

# STRATEGIC PLAN

## 2024-2029

# AHEAD BY A CENTURY

“ *Making Canada better known.* ”



ROYAL CANADIAN  
GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY







## Message from the President and the CEO

**WHEN THE ROYAL CANADIAN GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY** (RCGS) was founded in 1929, its mission was to “make Canada better known to Canadians and the world,” a goal that is as vital today as it was nearly a century ago. From its bright headquarters in the heart of the nation’s capital at 50 Sussex Drive, the RCGS is a beacon of understanding; it is where Canadians meet to learn about their country and their responsibility as citizens to build a more sustainable future for us all.

As the RCGS prepares to celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2029, and the 100th anniversary of the founding of *Canadian Geographic* magazine in 2030, we have grown to become the country’s #1 paid magazine with 4.3M readers each month online and in print. We have also built Canada’s largest educational network with 28,000 educators using our teaching resources and giant floor maps in classrooms reaching 750,000 students each year.

### OUR VISION:

To help Canadians chart a successful future by fostering a greater understanding of Canada’s geography—the diverse human and physical landscape—as well as the changes affecting its people and the environment.

In the lead up to the centennial, we have celebrated some globally significant achievements. In 2024, the **Shackleton Quest Expedition** team made the historic discovery of Sir Ernest Shackleton’s final ship, *Quest*. The discovery on June 9, 2024, in the Labrador Sea, was covered by more than 2,000 media outlets worldwide including the *Globe and Mail*, the *BBC* and the *New York Times*.

The discovery comes one year after the RCGS mounted its first major exhibition focused on Canadian filmmaker and deep sea explorer James Cameron’s expedition to the deepest part of the Ocean, the Mariana Trench, in 2012. The exhibition attracted more than 25,000 visitors to 50 Sussex Drive, and engaged tens of thousands more online.



**CANADIAN GEOGRAPHIC** also published the first ever **Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada** in 2018, a foundational project that was born in collaboration with the Assembly of First Nations, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and the Métis National Council. The atlas is helping us define our efforts to lean into the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and ensure the RCGS continues to be a centre of trust for Indigenous Peoples.

In 2018, we made 50 Sussex our new home, a beautiful building that is now **Canada's Centre for Geography and Exploration**. The new space has become a vibrant hub bringing our community and the country together for Can Geo talks, Geo Schools, events, exhibitions, documentary film screenings, and serving as the production offices for the magazine and our educational outreach programs.

The new Strategic Plan will ensure our second century is as exciting as the first through five key areas: **Discovery, Inspiration, Change**, deepening our **Connection with Indigenous Peoples**, and building **Resilience for the future**. As one of Canada's largest educational charities, and as publisher one of its most read and beloved magazines, the Royal Canadian Geographical Society is uniquely positioned to use the power of geography to unite Canadians, inspire future generations and help chart a better future for the country.

**Hon. Lois Mitchell, CM AOE LLD FRCGS**  
President RCGS

**John Geiger, CM LLD FRCGS**  
Chief Executive Officer, RCGS





# AN ENDURING VISION, MISSION AND VALUES

## OUR VISION

To help Canadians chart a successful future by fostering a greater understanding of Canada's geography—the diverse human and physical landscape—as well as the changes affecting its people and the environment.

## OUR MISSION

To make Canada better known to Canadians and to the world.

## OUR VALUES

### Collaboration

Maximizing the impact and influence that can be gained through working with others with whom the RCGS shares values, aims and affinities.

### Environmental Action

Enhancing awareness and understanding of climate and biodiversity related issues. To engender engagement and participation on the part of Canadians.

### Respect and Inclusion

Recognizing and honouring the unique position of Indigenous Peoples and their lands, while reflecting and acknowledging the diverse voices and experiences of all who call Canada home.

### Exploratory spirit

Encouraging individuals and groups to reach beyond their knowledge and understanding to explore geographical knowledge that is new to them.

### Learning

Inspiring the desire to learn and encouraging the building of geographic knowledge and skills through formal and informal education.

### Engagement

Inviting and honouring contributions from all sectors of Canadian society to support the programs and activities of the RCGS.





# DISCOVER

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## STRATEGIC GOAL #1

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Recognizing that discovering the world around us can be a great source of joy, the Society commits to:

- Broaden Canadians' knowledge and appreciation of Canada
- Support research and exploration
- Promote the experience of geography and geotechnologies
- Promote nature-based, regenerative travel

“ *Our backs were up against the wall, and then suddenly the ship pops up on the screen. And that was it. I was euphoric, I was stunned, I couldn't believe we actually found it.* ”

**John Geiger,**

Shackleton Quest Expedition Leader and RCGS CEO  
on the discovery of Sir Ernest Shackleton's final ship, *Quest*.



# INSPIRE

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## STRATEGIC GOAL #2

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As a leading educational organization, the Society is ideally suited to inspire Canadians through our educational programs at our headquarters in the nation's capital, and through our national network of 28,000 teachers and 750,000 students in every province and territory. We commit to:

- Transform learning for students and educators across the country
- Engage and welcome new Canadians
- Amplify achievements in the field of geography in support of the Society
- Highlight Canada's Centre for Geography and Exploration at 50 Sussex as a compelling and inspiring destination

“ *When you have that moment of empowerment, when someone believes in you, all of a sudden, a switch is thrown in your head, and you believe it's possible.* ”

**James Cameron,**  
RCGS Gold Medallist, Filmmaker and Deepsea Explorer



# CHANGE

## STRATEGIC GOAL #3

Canadians are concerned about the air they breathe, the water they drink, and the impact of climate change on the natural world. To help Canadians navigate ongoing climatic change, the Society will:

- Educate and empower the public to use new ways of thinking about geography to effect change
- Influence relevant public policies as a trusted resource and convenor
- Promote resource stewardship to protect biodiversity and climate
- Increase the RCGS' reach and the availability of its work

“*The moment I saw this white pinnacle of ice for the first time, standing like a mountain on the ocean, my heart was racing. It was beautiful. It was sculptural. And I also had a feeling of reverence. This ice is endangered. And I had the sense that I was looking at something that would never be the same again.*”

**Jill Heinerth,**

RCGS Explorer-in-Residence, and world renowned cave diver.



# INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

## STRATEGIC GOAL #4

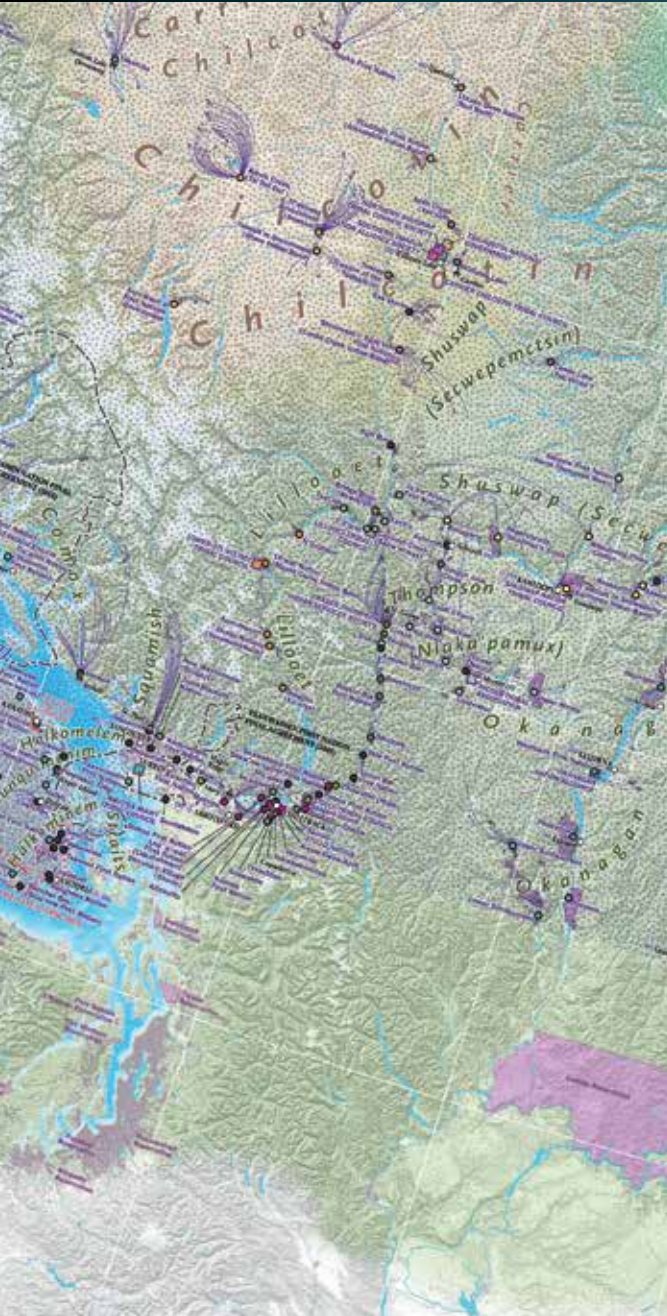
To advance Truth and Reconciliation, while honouring and acknowledging the lives and knowledge of Indigenous Peoples, the Society will continue to:

- Deepen our connections with Indigenous Peoples and integrate Indigenous ways of knowing and being through respectful collaborations with Indigenous nations, communities and organizations.
- Ensure the RCGS continues to be a centre of trust for Indigenous Peoples.

“ Fundamental to our Indigenous teachings is the fact that everything and everyone on Earth is related. If one comes to believe this, then the arc of humanity can bend our course for the future toward the restoration of our natural world. It is in this spirit, and with this focus moving forward, that I embrace the role of Honorary President. ”

Chief Perry Bellegarde,

RCGS Honorary President, RCGS Gold Medallist  
and former National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations.





# A RESILIENT RCGS FOR THE FUTURE

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## STRATEGIC GOAL #5

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Strengthening the foundation for the Society's second century means expanding our network, reaching new Canadians, and creating more value. The Society will:

- Ensure the RCGS reflects the diversity of the country
- Enhance engagement with Society Fellows
- Expand our reach to members, readers, donors and young people
- Diversify revenues to build financial sustainability

“*Canadian Geographic helps us understand the land we live on and how we can exist together. It creates a sense of direction and belonging for our future. Alex and the Trebek Foundation have supported the RCGS because it reaches the entire country through education, and it has been encouraging geographic literacy for nearly 100 years.*”

Jean Trebek,  
Fellow of the RCGS





# AHEAD BY A CENTURY

**IN 1929**, when a group of 28 eminent Canadians founded the RCGS as an organization that was to champion a deeper knowledge and appreciation of Canada's immense geography, none could have imagined that the nation was on the doorstep of the Great Depression. Nevertheless, from its first formal meeting in January 1930, the Society captured the attention and imaginations of Canadians, even through dire economic times. That was a feat in itself, as it began without a private endowment or guaranteed source of income and was intended to be "popular in character," open to all for a membership fee of a mere \$3 per year.

In a sense, that notion of broad accessibility belied the eminent nature of many of the Society's first directors. Our first Honorary President was famed explorer, cartographer, geologist and fossil discoverer Joseph B. Tyrrell, whose name is commemorated on a peak in Alberta's Banff National Park, and in the name of the world-renowned Royal Tyrrell Museum of Paleontology. The first President of the Board was Charles Camsell, the geologist and commissioner of the Northwest Territories. The first Patron of the RCGS was Governor General Viscount Willingdon. Today the RCGS' Patron is Her Excellency the Right Honourable Mary Simon. Society Fellows today include Margaret Atwood, former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, Dr. Wade Davis, Dr. Roberta Bondar, Natan Obed, Sir Michael Palin, Robert Bateman and nearly every Prime Minister of Canada.

In 1930, the Society published the first issue of the *Canadian Geographical Journal*, which became *Canadian Geographic*, now ranked as Canada's #1 paid magazine. Other notable recent successes include participation in the Parks Canada-led Victoria Strait Expedition which located Sir John Franklin's HMS *Erebus*, the publication of the first ever Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada in 2018, the opening of a new headquarters for the RCGS at 50 Sussex Drive in 2018, and the discovery of Sir Ernest Shackleton's final ship *Quest* in 2024.

In the coming years RCGS will be announcing projects that will celebrate our success and progress as an iconic organization. These projects will focus on partnerships that champion a more sustainable future, expand our reach as Canada's Centre for Geography and Exploration at 50 Sussex Drive, continue our work to deepen relationships with Indigenous Peoples and new Canadians and expand our educational outreach to all Canadians. These special priorities will be reflected in future annual plans and will be shared as we continue on the road towards the 100th anniversary.



## AHEAD BY A CENTURY PRIORITIES

- **HIGHLIGHT 50 SUSSEX DRIVE** as a compelling and inspiring destination by building the new Sir Christopher Ondaatje Reading Room and David Thompson Map Room, to enhance Canada's Centre for Geography and Exploration for the 100th anniversary.
- Plan the **NEW GEOGRAPHIES SUMMIT** in 2029-2030 and the New Geographies Initiative to help Canadians navigate the changing climate and its impact on both human and physical geography.
- Secure a partner to **DIGITIZE 100 YEARS OF CANADIAN GEOGRAPHIC** magazine by 2030.
- Establish a **NEW NETWORK OF PARTNERSHIPS** to extend the reach and profile of RCGS including organizations like the Explorers Club in New York, National Geographic in Washington, the Royal Geographical Society in London, Royal Scottish Geographical Society, the Fram Museum in Norway and others.
- Working in concert with our partners, **INVEST \$1 MILLION ANNUALLY** in research and exploration
- Continue to **GROW THE RCGS** as a centre of trust for Indigenous Peoples





# OUR FUTURE

IN 2029, the RCGS will mark its **100<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY**. In 2030, *Canadian Geographic* magazine will celebrate 100 years of telling Canada's story to Canadians and the world. To publish continuously online and in print, year in, year out for 100 years through a century of environmental, technological and social change is an extraordinary feat, of which we are very proud. Our audience continues to grow through digital storytelling, auguring well for the future.

As one of the country's longest-standing and most beloved publishing and educational organizations, the mission of the RCGS is as vital today as it was a century ago.

This strategic plan will guide the Society's activities for the next five years. With Board oversight, a committed staff, enthusiastic Fellows, dedicated educators, explorers, photographers, scientists, geographers, storytellers, volunteers, partners and an engaged community, we are committing to face the most challenging issues of our time with confidence, bringing the interdisciplinary strength of geography to bear on matters that face us now and in the future. We are confident that we will achieve great things together.

While the strategic goals and priorities articulated in the plan provide a framework for the future, this plan should be seen as a living document that can be reviewed and adapted as opportunities present themselves to the RCGS and our community.

We know if we succeed, we will be enhancing the lives of Canadians. Our mission of **making Canada better known to Canadians and to the world** is as vital today as it was in 1929, and will inform our goals for our second century.



“ *Making Canada better known.* ”









\*For credit information on the photos featured in this project, please visit:  
[rcgs.org/stratplancredits](https://rcgs.org/stratplancredits)