



Digital Policy Hub

APRIL 2026 RESEARCH CONFERENCE AGENDA

April 2026 Cohort Capstone Event
Tuesday, April 28, 2026
9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. EDT (UTC -4)
CIGI Campus, Auditorium

AGENDA

9:00 a.m.	Registration, Breakfast <i>Foyer</i>																			
9:30 a.m.	Introduction & Opening Remarks from Dianna H. English , Digital Policy Hub Director, CIGI <i>Auditorium</i>																			
9:45 a.m.	Morning Keynote Address from Anne Gaviola Toronto-based journalist and technology commentator specializing in AI, Innovation and the Future of Work																			
10:30 a.m.	Panel 1: Institutionalizing AI: Policy, Education, and Civic Design (75 mins) Moderator: Laila Mourad, DPH alum <table border="1" data-bbox="269 1104 1498 1648"> <thead> <tr> <th><i>Presenter</i></th> <th><i>Presentation</i></th> <th><i>Friendly Dialogue provided by:</i></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Mehrsa Ehsani</td> <td>From Experimentation to Embedding: Governing SMEs' Use of Generative Systems in Canada</td> <td>Julian Lam</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Julianna Kowlessar</td> <td>Developing AI Policies in Ontario Schools with Critical Media Literacy</td> <td>Anna Legault</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Julian Lam</td> <td>From Deficit to Design: Civic Technology as Democratic Infrastructure for AI Governance,</td> <td>Mehrsa Ehsani</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Anna Legault</td> <td>Multilingualism as design: Building digital architectures</td> <td>Mark Robbins</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mark Robbins</td> <td>From CivTech to Combat: Ukraine's Pre-War Digital Transformation through to Defence Capability</td> <td>Julianna Kowlessar</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		<i>Presenter</i>	<i>Presentation</i>	<i>Friendly Dialogue provided by:</i>	Mehrsa Ehsani	From Experimentation to Embedding: Governing SMEs' Use of Generative Systems in Canada	Julian Lam	Julianna Kowlessar	Developing AI Policies in Ontario Schools with Critical Media Literacy	Anna Legault	Julian Lam	From Deficit to Design: Civic Technology as Democratic Infrastructure for AI Governance,	Mehrsa Ehsani	Anna Legault	Multilingualism as design: Building digital architectures	Mark Robbins	Mark Robbins	From CivTech to Combat: Ukraine's Pre-War Digital Transformation through to Defence Capability	Julianna Kowlessar
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11:45 a.m.	Morning Break (15 min)																			

<p>12:00 p.m.</p>	<p>Panel 2: Strategic Autonomy: Protecting Africa’s AI, Energy, and Digital Trade Assets (60 mins) Moderator: Andrew Heffernan, DPH alum</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="277 306 1500 590"> <thead> <tr> <th><i>Presenter</i></th> <th><i>Presentation</i></th> <th><i>Friendly Dialogue provided by:</i></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Amal Hussein</td> <td>Beyond the Frontier: A Framework for Open-Weight AI in Africa</td> <td>Kyle Volpi-Hiebert</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Clarence Sokolambe Lakpini</td> <td>Do Not Disclose: Trade Secrets and Nigeria’s Energy Transition</td> <td>Amal Hussein</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Kyle Volpi-Hiebert</td> <td>Soldiers of (Mis)Fortune: Mercenaries and Digital Propaganda Campaigns in Africa</td> <td>Clarence Sokolambe Lakpini</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	<i>Presenter</i>	<i>Presentation</i>	<i>Friendly Dialogue provided by:</i>	Amal Hussein	Beyond the Frontier: A Framework for Open-Weight AI in Africa	Kyle Volpi-Hiebert	Clarence Sokolambe Lakpini	Do Not Disclose: Trade Secrets and Nigeria’s Energy Transition	Amal Hussein	Kyle Volpi-Hiebert	Soldiers of (Mis)Fortune: Mercenaries and Digital Propaganda Campaigns in Africa	Clarence Sokolambe Lakpini
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<p>1:00 p.m.</p>	<p>Lunch <i>Foyer</i></p>												
<p>2:00 p.m.</p>	<p>Afternoon Keynote Address from Dr. Derek Newton <i>Auditorium</i> Senior Vice President, Business Development and Strategic Partnerships at Mitacs</p>												
<p>2:45 p.m.</p>	<p>Panel 3: Reimagining Canada’s Online Harms Response and Public Digital Spaces (60 mins) Moderator: Caleigh Wong, DPH alum</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="277 1083 1484 1377"> <thead> <tr> <th><i>Presenter</i></th> <th><i>Presentation</i></th> <th><i>Friendly Dialogue provided by:</i></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Karmvir K. Padda</td> <td>Half the Players, Half the Safety: Misogyny on Gaming Platforms</td> <td>Alexander Martin</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Alexander Martin</td> <td>Beyond a Canadian Facebook: Interoperable Public-Interest Social Media for Canadian Democracy</td> <td>Dylan White</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Dylan White</td> <td>AI Companions and Canada’s Online Harms Framework</td> <td>Karmvir Padda</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	<i>Presenter</i>	<i>Presentation</i>	<i>Friendly Dialogue provided by:</i>	Karmvir K. Padda	Half the Players, Half the Safety: Misogyny on Gaming Platforms	Alexander Martin	Alexander Martin	Beyond a Canadian Facebook: Interoperable Public-Interest Social Media for Canadian Democracy	Dylan White	Dylan White	AI Companions and Canada’s Online Harms Framework	Karmvir Padda
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<p>3:45 p.m.</p>	<p>Afternoon Break (15 min)</p>												

4:00 p.m.	<p>Panel 4: Sovereignty and Security in the Digital Age (75 mins) Moderator: Shirley Anne Scharf, DPH alum</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th><i>Presenter</i></th> <th><i>Presentation</i></th> <th><i>Friendly Dialogue provided by:</i></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Alonso Muñoz Sanchez</td> <td>Geoeconomics and the AI Chip Race: Lessons from Taiwan for Middle Powers</td> <td>Nathaniel Sukhdeo</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Jeffrey Klinck</td> <td>Blueprint to Implementation: A BIS-Inspired Unified Ledger for Canada</td> <td>Fabrice Blais-Savoie</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gabrielle Lim</td> <td>Technoimaginaries and the Search for Infinite Power</td> <td>Jeffrey Klinck</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Fabrice Blais-Savoie</td> <td>Trade in Services as Transboundary Data Regulation: Data Marketplaces, Data Commercialization and Data (Re-)Purposing</td> <td>Gabrielle Lim</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Nathaniel Sukhdeo</td> <td>Protecting Canadian Digital Economic Sovereignty: Operationalizing Distributed Ledger Technologies</td> <td>Alonso Muñoz Sanchez</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	<i>Presenter</i>	<i>Presentation</i>	<i>Friendly Dialogue provided by:</i>	Alonso Muñoz Sanchez	Geoeconomics and the AI Chip Race: Lessons from Taiwan for Middle Powers	Nathaniel Sukhdeo	Jeffrey Klinck	Blueprint to Implementation: A BIS-Inspired Unified Ledger for Canada	Fabrice Blais-Savoie	Gabrielle Lim	Technoimaginaries and the Search for Infinite Power	Jeffrey Klinck	Fabrice Blais-Savoie	Trade in Services as Transboundary Data Regulation: Data Marketplaces, Data Commercialization and Data (Re-)Purposing	Gabrielle Lim	Nathaniel Sukhdeo	Protecting Canadian Digital Economic Sovereignty: Operationalizing Distributed Ledger Technologies	Alonso Muñoz Sanchez
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5:15 p.m.	<p>Closing Remarks from Dianna H. English, Digital Policy Hub Director, CIGI <i>Auditorium</i></p>																		
5:30 p.m.	<p>Reception <i>Foyer</i> Light refreshments and snacks</p>																		

HOUSEKEEPING NOTES

- **In Person:** Please arrive at CIGI Campus (67 Erb St. W., Waterloo ON) around 8:45 AM EST to meet the cohort and find the auditorium in time for the opening remarks. Please contact Reception at reception@cigionline.org if you have trouble locating the CIGI staff entrance/if you require any assistance upon arrival.
 - **WIFI:** CIGI Campus Guest
 - Password: think_67_tank
 - **Parking:** Parking is not available on-site. Please visit <https://uptownwaterloobia.com/uptown-parking/> for parking locations and rates. There is free 2-hour parking in city lots and streets.
- **Virtual:** Please join the meeting a few minutes in advance to check your connection and allow time for troubleshooting. If you have any technical difficulties, please contact **CIGI Events** at events@cigionline.org
 - Please identify yourself in Zoom as first name, last name, organization (for example, “Bob Fay, CIGI”).
 - Please remain muted during others’ presentations.

- During the discussions, please use the Q&A feature if you have any questions and we will do our best to answer as many questions as possible.
- **Zoom link:** <https://cigionline-org.zoom.us/j/82112941547>

AUDIENCE Q&A: SLIDO

We invite you to submit questions throughout the session using Slido. Please scan the QR and enter your question at any time. You can also upvote questions you would like to see answered—this helps us prioritize during the Q&A segment. The moderator will select a range of questions to pose to the panel toward the end of the session.



PANEL FORMAT

The format for each panel will be as follows:

1. Main Presentations – 5 minutes per presenter
2. “Friendly dialogues” (one insight and one question) – 5 minutes
 - 2.5 minutes responding to the assigned peer’s paper
 - 2.5 minutes for the author’s reply
3. Collect questions from the audience
4. One round of presenter responses to floor questions

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Establishment of the Hub Program

The Digital Policy Hub at the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) launched in September 2023 and is a collaborative space for emerging scholars and innovative thinkers from the social, natural and applied sciences. It provides opportunities for undergraduate, graduate students, post-doctoral and visiting fellows to share and develop research on the rapid evolution and governance of transformative technologies. This conference marks an opportunity for Hub fellows to discuss their research with the wider CIGI community.

The program hosts fellows for up to 12 months in residence at the state-of-the-art CIGI Campus and working remotely, linking to CIGI’s existing network of more than 100 fellows from around the world. Participants join skills-building seminars and other activities that cut across research, analysis, and policy, while advancing their career development.

The Hub is founded on transdisciplinary approaches (i.e., research that cuts across disciplines and engages fellows with policy makers and industry professionals) that seek to increase understanding of the socio-economic and technological impacts of digitalization and improve the quality and relevance of related research. This approach also broadens the capacity of participants to conduct work across disciplines.

Research Focus Areas and Approaches

Transformative technologies are rapidly reshaping our world. Many are widely known — although often not well understood. In parallel, the digitalization of almost everything has created a more interdependent, data-driven world.

While broad technological change is nothing new, many current developments are moving at an accelerated pace, on a global scale and with little or no coherent governance framework nationally or internationally. There exists a pressing need for a transdisciplinary understanding of governance issues across the range of technologies and digitalization.

The Hub's research focuses address this need, centring on digital ethics and rights frameworks that assist in identifying and mitigating the gaps between rapid technological disruption and diffusion, and the lack of governance frameworks at the national and international levels.

Core research areas include:

- Data, economy, and society
- Artificial intelligence
- Outer space
- Digitalization, security, and democracy
- The environment and natural resources

Program objectives

- To generate greater understanding in the public, private and non-profit spheres, of how diverse emerging transformative technologies interact with existing governance frameworks that seek to prioritize digital ethics and rights responsibilities, both in Canada and internationally.
- To help build analytical and policy practices and standards for a new generation of emerging researchers to meet the challenges and opportunities of the digital era.
- To contribute to the development of the Digital Policy Hub itself, through showcasing reports, discussions, and events produced by researchers to the broader community; and through fostering an environment that positions Fellows as future policy and decision-makers.




Partners




We thank Mitacs for its partnership and support of Digital Policy Hub fellows through the Accelerate program. We also thank the Balsillie Family Foundation for its ongoing support. Finally, we'd like to acknowledge the many universities, governments and private sector partners for their involvement in allowing CIGI to offer this holistic research environment.



Visiting fellows receive full financial support from the organization or workplace they are affiliated with during their tenure at the Digital Policy Hub. For more information on the Digital Policy Hub, please visit <https://www.cigionline.org/digital-policy-hub/>

DIGITAL POLICY HUB FELLOW BIOGRAPHIES

	<p><u>Fabrice Blais-Savoie</u> Digital Policy Hub Master’s Fellow</p> <p>Fabrice Blais-Savoie is a Digital Policy Hub master’s fellow studying international public policy at the Balsillie School of International Affairs. During his Digital Policy Hub fellowship, he will be examining trade in data and transnational regulatory mechanisms.</p>
	<p><u>Mehrsa Ehsani</u> Digital Policy Hub Post-doctoral Fellow</p> <p>Mehrsa Ehsani is a Digital Policy Hub postdoctoral fellow specializing in entrepreneurship and innovation, with a Ph.D. from the Haskayne School of Business, University of Calgary. Her research investigates how generative artificial intelligence (AI) can serve as both a tool of empowerment and a source of new bias for minority entrepreneurs. During her Digital Policy Hub fellowship, she will examine how AI adoption reshapes entrepreneurial strategy, access and equity. Mehrsa’s work blends deep engagement with marginalized founders and policy-driven scholarship to advance inclusive, responsible innovation.</p>
	<p><u>Kyle Volpi-Hiebert</u> Digital Policy Hub Visiting Fellow</p> <p>Based in Montreal, Canada, Kyle Volpi Hiebert is a Digital Policy Hub visiting fellow, a researcher and an independent political risk analyst focused on globalization, conflict and emerging technologies. He is a consultant for the African Futures initiative at the Institute for Security Studies and was formerly based in South Africa as deputy editor of the <i>Africa Conflict Monitor</i>, a monthly digital report dissecting the causes and effects of war, terrorism and unrest across the continent. Kyle’s work has also been published in or by <i>Newsweek</i>, <i>The Walrus</i>, <i>CBC News</i>, <i>The Hill</i>, <i>Computer Weekly</i>, <i>Toronto Star</i>, <i>Middle East Eye</i>, the Canadian Global Affairs Institute, <i>Política Exterior</i> and elsewhere.</p>

	<p>Amal Hussein Digital Policy Hub Master’s Fellow</p> <p>Amal Hussein is a Digital Policy Hub master’s fellow and an M.Sc. candidate in systems science and engineering with a concentration in interdisciplinary artificial intelligence (AI) at the University of Ottawa. She contributes research on AI ethics and governance with the Canadian Robotics and Artificial Intelligence for Engineering Design Laboratory. A multidisciplinary designer with a background in systems design and applied AI, Amal explores how global AI ethics principles align with African political, economic and governance contexts. Her work spans public interest technology, civic tech innovation and responsible systems design, and is informed by her prior experience in federal digital service delivery.</p>
	<p>Jeffrey Klinck Digital Policy Hub Undergraduate Fellow</p> <p>Jeffrey Klinck is an undergraduate fellow at the Digital Policy Hub and a third-year engineering physics student at the University of Toronto. His research is centred on blockchain technology, with a focus on decentralized finance (DeFi) mechanism design and market microstructure. His work on DeFi has been published at several venues, including the ACM International Journal of Network Management, IEEE Blockchain conference, and Advances in Financial Technologies conference. During his fellowship, Jeffrey is investigating macro technological, economic, and political dynamics shaping the adoption of blockchain-based technologies like cryptocurrency, stablecoins, and DeFi in Canada.</p>
	<p>Julianna L. Kowlessar Digital Policy Hub Doctoral Fellow</p> <p>Julianna Kowlessar is a Digital Policy Hub doctoral fellow and Ph.D. candidate in the joint graduate program in communication and culture at York and Toronto Metropolitan Universities. Her research centers on advancing Canadian critical media literacy education through innovative pedagogical methods, including, but not limited to, games for K–12 students. During her Digital Policy Hub fellowship, she will be examining the history of media literacy education initiatives across Canadian curricula, identifying relevant gaps, and exploring potential policies that can serve as a starting point in thinking about how critical media literacy efforts can be expanded nationally.</p>



[Clarence Sokolambe Lakpini](#)

Digital Policy Hub Doctoral Fellow

Clarence Lakpini is a Digital Policy Hub doctoral fellow pursuing a Ph.D. in intellectual property (IP) law at the University of Ottawa. During his Digital Policy Hub fellowship, he will examine how Nigeria can foster an equitable energy transition by leveraging digital technologies and reforming its IP system to accelerate the adoption of solar energy. His research focuses on the intersection of digital technologies, IP law and energy justice in the Nigerian context, with the goal of providing policy recommendations for a just transition that supports underserved populations.



[Julian Lam](#)

Digital Policy Hub Master's Fellow

Julian Lam is a Digital Policy Hub master's fellow and is currently studying law at the University of British Columbia (UBC). As a Digital Policy Hub fellow, he is exploring how civic-technology platforms can be used to enhance the inclusivity, legitimacy and effectiveness of artificial intelligence (AI) governance at both the national and international levels. His research builds on previous work leading AI policy initiatives at the Centre for Media, Technology and Democracy at McGill University, as well as developing the global strategy for Canada's digital supercluster. He holds a B.A. in international relations from UBC and an M.P.P. from McGill, where he was a McCall MacBain scholar.



[Anna Legault](#)

Digital Policy Hub Master's Fellow

Anna Legault is a Digital Policy Hub master's fellow pursuing an M.A. in Digital Humanities at McGill University. With a background in linguistics and translation at the United Nations and Canadian government, she is a practitioner-academic of interdisciplinary language work. As part of the Digital Policy Hub Fellowship, she is examining the role of emerging translation technologies and localized language models in shaping a multilingual digital landscape.



Gabrielle Lim

Digital Policy Hub Doctoral Fellow

Gabrielle Lim is a Digital Policy Hub doctoral fellow and a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Political Science at the University of Toronto and is affiliated with the Citizen Lab at the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy. Gabrielle’s research stands at the intersection of technology, security and global governance. Her work examines how emerging technologies in outer space and cyberspace shape international relations, conceptions of sovereignty and the global commons. She was previously an Open Technology Fund Information Controls Fellow and studied at the Shorenstein Center at the Harvard Kennedy School, Data and Society. You can read more about her at gabriellelim.com.



Alexander Martin

Digital Policy Hub Doctoral Fellow

Alexander Martin is a Digital Policy Hub doctoral fellow and a Ph.D. candidate in science and technology studies at York University. His research focuses on information integrity, digital governance and digital communication infrastructure in Canada.

He is a deputy editor at Open Canada, where he works with authors on Canadian foreign policy and technology policy issues. He previously held policy and strategic communications roles at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s Office of the Chief Scientist and the United Nations Information Integrity Unit, focusing on mis- and disinformation and hate speech in peace operations. His work examines how public interest digital infrastructure and governance can strengthen democratic resilience and digital sovereignty in Canada.



Alonso Muñoz Sanchez

Digital Policy Hub Undergraduate Fellow

Alonso Muñoz Sanchez is a Digital Policy Hub undergraduate fellow studying public policy and international relations at the University of Toronto. His research focuses on the geopolitics of transformative technologies, with current work examining semiconductor supply chains as an arena of strategic competition and the energy demands of AI data centres. Alonso has published research and commentary on AI governance, digital policy, and social innovation in *The Hill Times* and the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, and presented his work at international conferences in Amsterdam and New York City. Alonso’s professional experience spans public affairs advisory and policy advocacy across the private, not-for-profit, and public sectors.



Karmvir K. Padda

Digital Policy Hub Post-Doctoral Fellow




Karmvir K. Padda is a Digital Policy Hub postdoctoral fellow with a Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Waterloo. During her fellowship, she will examine how platform affordances shape the spread of gendered misinformation and extremist discourse across moderated and unmoderated online spaces.



Mark Robbins

Digital Policy Hub Visiting Fellow

Mark Robbins is an entrepreneurial public servant in the Government of Canada working at the Department of National Defence and a visiting fellow at the Digital Policy Hub. He has spent his career working in the innovation and emerging technology space, not only as a public servant, but also as a think-tank advisor to governments and a professional researcher. Some of his greatest hits to date involve creating well-respected and influential research on innovation policy, and contributing to government’s perspective on the rapid growth of emerging technologies such as drones and artificial intelligence. Perhaps most importantly, he has been able to roll his sleeves up and get in the trenches with amazing start-ups, scale-ups, scientists and incubators around the world to make things happen.

	<p><u>Anna Romandash</u> Digital Policy Hub Visiting Fellow</p> <p>Anna Romandash is an award-winning journalist and author of <i>Women of Ukraine: Reportages from the War and Beyond</i> (2023). A visiting fellow at the Digital Policy Hub, Anna was named Media Freedom Ambassador of Ukraine for her human rights and media work and was one of the winners of the European Institute of the Mediterranean literary contest for her reporting. In addition, she is the recipient of awards from Internews, the Council of Europe and the Samovydet's Literary Reportage Contest for her work in Ukraine. Romandash works at the intersection of media, technology and human rights, and is passionate about digitalizing democracy and making technology more inclusive.</p>
	<p><u>Nathaniel Sukhdeo</u> Digital Policy Hub Doctoral Fellow</p> <p>Nathaniel Sukhdeo is a Digital Policy Hub doctoral fellow and a Ph.D. student in law at the University of Victoria. During his Digital Policy Hub fellowship, he will be examining an integration of Indigenous legal orders into Canadian digital governance policies to enhance democratic resilience and digital security. He holds a juris doctor and juris indigenarum doctor (Indigenous legal orders) from the University of Victoria Faculty of Law, a Master of Public Administration from the Royal Military College of Canada and a B.A. in political science from Western University. Nathaniel's professional experience is as a naval warfare officer in the Royal Canadian Navy and as counsel with the Department of Justice Canada.</p>
	<p><u>Dylan White</u> Digital Policy Hub Visiting Fellow</p> <p>Dylan J. White is a visiting fellow at the Digital Policy Hub and recently completed his Ph.D. in philosophy, specializing in AI ethics, at the University of Guelph. He works as AI governance lead for the Office of the Chief Information Officer, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. During his Digital Policy Hub fellowship, he is examining how AI is reshaping digital attention economies and the governance challenges this transformation presents.</p>