THE DATA MATTER

CRDCN QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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CRDCN
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Welcome to the latest edition of *The Data Matter*!

In this issue, CRDCN Executive Director Dr. Natalie Harrower shares her experience at the recent Canadian Science Policy Centre Conference in Ottawa, where she was part of an expert panel fishbowl session on the hot topic of the new Major Research Facility Framework being developed by the Canada Foundation for Innovation.

Next, we explore the recently released CRDCN 2024-2029 Strategic Plan, delving into the four Strategic Pillars that comprise the plan for the Network over the next five years.

Lastly, we spoke with Catherine McGoveran, the Academic Director of the Research Data Centre at the University of Ottawa, that will be serving as host location for the CRDCN 2025 Conference in May 2025! [Abstracts for papers and posters are being accepted](#) until February 2, 2025 and early bird registration opens on January 13, 2025!

We wish you all a restful and safe holiday season!

Ryan Murphy
Editor, *The Data Matter*

CRDCN and fellow MSIs lead a discussion at CSPC 2024 on considerations for the new *Major Research Facilities* framework

By Natalie Harrower, CRDCN Executive Director

Every year the Canadian Science Policy Centre (CSPC) holds an annual conference that gathers researchers, research funders and policymakers to collectively discuss current and emerging issues, and how science, innovation, and public policy can address these issues for the betterment of society.

The 2024 CSPC conference was held in Ottawa on 22-24 November and featured a 'fishbowl session' on the pressing topic of the new Major Research Facility (MRF) framework, which is being developed by the Canada Foundation for Innovation at the request of the Department of Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED). The panel was organised by the Canadian Light Source and included representatives from a range of research infrastructures across the country, including myself, Dr. Art McDonald, Professor Emeritus and recipient of the 2015 Nobel Prize in Physics, Dr. Alannah Hallas, an Associate Professor in the Department of Physics and Astronomy at the University of British Columbia (UBC) and a Principal Investigator at UBC's Blusson Quantum Materials Institute, Dr. Chithra Karunakaran, Director of Science and Innovation at Canadian Light Source, which hosts Canada's only synchrotron, and panel chair Kevin Fitzgibbons, who serves on the Board of Neutrons Canada. There were attendees from across disciplines and geographies, and representatives from CFI and ISED in the room.

The fishbowl session, which turned the entire 'audience' into an active participant, began with short thought pieces by each of the panelists, followed by discussions around the room. The focus was on how to ensure that the new MRF framework is developed in ways that best address current and future research requirements in Canada. In advance of the session, a Discussion paper was shared that asked participants to consider a number of key issues in relation to the new framework.

The panel started with the acknowledgement that a lifecycle approach to funding these infrastructures is very welcome, because infrastructures are long term investments and should be funded to ensure value and return on that investment. The current method of short-term project-based funding is not suitable.

Second, the panel agreed that a portfolio-based approach to research infrastructures, supported

Panelists at the CSPC 2024 session.
Front Row (L-R): Dr. Natalie Harrower, Dr. Art McDonald, Dr. Alanna Hallas, Dr. Chithra Karunakaran. Back Row (L-R): Kevin Fitzgibbons, Janet King, Janet Halliwell, Sandra Noel.

Photo: Dr. Natalie Harrower

by a road-mapping exercise to understand current strengths and gaps across the research ecosystem, is strongly needed to guide decision making when it comes to government investment. Both of these elements – a lifecycle approach to funding and portfolio approach to inclusion – are part of the request from the Government of Canada in the task it set for CFI and ISED to develop the new framework. They provide excellent starting points for addressing systemic challenges in the funding of national research infrastructures. However, as it currently stands, there are 19 CFI Major Science Initiatives, and only 6 of these are slated for inclusion in the first phase: CCGS Amundsen, Canadian Light Source (CLS), Ocean Networks Canada (ONC), Ocean Tracking Network (OTN), SNOLAB, and VIDO.

The panelists and audience members then went on to detail the additional considerations, in terms of strategic approaches, that are required to ensure the success of this new framework and the future of a suite of national research infrastructures across the country. A white paper is forthcoming from this session and will be shared on the CRDCN website in the new year. In advance of that, I am sharing with you the considerations that I put forth from the perspective of the social sciences and humanities, which are typically underfunded disciplines, and have their own particular configurations and requirements. (Note that of the 19 MSIs, there is one in the humanities – Coalition Publica – and one in the social sciences – CRDCN, which also supports population health studies).

I offered three main points for consideration:

First, a portfolio approach is meant to look across the research ecosystem at a wide range of scientific needs so that funding decisions can be made with that range in mind. By creating a new framework that selects only six infrastructures for inclusion in a first phase, there is a risk of creating or exacerbating disparities. Instead of implementing the framework for these six and then looking at a second phase, a national road-mapping exercise should take place as part of Phase 1. If the goal is to support a suite of disciplinary infrastructures that strategically serve the full suite of scientific needs across the country, then those needs and the relevant infrastructures and gaps should be identified very early, so that a pathway is developed for all areas in a systematic way.

Second, a portfolio approach should consider, at its centre, a diversity of disciplines, domains, and methodologies. This is important in order to encompass the range of research needs across the country, but also because it enables complementarity of approach when it comes to addressing wider needs that cut across disciplines. For example, the management and reuse of research data and digital approaches to research are becoming increasingly central to understanding and improving our current world, and they are also key to the functioning of many national research infrastructures. The effort to progress open science practices such as open access publishing and replicability, as examples, has been well supported by infrastructures focused on the SSH; the advances developed in these disciplines can be used and adapted by research infrastructures in other domains as well.

Third, there is a need to assess what is meant by 'size', 'value' and 'impact' in any definition of the term 'major'. One of the current thresholds for inclusion in Phase 1 of the MRF framework is a capital investment exceeding $100 million. This figure uses the cost of hard infrastructure as a central factor in the definition of 'major', whereby different indicators may be more indicative in other disciplinary contexts. In the social sciences and humanities, research infrastructures define their 'assets' more in terms of data, collections and people than in terms of buildings and technical infrastructure. CRDCN, for example, supports at any given moment a network of around 2,500 researchers from across Canada, at 46 institutions of research and higher education, across over 30 disciplines. The research they produce informs public policy areas such as education, economy, public health, labour, social services, immigration, childhood development, and a host of other areas that impact the daily lives of Canadians.

On top of this, about 30% of CRDCN researchers are students, so the research infrastructure plays a major role in building the next generation of highly qualified personnel in Canada. These factors are all considerable indicators of size, value and impact, but they have very little to do with thresholds around capital costs. This is not to say that capital costs are negligible, but that is a topic for a different article!

What you need to know

- Once the white paper is published, we will be sharing it via our website and social media accounts.
- For more information on CRDCN's interest in this topic, please see the Pillar on 'Research Ecosystem' in our 2024-2029 Strategic Plan.

Strategizing a course for the future of CRDCN

In 2025 the Canadian Research Data Centre Network (CRDCN) will commemorate a quarter century of partnership with Statistics Canada and universities across the country, while also launching the virtual Research Data Centre (vRDC), a powerful new centralised data infrastructure network. The vRDC is the first time in our Network's 25-year history that remote access to Statistics Canada microdata will be possible for our researchers, which will enhance our ability to support collaborative research and to diversify our user base. In advance of the 25th anniversary of the Network, we have launched the 2024-2029 CRDCN Strategic Plan, which outlines our bold new vision, mission and values.

We are proud of this plan, because it reflects what we heard from our stakeholders across the country and sets out a new vision that will guide us through the next quarter century as one of Canada's key national research infrastructures. The plan articulates this vision through four strategic pillars:

Data: CRDCN's **raison d'être** is facilitating access for academic researchers to a rich array of Statistics Canada datasets and the smooth functioning of this access remains the Network's first and most central strategic pillar. Over the next five years, we plan to support Statistics Canada's expansion of the range of datasets available, support expanded linkages between datasets, and consider the potential for CRDCN to steward datasets from additional sources. Through these goals, we will harness the power of the vRDC to improve and democratise access to a diverse range of researchers across Canada.

Community and Capabilities: Data are often referred to as 'assets', and while this is true, the core assets at the heart of the CRDCN are the researchers themselves. We aim to build researcher capability through training in key areas, and to build the community that supports these researchers. By developing CRDCN as a professional network, and fostering collaborations across centres and disciplines, we hope to harness the remarkable strength of the nearly 2,500 researchers that constitute CRDCN's status as a national research infrastructure. Through this, we will actively work to build the Network's inclusivity and diversity by collaborating with a range of partners across the research ecosystem.

Evidence-informed Decision-making: Quantitative research in social science and population health generates important insights into a range of important policy areas, but the pathway between academic research outcomes and policy input needs to be strengthened. With its wide user base across the country, representing over 30 disciplines of inquiry, CRDCN is well positioned to foster the exchange between academics and decision makers to help address complex questions and large-scale societal challenges.

Research Ecosystem: Our ability to support research also requires attention to the larger ecosystem in which that research takes place. CRDCN will contribute to the discussions in this larger ecosystem, helping to shape developments in areas such as Open Science, data management, and research infrastructure road-mapping. Through national engagement and participation in international fora, we will support the development of relevant best practices, work to increase public trust in research, and create a sustainable future for CRDCN as a national research infrastructure.

CRDCN Executive Director Natalie Harrower spoke about the new Strategic Plan, saying: "Building the pillars for this plan provided a wonderful opportunity to meet widely with our Academic Directors, to learn from researchers, to explore common goals with our colleagues at Statistics Canada and, more generally, to understand how to prioritise medium term goals.

Data
Enable innovative research through expanded data access and use

Community & Capabilities
Develop skills and build expertise for data-intensive research topics and professions

Evidence-informed Decision-making
Strengthen the bridge between academic research and decision-makers

Research Ecosystem
Foster the continued development of best practices in the research and data ecosystem

rations that will see the Network kick off the next 25 years of outstanding research.

We also spoke about the new Strategic Plan with the Chair of the CRDCN Board, Janet Halliwell, who provided some thoughts on how this plan will impact research in Canada:

"This is an exciting time in the evolution of CRDCN as we transition to the vRDC, democratising access to the rich microdata of our partner, Statistics Canada, deepening opportunities for forefront research in social sciences and population health. Equally exciting is the prospect of amplifying the value proposition of the Network through new partnerships and collaborations involving the CRDCN research community and the CRDCN itself."

As we step into the next 25 years of the CRDCN's

The result articulates the direction that we need to take over the next five years to both build on the successes of the Network, and to outline new opportunities to support quantitative research in the social sciences and population health sciences." CRDCN staff are looking forward to the partnerships and collabo-

future, we are very proud to share this five-year plan, and we hope you will take time to read it. If something piques your curiosity, perhaps we can work on something together. Feel free to reach out to us at info@crdcn.ca.

What you need to know

- The 2024-2029 Strategic Plan has been released on the cusp of two major milestones: CRDCN's 25th anniversary and the launch of the vRDC.
- The plan revises the CRDCN vision, mission and values, and articulates our strategic priorities for the next five years across four Pillars: Data, Community & Capabilities, Evidence-Informed Decision-Making, and Research Ecosystem.

Co-chairing and hosting the 2025 CRDCN event of the year!

In May 2025, in line with the 25th anniversary of the Canadian Research Data Centre Network (CRDCN), and its partnerships with Statistics Canada and Collaborating Institutions, the Network will be holding its annual conference in the Ottawa.

May 13 and 14, researchers, academics, policymakers and students from across Canada will come to the University of Ottawa for this two-day event featuring paper and poster presentations, plenary discussions, workshops and a special 25th anniversary social event.

As host university of the conference, University of Ottawa is wonderfully situated to host as a central location for our many delegates across Canada, in close proximity to Statistics Canada offices in Ottawa/Gatineau, who will host conference co-located workshops on May 12, 2025.

To learn more about our host, we sat down to speak with Catherine McGoveran, Academic Director (AD) of the Ottawa Research Data Centre (ORDC) and CRDCN 2025 Conference Co-Chair, to learn about the ORDC and about other features of the University of Ottawa that might be of interest to conference attendees.

Having taken on the role of AD in 2021, McGoveran began working at the University of Ottawa Library in 2011 as the Government Information Librarian.

"I worked as part of a team of librarians and specialists in the Geographic, Statistics, and Government Information (GSG) Centre at the Library, which gave me the opportunity to collaborate closely with our data team in responding to requests from students and faculty from a wide variety of disciplines," she says. "Since I started at uOttawa, I've continued to work closely with data colleagues in the library, transitioning to be the Head of the GSG Centre, then later as the Chair of the Library's Interdisciplinary Data Team, and now as the Head of the Library's newly formed Scholarly Communication and Data department."

The role of Academic Director and the task of managing data services in the library are quite similar, which is what led her to put her name forward for the position when it opened in 2021.

"Wearing dual hats as a librarian and an AD has helped further the close relationship between the ORDC and the library team, enabling us to better triage requests across the continuum of data access and make connections between library services and supports and the unique needs of the ORDC researcher community," says McGoveran.

The ORDC has about 125 unique researchers, according to McGoveran, representing the University of Ottawa along with other universities and government departments. The researchers from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Medicine are the most active ORDC users.

Of course, with this many users, tracking the resulting output can be a challenge. In the coming year, the

Morisset Library, home of the ORDC.
Photo:University of Ottawa

tal Ripp, on this project and we're taking inspiration from the work done by our colleagues at QICSS (the Quebec Inter-University Centre for Social Statistics)," says McGoveran. "One of the goals of this project is to enable us to increase visibility and better communicate the impact of the research conducted in the ORDC."

The campus hosting the ORDC is located in downtown Ottawa, which McGoveran and those at the CRDCN believe is an ideal venue to host the CRDCN 2025 annual conference and commemorate the 25th anniversary of the partnership with Statistics Canada and Collaborating Institutions.

"At the heart of the nation's capital, which hosts numerous key stakeholders relevant to the research activities enabled by CRDCN, the conference will be a great opportunity for making connections and fostering collaborative learning," she says.

Attendees may also want to take time out to take a walk along the Rideau Canal, which is right nearby, or the Living Laboratory Aquarium and rooftop greenhouse, she adds.

Early bird registration for CRDCN 2025 will be opening soon, so keep an eye on your inboxes and social media channels!

Abstracts for paper and poster presentations are currently being accepted until February 2, 2025. To submit an abstract, visit our website.

ORDC is working to develop a protocol to improve the capture of output coming from research taking place at their facility.

"I'm working closely with our Data Librarian, Chan-

What you need to know

- CRDCN 2025 Conference to be held May 13-14 at the University of Ottawa
- Ottawa RDC putting a protocol in place to track researcher output
- Conference will celebrate the 25th anniversary of CRDCN on May 13th

If you have any feedback or ideas for future articles or themes, please reach out to us at info@crdcn.ca.