

THE ROAD TO EVIDENCE-INFORMED DECISION-MAKING IN CANADA

Evidence for Democracy (E4D) arose from Canadian scientists' frustration in the late 2000s with the federal government's increasing tendency, at the time, to sideline science in its decision-making. The government of the day was becoming bolder, more assertive and more sweeping in its avoidance of science that did not suit its agenda—defunding research, silencing scientists and shutting down research facilities.

Eventually, their outrage coalesced into a movement to restore the relationship between science and democracy, and E4D was born. Today, E4D continues to press for evidence-informed decision-making (EIDM), and hold the government to account in this respect.

You can explore this timeline to better understand the evolution of E4D and the continuous campaign for EIDM. It is also a useful companion piece to our case study on the same topic.

THE SPARK

2006 TO 2008

The Conservative Party of Canada comes to power

In 2006, Stephen Harper, leader of the newly reshaped Conservative Party of Canada, becomes prime minister with a minority government. Two years later, he will win a second (larger) minority government. These milestones mark the beginning of a systematic assault on science that would endure for nearly a decade and ultimately spark the creation of E4D.

2006



2007

2010

A sign of things to come

The Conservative government eliminates the long-form Census and begins making other assertive moves to quash science. Cases of government scientists being prevented from speaking to media begin to emerge. Bolstered by increasing coverage of the war on science by Canadian media outlets, researchers within and outside government start speaking out and penning editorials about muzzling.

2008



2009

Conservative party emboldened by majority win

The 40th Canadian Parliament is dissolved after the Conservative government is found to be in contempt of Parliament. The Conservatives are re-elected with a majority government. One of the returning government's first moves is to withdraw Canada from the Kyoto Protocol, a global accord designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that a previous government had ratified in Parliament in 2002.

2010



2011

The sidelining of science intensifies...

The Conservative Party doubles down on its anti-science actions, slashing budgets and shuttering research facilities. It proposes Bill C-28, with provisions to strip environmental protections, defund research institutions and shutter several government research stations, including the Experimental Lakes Area, a world-class living lab where scientists study how to protect freshwater.

2012



THE RESPONSE

2012

... and scientists mobilize

Graduate students and professors at the University of Ottawa, exasperated by the government's unrelenting dismissal of science, come up with a plan to organize a protest. They coordinate what will come to be known as the "Death of Evidence" rally, which attracts hundreds of scientists and thousands of supporters to Parliament Hill, some wearing lab coats and others dressed in grim reaper costumes.

Channelling the protest's momentum, E4D is incorporated in the fall with one of the protest organizers as its executive director.

2013



2013

The Science Uncensored campaign begins

E4D runs its first campaign, *Science Uncensored*, focusing on the suppression of government scientists. It publishes an online timeline of occasions on which the government silenced scientists and invites the public to sign a petition asking the government to restore free speech. The petition serves as E4D's first website, and the newly formed organization begins publishing a blog advocating for EIDM. E4D starts to gain a following, and *The Hill Times* publishes its letter to the editor protesting the censoring of government scientists.

2013



2015

Can Scientists Speak?

E4D publishes its first research report, *Can Scientists Speak?*, grading 16 federal government departments and agencies on their communication and media policies. Over 85% of the departments and agencies receive a grade of C or lower.

2014



Gearing up for another election

With the next federal election on the horizon, E4D works to make the importance of science and evidence a prominent election issue, creating an advocacy campaign that aims to secure concrete policy commitments from political parties to improve EIDM. Its work is shaped by the recognition that the first step toward achieving EIDM is to elect a government that is committed to science and the use of evidence to formulate policy.

This will be a big year for E4D: in the run-up to the election, it creates a website to tell scientists' stories and explain why free scientific speech is important, develops policy recommendations to strengthen EIDM (including suggesting that Canada establish a Chief Science Advisor), builds relationships with politicians and their staff, and creates a Science Pledge to mobilize public support for science and engage candidates.

2015



THE PROGRESS

2015

Signs of progress

Eighty candidates from multiple parties take the *Science Pledge*, and the Liberal Party releases an election platform that prioritizes science. The Liberals win a majority government. The party is widely expected to restore free speech for federal scientists and respect for EIDM generally. Stephen Harper steps down as Conservative leader.

2015



2015

Advocacy starts to pay off

The Liberal government names a Minister of Science and restores the long-form Census, the first of a number of scientific endeavours powered down or defunded by the Conservative government that it will ultimately revive. Mandate letters to Ministers are made public and state the government's commitment to using the best available science and EIDM.

2015



2015

E4D focuses on relationship-building

With a more science-friendly government now in power, E4D shifts its advocacy approach to focus more on building bridges. It begins to push for specific science-related policies, build relationships with core government partners, and hold the government accountable for its science-related commitments.

2015



THE LONG CAMPAIGN

2016

Trouble south of the border

While the Liberal government seeks to appoint a Chief Science Advisor for Canada, the US elects Donald Trump as president. The problem of misinformation and alternative facts begins to intensify, and anti-science policies intensify in the US.

2016



2016

Campaigning to protect free speech

E4D begins its campaign to save the Polar Environmental Atmospheric Research Lab following unexpected cuts to a climate science program that funded critical Arctic research, and sends an *open letter* to the prime minister and the ministers of two science-related departments calling for federal departments to implement and adopt a set of scientific integrity policies that would allow scientists to speak freely about their work and safeguard it from political interference. More than 5,500 Canadians sign the letter.

2016



2017

Mobilizing for science

American scientists organize the Scientists' March on Washington, with satellite marches planned across the US and elsewhere in the world. E4D organizes a corresponding March for Science in Ottawa in solidarity.

The Advisory Panel on Federal Support for Fundamental Science releases *Investing in Canada's Future: Strengthening the Foundations of Canadian Research* (also known as the Naylor Report), and E4D runs its #supportthereport campaign to push the government to implement the report's recommendations.

2017



2017

A Chief Science Advisor for Canada (again)

The Liberal government announces a new Chief Science Advisor to the Government of Canada. The appointment follows a nine year hiatus after the Conservative government abolished the role of National Science Advisor in 2008.

2017



2017

Science Integrity in British Columbia

E4D joins forces with supporters to shed light on the issue of inadequate science capacity in the Government of British Columbia. E4D also publishes *Oversight at Risk*, investigating the state of public sector science in British Columbia and puts forward recommendations to strengthen research capability, communication and scientific integrity in the province.

2018



2018

A win for free speech

E4D's efforts to secure free speech for federal government scientists are rewarded when the government adopts and implements the scientific integrity policies across government.

2018



2018

Increased investments in fundamental science

The 2018 federal budget announces new investments in science and research, marking significant steps towards the recommendations laid out in the 2017 Fundamental Science Review. The budget also makes considerable mention of the government's commitment to EIDM.

2018



2019

E4D co-organizes the Vote Science campaign

In the lead-up to the 2019 election, E4D teams up with six other science-based organizations to launch Vote Science, a campaign that provides a portal for voters to engage candidates. The campaign provides a toolkit on how to address election candidates at meetings or events, with social media tools and forms for tracking interactions.

2019



2019

New avenues for E4D

The Liberal Party is re-elected with a minority government and does not renew the position of Minister of Science. The 2019 federal budget expands on previous investments in science and commitments to EIDM.

E4D creates a Truth Pledge as part of a suite of training tools and modules to combat misinformation, encouraging members to commit to reducing the spread of misinformation online, and begins offering training on science communication and policy-making.

2019

THE FUTURE

2020

The COVID-19 pandemic changes everything

The World Health Organization declares the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) a pandemic, ushering in a chaotic period that will eventually test the public's willingness to trust scientists, health officials and key decision-makers in government.

E4D surveys its Canadian supporters to find out why and how they engage in science advocacy. The results give E4D a deeper understanding of the challenges facing science advocates.

2020

2021

Liberal government re-elected, E4D continues to evolve

It's another election year, and E4D revives the Vote Science campaign to remind candidates and parties that Canadians continue to care about science. The Liberal Party returns to power as a minority government for another term.

E4D continues to monitor the government's use of science in policy, releasing its first report on the transparency of evidence usage in policy, *Eyes on Evidence I*. In 2022, E4D releases its second report on this topic, *Eyes on Evidence II*. These reports mark the next stage of sophistication for E4D as an organization, now equipped and positioned to assess the government's transparency of evidence usage regularly and report on it publicly.

2021

2022

A new seat for science in the House of Commons

Canada's 44th session of Parliament welcomes a new Standing Committee for Science and Research. E4D provides testimony to the new Committee, emphasizing the increased need to secure a voice for science in government decision-making.

2022

KEY PUBLICATIONS

As E4D transitioned from protesting anti-science government decisions and lobbying for EIDM to playing a more nuanced role with a greater emphasis on skills training and relationship-building, it began to produce a range of webinars, workshops, reports and other tools to help scientists interact more effectively with politicians and the public, understand policy-making, address misinformation, and more.

For example, E4D has conducted skills and knowledge training on topics like:

- Transitioning from science to (science) policy
- Achieving open science in government
- Science communication in briefing notes

E4D has also produced webinars and toolkits like:

- [Science Policy 101](#)
- [Science Communication 101](#)
- [Pre-budget consultation](#)
- [Your new toolkit for addressing misinformation](#)
- [How to write a briefing note](#)
- [Preparing Plain Language Summaries](#)
- [Connecting with your political representatives](#)
- [Federal Budget Toolkit](#)
- [Engaging with your federal candidates](#)