

**Legislative
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**Assemblée
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Legislative Research
Information and Technology Services Division
Room 2520, Whitney Block
Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1A9
Telephone: (416) 325-3675
Facsimile: (416) 325-3696

Recherche législative
Division des services de l'information et de la technologie
Bureau 2520, Edifice Whitney
Queen's Park
Toronto (Ontario) M7A 1A9
Téléphone: (416) 325-3675
Télécopieur: (416) 325-3696

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**ONTARIO FRENCH-LANGUAGE EDUCATIONAL
COMMUNICATIONS AUTHORITY:
ORDER-IN-COUNCIL APPOINTMENT OF
BARAK QUEIJA ***

Prepared for:

Standing Committee on
Government Agencies

Prepared by:

Jason Apostolopoulos
Research Officer
Legislative Research

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INTRODUCTION

This paper was prepared for Members participating in the Committee’s review of the Order-in-Council appointment of Barak Queija as part-time member and Vice-Chair of the Ontario French-language Educational Communications Authority, commercially known as Groupe Média TFO (hereinafter “TFO”)¹. It describes the operation of TFO, presents information about the appointees, and suggests possible lines of questioning.

ONTARIO FRENCH-LANGUAGE EDUCATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS AUTHORITY (TFO)

Enabling Statute		Responsible Ministry	
<i>Ontario French-language Educational Communications Authority Act, 2008</i>		Education	
Agency Type		Most Recent Annual Report	
Operational Enterprise		2019-20	
Activities of the Agency			
The board has a mandate to provide a broad range of educational and cultural programs and services that reflect the dynamic and rich nature of French-speaking Ontario. The Authority governs TFO, the province's source for Franco-Ontarian educational and cultural multimedia products, and serves all those interested in knowledge, discovery and learning.			
Board Membership			
Statutory Number of Members: 9 part-time members		Position	Remuneration
No. Appointed by Cabinet: All		Chair	Up to \$350 per diem
Term of Office: Up to 5 years, plus 5 year renewals		Vice Chairs ²	Up to \$250 per diem
		Members	Up to \$200 per diem
Position Requirements			
No members shall be public servants employed under Part III of the <i>Public Service of Ontario Act, 2006</i> .			

BACKGROUND

The Ontario Educational Communications Authority (TVO) was originally mandated to produce content serving the Franco-Ontarian community starting in 1966.³ In 2008, the Ontario French-language Educational Communications Authority (TFO) become an autonomous agency, following the passage of the *Ontario French-language Communications Authority Act, 2008*.⁴

¹ TFO stands for Télévision française de l'Ontario.

² The Lieutenant Governor in Council may designate one of the other members as Vice-Chair, and shall appoint a person other than a member of the Authority as Chief Executive Officer.

³ TFO, [History](#).

⁴ *Ontario French-language Educational Communications Authority Act, 2008*, S.O. 2008, c. 10.

CURRENT OPERATIONS

TFO provides French-language educational and cultural multimedia content and services through television and digital media including videos, video games, mobile applications, as well as subscription and social media platforms. TFO operates the TFO television channel (the exclusive French-language television service in Canada operating entirely outside of Quebec), IDELLO (an online learning platform for teachers, early childhood educators, students and parents), BOUKILI (a collection of illustrated children's books in French), Mini-TFO (online videos and games for children 2 to 6 years), and le LUV (a production studio and incubator for digital content creation), among other programs.

TFO directly supports the Ministry of Education's French-language planning policy ([Politique d'aménagement linguistique](#)) and provides customized services and content for French and English-language school boards (including French as a Second Language programs) as well as other educational organizations.⁵

Additionally, TFO's current strategic plan (2020-2022) is centered on enhancing TFO's role more broadly as "an essential education and cultural partner to develop employability skills in French."⁶ This includes building content and infrastructure to enhance "permanent learning" in the Franco-Ontarian community and beyond, defined as the continuous development of skills and knowledge essential to employability and personal growth.⁷

While TFO content is catered to Ontario and the Franco-Ontarian community, it is increasingly exported to global markets such as the United States.

Minister's mandate letter

In his March 26, 2020 [mandate letter](#) to TFO, the Minister of Education requested TFO implement the following recommendations going forward:

- Work with the Ministry to develop a new memorandum of understanding (MOU)⁸
- Establish performance targets and measures for the organization
- Track statistical data on the use and adoption of all educational programs
- Work to ensure the efficiency and viability of the organization
- Ensure the efficient management of expenditure in accordance with the priorities of the government in accountability and financial management
- Work to increase self-generated income, including, but not necessarily limited to, philanthropy and sponsorships, and the marketing of current offerings

⁵ Ministry of Education, [Published Plan and Annual Report 2020-21](#).

⁶ Groupe Media TFO, [Strategic Plan 2020-2022](#).

⁷ Groupe Media TFO, [Annual Report 2019-20](#), p. 12.

⁸ The current MOU with the Ministry of Education was signed in 2011 and extended in 2019.

- Continue to work with the Ministry to promote transparency and good governance and implement the recommendations of Ontario’s [Agency Review Task Force](#) (focused on improving efficiency, effectiveness and value for money of provincial agencies)

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

As part of the [COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act, 2020](#) (passed June 21, 2020) amendments were made to both the [Ontario Educational Communications Authority Act](#) and the [Ontario French-language Communications Authority Act, 2008](#).

According to a government news release, the amendments broaden the mandates of TFO and TFO to allow them “to provide centralized administration, coordination and support for teacher-led online learning in the English-language and French-language publicly-funded education systems.”⁹ The overall purpose of the changes is to give secondary students more choices in online learning. TFO supports these amendments.¹⁰

Additional TFO developments since 2019-20 include the following:

- In fall 2019, TFO surpassed over a billion cumulative views on its YouTube channels.¹¹
- In response to COVID-19 and the closure of schools, TFO launched “Le Camp TFO en Famille” (TFO Family Camp) a digital platform for parents, teachers, and students. TFO noted the digital channel reached over three million views in the first three months of operation.
- TFO launched a “New Revenue Stream and Philanthropy” program to stimulate efforts to diversify its funding and ensure the long-term sustainability of the organization.
- In January 2021, TFO and the Consortium Centre Jules-Léger signed an agreement to develop educational resources for students with special needs.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Most of the Authority’s funding comes from the Ministry of Education, with smaller contributions from revenue-generating activities (e.g., sale of signal subscriptions), and grants from the federal government and other provinces. According to TFO’s Financial Statements, the total amount of funding received from the Government of Ontario in 2019/20 was \$30.8 million, which is the same

⁹ Office of the Premier, “[Ontario Starting Down the Path to Growth, Renewal and Economic Recovery](#),” news release, July 8, 2020.

¹⁰ Groupe Média TFO, “[OTELFO Bill Submitted to Queen's Park - New mandate for Groupe Média TFO](#),” news release, July 8, 2020.

¹¹ Ibid.

amount as in 2018/19 (with the exception of \$1 million received in 2018/2019 for the build out of TFO's new Ottawa offices).¹²

Total expenses for the Authority were \$38.9 million 2019-20. This includes \$6.8 million for content and programming, \$7.5 million for production and technology, and \$8.1 million for administration.¹³

In a 2017 white paper, TFO noted issues with the current funding model used by the Government of Ontario. Among other things, TFO noted it has shifted to digital technologies and changed its corporate culture; however, the government's funding model remained unchanged. The funding model is based on traditional educational television and does not reflect the needs of modern digital platforms. The white paper states that, "[u]nder the current funding model, there is little if any room for Groupe Média TFO to continue to achieve further progress as a digital leader [and] fully realize its potential for innovation."¹⁴

MEDIA COVERAGE

A January 30, 2021 article by Radio-Canada reported that TFO had recently spent more than \$1 million to renew its brand image and overhaul its corporate website. A statement from TFO defended the decision as being in compliance with all provincial standards and that the rebrand helped lead to a 10% increase in subscriptions. However, a statement from the Ministry of Education noted the decision was entirely made by TFO and the Ministry had not been consulted.¹⁵

A June 14, 2018 article by Playback Daily reported that TFO had terminated 19 positions (including eight permanent and 11 contract positions), based on information provided by TFO. However, Unifor challenged these numbers and claimed TFO had actually laid off 37 workers.¹⁶ According to a statement by TFO, the cuts were made because TFO was "facing stagnating funding from the Ministry of Education, declining cable revenues and an increase in fixed costs" which include items such as collective agreement costs.¹⁷

THE WITNESS

According to the Office of the Premier, the Witness, of Toronto, is a Certified Financial Planner for IG Wealth Management, and a former Consultant for Accenture (professional services company). His community involvement includes serving as President and Chapter Chair for the Sigma Chi Fraternity and as President and Fundraising Chair for the Certified Executor Advisor Network (CEAN), Toronto Chapter.

¹² Groupe Média TFO, [Annual Report with Financial Statements 2020-21](#), p. 87.

¹³ Ibid., p. 96.

¹⁴ Groupe Média TFO, [Numérique Éducatif Francophone](#) (2017), p. 36.

¹⁵ Natasha MacDonald-Dupuis, "[Le diffuseur public TFO en Ontario a dépensé 1 million pour changer son logo et son site](#)," *Radio-Canada*, 30 janvier 2021.

¹⁶ Regan Reid, "[Layoffs hit TFO](#)," *Playback Daily*, June 14, 2018.

¹⁷ Ibid.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

What has motivated the witness to seek this position?

Could the witness describe previous experiences that might be of assistance for undertaking this position?

What particular contribution does the witness hope to make?

In the witness's opinion, what is required to succeed in the face of challenges created by COVID-19?