

CONFERENCE REPORT: CASA ADVOCACY WEEK

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Introduction

This report outlines the meetings that took place on the VP External's trip to Toronto and Ottawa during the month of November. The VP External met with Samara Canada and C-Street while in Toronto, and attended the *Canadian Alliance of Student Associations'* "Advocacy Week" in Ottawa.

The Office of the Vice-President External has been working extensively on the issue of youth and student civic engagement. This last month, we were faced with a Municipal Election, and we are very pleased with the community engagement that we saw. In an effort to foster long-term civic engagement, we are in the process of partnering with Samara (a non-profit organization out of Ontario) in piloting a program called *Democracy Talks* at the student union level. C-street is the organization that helped us create our current templates for OutreachAMS.ca. In the wake of all that has occurred in the last month and a half, we think it would be appropriate to revamp the website in coordination with C-street for campaign programming and outreach, which is one of their specialties. An example of their work can be found with the Vision Vancouver Municipal Elections campaign.

Samara – Meeting with John Beebe

John Beebe was our main point of contact when we began learning more about the work that Samara has been doing on civic engagement. Samara is a well-recognized and respected organization that strives to engage the average Canadian in political conversation. They developed a program called *Democracy Talks*, which they describe as "a facilitated, activity-based discussion around issues that matter to society. Democracy Talks builds democratic engagement by providing a community-based, non-partisan forum for people to have their ideas heard, hear from other members of their community and develop their political voice. For some, it is a chance to build connections with others who share a passion for politics but for many it is their first step towards fully engaging Canada's democracy."

My meeting with John was a follow up on the *Democracy Talks* program that we are customizing for the AMS. We had a nice recap on the municipal elections, and trends we are noticing on the youth civic engagement file. Our hope is to set up a long term program that can be administered in-house to engage council, constituencies, and the student body at large on issues that affect them beyond just participating in a host of elections. With this in mind, the VP External's office is partnering with Samara to bring *Democracy Talks* to the UBC community, starting with a focus group workshop on Monday, December 8th.

C-Street Meeting

This meeting was to look at opportunities for revamping OutreachAMS.ca, and creating a layout that has greater continued engagement functions on the campaigns that we promote. We hope to use the website as the main point of contact for student engagement and outreach in preparation for the upcoming transit referendum. It should be noted that outreachams.ca is hosted on *Nation Builder*, which has a comprehensive *Get out the Vote* data collection function that we have yet to tap into. After the Mayor's Council releases more information on the transit referendum, I will be reconnecting with C-street for quotes and brainstormed templates on how we can enhance the entire platform.

Canadian Alliance of Student Associations – Advocacy Week

The Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA) is a federally focused advocacy organization. They host an annual week long lobbying effort on Parliament Hill, where they engage with Members of Parliament, Senators, and other organizations. This year CASA scheduled upwards of 140 meetings, and was advocating for 5 major asks.

This year, CASA had five key advocacy priorities that focused on:

- Expansion of the Canada Student Loans and Canada Student Grants programs
- Increased institutional support for the indirect costs of research
- Elimination of the 2% cap on the Post-Secondary Student Support Program
- Enhancing Canada's Labour Market Information
- Renewal of the Mental Health Commission of Canada, with a focus on students

Expansions on the following topics can be found in the *CASA Advocacy Week Research Debrief Document*, which is provided with this document.

While there, I attended meetings with the following individuals:

- Senator Percy E. Downe, Prince Edward Island
- MP Joyce Murray, Vancouver-Quadra
- MP Malcolm Allen, Welland
- MP Jean Crowder, Nanaimo-Cowichan
- MP Mike Sullivan, York South-Weston
- MP Mylene Freeman, Papineau-Mirabel

- MP Wei Young, Vancouver South

Each meeting was different in scope and issues addressed. Participating in these meetings was very helpful in gaining a better feel for the political temperature around student issues at the federal level among different party lines. There was a very large delegation of *Alliance of BC Student* board members present at *Advocacy Week*; this was a great opportunity for the board to see how a large scale lobbying effort can be conducted, and how other student organizations function internally. Additionally, it was a wonderful opportunity to learn and practice effectively communicating with elected representatives.

Elections Canada Meeting

CASA arranged a meeting with Elections Canada for interested conference participants. Elections Canada is in the process of developing a strategy to better engage students across the country for the 2015 Federal Elections. The plan is to set up Voting Stations at 22 strategically selected student associations across Canada. We have been selected as one of the major institutions where Elections Canada would like to host a voting station. This meeting was designed to provide a more descriptive picture of what the voting process will look like, and how we can engage students more effectively. This strategy is to make voting more accessible for students and campus community members. We have been in continued talks with Elections Canada about facilitating a space for them to use during the election. As previously indicated, engagement for elections is a high priority for the office of the Vice-President External; an opportunity to work with Elections Canada will be a productive way to program long-term on the civic engagement file. More information will be made available to council closer to the date of the Federal Elections.

Conclusion

This was overall a very positive experience. I would recommend that the AMS continue to follow the work that is being done by CASA, to maintain an observation of federal lobbying efforts that are being put forward by student associations from across the country. Lastly, this was very insightful on how we can improve the Alliance of BC Students, and enhance our outreach on a provincial level.