Strategic Plan
2015–2020
MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

For more than 85 years, The Royal Canadian Geographical Society has contributed to our understanding of Canada and of what it means to be Canadian. In that span of time, Canada has changed dramatically too and so has the Society. We have adopted new technology, we have increased our reach and we have instituted programs that were undreamed of eight decades ago. Through all the innovation and change however, we have maintained our traditions and hewed closely to our original mission and purpose.

It is now incumbent upon us to stand upon this storied past and cast our eyes forward. It is time for us to recommit to our mission, to define a new future and to ensure that our objectives are both strategic and measurable. A well-constructed strategic plan enjoying the support of the College of Fellows will lead to a dynamic, viable and sustainable future for the Society that, in turn, will contribute to Canada’s growth, development and prosperity.

Paul Ruest, PhD
President
OUR MISSION

Dr. Charles Camsell and a group of like-minded, far-sighted and proud Canadians founded The Royal Canadian Geographical Society (RCGS) in 1929. From its inception, the mission of the Society has been clear. The Royal Canadian Geographical Society is dedicated to making Canada better known to Canadians and to the world.

OUR VISION

The vision of the Society is to help Canadians chart a successful future by fostering a greater understanding of Canada’s geography — the diverse human and physical landscape — as well as the changes affecting its people and the environment.

OUR VALUES

- **Exploratory spirit** – encouraging the desire to go beyond the known to chart the unknown and to advance and impart geographical knowledge
- **Continuous learning** – inspiring the desire to learn and valuing the transfer of knowledge,
- **Engagement** – encouraging and appreciating the active participation and contributions of volunteers to the programs and activities of the Society
- **Collaboration** – appreciating the impact and influence that can be gained through working with other like-minded organizations
- **Environmental awareness** – encouraging the use of geography to enhance awareness and understanding of environmental issues
OUR CONTEXT

The Royal Canadian Geographical Society is one of Canada’s largest not-for-profit educational associations. As a registered charity, the Society is incorporated under Part II of the Canada Corporations Act. In 2013, the Minister of Industry approved the Society’s most recent operating by-law.

The College of Fellows is at the centre of the Society’s governance. The College comprises hundreds of individuals, representing Canada’s diverse regions and communities, who volunteer their time and expertise in support of the Society’s mission.

The College is the voting body that elects the President, other members of the Board of Governors, as well as new Fellows. The College provides guidance and financial support, and helps raise the profile of the RCGS and its educational, research and expeditions programs.

The Society owns Canadian Geographic Enterprises, a fully integrated cross-platform publisher of Canadian Geographic, Canadian Geographic Travel and Géographica magazines. Canadian Geographic, continuously published since 1930, is among Canada’s most read magazines and has in recent years been acknowledged as the country’s “most interesting” magazine. Canadian Geographic’s strong brand is a key factor in the Society’s value proposition and enables the Society to pursue vitally important revenue-generating custom publishing activities that also contribute to increasing the Society’s profile and its footprint in Canada.

The Society employs a number of mechanisms to fulfil its mission, including providing research grants to post-secondary students, supporting expeditions within Canada and awarding medals that recognize extraordinary service or achievements in geography. The Society also manages Canadian Geographic Education, a program supported by an extensive volunteer network of thousands of educators from every province and territory, that offers teachers and students innovative ways to discover the physical and human geography of Canada through the provision of English and French resources for the classroom and professional development in support of geographic pedagogy.
The Society was a key partner in the 2014 Victoria Strait Expedition, the Parks Canada-led public-private partnership which located HMS Erebus, one of the exploration ships commanded by Sir John Franklin that was lost in 1848. The 2014 Expedition serves as an example of the kind of major projects that the RCGS can use to excite the interest of Canadians and people around the world in the geography of Canada. Not only did the Expedition succeed in raising the profile of the RCGS, it also provided content for Canadian Geographic Education, and for the general public through Canadian Geographic and Géographica magazines as well as an illustrated book. The Society was able to leverage sponsorship and donor support to fund its educational resources.

To commemorate Canada’s 150th anniversary in 2017, the Society will undertake a number of projects that will draw inspiration from the past while firmly facing forward. The Society will embrace opportunities to celebrate Canada’s rich geographic heritage in concert with partners that will aid the Society in reaching new audiences at home and abroad.

In the time span of this strategic plan the Society will mark its 90th anniversary, an occasion that calls both for reflection and for action. The Society will take full advantage of the anniversary to showcase and celebrate geography and, by extension, the Society.
OUR OBJECTIVES

Like the mission, the objectives by which the Society has delivered on its mission have changed little since the early years as they have proven to be effective and enduring. They include:

- Encouraging a deeper appreciation of Canada's rich geography across the country and beyond our borders,
- Advancing geographic literacy and education,
- Enabling exploration and discovery,
- Supporting research and lifelong learning, and
- Acknowledging outstanding achievement in the field of geography and service to the Society.

As one of the largest not-for-profit educational organizations in Canada, the Society must continue to manage its financial resources prudently and in accordance with the requirements respecting its status. Within this context, a key objective is to generate a steady flow of donations, sponsorships and strategic partnerships to sustain and expand the organization’s capacity to deliver its programs and activities. For this reason, the Society must take advantage of innovative technologies, new means of communicating such as social media, and significant partnerships to reach more Canadians and to foster a lifelong engagement with geography. The overarching objective is to ensure to the greatest extent possible that the Society is on a sound financial footing.

The next five years afford the Society a singular opportunity to expand its membership beyond its traditional audiences, to establish a sustainable financial foundation, to enhance its programs, to ensure the College of Fellows is representative and inclusive, and to underscore its mission as the country commemorates a series of nation-building anniversaries.
OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The strategic priorities are designed to illustrate the breadth, dynamism and aspirations of the Society. They are not presented in any priority order.

Advancement

Develop and implement a funding development strategy that will ensure long-term revenue growth and sustainability for the Society. This strategy will be multi-layered, and focus on:

1. Leveraging and enhancing the Society’s programs and communications assets,
2. Seeking to expand the financial support for the expedition, education and research programs, in particular through private-sector partnerships and targeted fund-raising,
3. Enhancing and diversifying opportunities for charitable giving and support,
4. Increasing the profitability of Society fundraising events and instituting a recommended minimum contribution level for Fellows, and
5. Encouraging higher levels of individual donation through donors’ programs such as the Compass Rose Club.

Awards and Recognition

Honour outstanding service to Canada in the field of geography and acknowledge exemplary service to the Society by:

1. Continuing well-considered and meaningful recognition of highly deserving individuals or teams for a number of existing medals and awards: Massey, Gold, Martin Bergmann, Sir Christopher Ondaatje Medal for Exploration, Camsell, Lawrence J. Burpee, Geographic Literacy, Innovation in Geography Teaching and 3M Environmental Innovation,
2. Establishing the Sir Christopher Ondaatje Medal for Exploration as the pre-eminent exploration award in Canada for outstanding achievements by an individual Canadian explorer for work in Canada or abroad, or by a foreign citizen for exploratory achievements within Canada, and enhancing public awareness and profile of this award,
3. Further developing and implementing a pyramidal system of honours, to include a silver medal (to be named after J.E. Bernier) and RCGS commendations for recognition of voluntary service to the Society and for making Canada’s geography better known to Canadians, and
4. Increasing awareness among Fellows and the public of the opportunities to make suitable submissions for individuals/teams to be honoured for various medals and awards.
OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES (CONT'D)

Canadian Geographic Education

Foster geographic engagement among Canadians by supporting improvement and strengthening of geographic education at all levels through:

1. Increasing participation in CG Education’s network of educators through offering new resources, establishing new partnerships, promoting geographic literacy through a variety of communication channels, and enhancing professional development opportunities,

2. Offering an expanded range of English and French educator resources that reflects current thinking in geographic education, conducting surveys and research into teaching and learning – geographical and spatial literacy, as well as focusing on urban geography and cultural geography,

3. Advocating for strengthening geographic education in Canada by supporting geographic education research, inspiring Canadians to value geographic and spatial thinking, and

4. Partnering with other organizations to advance geographic education at the local, provincial/territorial and national levels, and contributing a Canadian perspective to international initiatives in geographic education.

Canadian Geographic Enterprises

Nurture and leverage the reach and brand equity of Canadian Geographic, Géographica, CG Travel and CG Education in support of the mission and vision of the Society by:

1. Having the largest brand universe of any Canadian magazine by subscribing to the highest quality and standards for magazine, website and social media publishing and by emphasizing the three pillars of excellence (writing, photography and cartography),

2. Enhancing the presence and visibility of the Society and its programs with all Canadians in English and French,

3. Achieving financial health through strong leadership, effective management of resources, administrative excellence and concerted attention to the three financial drivers of the organization: custom publishing, circulation and advertising sales, and

4. Increasing partnerships and sponsorships by optimizing the unique capabilities of CGE namely its broad public base (the magazine) and its relationship with the educational community (CG Education).
OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES (CONT’D)

College of Fellows

Reinforce the Society’s Fellows community and build a supportive and representative College that reflects Canada by:

1. Making use of surveys and consultations to determine the needs and wants of Fellows so that they become more involved either as volunteers or fundraisers/financial contributors,

2. Increasing the number of active Fellows from regions other than Ottawa-Gatineau by 50 new members on a yearly basis in order to generate greater awareness of the Society throughout the country and to better reflect Canada’s diversity and demographics,

3. Holding an annual function in major urban centres to raise the profile of the Society and to promote its aims, goals and programs, and

4. Communicating more effectively with Fellows.

Expeditions

Foster and support exploration, adventure and expeditions that will expand geographic appreciation, understanding and knowledge of Canada by:

1. Seeking to expand financial support for the expedition program in collaboration with the Advancement Committee, through private-sector partnerships and sponsorships, and through targeted fundraising:
   - Increase the profile of the Expedition of the Year through media and public appearances; and
   - Expand outreach activities through digital and social media, the magazines and presentations,

2. Leveraging support from key partnerships to encourage Aboriginal expeditions through the Aboriginal Expedition Grant,

3. Determining whether an “Explorer-in-Residence program” is a viable and sustainable project for RCGS to undertake, and

4. Developing and implementing a project within the Expeditions Program to seek funding and to carry out a major RCGS expedition on a 3-5 year cycle (similar in scope and extent to the Logan ‘92 Expedition).
OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES (CONT’D)

Public Engagement

Contribute to a wider appreciation of the importance of geography as a relevant and integrative discipline by:

1. Pursuing public events through partnerships with other organizations and institutions,
2. Adopting innovative means of increasing communication with Fellows, partners and other shareholders in all parts of the country and the world,
3. Creating more opportunities to move geography into the public realm, and
4. Developing a model for Society events that generates revenue for the Society.

Research Grants

Support geographic enquiry and research by:

1. Developing a research agenda that shapes and reflects the Society’s priorities and interests,
2. Offering a greater number and range of grants to individuals engaged in geographic research,
3. Paying special attention to geospatial technology and GIS-related research,
4. Seeking wider public recognition of the Society’s support to researchers, and
5. Leveraging the multiple platforms of the Society to highlight the research supported through the grants program.
CONCLUSION

This strategic plan will guide the Society’s activities for the next five years as it implements its mission to make Canada better known to Canadians and to the world. It is an ambitious mission, but one that the Society’s committed staff and enthusiastic Fellows have been pursuing with dedication for more than 85 years in collaboration with a large number of institutions, private partners and volunteers that support the advancement of geographic literacy, exploration, and a deeper appreciation of our rich geography.

Within the coming five years, Canada will celebrate an important milestone: its 150th anniversary in 2017 and the Society will mark its 90th year in 2019. The Royal Canadian Geographical Society can look back with pride at its contribution over many decades. Using the roadmap articulated in this plan the Society will aspire to foreground geography in the public consciousness and, as a result, realize its vision to help Canadians chart a successful future by fostering a greater understanding of Canada’s diverse human and physical landscape, as well as the changes affecting its people and the environment.

The objectives and priorities articulated in the plan will be reviewed periodically to ensure they continue to be aligned with the Society’s mission, vision and values, as well as adjusted to capture new and emerging opportunities as they may materialize.