

---

# Partners In Research

Executive Director Report 2014

Kevin Cougler

---



---

## Message from Executive Director

The year of 2014 brought some challenges. The grant from the Federal Development Agency of Southwestern Ontario came to an end and the decay of the economy in Alberta affected PIR deeply by way of financial support coming from Alberta. This saw a corresponding layoff of ultimately half of the staff at PIR which had a significant affect on our ability to deliver on aspects of programming.

It was also a year of success with significant gains realized in the Connected North and Sanofi BioGenius Challenge programs and the pilot project of Live Event. VROC continued to be popular in many areas of Ontario and Alberta and the remaining staff did an amazing job of rising to the challenge of the void left by other staff leaving.



### Staff Changes

Zoe Letwin, Carol Waun, Mike MacMillan, Melissa Wilkie and Matt Danchak were all affected by the staffing cuts in 2014. Jesse Cressman-Dickinson left of her own accord to ultimately pursue a job as an aid to a city councillor in Ottawa. Main subcontracts are Mathew Danchak for I.T. and Christine Felsheim for bookkeeping.

Mel Kern was promoted to Program Manager of the Sanofi BioGenius Challenge from her role as Administrative Assistant. Kelly Wood was hired as the new Administrative Assistant and resigned in December in favour of a job as a teacher. Drew Fallowfield was reassigned from Summer STEM Camp Director to Connected North Program Manager. Brent Peltola continued in his role as Program Director and Stacey Joyce continued as VROC Program Manager. A special mention is very appropriately placed here to recognize the extraordinary effort of Brent Peltola who, in the face of losing staff, managed to do an excellent job in maintaining consistency and growth in PIR's programs. It was a wonderful effort by Brent who deserves our thanks and congratulations.

---

## Pilot Program: Live Event

**Summary:** Live Event is a live interview by a PIR staff member of a researcher within the STEM fields. The interview can be joined live through videoconferencing by schools across Canada or through uStream. The uStream is a passive method of participation although schools may pose questions prior to the event or live through Twitter using the #askPIR hashtag.

**Success Stories:** Live Event “launched” with astronaut Commander John Herrington in a session conducted in concert with the Calgary Beakerhead week. The session with Commander Herrington was viewed by 158 end points. The session was a successful collaboration between Partners in Research, the Alberta Women’s Science Network/Power to Choose, and the University of Calgary.

**Metrics:** The data provided is inclusive of all PIR Live Events held between September and December 2014 (excluding the Commander Herrington event to avoid skewing the data).

Number of Events - 14

Number of Concurrent End Points - 80

Avg. End Points per Event - 5.7

Total Number of Views (estimated) - 2080

Avg. Views per Event - 148.6

The Live Event web page received 153 visitors between Oct 1 and Dec 31 2014.

**Future:** Live Event has a good future. As PIR has moved through the pilot phase the marketing effort has increased as well as the scope. Each Live Event sees an increased number of schools participating and it will be a good story to tell PIR’s funders in terms of audience reached with these events.

---

## Sanofi BioGENEius Challenge Canada

**Summary:** The SBCC is a national biotechnology competition that seeks to spark scientific interest in Canada's youth. Since its inception in 1993, the SBCC program has inspired over 4500 students toward discovery and careers in the exciting field of biotechnology. More than just a science fair, the SBCC challenges students to initiate and undertake university-level research projects. Students define a project outline, work with mentors to conduct research, and then present their findings in regional competitions across the country. Regional winners compete at the National level, judged by a panel of Canada's eminent scientists. Finally, national winners go on to the International BioGENEius Challenge in the United States. In 2014 the competition was held in San Diego, California June 20 - 24.

**Success Stories:** The SBCC National Competition was held in Ottawa in concert with the Partners In Research National Awards – competition on Thursday May 23 and awards on Friday May 24. This was a unique opportunity to award up and coming scientists and established researchers in a combined event. Participant feedback (from students, parents, chaperones and regional coordinators) was very complimentary. An effort was made to ensure that the competition would be a memorable experience for all regardless of the outcome of the competition. Group dinners and lunches and socialization opportunities were included in the competition. The national champion was Nicole Ticea from Vancouver, BC for her project "Microfluidic Point-of-Care Device for Diagnosis of HIV via Recombinase Polymerase Amplification".

**Metrics:** The data provided is inclusive of the competition year September 1, 2013 to August 31, 2014 (competition year is used because of the nature of the program and changes that occur year over year).

Number of Student Project Proposals - 169

Number of Student Projects Competed - 130

**Future:** Changes planned for the 2014/15 competition year include allowing only single student projects to bring the Canadian completion into alignment with the international competition and new branding to improve marketing of the competition.

---

## Connected North

**Summary:** Connected North is a leading-edge program that delivers immersive and interactive education services to remote Aboriginal and Inuit communities through high-definition two-way video communication and collaboration technology. Partners in Research has joined with Cisco Canada, in collaboration with SSi Micro, governments, NGOs, foundations, media companies, Cisco employees, and Cisco customers and partners to leverage the Virtual Researcher On Call program in order to deliver immersive educational opportunities to help address the needs of young people living in Canada's North

**Success Stories:** At the end of a successful pilot year with the Aqsarniit Middle School in Iqaluit NU, the 2014 program year for Connected North culminated in a trip to Fort Providence, NWT by Program Director Brent Peltola. Brent visited the Deh Gah school, the only school in First Nations community of 750 people. Brent was amazed by the passion and commitment of the community to do more for their kids and was privileged to participate in the first video connections between the school and their partner school from Calgary. The Deh Gah school has become a regular user of the Connected North program.

**Metrics:** The data provided is inclusive of all Connected North events held between September 1, 2013 and August 31, 2014 (program year is used because of the nature of the program and changes that occur year over year).

Number of Northern Schools Involved - for the bulk of the program year the Aqsarniit Middle School in Iqaluit was the only participating school - the Deh Gah school completed a small number of sessions in May and June.

Number of Partner Schools - 3 different schools connected with the 3 classes from Aqsarniit Middle School at various times during the year

Number of Expert Sessions - 44

Number of Class to Class Sessions - 7

Number of Teacher PD Sessions - 5

CILC Sessions - 3

Total Number of Sessions - 59

---

Number of Sessions Cancelled Due to Weather etc. - 17

**Future:** The 2014/15 Connected North program year looks good. An agreement between Partners In Research and Cisco Systems Canada will see PIR leading the educational arm of the program with Cisco playing the role of arms length supporter and fundraiser.

### **Virtual Researcher On Call**

**Summary:** VROC experienced positive engagement throughout 2014 in Ontario, Alberta and Nunavut. The VROC program, which involves interaction between researchers and classrooms virtually, was established in 2005 and remains the flagship educational program of PIR. The Connected North program utilized VROC experts as its content for STEM sessions.

**Success Stories:** After launching the ExpertBook utility in September of 2013, PIR continued to refine and improve the tool to serve the teacher participating in the program. ExpertBook was, in 2014, the most highly visited page on the PIR website and has become the go-to page for VROC users in the network.

**Metrics:** The data provided is inclusive of the calendar year January 1 , 2014 to December 31, 2014

Number of VROC Sessions - 277

Number of Views of VROC Session (student reach) - 7202

Number of Institutions with Experts in ExpertBook - 59

Number of Institutions with an Expert in one or more Session(s) - 35

Number of VROC Experts (total / new) - 449 / 254

Number of VROC Teachers (total / new) - 766 / 309

Social media, website (659 visitors from Oct. 1 to Dec. 31; 2.984 actions, avg time/visit 3m 41seconds; most popular pages visited included ExpertBook, video, sign-up and podcasts).

---

**Future:** With significant funding cuts, resulting in similarly significant staff cuts, there no longer remained enough resources to operate Summer STEM Camp and VROC. Since the SBC and Connected North programs were tied directly to budgets and contracts, staff on these programs could not also manage Summer STEM Camp and VROC. One program had to be cut. Summer STEM Camp broke even and VROC was still a revenue generator as well as PIR's flagship educational initiative so the decision was made to cut Summer STEM Camp. This allowed remaining staff to concentrate on allocating resources into the Ontario VROC program which are anticipated to yield significant results in 2015.

### **Summer STEM Camp**

**Summary:** Summer STEM Camp was an initiative that directly impacted students aged 5-13 across Ontario through hands-on activities related to STEM subject areas. Almost 800 campers from 8 locations attended Summer STEM Camp as far north as Sudbury, as far west as London and St. Thomas and as far east as Greater Hamilton. Campers received virtual visits from researchers through the VROC program as part of their Summer STEM Camp experience.

**Success Stories:** One of the most interesting and repeated success story from this initiative were the thank you's from parents from small towns who repeatedly thanked us for offering this program in their location. We quite often heard that it was great to have a program of this calibre in Tillsonburg, Ingersoll, St. Thomas or Ancaster so that parents had quality programming locally and didn't have to drive to a large urban centre.

**Metrics:** The Summer STEM camp web page received 364 hits between Oct & Dec 2014. No metrics were tracked prior to October. 742 campers attended STEM Camp.

**Future:** This program was cancelled in 2014 so that office staff could concentrate on remaining programs that have a more significant impact on revenue in the wake of the loss of revenue from Alberta and FedDev.

### **Online Analytics**

In October 2014, PIR implemented an online analytics tool to assist with online marketing efforts. In those two months, [pirweb.org](http://pirweb.org) received 1,748 hits performing 3,977

---

actions with an average time spent on the site of 1m 47seconds. the most popular pages visited were the PIRNA, Educational Programs, About Us and Summer STEM Camp pages. A larger sample size in 2015 will yield results that will allow PIR to make further marketing decisions.

### **Summary**

The future of PIR continues to be bright. While facing challenges of funding and delivering on program commitments during these challenges, PIR has proven itself as an organization capable of meeting adversity head on. The focus in 2015 should be on relationships with long standing supporters from universities, colleges and research institutes. The Ontario Council of Universities (Research) and Colleges Ontario have been fantastic partnerships for PIR over the last few years and particular attention was paid toward developing these relationships even further which yielded positive results.

I am confident that PIR has the fortune of having extremely dedicated staff who will be able to make 2015 another successful year.