Summary of the Evaluation of the Digital Citizen Initiative 2018-19 to 2020-21

Overview

The Digital Citizen Initiative (DCI) aims to support democracy and social cohesion in Canada by building citizen resilience against online disinformation and building partnerships to support a healthy information ecosystem.

The DCI has two components: the Digital Citizen Research Program and the Diversity of Content Online (DoCO Initiative).

This evaluation is the first for DCI and includes activities undertaken between 2018-19 and 2020-21. It focused primarily on the Digital Citizen Research Program.

Findings

Relevance

Overall, DCI demonstrates relevance by:

- meeting new and key needs, especially those related to the COVID-19 pandemic;

- aligning with federal government priorities; and

- being complementary and not duplicative with other initiatives.

DCI's partnerships allow for effective information sharing regarding needs and limit duplication of efforts.
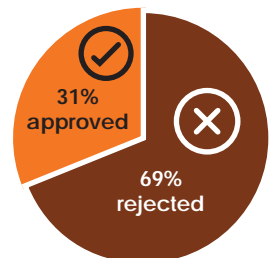
DCI's continued relevance is at risk given:

- demand outweighs program resources; and

- the increasing number of actors in this field may lead to duplication in the future.

The evaluation reveals synergies (good sharing of information about priorities and potential projects to fund) between DCI and other federal departments. However, the potential for overlap could increase as additional actors enter the space.

The evaluation concludes that current DCI resources limit the achievement of additional outcomes and that more impact could be achieved through larger projects and a higher number of projects.

Only 31% Of DCI Projects Were Approved
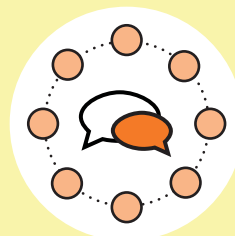
31% approved

69% rejected

Effectiveness

The DCI has made progress in its expected short- and medium-term outcomes by:

- funding research and awareness activities and making research publicly available,

- increasing awareness of online digital issues among recipients and participants including citizen-focused projects related to COVID-19 pandemic misinformation, and

- creating an international multi-stakeholder working group that developed and published the Guiding Principles on Diversify of Content Online.
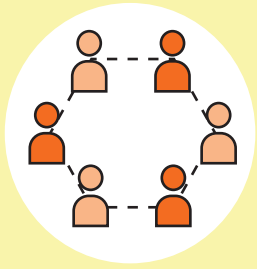
312 DCI-funded research and data collection products made accessible to researchers

63 networking and information sharing events held by the Digital Citizen Contribution Program (DCCP) funded organizations

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Effectiveness

6 meetings of the Multi-stakeholder Group on DoCO held in 2020 and 2021

2 National Digital Media Literacy Week events funded by DCCP

The evaluation identified some issues with the DCI performance indicators including:

- a reliance upon short- and medium-term performance indicators, and

- opportunities to improve the expected outcomes and their associated indicators.

Efficiency

DCI has elements of efficient delivery:

- the service standards were met nearly 100% of the time,

- the partnerships, notably with SSHRC through the SSHRC-DCI Joint Initiative, and

- the total DCI direct costs during 2019-2021 were comprised of 87% Gs&Cs and 13% Salaries and O&M.

Some issues identified with the DCI performance indicators may have an impact on efficiency.

DCI Actual Spending and Administrative Ratio of Efficiency, 2019-20 to 2020-21

Fiscal Year	Vote 1: Salary & EBP	Vote 1: O&M	Vote 5: Gs&Cs	Total	ADM Ratio**
2019-20	$608,067	$53,026	$1,881,335	$2,542,428	2.8
2020-21*	$550,085	$25,608	$6,612,403	$7,188,096	11.5
TOTAL	$1,158,152	$78,634	$8,493,738	$9,730,524	7.2

Source: Finance Management Branch Data

*to October 2021

**The administrative ratio was determined by dividing the Gs&Cs by Vote 1 of each year. The total is the average of the 2 years.

Recommendations

To ensure continued and strengthened relevance and performance of DCI moving forward, the evaluation recommends that the Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Cultural Affairs:

1 Clarify existing roles and responsibilities for DCI within PCH and with partners to better integrate functional responsibilities within the sector and promote strong collaboration and communication while preventing any duplication or overlap of efforts or resources.

2 Review, update and communicate funding priorities for DCI to ensure achievement of key results within available funding.

3 Review and update the DCI Program logic model and performance measurement indicators to ensure information is available for strategic planning, decision-making and reporting.

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