

# Our True North

## Creative Sovereignty as Strategic Infrastructure for a Resilient and Prosperous Canada

*An initiative to leverage creativity as an essential resource, developing a living framework that establishes creative sovereignty as foundational to national advancement*

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### **Issue:**

Creative sovereignty is the enduring capacity of a nation to autonomously generate, renew, and direct its own future—encompassing not only culture, stories, and innovations, but the very systems and structures that enable societal resilience and prosperity. During times of great challenge and disruption, it is this creative capacity that transforms crisis into opportunity, enabling societies to adapt and thrive.

However, in a world of accelerating complexity and destabilization, the foundations of Canada's creative sovereignty are eroding. Talent exodus, diminishing R&D, and fraying social bonds erode our capacity to chart our own course. Despite abundant natural resources and world-class education, Canada's faltering creative sovereignty has produced alarming gaps between potential and performance. We face food insecurity amid agricultural abundance, housing unaffordability despite vast landscapes, and lagging innovation in the presence of exceptional talent. We produce world-class talent—iconic musicians, filmmakers, scientists, and entrepreneurs—only to see them depart for opportunities abroad, taking their innovative potential with them. Social cohesion weakens in the absence of compelling shared narratives and unifying national values, while our extraordinary diversity—Indigenous heritage, linguistic duality, and immigrant vitality—remains an untapped wellspring for reimagining our collective future.

A Canadian renaissance is necessary and within reach. We need coordinated action to invigorate our creative sovereignty. We must create systems that build creative sovereignty as living infrastructure—no longer treating 'culture' as separate from economic prosperity and national resilience—ushering forth new forms of wealth as we pursue Our True North.

## Analysis:

Canada's creative sovereignty is at a critical juncture, with economic data highlighting both untapped potential and alarming vulnerabilities. The creative economy contributes significantly to Canada's prosperity—generating \$58.5 billion (2.2% of GDP) and employing over 600,000 people as of 2022—yet structural weaknesses threaten our ability to maintain this vitality.

Five key challenges currently undermine Canada's creative sovereignty:

1. **Talent Exodus:** Nearly two-thirds of Canadian graduate students report they are likely to leave Canada after completing their degrees, with half of recent graduates already gone or planning to depart. This brain drain is particularly acute in creative and innovative fields, where higher salaries and more dynamic ecosystems abroad—particularly in the United States—draw away our best minds. Canada has fallen from 5th (2019) to 10th (2023) in the OECD's talent attraction rankings.
2. **Investment Gap in R&D:** Canada's national R&D expenditure sits at approximately 1.6% of GDP, which is 37% below the OECD average of 2.5%. This represents a staggering \$28.7 billion annual investment shortfall.
3. **Fraying Social Cohesion:** Increasing polarization, economic inequality, and the absence of shared narratives are weakening the social bonds necessary for collaborative creativity. Without an energized, well-supported, and unifying cultural framework, Canada's diverse perspectives remain siloed, their full potential untapped.
4. **Performance Gaps in Core Systems:** Despite abundant agricultural capacity, 18% of Canadian families faced food insecurity in 2022. Similarly, 22% of households struggle with housing affordability, spending over 30% of income on shelter. These gaps highlight failures in our capacity to creatively address fundamental needs.
5. **Cultural and Media Pressure:** Globalization, digital fragmentation, and the rapid rise of artificial intelligence have made Canada's creative landscape increasingly vulnerable to foreign dominance.

## Recommendation:

We recommend the following actions to establish creative sovereignty as essential infrastructure for Canada.

1. **Launch 'Our True North', the Creative Sovereignty Campaign** to invigorate national cohesion by showcasing Canada's creative problem-solving heritage and celebrating our entrepreneurial potential to advance the frontiers of what's possible.

This national initiative will highlight the unique collaborative possibilities of Canada, drawing on our nation's complexity to tackle complex challenges. The campaign will spotlight breakthrough Canadian innovations, feature multimedia storytelling of creative journeys, and create public spaces for cross-discipline collaboration.

Implementation would begin with a nationwide campaign in the near-term, followed by regional innovation showcases and a major creative sovereignty summit in early 2026.

This campaign would prominently feature the eye-catching signature programs, the National Moonshot Initiative and ‘Call in the Eh Team’ (elaborated in item 2), inspiring Canadians to participate in solving our most ambitious challenges while celebrating creative breakthroughs that make the best of our collective innovative capacity. This campaign will set a clear direction that orients Canadians toward Our True North.

2. **Build Our True North Talent Base.** This Strategic Talent Development and Retention Program includes:
  - a. a Creative Sovereignty Tax Credit for returning expatriates who establish businesses in Canada,
  - b. a National Moonshot Initiative with prizes for breakthrough Canadian innovations,
  - c. dedicated investment in systems-level literacy and generalist skills development—equipping Canadians to thrive in the AI age by understanding complex systems, exercising creative agency, and adapting across disciplines., and
  - d. ‘Call in the Eh Team’: recruit iconic Canadians who have achieved international success to return for high-impact collaborations with emerging Canadian talent. These homecoming partnerships would establish mentorship pipelines, create signature Canadian projects with global reach, and demonstrate that Canada can be both the launching pad and destination for world-class creative careers.
3. **Launch Canadian Creative Sovereignty Fund (CCSF)** to catalyze sovereign storytelling, creative technologies, and high-value IP development. Unlike traditional funding programs that operate in isolation, CCSF would function as an integrated ecosystem builder with three distinctive elements:
  - a. **Cross-Sector Synergy Program** incentivizing collaborations between traditionally separate domains, producing Canadian renaissance stories—aerospace and nuclear, cultural heritage with blockchain, quantum cryptography with fintech startups—to originate prime mover innovations in Canada and becoming a magnet for global creative talent;
  - b. **IP Sovereignty Provisions** requiring funded projects to maintain majority Canadian ownership while establishing pathways to scale globally; and
  - c. **Market-Making Mechanisms** that connect Canadian creators directly with global distribution platforms through negotiated placement agreements.
4. **Establish a National Creative Sovereignty Council (NCSC) with Integrated Measurement Framework** bringing together federal departments (PCO, Heritage, ISED), provincial/territorial representatives, Indigenous leadership, and private sector

innovators. The NCSC would coordinate policy, break down silos, and develop Canada's first Creative Sovereignty Index—a comprehensive measurement system tracking creative capacity, narrative resilience, and innovation strength across the country.

**Recommendation Summary: Our True North Creative Sovereignty Imperative**

By implementing these recommendations as an integrated strategy, we aim to transform creative sovereignty from concept to cornerstone—establishing the infrastructure needed for our nation to autonomously generate novel adaptations to complex challenges. This approach recognizes creative capacity not as a cultural luxury but as the foundation for a vibrant economy, social cohesion, and sovereign future.