

Speaking notes for Suzanne Corbeil  
Chair of the SMCC steering committee\  
At Oct. 2 launch event

I am excited at seeing all the people who have taken the time to come to this event. Your attendance shows we have reached a crucial stage toward meeting the goal of a Science Media Centre of Canada – SMCC.

That goal is “accurate and rational coverage of science issues in the Canadian mass media.” Under the term “science” we include health, technology, the environment, medical research, engineering and the whole gamut of the physical, life and social sciences. We aim to improve the quality and quantity of reporting in all those fields in the mass media.

I’m guessing that some of you here today have had disappointing experiences resulting from media coverage of a science issue.

And certainly no journalist wants to be associated with stories that are inaccurate. But sometimes in today’s over-burdened news rooms, reporters get thrown into complex stories without the time to grasp the details or identify the most reliable experts.

When the results affect coverage of matters like federal food safety, corporate initiatives or the off-beat projects of individual researchers, the result is that Canadians are the big losers when good science policy is put at risk because of poor communications.

Shortly, you’ll hear from Fiona Fox, the director of the very first Science Media Centre – established seven years ago in Britain – about their success when “science gets in the headlines”

The SMCC will draw on the experience of SMCs in the U.K., Australia and New Zealand and from others in the early development phase in Denmark, Japan and South Africa. But we agreed from the birth of the idea two years ago that we wanted a made-in-Canada model, operating in both official languages and responsive to all regions in the country.

That’s why we asked Halifax Global Management Consultants to consult widely with potential stakeholders during a feasibility study a year ago.

Here's what we heard:

- **newsroom “gatekeepers”** told us that recent shifts in the Canadian media mean there are fewer and fewer specialist reporters. So they felt it was important that the Centre focus on helping general assignment reporters find experts and get concise briefings on topical concerns – all that on deadline
- **researchers** said they wanted to better understand what motivates journalists and how the media sets news priorities.
- **public affairs offices at universities** said they would welcome opportunities for a higher profile for Canadian research, through our links with sister SMCs.
- **working journalists** stressed a crying need for a source of royalty-free infographics and animations that could complement their words.
- **officials from both federal and provincial governments** talked about the need for improved mass media reporting that would inform public dialogue on policy matters with a science dimension.
- And almost **everybody** championed the idea of a web-based central registry of scientific meetings, so journalists could find reporting opportunities in their own backyards.

We've incorporated such ideas in a business plan and we expect to pick up even more good ideas from the discussion here today. Our target is to open for business next summer with the complete suite of services.

To make all this work, we have hired our first employee on contract to the end of the year – Rita Smith.

The Steering Committee has also decided that the initial location of the SMCC will be here in Ottawa, with the prospect of setting up a regional network.

Within days we expect to have confirmation that the SMCC is registered federally as a non-profit corporation. Already we are identifying individuals for our board of directors.

We are also beginning the painstaking process of building up our database of qualified experts in all the many scientific fields which the SMCC will cover – experts who will be vetted both for being on the cutting edge of their field and also for willingness to talk to the media.

Finally, we hope to announce within a few weeks the hiring of our equivalent of Fiona Fox, the Director of the SMCC.

I would also like to acknowledge both the financial contribution and vision of the SMCC Charter Members without whose support none of this would be possible.

With all these developments and the tremendous interest in today's events, you can see why all of us who have been working toward the Science Media Centre of Canada are so excited.