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Project Pandemic: Canada Reports on COVID-19
Project Description

A: Brief project description

This unique collaborative investigation aims to unite efforts by journalists and journalism students at Canadian news organizations and universities. The goal: to track the impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable populations, including essential service workers, the homeless, rural and remote communities, Indigenous peoples and other groups in real-time. We will do this by building upon data gathered by government health authorities and citizens' self-reported information on infections compiled by Flatten.ca

For small and local news organizations and bureaus, participation may be limited to posting maps on websites and social media, and checking in with "Project Pandemic" in a process that takes a few minutes, once per week. Larger news organizations may elect to devote further resources.

This is the equivalent of a wartime effort, where journalists are encouraged to come together and contribute in the public interest.

In terms of sharing the results of data we collect, we envision something similar to our recent investigation into lead levels in drinking water across the country — waves of focused reports, released simultaneously and curated to your local audience. For "Project Pandemic," each story wave would focus on one specific vulnerable population.

In the months ahead, our storehouse of data will grow to the point that we will be able to investigate why some groups were more affected by the virus.

The first step: To uncover how many front-line healthcare workers in Canada have contracted the virus and how that might be impacting the healthcare system as a whole.

B: Contributors and participants

The project is coordinated by the Institute for Investigative Journalism (IIJ), with the support of the Canadian Association of Journalists (CAJ). The IIJ's funding for this project is supplied by its

founding partner, The Rossy Foundation, with additional support from the McConnell Foundation.

Esri Canada, a company providing essential mapping services used by private companies and governments around the world, has donated free licenses of its software, including access to open data from authoritative government sources, and a database maintained by Environics Analytics.

Flatten.ca is a not-for-profit organization created by a group of students and faculty from the University of Toronto, the University of Waterloo, the University of New Brunswick and McMaster University. Their web app collects self-reported data on the spread of COVID-19 in local communities and around the nation, enhancing our database and providing journalists with an in-depth look at where COVID-19 is spreading within their communities.

All news organizations in Canada are invited to take part. Local news organizations might consider registering with the network to report in their area; regional, provincial and national news organizations might consider involving a journalist at each bureau.

All contributing university journalism schools and their related student publications are invited to post the dynamic map on their websites. (The IIJ's partner institutions are University of British Columbia, Mount Royal University, MacEwan University, University of Regina, First Nations University of Canada, Ryerson University, Carleton University, Humber College, University of Western Ontario, Ryerson University, Concordia University, Université du Québec à Montréal and University of King's College). The IIJ will hire journalism students across the country in connection with this project.

If our reporting tools become more sophisticated, some parts of this project may be opened to the public.

C: Governance

The project will be coordinated by the IIJ, with the support of the CAJ.

The editorial board will consist of one representative from each member institution or news organization. In the event that the membership exceeds 15 organizations, the editorial board will consider splitting into regional and topic-specific committees.

The editorial board will be asked to weigh in on less pressing matters by email, with conference calls every two weeks or as needed.

D: Special projects

"Project Pandemic" proposes special features on targeted issues such as COVID-19's impact on health-care workers; the homeless; residents of rural, remote and Indigenous communities; and more. Drawing on mapping technologies, apps and databases, every topic would have a strong interactive component, encouraging deeper audience engagement with each wave of stories.

Story wave #1
Population surveyed: Health-care workers
Central question: What price have health-care workers paid for helping people?

How do we execute it: Journalists conduct standard surveys at nearby health-care clinics, facilities, pharmacies and other locations
What does the reporting reveal: Occupational health and safety risk for health-care workers.
Question to explore: How can we better protect our front-line health-care workers?
Interactive component for audiences:
Step 1: Telling their personal stories of interactions with health-care professionals -- upload photos and blurbs.
Step 2: Share their COVID-19 stories on a web app the coalition is building. (Feeds into "ongoing" monitoring, which is not listed here.)

Story wave #2
Population surveyed: Homeless and street-involved populations
Central question: How well is Canada doing at protecting the homeless from the pandemic?
How do we execute it: Journalists check on homeless shelters, shelters for women, youth, and new temporary shelters erected by cities for vulnerable people.
What does the reporting reveal: Whether the homeless are sufficiently protected from COVID-19.
What question to explore: Are emergency shelters and new policies sufficient?
Interactive component for audiences: If quarantines are lifted, a citizen journalism effort could be engaged to verify homeless numbers, inspired by this investigation.

E: Description of analysis

The data gathered by coalition reporters will be analyzed by statisticians and data scientists who are members of "Project Pandemic" and shared with experts in relevant fields for comment. The analysis may include regional and provincial comparisons and comparisons against infection and fatality figures from government open data sources, the StatsCan database, Esri's own database and data from Environics Analytics.

Data journalists with member news organizations are invited to perform their own analyses, with the caveat that since they are benefitting from members' work, they must share what they find with all members. All analyses must be promptly shared and uploaded, and all members notified on Slack in the #storylines channel.

F: Description of "Project Pandemic" ongoing investigation

Members are also invited to join the ongoing "Project Pandemic" investigation. This is the foundation of "Project Pandemic" — the basis of a separate series to be published in the fall. Additional details on this part of the project will be sent out to members in the coming weeks.

As part of the investigation, each member commits to calling, or otherwise checking infection, testing, recovery and fatality numbers in a minimum of two locations in their region at least once each week. Checking more often and taking on more responsibilities is encouraged, but this minimum should be maintained from week to week. Examples include but are not limited to:

a. Centres providing essential services
b. Homeless shelters
c. Facilities for the elderly
d. Centres and supportive housing for Indigenous peoples
e. Facilities providing care for people with disabilities
f. Refugee/language support centres

g. Centres for migrant workers
h. Supervised consumption sites

There is a pressing need for reporting from rural, remote, First Nations, Metis and Inuit communities.

Each time the reporter obtains numbers from their weekly reporting, they must fill out a simple form that will automatically upload the data collected into our coalition's map. Reporters should also periodically re-verify that statistics provided by the regional health authority match those reported by the province and the federal government.

Contributing news organizations will be able to publish a dynamic map of their own creation. Some standard maps provided by "Project Pandemic" may show the impacts of standard determinants of health, such as income and distance from care.

G: Payment

Members acknowledge that no payment is associated with "Project Pandemic." All content produced as a result of membership in this project must be freely available to the public.

H: Simultaneous publication

All members agree to grant permission to member news organizations and universities to use the information they gather to produce works of journalism, across all mediums.

No member news organization may scoop another news organization. If you plan to pursue a story based on this project, please share these plans on the Slack channel #storylines. Please include a brief description of the story you plan to tell.

If other news organizations express interest in a proposed story, all parties will coordinate to share interviews. Collaboration methods standard to large groups will be described in shared documents, presentations, and videoconference seminars that will be held for those members interested in attending.

When you plan to publish a story, you must also paste a reminder on the #storylines channel at least 48 hours before publication, with the exact time and date of publication or broadcast.

I: Crediting policy

Any data a reporter gathers will be tagged with their name, news organization and date of input.

In the spirit of collaboration, any articles, broadcasts or multimedia reports produced as a result of our collective effort must reflect this. As described in our common agreement, a failure to follow crediting guidelines will be brought to the editorial board.

The words "as part of the "Project Pandemic" collaborative mapping effort mobilizing journalists across the country" should be included near the top of the article or script.

In descriptions of the data or map, by agreement with Esri Canada, participating news organizations must publish this phrase: "using Esri ArcGIS technology."

Published maps must have the “Powered by Esri” logo. “Project Pandemic” coordinators will send the logo to reporters by email.

At the bottom, an explainer, as follows:

“Project Pandemic: Canada Reports on COVID-19” is a national collaboration bringing together journalists and journalism students from news organizations and universities across Canada to gather information as a public service. The consortium draws on data gathered by governmental health authorities, journalists and the nonprofit platform Flatten.ca. This project is coordinated by Concordia University’s Institute for Investigative Journalism, with the support of the Canadian Association of Journalists. For the full list of credits, please visit concordia.ca/projectpandemic.”

J: Communications and data storage systems

Data will be stored on Esri’s ArcGIS Online platform in a secured organization account: caj-iij.maps.arcgis.com. Supporting documentation for special projects and the “Project Pandemic” investigation can be stored on the project’s Google Drive.

All members agree to communicate with the group and share their research via our Slack channel, which is our group’s primary means of communication. Only group notices and weekly newsletters will be sent by email.

K: Updates to this description

This is an innovative project and as such, work processes will change over time. There may be updates to our member agreement and to this document as the project unfolds, as approved by the editorial board.

L: End date

The final date for this project is currently set for Sept. 15, 2020. This can be extended with the board’s approval if automation, donations and manpower are sufficient. Some experts predict a resurgence of the virus in the late fall and winter, which may prompt an extension.

M: Frequently asked questions

- **Will this get in the way of health authorities’ ability to do their job?**
  - We’ve been checking widely with foundations, media partners, the federal government, nonprofit organizations and university medical departments. The consensus has been that this is a worthwhile project.

- **How will we know the figures are accurate?**
  - Reporters will verify wherever possible, as is standard practice. Self-reported numbers contain inaccuracies, but also help us to understand people’s experiences and perceptions. We must be careful to report the sources of any numbers in order to be transparent and accurate.

- **What about materials for francophones?**
  - We have created this system within a few days. We are working as fast as we can to set up as many French-language services as possible.

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