

Legislative  
Assembly  
of Ontario



Assemblée  
législative  
de l'Ontario

# **STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES**

## **REPORT ON AGENCIES, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS**

THE ONTARIO EDUCATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS AUTHORITY  
(TVO)

1<sup>st</sup> Session, 39<sup>th</sup> Parliament  
58 Elizabeth II

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The Honourable Steve Peters, MPP  
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly

Sir,

Your Standing Committee on Government Agencies has the honour to present its Report and commends it to the House.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Julia Munro".

Julia Munro, MPP  
Chair of the Committee

Queen's Park  
May 2009

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES  
COMITÉ PERMANENT ORGANISMES GOUVERNEMENTAUX  
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1A2

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES  
MEMBERSHIP LIST**

1<sup>st</sup> Session, 39<sup>th</sup> Parliament

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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES  
LIST OF CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

KEVIN DANIEL FLYNN was replaced by LOU RINALDI on February 19, 2009.

RANDY HILLIER was replaced by GERRY MARTINIUK on March 25, 2009.

FRANCE GÉLINAS was replaced by HOWARD HAMPTON on April 9, 2009.

MARIA VAN BOMMEL was replaced by RICK JOHNSON on April 9, 2009.

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**LIST OF TEMPORARY SUBSTITUTIONS**

LAUREL BROTEN

CHERI DINOVO

ANDREA HORWATH

FRANK KLEES

REZA MORIDI

ROBERT RUNCIMAN

LAURIE SCOTT



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## CONTENTS

	2
INTRODUCTION	1
ONTARIO EDUCATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS AUTHORITY: OVERVIEW	2
Mandate	2
Bill 55	2
Recent Developments	2
TVOntario's Licence	3
Memorandum of Understanding	3
Activities	4
TVO	4
The Independent Learning Centre	4
Finances	5
Structure	5
THE COMMITTEE'S HEARINGS	6
TVOntario	6
Opening Presentation	6
Matters Raised by Committee Members	6
Presence at (and coverage of) Queen's Park	6
Regional Programming	8
TVO Priorities: Web-Based Initiatives and Television	8
In-House Content Creation	9
Youth Programming	9
Independent Learning Centre (ILC)	10
Membership and Viewing Numbers	10
Value for Money	10
On-demand TV	12
French-language programming	12
Civics 101	12
Stakeholder Presentations	13
Joanne Simmons (former TVO consultant)	13
The Canadian Media Guild	14
Mr. George Thomson (Citizens' Assembly of Ontario)	16
COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS	18



## INTRODUCTION

Under Standing Order 108(f) the Standing Committee on Government Agencies is given the mandate to review the operation of all agencies, boards and commissions (ABCs) to which the Lieutenant Governor in Council makes appointments, and all corporations to which the Crown in right of Ontario is a majority shareholder. The Committee is empowered to make recommendations on such matters as the redundancy of ABCs, their accountability, whether they should be sunsetted, and whether their mandate and roles should be revised.

In accordance with its terms of reference, the Committee reviewed the Ontario Educational Communications Authority (the Authority, or TVOntario) on September 11, 2008.

Appearing before the Committee from TVOntario were Mr. Peter O'Brian, Chair; Ms. Lisa de Wilde, CEO; and Lee Robock, Chief Operating Officer.

The Committee received three stakeholder presentations. Ms. Joanne Simmons, an elementary school Vice-Principal, shared her experience of working with TVOntario in the development of children's educational programming. The Canadian Media Guild was represented by Ms. Lise Lareau, national President, Ms. Karen Wirsig, Guild staff, and Mr. David Hawkins, President of the Guild's unit at TVO. Mr. George Thomson, former Chair of the Citizens' Assembly of Ontario, spoke about TVOntario's role in promoting citizen engagement with the political process in Ontario. The Committee wishes to express its appreciation to these witnesses. For the full text of presentations that witnesses made, readers should consult the Committee *Hansard*.

This report presents the Committee's findings on TVOntario. The Committee urges the Chair of TVOntario to give serious and thoughtful consideration to the Committee's recommendations.

## **ONTARIO EDUCATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS AUTHORITY: OVERVIEW**

The Ontario Educational Communications Authority operates under the terms of the *Ontario Educational Communications Authority Act*, and a broadcasting licence issued by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) pursuant to the federal *Broadcasting Act*.

### **Mandate**

Section 3 of the *Ontario Educational Communications Authority Act (OECAA)* establishes that the Authority's objects are:

- (a) to initiate, acquire, produce, distribute, exhibit or otherwise deal in programs and materials in the educational broadcasting and communications fields;
- (b) to engage in research in those fields of activity consistent with the objects of the Authority under clause (a);
- (c) to discharge such other duties relating to educational broadcasting and communications as the Board considers to be incidental or conducive to the attainment of the objects mentioned in clauses (a) and (b); and
- (d) to establish and administer distance education programs.

### **Bill 55**

Prior to April 1, 2007, the Authority also delivered educational programming on TFO, the French-language counterpart to TVOntario (TVO). An Order-in-Council established the Ontario French-Language Educational Communications Authority (OFECA) effective April 1, 2007. With the passage of Bill 55 (the *Ontario French-language Educational Communications Authority Act, 2008*), OFECA's status as a stand-alone corporation was given a statutory basis. The *Ontario French-language Educational Communications Authority Act, 2008* came into force on July 25, 2008, and included a number of amendments to the *OECAA*.

### **Recent Developments**

In 2002, the Authority's mandate was expanded to include responsibility for distance education programs.

In 2005, responsibility for the Authority was transferred from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to the Ministry of Education, and the mandate to support "higher student achievement" was strengthened. The positions of Chair and CEO were made separate at this time.

At the government's request, TVOntario's leadership conducted an internal review to ensure that TVO continues to provide full value for the government funding it receives, and that its activities are aligned with the government's education policy priorities and are as relevant as possible to all Ontarians. The results of this review informed TVO's 2006 strategic plan (included in the documentation the agency supplied to the Committee).

## TVOntario's Licence

The federal *Broadcasting Act* mandates the CRTC to establish the conditions with which broadcasters must comply in order to access the country's airwaves. In August 2008, TVOntario's licence was renewed for a full seven-year term, beginning September 1, 2008. The Authority is licensed to operate

the English-language educational television service, TVO (CICA-TV and its transmitters).<sup>1</sup>

Under the terms of its licence, TVO must broadcast certain levels of original programming, ensure that 100% of its programming broadcast during the broadcast day is closed captioned (with the exception of advertising and promos), and expand its amount of described video programming from a minimum of one hour per broadcast week (by September 1, 2009) to a minimum of four hours per week (by September 1, 2013). As conditions of its licence, TVO has also agreed to adhere to the Canadian Association of Broadcasters' *Voluntary code regarding violence in television programming* and the Association's *Equitable Portrayal Code*.

TVO is subject to the general requirement under the *Television Broadcasting Regulations, 1987* that a minimum 60% of the broadcast day must be Canadian programs. TVO notes that over 80% of its programming budget is spent on Canadian programs.

In materials supplied to the Committee, the Authority points out that "TVO must operate as an independent and separate entity from government to retain its eligibility to hold a CRTC licence." As a result, the Authority notes:

TVO's programming decisions, while fully aligned with the province's educational priorities, are made by its management, with oversight by its Board of Directors.<sup>2</sup>

## Memorandum of Understanding

The Authority's arm's-length relationship with the Province is expressed through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Ministry of Education. The current MOU was first signed in November 2001 and was to have expired in November 2006. The Committee learned that a revised MOU that better reflects

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<sup>1</sup> Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, Decision CRTC 2001-38, Ottawa, February 2, 2001. Until 2008, the Authority also held the licence for transmitters carrying the signal for the Ontario Legislative Assembly channel, which TVO maintains on behalf of the Assembly. In 2002, the CRTC issued an exemption order for persons operating an undertaking to provide coverage of parliamentary proceedings from having to apply for a licence so long as the coverage provided meets criteria prescribed in the exemption (*Parliamentary and Provincial or Territory Legislature Proceedings Exemption Order – Broadcasting Public Notice CRTC 2002-73*). Accordingly, in 2007, the Authority applied to the CRTC to have its licence for the satellite-to-cable programming undertaking broadcasting the proceedings of the Ontario Legislative Assembly revoked rather than renewed. The Commission's decision granting this request was issued on February 26, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Ontario Educational Communications Authority, *Responses to Questionnaire for the Standing Committee on Government Agencies* (Toronto: TVO, July 31, 2008), Tab 3.

the current Authority (i.e., following the creation of an autonomous TFO) is awaiting approval by Management Board.

## **Activities**

The Authority has two distinct divisions: TVO, and the Independent Learning Centre (ILC).

### *TVO*

The Authority's English language network, TVO, is available to 98.5% of all households in Ontario, and is viewed, on average, by 3.5 million Ontarians each week. TVO provides curriculum-linked programming for children and youth, course-related programs in partnership with Ontario colleges and universities, and adult programming that encourages learning and active citizenship.

More than 70% of TVO's broadcast day is devoted to uninterrupted children's educational content; from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday, and 6 a.m. to 4 p.m. on weekends. In a recent broadcast season, TVO's children's programming reached 1.4 million children aged 2 to 11 years of age (97.3% of the demographic), and is viewed on a weekly basis by more than 500,000 children aged 2 to 11.

TVO's prime time schedule of current affairs programming, documentaries, drama, and film maintains a 2% share, which TVO notes is higher than all Canadian specialty channels except TSN (The Sports Network).

Since 2001, TVO has also developed two Internet sites: *TVOKids.org* and *TVOParents.org*. Along with the Authority's Internet home page *TVO.org*, these websites were reached by 3.7 million unique visitors in a recent broadcast season. TVOKids.org receives almost 300,000 unique visitors each month. In addition, in a recent season, 2.6 million podcasts of TVO current affairs programming were downloaded.<sup>3</sup>

### *The Independent Learning Centre*

In 2002, the Progressive Conservative government transferred the Independent Learning Centre from the Ministry of Education to TVOntario as part of its commitment to create a distance education network in Ontario. The ILC provides Ontarians with opportunities to earn high school credits leading to a diploma through either distance education courses or the General Educational Development (GED) tests. Its services include the *Ask a Teacher* free online homework help resource, CareerMATTERS (an interactive career website), and the Lifelong Learning Challenge Fund, which provides web-based Ontario work-skills training through corporate and post-secondary institution partnerships and is funded by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities.

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<sup>3</sup> Data in this section is taken from the TVO web page "TVO: Facts and Figures" at [http://www.tv.org/cfm/tvoorg/about/index.cfm?page\\_id=886#subSection\\_3](http://www.tv.org/cfm/tvoorg/about/index.cfm?page_id=886#subSection_3), accessed August 28, 2008.

Last year, the ILC delivered distance education and GED testing services to more than 25,000 people in Ontario. In 2008, 5,243 people completed ILC courses.

## Finances

The Authority's main sources of funding include an annual operating grant from the Ministry of Education, other government support, sales, corporate sponsorships, and members' contributions. According to the 2008-09 Estimates for the Ministry of Education, TVO will receive \$45.9 million in funding in 2008-09, which includes a basic operating grant of \$37 million. Self-generated income has averaged \$13.2 million in the past three years, and the Authority's expenditures in 2007-08 totalled just under \$62 million.

## Structure

Under s. 2 of the *Ontario Educational Communications Authority Act*, TVOntario is established as a corporation without share capital. The Board of Directors is composed of not more than nine members, including a Chair and Vice-chair, appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council (the cabinet). The Lieutenant Governor in Council appoints another person as the Chief Executive Officer. The term of office is five years, with the possibility of reappointment. The Board has an audit committee that meets at least four times per year, and a governance committee that meets at least twice a year.

A unique feature of the Authority's governance structure is the role played by advisory councils. Under s. 9 of the Act, TVOntario has appointed five regional advisory councils, comprised of volunteers from across the province. The functions of the councils include:

- providing feedback to TVOntario about the broadcasting needs of their local communities and community reaction to TVOntario's programming;
- promoting awareness and use of TVO services in their communities, and sponsoring special initiatives to make these services available to schools, community centres, libraries, hospitals, and other local agencies; and
- supporting a range of special events and other cultural activities in their regions.

Each council meets four times each year in communities around its region. Every 18 to 24 months, all council members meet with TVOntario's Board of Directors and senior staff at a strategic planning conference.

## THE COMMITTEE'S HEARINGS

### TVOntario

#### *Opening Presentation*

Chair Peter O'Brian and CEO Lisa de Wilde expressed their enthusiasm about meeting with the Committee and completed their opening remarks by means of a video presentation. The Committee was informed about the activities of the Authority, its recent achievements and future plans. These included the following:

- the transformation of TVO's production from an analog base to a digital platform;
- an increase in resources devoted to web-based content;
- a multi-platform content management and delivery strategy;
- consistent with a "vision to empower people to be engaged citizens through educational media," continued development of TVO's flagship current events program (*The Agenda with Steve Paiken*), including more regional production of episodes; and
- the development of a multi-media Civics 101 project designed to improve awareness and understanding of Ontario politics and government.

TVOntario told the Committee that "we offer something for every citizen in Ontario," and described TVO programming as a "powerful alternative to commercial television." Describing *The Agenda*, TVO noted that "the broadcast is just the sparkplug; it's our blogs, our discussion forums, and our selection of web-exclusive resources that really build community around the issues."

### Matters Raised by Committee Members

#### *Presence at (and coverage of) Queen's Park*

TVOntario was questioned about the apparent closure of its office at Queen's Park, in light of the following considerations:

- the absence of any dedicated coverage of events at the Legislative Assembly of Ontario;
- perceptions of low levels of political literacy within the general public; and
- TVO's continued staffing of an office in Ottawa.

Responding, Ms. de Wilde stated that TVO's "commitment to covering what makes Ontario Ontario has never been stronger." She also noted that TVOntario is not (and has never been) a news organization. Instead, TVO demonstrates its strong commitment to providing coverage of Ontario through its expertise in current affairs, most notably with its flagship program, *The Agenda with Steve Paikin*. The format of *The Agenda* is designed so that the program can "go deep"

on the big issues of the day. (Later, in response to questioning, Ms. de Wilde would note that TVOntario's research has indicated viewers want more depth in their current affairs programming, have a real interest in understanding matters, and are not satisfied with the "sound bites" that dominate much news coverage.)

Ms. de Wilde suggested that the physical proximity of TVO's offices to the Legislature ("a few subway stops away") allows TVO journalists to be at Queen's Park quickly when necessary, and she assured the Committee of the organization's passion to bring viewers the big issues in the province. The "bureau" in Ottawa was explained as shared office space used by a TVO producer who lives in that city.

The commitment to raising the political literacy of the province through development of TVO's web-based platforms was also emphasized by Ms. de Wilde. Educational information (e.g., what happens in Question Period, how Committees work, or how the Budget is made) provided in this way can be available on an on-demand basis.

The Committee expressed the concern that by designating web-based platforms to provide its educational content concerning the Legislature, TVO bypasses that segment of the population unable to access these platforms. The suggestion was made that in its future strategic planning TVO might consider expanding its political programming for those who do not access information through the Internet.

At one point, TVOntario was asked for a sense "in terms of hours of coverage" of the time *The Agenda* devotes to issues in Ontario compared with coverage under the previous format with *Studio 2* and *Fourth Reading*. This was one of several questions that TVOntario undertook to answer at a later date. The response the Committee subsequently received on this matter was as follows:

While the format has changed, the amount of time is equal to, if not more, than was the case with *Fourth Reading* and *Studio 2*.<sup>4</sup>

### **Recommendations:**

*1. While commending TVOntario for its in-depth coverage of issues and its plan to offer civics education content on its website, the Committee recommends that TVOntario consider opportunities to provide more coverage of Ontario politics and government, including the business of the Legislature, and educational programming about the political process and parliamentary proceedings.*

*2. The Committee recommends that TVOntario:*

*(a) explore the feasibility of producing a weekly Ontario-specific program on parliamentary and political events and report back to the Committee within 90 days of the*

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<sup>4</sup> Ontario Educational Communications Authority (TVO), "Responses to Questions from the Standing Committee on Government Agencies at TVO's appearance on September 11, 2008," Letter to the Committee (revised), November 5, 2008.

*tabling of this report with the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly; and*

*(b) explore the feasibility of broadcasting the Ontario Parliament's Question Period in a more viewer-friendly time slot and report back to the Committee within 90 days of the tabling of this report with the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.*

### ***Regional Programming***

Committee members noted that local and regional news and current affairs programming has disappeared in many communities across the province, and wondered if TVOntario might be able to help fill that gap. Ms. de Wilde indicated that leveraging new technologies will give the organization more flexibility, including a capacity to take production on the road. She also indicated, in response to a question about production quality using mobile digital equipment, that going into the field is a costly exercise. Having previously noted that TVOntario is excited to be taking *The Agenda* on the road, Ms. de Wilde also observed that it has been some time since TVO has had the means to undertake such a project, and described this particular undertaking as “a beginning”. Producing *The Agenda* in the regions is a sufficiently large project to require the hiring of freelancers.

### ***TVO Priorities: Web-Based Initiatives and Television***

Representatives of TVO expressed their excitement with the expanded possibilities for delivering content on multiple platforms provided by the digitization of production facilities and content management capacity. In addition to the “web” (i.e., the Internet), additional platforms, often web-based (e.g., podcasts), are opened up by digitization, as well as the ability to export TVO content outside the province by a number of means.

At various points, Committee members asked about the balance between TVOntario's production of content for television and the increasing emphasis on TVO's web presence and the creation of original content for web-based platforms. The Authority was asked about limitations in accessing its web-based content, either by those living in remote areas (e.g., children in northern communities) where Internet access is limited, or by those in the population (e.g., seniors) who may be uncomfortable accessing information by digital means. It was suggested that TVO consider expanding Ontario-based programming for those not connected to the Internet. A related suggestion concerned TVO's ability to address the deficit in local and regional issue coverage that has resulted from consolidation in the media business.

Observing that TVO's role is to create Internet content, not extend Internet access, Ms. de Wilde also expressed confidence in the level of high quality educational content provided through its television signal – the role of web-based content, where it is available, is to enrich that experience. She reiterated that taking advantage of new technologies will allow TVO in the future to expand its level of regional production, one example being the project to take *The Agenda* on the road to explore regional economies.

### **Recommendation:**

*3. The Committee recommends that TVOntario continue to investigate the possibility of employing digital technologies to produce new, cost-effective, regionally-based content.*

### *In-House Content Creation*

Representatives of TVOntario were asked about the organization's in-house production activities, and specifically about any impact of the digitization project and new web-based initiatives on TVO's in-house production of television programming.

The Committee was told that TVO's ability to create made-in-Ontario content is one of the organization's greatest strengths, something that allows it to fulfil its mandate of providing what other broadcasters won't – "we are obsessed with doing things that the market doesn't do." Current production consists of about 500 hours per year, which includes 200 hours of children's content, much of it linked to the Ontario curriculum.

Concern was expressed that 500 hours of in-house production is a drop from a previous level of 700 hours. Ms. de Wilde was asked about her description of TVO as "a smart aggregator of content," and whether this represents a shift in focus from producing original content to collecting and distributing information. She assured the Committee that TVO's commitment to in-house content is "sacrosanct" and that the concept of "a smart aggregator" is simply an updated version of what constitutes a broadcaster. Ms. de Wilde reminded the Committee that the new content created for the web is also unique, important Ontario content, and TVO re-iterated this in the material subsequently sent to the Committee:

It should be noted that the number of hours of **traditional TV** programs does not reflect the vast amount of new digital programming such as the program, *Your Voice*, the three websites, hundreds of games, the many blogs, micro sites, wikis and the videoplayer, which are also made-at-TVO, made-in-Ontario content and critically important to TVO relevance in the digital age.<sup>5</sup>

### **Recommendation:**

*4. The Committee recommends that TVOntario continue to develop innovative content, including web-based resources, for distribution on a variety of platforms, while maintaining (if not increasing) its current level of in-house original television programming.*

### *Youth Programming*

As noted, TVOntario's opening presentation spoke about offering something "for every citizen in Ontario." TVO officials were asked about programming plans for young adults and teens. Ms. de Wilde suggested that the new possibilities opening up for TVO with the transformation to digital production and content

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

management will provide opportunities to attract the youth demographic, which is a segment especially tied in to web-based Internet experiences. At the present time, though, TVO has nothing ready for implementation.

### *Independent Learning Centre (ILC)*

Asked about the Independent Learning Centre, Ms. de Wilde indicated that a digital strategy is in development for migrating more of the course work of the ILC onto the Internet, which is where older teenagers and young adults are expecting to find information products. She noted that the work of the ILC involves “lots of small, happy stories where the ILC . . . really does move people to a better place in their lives, and that’s pretty exciting.”<sup>6</sup>

#### **Recommendation:**

*5. Commending TVOntario for its work to date with the Independent Learning Centre (ILC), the Committee recommends that TVOntario continue to support and strengthen the development of materials for the ILC.*

### *Membership and Viewing Numbers*

Questioned by the Committee, Ms. de Wilde indicated that TVO currently has about 75,000 members (down from a previous high of 100,000). TVOntario was also asked about an editorial which commented that TVO does not release its viewing numbers to the public. Ms. de Wilde indicated that the organization is guided by some of the viewership numbers “when it’s falling within our . . . educational broadcast strategy.” Asked about why the broadcaster doesn’t release all of its number on an annual basis, Ms. de Wilde commented that “some of the key numbers” are put in the annual report.

#### **Recommendation:**

*6. Recognizing that TVOntario is not a ratings-driven organization, the Committee recommends that TVO consistently report all its membership and viewership numbers in its Annual Report.*

### *Value for Money*

As noted above (in Recent Developments), the internal review conducted by TVOntario’s management in 2005-06 was concerned, in part, with ensuring that TVO provides full value for the government funding it receives. The Committee asked TVOntario a number of questions concerning its costs of production and operations, and in several instances, to provide more precise information to the Committee at a later date.

Following up on the confirmation by Ms. de Wilde that *The Agenda* is TVO’s most costly production, the Committee requested information about the show’s annual cost. The response subsequently provided by TVOntario is, in part, as follows:

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. A-211.

The Agenda with Steve Paikin is TVO's flagship daily current affairs show and accounts for 176 hours of original made-in-Ontario content on an annual basis. It represents the largest single item of the programming budget.

While TVO appreciates the Committee's interest in the breakdown of the specific costs of our programming, it has been TVO's practice over the past 30 plus years not to disclose confidential internal costing and budgeting information for such individual programs.<sup>7</sup>

TVO also expressed concern about disclosing "disaggregated confidential cost and budget information relating to a single, but critical program" during an important round of collective bargaining with one of its unions.

As requested, TVOntario disclosed that the cost of producing and distributing the DVD *Steve Paikin – Year Two of The Agenda* was "less than \$1,000, with 64% going to postage." In response to a question about the cost of freelancers hired to augment in-house teams involved in the out of studio productions of *The Agenda*, TVO noted that "the cost of these services represents less than 0.1% of TVO's operating budget."<sup>8</sup>

Representatives of TVOntario were asked about how the organization defines internally that it is providing value for money. Ms. de Wilde indicated that the metric used by TVO is average cost per person per annum (\$3 or less). Materials later supplied by TVO to the Committee state that "when compared to other educational broadcasters in Canada, TVO's service is delivered at less than half the cost per person in the province compared to [that] of SCN or Télé-Quebec."<sup>9</sup> The response does not indicate the means by which TVO determined that each educational broadcaster is providing an equivalent product.

Ms. de Wilde also commented that value for money "is about being really focused on how we do things in a way that is modest and that has limited focus." She noted that the digital transformation involved moving from five shooting spaces to three, and that the organization gave up two floors of the building to reduce costs. The Committee expressed interest in receiving information about these reductions in base costs. At a later date, TVO supplied the following response:

A leasehold renovation was undertaken in 2006 which allowed total leased space to be reduced by one floor. When TFO became autonomous in 2007, the leased space was reduced by another floor, reducing total space by 31%. In 2007, our warehouse space was also reduced by 35%.

In addition, through attrition and retirement, the organizational structure is being streamlined. . . . Since streamlining efforts began in 2006, our headcount has been reduced by 29.7% with the TFO autonomy having the greatest impact, 21.3% (111)

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<sup>7</sup> Ontario Educational Communications Authority (TVO), "Responses."

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

transferred to TFO, and other streamlining initiatives 8.4% (43.5).<sup>10</sup>

**Recommendations:**

*7. The Committee recommends that TVO consider developing a more specific method for measuring and ensuring that its activities are providing value-for-money.*

*8. The Committee recommends that TVO be encouraged to continue to work on achieving efficiencies, without sacrificing its capacity for providing high quality educational programming for all the citizens of Ontario.*

*On-demand TV*

The Committee asked whether investments in digital capacity will allow TVO to move to an on-demand strategy, where viewers access specific television programming options via the Internet at the time of their choosing. Ms. de Wilde confirmed the existence of a trend to what is known as IPTV (Internet protocol-based television). IPTV would allow each viewer to customize their experience of TVO, creating in effect “my TVO.” She noted that among the possibilities this could open up would be the ability for parents to select children’s program content that is most suited to their own child’s educational needs. As with some of the other opportunities created up by the digital transformation, IPTV will not be possible until TVO completes its transition in terms of digital content management.

*French-language programming*

The Committee asked about French-language segments in TVO’s daytime programs schedule, suggesting that there may be significant numbers of Ontario children not ready for TFO, but who might learn from less intensive content provided in the context of other kids shows. Subsequently, TVO provided the Committee a description of the character Magie Gi, who is the French-as-a-Second-Language character on Gisèle’s Big Backyard. Episodes of *Magie Gi* are broadcast in the morning preschool block and are available on the TVOKids.com website, providing “young learners [with] French vocabulary that is relevant to their daily lives.”<sup>11</sup>

*Civics 101*

The Committee expressed its interest in the Civics 101 initiative that TVOntario is developing. Noting that Members often visit schools and speak to children, usually in grade 5, TVO was asked if its Civics 101 materials would be aimed at the grade 5 level. Ms. de Wilde indicated that while Civics 101 would be relevant to grade 5 pupils, its content would be aimed at a broad audience. TVOntario was asked to consider developing a CD or a downloadable presentation that could be delivered to grade 5 pupils and provide an introduction to the way parliament and government operate in Ontario. According to Ms. de Wilde, Civics

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

101 is still very much in development, but will offer a suite of resources that could be repackaged as a teaching tool.

**Recommendation:**

*9. The Committee commends TVOntario for its Civics 101 initiative to improve general knowledge of Ontario's political system and recommends that it also develop materials for pupils at the grade 5 and grade 10 levels that introduce them to the basic institutions and processes of Ontario's political system.*

**Stakeholder Presentations**

*Joanne Simmons (former TVO consultant)*

The witness is currently an elementary school vice-principal in Scarborough. Formerly a special education consultant for the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), she worked on the early math strategy for the expert panel report of the Ministry of Education. She became involved with TVOntario while working as an instructional leader for mathematics across the TDSB. Over a period of four years, she participated in the development of 40 episodes of a five-minute math show called *Tumbletown Tales*. Ms. Simmons's responsibility was to validate the math content of each episode and ensure that it was developmentally appropriate for children in Ontario schools. She was later invited by TVO to write teachers' guides, and was consulted on the creation of an interactive website that connects children directly to the programs. She described her experiences of TVO's work with educators:

Beyond just having kids use it, what TVO does time and time again, in my experience and in my conversations, working with colleagues working in other curriculum areas, is . . . reach out to teachers to just really make sure and get their feedback that what's going on – the television, on the computer and in the hands of students in the classroom – is in fact the highest quality materials. So they came into my school, put on a fantastic in-service for my teachers, provided them with more resources and gave them an opportunity to give feedback and ways to improve the programs. For me, that is also very impressive.

. . .

In my latest role as a vice-principal, I've grown an even greater appreciation for the outreach that TVO provides to parents and our community.<sup>12</sup>

Noting that Ms. Simmons had discussed numeracy and literacy, the Committee asked her about other areas in which children could benefit from expanded programming by TVO. Ms. Simmons identified media awareness as an "educationally hot topic," and spoke about the need to help kids "be critical thinkers about the things they find on a website." Asked if this type of media

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<sup>12</sup> Standing Committee on Government Agencies, *Hansard*, September 11, 2008, p. A-219.

awareness should focus on the Internet or also treat television programming, Ms. Simmons indicated an ongoing need for talking about both media.

Asked about the TVO's Civics 101 project, Ms. Simmons noted the value of such resources to teachers teaching civics, and gave the example of the upcoming federal election as an issue that would command attention. As she later noted, "kids are actually very interested in politics. Teachers, obviously, aren't always as equipped as we should be for teaching it."<sup>13</sup>

**Recommendation:**

*10. The Committee recommends that TVO expand on its excellent work in partnering with teachers and school boards to address curricular goals of improving literacy and numeracy by developing educational materials addressing additional topics such as media awareness and critical thinking in a multi-media environment.*

*The Canadian Media Guild*

A producer at TVOntario, Media Guild unit president David Hawkins, described how work of Guild members has changed since the early days of TVO. He described his own work as

almost exclusively on producing for the Web, providing Ontarians with new ways to access and share information, and identify and participate in conversations about issues that matter to them. . . . I'm one of the producers involved in this initiative to build a new level of citizen involvement in the discourse on public issues that affect them directly.<sup>14</sup>

Mr. Hawkins told the Committee about the enthusiasm and ideas that TVO employees are bringing to the creation of new kinds of programming for television and the Web. He also told the Committee that

TV is the platform that inspires other platforms. Every media organization uses their television productions to drive traffic to online.<sup>15</sup>

Mr. Hawkins finished his presentation by assuring the Committee that "TVO employees are a skilled, experienced and committed resource," and urged the Committee to make a long-term commitment to TVOntario.

Guild national president Lise Lareau stated that "TVO is more important now than ever," because of industry changes that have caused many private media companies to withdraw from local and regional newsgathering. Ms. Lareau suggested that TVO possesses "the knowledge and talent to be more proactive in its programming, to have a role in developing issues as opposed to covering them when they've become issues."<sup>16</sup> She also noted four areas that Guild

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. A-223.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. A-224.

members have identified where they believe TVOntario has the capacity to do more:

- youth programming (for those “over 12”), where “television and Internet could be far more connected”;<sup>17</sup>
- the environment;
- arts and culture, which “*Studio 2* used to do”; and
- more political discourse.

**Recommendation:**

*11. The Committee recommends that TVOntario consider providing more interactive programming for teens, and more dedicated coverage of specific topics such as the environment, or arts and culture.*

Committee members asked the Canadian Media Guild representatives about the challenges of making the transition from analog to digital, such as the need for training, as well as the opportunities provided, such as IPTV. Mr. Hawkins indicated that everyone is learning during this period, and that figuring out who does what is among the issues to be worked through. Ms. Lareau urged the Committee members

not to get hung up in the technology. We’re here to say that it’s actually not the technology that matters that much. The technology is going to change certain delivery options and accessibility options, but really we’re here to say, “. . . You still need content. You still need programming.” . . . whether it’s on demand or streamed or seen over the air for free or cable or satellite, it really doesn’t matter to our members that much as long as they’re producing stuff for consumption for citizens to see and hear.<sup>18</sup>

Committee members asked about morale in the workplace at TVOntario and about whether the level of resources devoted to taking *The Agenda* on the road will reduce the capacity of TVO to develop some of the other ideas that have been proposed. Mr. Hawkins admitted that “there’s continued uncertainty around the strategic agenda, and . . . also great excitement about the potential and possibility for accessing new tools, new production methods, new content that we can make.” He also reiterated that the capacity exists within the organization “to do this kind of new and additional programming that we’re talking about.”<sup>19</sup> Ms.

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<sup>17</sup> The Committee heard that “programming that itself is youth-driven – the face of the show is youth, the issues are actually identified and explored by youth – would generate a youthful audience in that demographic.” Standing Committee on Government Agencies, *Hansard*, September 11, 2008, p. A-227.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. A-225.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. A-226.

Lareau offered the clarification that the ability exists, and probably the capacity, but also that the latter may depend on budget considerations.

In response to questioning, Guild representatives suggested that professional staff and workers have not been part of conversations with TVO management concerning new content initiatives. Ms. Lareau also suggested that TVO management may not be interested in new content initiatives:

The folks working inside don't get a sense that they're part of the conversation, but also that these conversations are happening anywhere, this sort of "let's do more." I think that may be, too, a media phenomenon of the past 10 years. A lot of media employers have shrunk, as I indicated earlier. So it's easy to get into a mindset of doing less.<sup>20</sup>

*Mr. George Thomson (Citizens' Assembly of Ontario)*

Mr. Thomson is the former chair of the Citizens' Assembly of Ontario and addressed the Committee concerning TVOntario's contribution to the work of the Assembly, which ran from June 2006 to May 2007. Quite apart from the specific project delegated to the Citizens' Assembly, Mr. Thomson suggested that the process of engaging citizens in public policy discussions and decisions may become more common in the future. He observed that

TVO was the media – and frankly, the only media, I think – who saw the process of citizen engagement as so important here, independently of the topic being addressed.<sup>21</sup>

There were five components to TVO's partnership with the Citizens' Assembly of Ontario:

1. Creating a video record of the entire proceeding.
2. Using broadcast and journalism students to do much of the work, thereby reducing costs and providing a valuable educational experience for these students.
3. Using student journalists to create separate materials such as blogs and podcasts.
4. Creating an interactive element that allowed viewers to comment on the proceedings and feed that back into the record.
5. Using regular TVO programs to produce a balanced and informative discussion of the issue(s).

In Mr. Thomson's view, this experience will be valuable for future exercises of citizen engagement:

The potential is enormous when you think of the other areas where citizens have to become connected and engaged. I think it

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. A-227.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. A-228.

fits perfectly with TVO's educational mandate, and over time I think will have a real impact on the way TVO goes forward and carries out its role.<sup>22</sup>

The Committee asked Mr. Thomson if he believes there is a future role for TVO to expose all Ontarians to the same learning curve that was required in the case of the Citizens' Assembly. Answering in the affirmative, Mr. Thomson contrasted this type of ongoing learning experience with polling or focus groups:

People don't learn [in polling or focus groups] . . . they tell you what they already know. This was a process where they learned and then decided what they knew. This method using new technology may be a way to enable to continue a learning process and then be real, informed contributors rather than off-the-top-of-the-head contributors. It's going to take a while and it's a hard slog to get there, but I'm very pleased that TVO took it on as an exercise here.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. A-228.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. A-230.

## COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. *While commending TVOntario for its in-depth coverage of issues and its plan to offer civics education content on its website, the Committee recommends that TVOntario consider opportunities to provide more coverage of Ontario politics and government, including the business of the Legislature, and educational programming about the political process and parliamentary proceedings. (pp. 7-9)*

2. *The Committee recommends that TVOntario:*

*(a) explore the feasibility of producing a weekly Ontario-specific program on parliamentary and political events and report back to the Committee within 90 days of the tabling of this report with the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly; and*

*(b) explore the feasibility of broadcasting the Ontario Parliament's Question Period in a more viewer-friendly time slot and report back to the Committee within 90 days of the tabling of this report with the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. (pp. 7-9)*

3. *The Committee recommends that TVOntario continue to investigate the possibility of employing digital technologies to produce new, cost-effective, regionally-based content. (p. 10)*

4. *The Committee recommends that TVOntario continue to develop innovative content, including web-based resources, for distribution on a variety of platforms, while maintaining (if not increasing) its current level of in-house original television programming. (pp. 10-11)*

5. *Commending TVOntario for its work to date with the Independent Learning Centre (ILC), the Committee recommends that TVOntario continue to support and strengthen the development of materials for the ILC. (p. 12)*

6. *Recognizing that TVOntario is not a ratings-driven organization, the Committee recommends that TVO consistently report all its membership and viewership numbers in its Annual Report. (p. 12)*

7. *The Committee recommends that TVO consider developing a more specific method for measuring and ensuring that its activities are providing value-for-money. (pp. 12-14)*

8. *The Committee recommends that TVO be encouraged to continue to work on achieving efficiencies, without sacrificing its capacity for providing high quality educational programming for all the citizens of Ontario. (pp. 12-14)*

9. *The Committee commends TVOntario for its Civics 101 initiative to improve general knowledge of Ontario's political system and recommends that it also develop materials for pupils at the grade 5 and grade 10 levels that introduce them to the basic institutions and processes of Ontario's political system. (p. 15)*

*10. The Committee recommends that TVO expand on its excellent work in partnering with teachers and school boards to address curricular goals of improving literacy and numeracy by developing educational materials addressing additional topics such as media awareness and critical thinking in a multi-media environment. (pp. 15-17)*

*11. The Committee recommends that TVOntario consider providing more interactive programming for teens, and more dedicated coverage of specific topics such as the environment, or arts and culture. (p. 18)*