
PartnersInResearch Canada

Executive Director Report 2016

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Message from Executive Director

At the last AGM May 3, 2016 we discussed various items to be addressed in 2016 and into 2017.

At that time we had secured funding from the Ontario Ministry of Education on a 20-month program development project (Delta) and had an agreement in principle with Sanofi Canada for an extension on the SBC management agreement. Efforts to become more efficient and effective, including a possible office relocation, video technology change and significant growth within francophone schools were discussed. Bolstering the membership of the Board of Directors was discussed and set as a goal.

Highlights

Zoom - The ClearSea program was replaced by the Zoom platform as the PIR videoconference solution in 2016. Zoom is a desktop solution that offers webcasting, virtual room and teleconference functionality. Zoom is a lightweight application that doesn't require admin privileges to install. Zoom has been well received by our teachers and experts alike. It provides a dependable high quality experience and is now a crucial piece of the PIR infrastructure.

Sumac – The Sumac Customer Relation Management (CRM) solution was installed in the summer of 2016 to replace our dependence on various spreadsheets and other third party mailer programs used to maintain communications with our teachers, experts and other contacts. Sumac allows us to efficiently send customized communications to an easily maintained contact list while following CASL rules.

Website – The French language PIR website has been translated and is currently being refined to match the English language site. Next steps in website development include more visually appealing and less text dependent look.

Human Resources

Staff Report

Anne Miller was hired on a full-time contract basis effective May 1, 2016 to deliver the Delta project. Anne's first days on the job were at the 2016 AGM in Ottawa. Mel Kern requested, and was granted, a leave of absence for medical reasons on Dec 31, 2016. Mel's departure has had a significant impact on the operation of the organization.

Volunteer Report

Scott Jones, volunteer PIR Live Event host, left us in June after securing a full-time position at the University of Waterloo. In September, Deb Wiltshire joined the PIR volunteer team as a (Volunteer) Volunteer Coordinator. Deb brings a lifetime of experience in healthcare leadership and is a dedicated volunteer for several organizations. Deb has been a great addition to the team and has been instrumental in PIR rebuilding our 5 member social media team volunteers, recruiting 2 administrative support volunteers and securing a bilingual website editor to assist with the French language website.

Co-operative Education Report

Georgey Kurien, from Central High School in London, has been with PIR since September as a co-op placement. Georgey has been working on various video production projects. We attempted to secure a Fanshawe communications co-op student for 2017 but were not successful.

Community Engagement Project

In the period October to December 2016 a first year student team from the Ivey School of Business at Western University worked with us toward recommendations for a strategic plan. Their report is being used by the operational team to construct a report that will go to the Strategic Planning and Programming Committee

Programming

Live Event

Live Event is a live interview of a researcher within the STEM fields that is broadcast on the Internet. Schools from across Canada can join the broadcast live through a simple Internet browser. The Live Event program is a passive method of participation that takes the pressure off teachers wondering how to incorporate this kind of content into their curriculum delivery. Participation occurs when students / schools pose questions by email prior to the event or live during the event through a text function.

In the first 2 years of the Live Event program, broadcast was completed by connecting the host and guest over video using the ClearSea application and then streaming the video connection to the Internet using U-Stream. The connection was fraught with technical hurdles that challenged our bandwidth and, at times, made the system quite cumbersome. As proposed at the 2016 AGM, the ClearSea application was replaced by Zoom which has a built in webcasting functionality. Zoom has allowed us to provide a better quality experience for the viewer, a more efficient and effective viewer registration process and improved turnaround time to post content to our YouTube channel while reducing our costs.

In April of 2016 we completed our first French language Live Event and in 2016 we delivered a total of 5 French language Live Events in 2016. On September 16 we did our 3rd consecutive “Virtual Speakerhead” in conjunction with Calgary Beakerhead. This session called “When Innovation, Technology & Art Collide” featuring British innovative inventor Dominic Wilcox had 6850 viewers (not included in the metrics below). We continue to work with the Council of Ontario Universities Research Matters program to highlight and co-promote programming.

Year	2014	2015	2016
Number of Events	14	27	41
Number of Concurrent Endpoints	90	440	840
Average Concurrent Endpoints Per Event	6.4	16.3	20.5
Student Reach (calculated at 25 students per endpoint)	2250	11000	21000

Looking Forward:

The Live Event platform continues to grow in popularity. The PIR reach and our ability to expose students to educational content, research and researchers from across Canada is much more effective under this platform than any other program that we operate.

Sanofi Biogenius Canada

Summary: The SBC is a national biotechnology competition that seeks to spark scientific interest in Canada’s youth. Since it’s inception in 1993, the SBC program has inspired over 5000 students toward discovery and careers in the exciting field of biotechnology. More than just a science fair, the SBC 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. Iveta Demirova from BC represented Canada at the 2016 competition held in San Francisco California.

Sanofi Canada agreed to continue sponsorship of the competition at a reduced rate (\$200,000 per year vs. \$360,000 per year) for the 2016/17 year. An addendum to the original 3-year agreement with Sanofi took until February of 2017 to get completed and payment of the August 31 and Feb 28 invoices wasn’t completed until April 2017 causing significant cash flow challenges.

In order to fit the new funding, a “Centrally Organized In Person Regional Competition” model was used this year because it has a significant cost reduction achieved by eliminating the Regional Coordinator role, provides a number of operational enhancements through central organization, preserves the opportunity to access regional sponsorship and maintains a platform for local media attention. This model maintained the basic structure of past years and allows for further downsizing or enhancement as required / desired in future years. Two regional competitions were held at Sanofi Canada sites and the seven other competitions were hosted at Universities across the country that reduced our costs through in-kind support and also improved relationships with those institutions. Both number of student project proposals and projects completed are down from past years that may, in part, be related to the change in model.

Year	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Number of Student Project Proposals	169	156	160	134
Number of Student Projects Completed	130	124	122	102

Looking Forward: The 2016/17 SBC National winner will qualify to compete in the international competition in San Diego in June. We have consulted with Sanofi Canada regarding the current travel situation in the US and they don’t feel that proactive action is required however we do face the risk of having our Canadian representative denied access to the US or refuse to participate.

Negotiations on future year funding will begin in late May with a goal to secure a new multi-year agreement.

Virtual Researcher On Call

Summary: The Virtual Researcher On Call (VROC) program, which involves interaction between researchers and classrooms virtually, was established in 2005. VROC is an educational support program that connects college and university professors and professionals in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) with Canadian students in elementary and secondary schools for real-time, interactive learning opportunities over a video connection.

In a survey completed in the spring of 2016, the ClearSea standards-based video communication platform was identified as one of the biggest hurdles for teachers using the VROC program. In the summer of 2016 ClearSea was replaced with the Zoom platform and we have worked to re-engage those teachers who had fallen away from using the VROC program.

The Sumac CRM platform has been an important addition in our support of this program. Regular newsletters are circulated to teachers suggesting experts to engage with and ways to use the VROC program to support learning in classrooms.

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016
Number of VROC Sessions	265	277	214	181
Avg VROC Sessions Per Month	22.1	23.1	17.8	15.1
Number of Views of VROC Session (student reach)	6890	7202	5350	4525

Looking Forward: The number of VROC connections is slowly increasing and so far in 2017 there have been 50 sessions. With consistent support and promotion and a stable, user-friendly technology platform we hope that the VROC program will see increased usage in 2017.

The VROC funding platform must be widened in order to continue operating the program. In 2017 we will be broadening our provincial scope using the SBC presence as leverage and also moving forward with a private funder approach campaign now being developed.

Delta Program

The Delta Program is a series of interactive curriculum resource packages that focus on grade 1-8 Science and Technology in alignment with the curriculum standards of the province of Ontario. These packages feature an experiential learning component, use inquiry concepts, have a story backbone and are supported by live interactive expert mentorship through videoconference.

In the summer of 2016, a curriculum writing team completed the first set of Delta lesson plans (85 in total). Starting in September 2016, 14 teachers were recruited for the first Delta pilot. The program received glowing feedback from the pilot teachers. The second Delta pilot began in January with 50 teachers from school boards across the province and early feedback from this pilot is also quite promising.

Looking Forward: The next step in Delta development will see the current lesson plans translated into French and a small French language pilot completed in the fall of 2017.

PIR TV

Originally referred to as VROC Video, this program was re-branded in 2015 as PIR TV. PIR TV is a series of YouTube playlists assembled into a cohesive channel. It offers us a place to display purpose shot video, partner video and most importantly PIR Live Event video.

With the advent of the Zoom application, we can now upload recorded content from these sessions within 24 hours of completion that has led to a significant increase in our PIR TV viewership. PIR Live Event recorded sessions are viewed between 80 and 250 times with the majority of these views happening in the first 48 hours.

Looking Forward: The social media team is starting a project to use small pieces of the recorded content to include with Tweets and FaceBook posts.