

Liberal Party of Canada Members' Voice Proposal

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Please send comments, ideas, questions to mark@votermedia.org

Summary

- Here is something the LPC can do now to help win the 2015 election, by uniting Party members nationally in developing and supporting a consensus platform, while showing Canadians a credible **commitment to democratic reform and accountability**.

- **Proposal:** Let LPC members vote at liberal.ca to allocate \$50 per day among competing Liberal blogs.

- A similar blog funding competition at UBC's student union helped engage, inform and connect members with elected leaders -- see video [Votermedia at UBC](#) and paper [Experiments in Voter Funded Media](#).

- This LPC blog competition can help generate ideas for future Liberal government policy. For example, nationwide **voter funded media could engage and inform voters**, broaden policy debate, enhance government accountability and reduce corruption.

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My Background

I'm a **financial economist** (cv: linkedin.com/in/marklatham) specializing in reform of democracies and corporations by improving voter information systems. See also my recent blog post on [Why I Joined the Liberal Party of Canada](#).

How Votermedia Enhanced Member Engagement at UBC

Since 2007, the University of British Columbia's student union (the Alma Mater Society or AMS) has empowered its members to allocate award funds among student bloggers covering AMS issues, especially student council elections. They have found that this system (now called "votermedia") encouraged the **creation of new campus media**, that provided engagement and debate well beyond that of their student newspaper, [The Ubyyssey](#).

We documented the results in video interviews. Quotes from video [Votermedia at UBC](#):

Alex Lougheed - AMS VP Academic 2008-2009:

"...it far surpassed any of anyone's expectations. ...having those eyes going towards a student voice that's well informed, has been instrumental, not only as a tool for student governments to get their

message across, but also as a tool for the student body to get their message across to the student governments."

Matthew Naylor - AMS Votermedia Committee:

"[Votermedia] has been able to not only democratize the media-sphere of campus life, but also has been able to engage more people in the process itself, because more people know what's going on, more people around the council table know what's going on, executives know better what they're doing, and how their portfolios are being viewed by the campus population."

Jason Ng - Student Blogger:

"...everyone has different interests, everyone's from all kinds of places, and it's hard to bring that community together. And voter funded media has helped start that. It's **helped bring together students that were not interested, necessarily, in student politics before**. And helped them realize that a lot of the issues that affect UBC go beyond students who have a direct interest in politics, and really affect all the students that are part of the community for the years that they're here."

A full description and discussion is in the paper [Experiments in Voter Funded Media](#). For a sample of UBC AMS blogger election coverage, see ubcinsiders.ca/category/elections. UBC AMS has about 46,000 members, comparable to the 70,000-member LPC.

How a Blog Competition Could Help the LPC

Member engagement, democratic participation and accountability have long been highly valued principles of the LPC. For example:

- The 2012 Biennial Convention adopted a priority resolution on LPC Governance "18. Democratic Renewal: ...ensure the Party deepen its commitment to internal democracy by maximizing the **democratic participation of its membership**." [On page 29 of [this pdf](#).] At the February 2014 Biennial Convention, outgoing National Membership Secretary **Matthew Certosimo** urged that 2012 resolution #18 still needs to be implemented in some way [in [this video](#)].

- A 2012 statement of [LPC Values, Principles, Priorities](#) affirmed:

"ENGAGEMENT: Promote engagement in the Party and in Canadian communities.

ACCOUNTABILITY: Improve accountability to the membership at all levels of the Party."

- The [November 2013 LPC Ontario Policy Meeting](#) included this resolution:

"18. Engaging Canada's Youth in the Political Process:

...

BE IT RESOLVED that when the Liberal Party of Canada develops policy, they utilize a communication model that is **interactive and employs social networking**;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this communication model reflect a political process that is ethical, accountable and transparent thereby **enhancing youth engagement** and assuring a stronger political process."

- In a [January 2014 exit interview](#), LPC National President **Mike Crawley** said:
"There's still a lot to be done creating channels and vehicles for **open policy discussion and debate within the party.**"

Yet engagement and accountability are hard to achieve in practice. As the LPC continues the process of narrowing down policy resolutions and building a coherent election platform, these democratic principles are as important as ever.

Votermedia does not simply reward existing bloggers. It induces the creation of new blogs by writers who can offer the most insightful and helpful content. We LPC members want to be involved in the policy process, and we want the Liberal Party to offer Canadians the most appealing and effective platform for Canada's next government. Some insights and connections that Liberal bloggers could provide the party membership are:

- **keeping members informed** about how LPC policy resolutions are evolving toward our election platform;
- helping to aggregate and focus **members' voices** as input into the platform;
- unifying our broad multifaceted member community around a consensus of ideas and principles;
- increasing members' enthusiasm about the Party as an **organization accountable to us**, that will offer a **government accountable to the Canadian people**; we can then share this enthusiasm with all voters;
- creating and sharing **campaign ideas and material** for the 2015 Canadian federal election; engaging Canadian voters; responding to attacks from other parties.

How an LPC Blog Competition Could Work

There are many possible ways of designing a media funding competition. Different designs can induce very different types of media content. Based on analysis of economic incentives, plus years of experimenting with designs, I would suggest something like this:

- **Blogging as the primary medium**: Allow all types of media, including combinations of media. Display a feed (such as [RSS](#) or Twitter) from each competitor on the ballot. We found at UBC that blogs are the most effective medium, so most discussions refer to competitors as blogs and bloggers, even if it's not restricted to blogs.

- **Award \$50 per day from LPC funds:** Based on our experience at UBC, \$20 a day may be a reasonable minimum for achieving a worthwhile impact. But given the greater importance of national politics, \$50 a day seems more appropriate for the LPC -- less than \$20,000 per year. The amount can be adjusted through time. Awards can be calculated daily, then accumulated and paid out monthly. The competitive design ensures maximum benefit per dollar spent.

- **Who can enter the competition:** Any LPC member or group of members could enter. A monthly maintenance fee would help limit the number of entries to those with high enough quality to have a chance at winning some funding. If the award pool is \$50 a day, then a fee of \$20 a month may be about right. Each competitor should set up a two-way electronic funding link, such as a PayPal account.

- **What types of blog content?:** Based on the principle of a free press, votermedia competitions seem to work best with a minimum of rules on what media content the competitors provide. That way it's driven by the voters, not by the contest administrators. Bloggers would try to provide the types of content that members value.

- **Continuous online voting at liberal.ca:** Each logged-in LPC member could vote on how to share the \$50 a day among the competing blogs. (We could try letting Supporters vote too.) The ballot could look something like votermedia.org/lpc (a prototype demo): You vote on each blog by choosing the share of funding you think it should get, from a menu of 0%, 10%, 20%, 30%, 40%. You can vote as often as you want, but only your latest vote is counted in each day's award calculation -- details at votermedia.org/faqs#Voting.

- **Open source:** The software at votermedia.org is open source and unpatented -- anyone is free to copy and adapt it. I'm willing to help LPC adapt it for liberal.ca at no charge.

How This Can Help the LPC Win the 2015 Election

Experience with a media funding competition within the LPC would create opportunities for applying similar ideas beyond the Party, to engage, inform and empower all Canadians. This could give us Liberals an advantage in the 2015 election campaign and as a future government, that the other parties would find difficult to match.

Votermedia is designed to make elected leaders more accountable to voters in any large organization, including democracies and corporations (where shareowners elect directors). By implementing it within the LPC, we can learn how it could help make Canada's government more accountable to all Canadians. Potential applications include:

- **Voter information and engagement** in election campaigns: Votermedia resembles some **campaign finance reform** proposals that advocate public funding for campaigns; but the funding would tend to go to less partisan information providers, for greater public benefit. (See video [How Votermedia Affects Election Campaigns](#); and middle paragraph on page 9 of the paper [Experiments in Voter Funded Media](#).)

- A new economic model to support public interest **investigative journalism**: Voter funded journalists can help make our governments (national, provincial, municipal) more transparent, less wasteful, less corrupt. A few

thousand dollars can buy a lot of investigative journalism if it is allocated competitively by voters -- UBC example at ubcinsiders.ca/category/investigative. Such public policy critiques could also help to fulfill the legislative review function now served by Canada's senate.

- Votermedia can be seen as a type of **electoral reform**, except that it supplements rather than replaces our existing electoral system. Designing a voting system to allocate funding among media, has close parallels to designing a voting system to elect representatives who allocate funding among government programs. Creating a small supplementary voting system offers opportunities to try out new designs that may work better. Votermedia was designed from the outset to encourage media to serve as broad a readership as possible, thus uniting a community toward consensus views, rather than dividing it into warring subgroups -- e.g. see pages 7-9 of the paper [Global Voter Media Platform](#).

- **Corporate reform**: If our democracies show voters how accountability can improve our governments, they can encourage corporate shareowners to similarly improve their voter information systems to make corporations socially accountable and financially efficient -- see the article [Proxy Voting Brand Competition](#). Those ideas inspired the creation of website [ProxyDemocracy.org](#), which helps shareowners compare mutual funds' voting records -- e.g. see this [ranking of funds voting on climate change resolutions](#). In 2009-2010 I was appointed to the USA Securities and Exchange Commission's post-financial-crisis [Investor Advisory Committee](#), "to represent individual investors, particularly with respect to their role in corporate governance."

- **Cooperative reform**: As democratic businesses, cooperatives have great potential for improving the lives of all Canadians. Unfortunately, they have so far only fulfilled a fraction of their potential, because they tend to become less democratic when they grow large, failing to live up to fundamental [co-op principle #2](#) (democratic member control). As with corporations, a truly accountable government can show co-ops how democratic reform could help them better serve members -- see [these posts on co-op democracy](#), and opinion piece [We Want Our Co-ops Back](#).

Conclusion: Why We Should Try an LPC Blog Competition

Creating a blog competition at liberal.ca offers many potential benefits to the LPC. In addition to better engaging our membership, it can help us explore new perspectives on such policy issues as **accountability and political reform**. It can show the way to reforming our voter information systems, so that Canadians will vote based more on substantial issues that matter, rather than superficial influences like **media smear campaigns**. It would complement the policy discussions at [liberal.ca/groups](#). Competitive allocation of funds continuously online can generate much valuable content for a limited cost, helping us craft our consensus national policy and platform message.

Building our Party's experience with empowering voters in this new way could enable us to offer Canadians a distinctively **credible commitment to accountability**. Canadians would then be more likely to entrust the Liberal Party with the responsibility of forming the next government.