing the Federation to enhance and engage what it does.
- Surviving staff shortages and keeping all services and programs running throughout 2011 and 2012
- Launching the database replacement project.

Operational challenges as identified by employees in January 2014

- Balance what we could do with what we would want to be doing/ unbalanced between ends and means
- Not getting what I want to get done fast enough
- Inadequate member relations & connecting with our members when their relationship with the Federation is not a priority
- Relationship with host universities for Congress
- Changing database
- How do we become more attractive to the media?
- Positioning the SSH is key to Canada's success in an environment that can be unappreciative of that perspective
- Implementing assessment scale for ASPP
- Staff shortages in early 2013
- Communicating personnel policies and changes
- Understanding the internal process in the finance department

