CANADA

Report of the
National Advisory Board
on Science and Technology

PUBLIC AWARENESS COMMITTEE

Presented to the
Prime Minister of Canada

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Public Awareness Committee Report

February 1988

The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily correspond to the views or policies of the Government of Canada.

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1.0 PUBLIC AWARENESS COMMITTEE REPORT

1.1 Introduction

On June 1, 1987, the Prime Minister requested that "given the critical importance of the technological challenge and of mobilizing the support of the Canadian taxpayer for increased spending on science and technology, NABST come forward on September 18, 1987, with a plan for public awareness, which would recommend ways of making the Canadian public more aware of NABST's role and ongoing work."

The Public Awareness Committee of NABST made a preliminary review of existing federal and provincial public awareness programs, as well as initiatives being considered by both levels of government.

The committee noted that the federal Public Awareness Program, established in 1983, is funded at $1.5 million annually. Under the program, an evaluation committee of private sector representatives, with experience in promoting S&T awareness, awards support to individuals and groups through biannual competitions.

Since the Prime Minister's request, the annual budget for the federal program was increased to $2.5 million. In addition, in January, 1988, the Minister of State (Science and Technology) announced the launch of a national public awareness campaign on S&T.

Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia and Alberta have similar programs, at different stages of development and with varying budgets.

In reviewing existing federal activities in promoting public awareness of S&T, the committee recommended that the campaign should:

a) convey a clear and balanced understanding of the links between a strong national performance in S&T and increased wealth and job creation;

b) publicize Canadian achievements in S&T;

c) make Canadians aware of the need to be informed of the latest developments in S&T, so they can deal with the economic and social effects of technological change. It should also underline the opportunity that Canadians would have for shaping their future by understanding and using S&T;

d) correct the existing imbalance of awareness among Canadians of the negative and positive aspects of S&T (e.g., job disruption and environmental impact vs. improved standard of living); and

e) help Canadians understand the many facets of S&T, illustrating with applications commonly found in the home, the workplace, educational institutions and recreational facilities. In addition, it should make the public

aware of the universality of S&T applications in scientific and non-scientific jobs (e.g., office work, agriculture, factories).

1.2 Target Audience

The campaign would aim to convince the target audience how important S&T is. The audience would include all Canadians, with a strong emphasis on young people (particularly females), industry leaders, the key players in S&T and workers whose jobs are affected by technological change.

a) **Women:** For this audience, the campaign would have to underscore the connection between S&T and access to higher-paying jobs in expanding fields, with greater job security.

> Furthermore, women would have to be convinced that they have a strong aptitude for S&T and that jobs in S&T are accessible to them. The campaign should give examples of successful women in such jobs.

b) **Young people:** (with specific messages adapted to females) High-school students must be made aware of how important S&T training, especially in mathematics, is in keeping professional career options open and obtaining challenging jobs.

> They must be convinced that basic training in S&T is useful, if not essential, for everyone. Scientific training is not a privilege of the elite, but an accessible and necessary part of every student's education.

c) **Educators:** (teachers, guidance counsellors, parents) This audience must be informed of the need to steer young people toward S&T and mathematics. Young people need encouragement to persevere with their studies to ensure a wide choice of promising careers. Educators need to give young women particular support to encourage more of them to select and carry on with S&T and mathematics courses.

1.3 Choice of Media and Advertising Message

To be certain that each target group is reached, the message and the media should be diverse and specifically adapted. The message for young people, for example, might be best conveyed through posters, pamphlets, buttons, videos, and advertising in public transit vehicles, high schools, and recreation and sports centres. The technologies and professions illustrated must be carefully selected to ensure that they interest the intended audience.

Although television was clearly identified as the best way to carry the public awareness message, the committee noted that existing funding could not support an extensive television campaign. Consideration should be given to increased funding to ensure high visibility.

1.4 Funding

The committee agreed that the provinces must be enlisted in the campaign, but expressed concern over possible delays in securing provincial funding commitments. Despite this concern, there was a strong consensus that the campaign be launched as soon as possible. One option suggested the federal government operate a core program with provisions that would facilitate provincial participation.

1.5 Design Criteria

There was a strong consensus that, while recognizing government actions in S&T, the campaign should be apolitical.

A private public relations and marketing firm should be hired to create the campaign design. It was recommended that this firm be hired at arm's length.

1.6 Timing

It would be most appropriate to launch the campaign during the National Conference on Technology and Innovation in January, 1988.

1.7 Participation and Promotion of NABST

The Board should be kept informed of the campaign's progress and could also serve as an arm's length advisor. Members could participate directly in specific activities, as well as encourage support for the campaign in their constituencies.

The creation of NABST underlined the unprecedented priority the government is placing on S&T. The committee agreed that making Canadians aware of NABST and its work would be beneficial to the campaign.

It was recommended that drafting a communications plan for promoting greater visibility for NABST and its work be a priority. Such a plan should be submitted to NABST for review.

1.8 Recommendations for Future Activities

Beyond the existing public awareness program and proposed campaign, the committee recommended some future activities. For example:

a) The Prime Minister could enlist the CBC and the National Film Board to increase S&T visibility, with the assistance of recognized and respected spokesmen (e.g., Suzuki, Séguin); and

b) The creation of *national* S&T publications would provide an invaluable and lasting contribution to promoting public awareness of S&T. Québec-Science is currently the single successful science publication. The federal government should support such publications.