

The Virtual Museum of Canada's Investment Program



On June 23rd, 2016, Mark O'Neil, CEO of the Canadian Museum of History announced funding for **eleven new projects** submitted by a diversity of public and private, not-for-profit Canadian museums and other Canadian historical, heritage and cultural organizations including the Beaton Institute, the Centre for Research on French Canadian Culture, Juno Beach Centre, the National Gallery of Canada, the Gulf of Georgia Cannery Society and the Laurier Museum.¹ The Virtual Museum of Canada has funded more than five hundred online projects that have been developed to, "...engage audiences of all ages, interests and abilities in Canada's history, heritage and culture."²

The Virtual Museum of Canada's 23rd investment program has opened for applications and all proposals are due **September 28th, 2016**. Only online submissions are accepted. Organizations can submit a proposal for a new virtual exhibit, virtual tour, interactive resource or educational resource on any topic. The program has two million dollars in funds and a project is eligible for up to \$ 250, 000.00.

Proposals should meet the program guidelines and the project budget, should clearly identify project costs and demonstrate that project teams have carefully considered eligible and ineligible costs. VMC staff review proposals to ensure they meet the mandatory criteria and then advisory committee members review proposals individually and then the advisory committee members meet in person to review proposals. The committee then submits their project funding recommendations. The process takes about six months to complete.

Projects must meet the museum's technological specifications, demonstrating how the final project will be perceivable, operable, understandable and robust.³ Like many investment programs, proposals must reach 70 points in the rated criteria

¹ For a complete list of the projects and a description of the funded projects, see the June 23, 2016 media release from the Canadian Museum of History: <http://www.historymuseum.ca/media/virtual-museum-of-canada-announces-approval-of-11-new-projects/> (accessed July 4, 2016). The Virtual Museum of Canada has two investment programs, one that funds virtual exhibits and other tools and the Community Memories program - <http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/virtual-exhibits/type/community-memories/>

² "Virtual Exhibits Investment Program" <http://vmc.historymuseum.ca/virtual-exhibits-investment-program/> (accessed July 4, 2016).

³ The Virtual Museum of Canada has developed a document that outlines and describes the mandatory technological requirements for all exhibits. You can access this .pdf document, http://vmc.historymuseum.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/VE023_VMC-VE-Technical-Requirements-June-2016-EN.pdf

to be considered for an investment. There are four rated criteria: content, technology, ability to deliver and partnerships.⁴ Letters of support should clearly indicate roles of partners in the project. Partner organizations must contribute cash or in kind contributions to project completion. As noted in the program guidelines, project proposals must provide a complete online experience that is separate from a specific context or physical space and this project must be available in French and English.⁵ The VMC has recently updated its websites and there is excellent and accessible information for anyone interested in putting together a project team.

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To date, there are 102 online exhibits to review and explore to evaluate content. The VMC online exhibits are also useful teaching opportunities for students to evaluate online content and to consider how history and heritage is displayed online. In past classes, I have asked students to develop criteria to evaluate these online exhibits and compare them with other online exhibits and tools. I have also provided them with a framework to consider and using content as a point of departure. Students have considered how easy sites are to navigate, how visually appealing they are and most importantly, gained skills to consider site content. This exercise makes them consider audience, age, access and how they might display history and engage audiences. Students have also compared early exhibits – those online prior to 2008 and those that followed to evaluate how technology has changed how we engage with history and heritage online.

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⁴ Content is worth 35 points, technology and ability to deliver are each worth 25 points and partnerships are 15 points for a total of 100 points.

⁵ See section 3.4 – Mandatory Criteria and 3.5 Rated Criteria, modified June 2016. <http://vmc.historymuseum.ca/program-guidelines/> (accessed July 4, 2016).

The Canadian Historical Association Technology and Social Media

Six months later, perhaps we still need to monitor the calls regarding Twitter's demise.¹ Now in existence for ten years, I would argue that Twitter continues to be an important part of academic conferences and a tool for reaching out to members and non-members of the Canadian Historical Association. At the Annual General meeting in Calgary, #twitterstorians engaged, posted, shared and mentioned the work of colleagues well in advance of the Annual Meeting of the CHA. This year, #twitterstorians were also able to interact and engage using the online program application that contained the familiar elements of the printed program and added features like syncing identified panels with calendars identifying them with stars. Users could also take a look at past presidents, look at the prize nominations, move to the participant list and advertisements were well featured. While there were a few glitches, the program application was easily updated to identify room changes or changes to speakers. The application also had options for users to take photographs and use social media – like Facebook, Tumblr and Twitter.²

Again this year, I used both Tweet Archivist and Voyant to analyze trends from the University of Calgary Annual Meeting. As noted in previous social media updates, in 2013, there were less than forty twitter followers in total who participated in twitter discussions throughout the entire conference, including Mentions and Retweets (MTs and RTs).³ Comparing data from 2014, 2015 and 2016, the number of tweets with the conference hashtag (#chashc) has remained steady – but the reach and number of impressions has strengthened to 4,091 814.⁴

Using Voyant and an export of the twitter feed using the #chashc2016, there were 93,678 words and 6,111 unique words.⁵ A 257.pdf page of archived tweets from May 29, 2016 to June 2, 2016 is available and can serve as a somewhat chronological record of #chashc2016.⁶ #ICYMI (in case you missed it) Andrea

Eidinger published a storify collection of tweets, photographs and activities from #chashc2016 that will take you through conference events and highlights.⁷ As an aside, Dr Eidinger also publishes a history round-up on her blog – Unwritten histories that provides an excellent curated collection of stories, tools, resources and information about history from a diversity of sources, saving time and helping those of you who are not sure where to begin looking for on-line resources.⁸

Social media tools like, Twitter and Facebook continue to be important tool for engaging and communicating among historians. @CndhistAssoc – the official twitter account for CHA/SHC, in use since 2012 and now with 1,752 followers more than doubling the number of followers since 2014 when @cndhistAssoc had 836 followers. Several affiliated groups like the Public History Group, the Canadian Committee on Women's History, the History of Children and Youth Group and the newly reconstituted Canadian Committee for Digital History have Facebook pages that update members and the public on job opportunities, calls for papers, public lectures and news stories relevant to these fields of history.⁹

For those still interested in checking out Twitter and other social media tools, but not sure where to start you might consider subscribing to some lists that are focused on specific topics. Check your favourite #twitterstorian for curated lists, your favourite collaborative blog like Active History and Borealia, the NiCHE website for tools and resources for teaching and engaging students and colleagues.¹⁰

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¹ See Joshua Topolsky, "The End of Twitter" *The New Yorker*, (January 29, 2016) <http://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/the-end-of-twitter> (accessed July 14, 2016) and Barbara Speed, "Why Twitter is dying in ten tweets" *Newstatesman.com*, (February 8, 2016) <http://www.newstatesman.com/science-tech/social-media/2016/02/why-twitter-dying-ten-tweets> (accessed July 14, 2016).

² Members are always encouraged to send their feedback and comments regarding the AGM as we will update the Program Chair manual to improve member experiences.

³ In 2013, there were about 380 tweets related to the annual conference, with less than forty users engaged in conversations. In 2015, @jlphistory, Joanna Pearce, the new representative for Graduate students had more than 650 tweets exceeding the entire engagement for 2013.

⁴ #chashc2014 3, 817, #chashc2015 3, 886 and #chashc2016 3, 652 tweets.

⁵ This information reflects the hashtag being used from May 19th, 2016 to June 25th, 2016.

⁶ This export is available to CHA members in MS Excel format.

⁷ Andrea Eidinger's storify for #chashc2016: <https://storify.com/AndreaEidinger/cha-shc-2016-5750bf64adc7db8a1ea3e33b> (accessed July 13, 2016).

⁸ Andrea Eidinger, blog – "Unwritten Histories" <http://www.unwrittenhistories.com> (accessed July 13, 2016). Her blog includes a list of historians online in Canada – so if you're not on it – you can contact her to be added: <http://www.unwrittenhistories.com/canadian-historians-online/> She adds a new blog on Tuesdays and you can access the history round-up on Sundays.

⁹ If your affiliated committee has a Facebook page or twitter account, please let the CHA office know so that your page can be promoted. The CHA also has a Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/Canadian-Historical-Association-Société-historique-du-Canada-215430858536628/> with almost 900 followers. A search of Facebook will yield pages for Active History, Borealia as well as national museums and heritage organizations.

¹⁰ <https://twitter.com/jomac1867/lists/history-in-canada> - which is a list of historians and researchers in Canada – associated with the CHA/SHC, history departments and heritage institutions.