

Canadian
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DRAFT CPSA RESPONSE TO CFHSS FRAMEWORK DOCUMENT

The Canadian Political Science Association appreciates the work that has gone into producing the Federation's draft strategic framework and the opportunity to respond to it as discussion proceeds. CPSA commends the Federation's commitment to develop a strategic framework and is impressed with the many and varied excellent activities outlined in the draft.

CPSA is indebted to its representative to the Federation, Professor Tony Porter, whose earlier memorandum on the Framework forms the basis of this response.

Like most strategic plans, the CFHSS Framework includes a mix of specific and more abstract goals. While overarching objectives are essential, CPSA believes that the CFHSS Framework could be made more specific, with more measurable goals. For instance "seek" is used in several places—it may be preferable to replace this with "find". The premise here is that it is better to have a specific measurable goal and fail than to have a goal that is too easily met because it isn't specified. CPSA understands that the Federation is engaged in an ongoing process and recognizes that developing more specific goals is planned for a future phase of the process.

In CPSA's view, the vision statement is substantially nationalistic in tone. In Political Science a notable shift in the past two decades has been a move towards a more international orientation, including Canadian-focused scholars treating Canada in more comparative perspective. The strong national focus of the vision statement seems at odds with this shift, which is not confined to Political Science, and with a later sentence in the plan: "This plan recognizes that a growing number of Canadians, especially youth, see themselves as citizens of the world". CPSA sees significant scope for the Federation to build and extend its international orientation, but does not believe that the vision statement adequately captures or facilitates this goal.

Strategic plans for organizations such as the Federation often serve a dual purpose. One is to guide the organization itself and the other is to promote the organization to external audiences. The CFHSS framework seems more oriented towards the former. Certainly it is important to establish clear goals and plans for reaching them but CPSA believes that the Federation should devote greater attention in its strategic planning to identifying and

reaching out to audiences concerned with issues that matter to the Federation and its members. As written, the current draft is unlikely to generate much interest among those not already quite involved with Federation activities, since to that audience the Framework will probably seem like a collection of commitments to continue to do what the Federation is already doing, with some incremental changes.

For instance, “Enhance the Value Proposition for Members” is management-oriented language. CPSA suggests that more direct wording might be helpful in emphasizing what is, after all, a thoroughgoing effort at rethinking the Federation’s role and approach; perhaps something like: “strengthen the Federation’s ties with its members and make it more valuable to them.” In addition, it would be helpful if the Framework could highlight the elements of the plan that are concrete new initiatives that will be attractive to members and potential new members.

If one of the CFHSS’s constituents in one of the humanities or social sciences communities who wasn’t familiar with the CFHSS tried to imagine what it does, taking into account his or her experience in a university or college, this person might expect the CFHSS to be active in two particular areas, neither of which is prominent in the Framework. First, the Federation has little engagement with the provincial and teaching aspects of the Federation’s constituents’ concerns, even though these concerns are as important as other issues the Federation pursues. Provincial spending and education policies are very important. Students in the humanities and social sciences and their parents are important constituencies. Humanities and social sciences deans are probably more oriented towards provincial issues than to federal ones. Second, as noted above, the Federation doesn’t seem as engaged with the international aspects of our constituents’ interests as one might expect. The Federation is well aware of international connections, as evidenced by the excellent panels at its Annual General Meeting. This type of strengthening of connections and the sharing of information could be featured more prominently in the Framework.

CPSA believes that a challenge for the Federation as an organization is to strengthen its links with its member organizations so that it maximizes its use to them. Professor Porter, who attends the Federation AGM as a representative of the CPSA, keeps the Association aware of the very valuable work that the Federation is going on emerging issues. However, it is less clear that this work flows through to the Federation constituents on an ongoing basis as much as it might. In reviewing the Framework and the work of the Federation, Professor Porter suggests a comparison with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The OECD produces knowledge and best practices about emerging policy issues. Its member states scrutinize its budgets intensely to see if it is providing value for money. It is continually scanning for emerging issues, and then it brings officials from member governments around the world and its own staff to meetings at its headquarters or other locations. At these meetings lessons are shared and best practices are developed, enriched and guided by the input of staff. These lessons are then brought back by officials to the member governments and publicized by the OECD.

Perhaps for the CFHSS this type of role is constrained by the existence of other organizations, such as the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada or the Canadian Association of University Teachers. As well, meetings of humanities and social

science deans may already occur that accomplish part of this function. Nevertheless, there may be a ways to do more to sponsor these types of interactions among current or potential Federation constituents, and thereby to also generate more revenue. The contrast between the Federation's two national meetings may highlight this. The Congress provides a framework that facilitates the ability of CFHSS associations and their members to organize themselves (for instance by proposing panels) in a way that advances their members' research and networking. By contrast, the AGM brings representatives to Ottawa to hear about the policy work the Federation has been doing and to listen to excellent panels of experts on important policy issues that the Federation has organized. This function of the AGM is really important, but it might be complemented by the Federation facilitating links more between its constituents on emerging policy issues. Some of the activities specified in the Framework will facilitate this, but it would be useful to bring this function of the Federation out more.

CPSA is grateful for this opportunity to comment on this important Federation initiative and looks forward to further consultations following the CFHSS Board meeting in November.

Submitted by
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