

AmbCanada Annual Report 2024-25

This report to the membership of AmbCanada is meant to serve double duty as a summer update on our activities to date this year and as the Annual Report for 2024-25 which I promised to send out to all members at our May Annual General Meeting. So, please excuse the length.

AmbCanada - CIPS Policy Conference

On May 12, 2025 we convened our first ever foreign policy conference at the University of Ottawa. Entitled " Finding Canada's Place in a Disordered World", we organized this event in partnership with the Centre for International Policy Studies (CIPS) at the University, under the direction of Prof. Alexandra Gheciu. The half-day conference was organized around three panels looking at the impact on Canada of the changes in U.S foreign policy under the new Trump Administration. The twelve speakers and moderators were drawn from our members, plus former senior public servants, think tank experts and University of Ottawa faculty. Six more partner organizations helped us to promote it. We had a "sold-out" crowd of over 130 people in the room (with many more whom we could not accommodate) plus 270 people following online from around the world. C-SPAN recorded the entire event and will be broadcasting different sessions from it over this summer. The feedback we received was universally positive. The conference was a clear demonstration of how we can advance our objective of making the value of diplomacy better understood by Canadians. The Board intends to repeat this initiative next year and is very open to co-sponsoring smaller events in a similar format with other universities in Canada.

Annual General Meeting

Given the timing of the policy conference, we decided to hold our 2025 AGM a month earlier this year, on May 13th, to make it easier for members visiting from outside Ottawa to attend both events. We had 49 members present in person at the Royal Ottawa Golf Club and another 53 present online. I gave a report on the Association's outreach and program activities over the previous year, Kathleen Mackay as Vice-President reported on our membership numbers and Phil Pinnington as Treasurer spoke to our (very healthy) financial situation. The substance of each of these presentations is given below.

New Board Members

One of the main aims of the by-laws adopted at our first AGM in 2022 was to encourage a more regular and predictable turn-over in our Board. Board members now serve for a three-year term which can be renewed once for a total of six years. New Board members are first proposed by the Nominating Committee chaired by Ian Burchett, then approved by the Board as a whole and finally ratified by the AGM.

This year, we had a greater than normal turn-over: Bob Hage and Kathleen Mackay both came to the end of their six years on the Board; Pierre Guimond decided not to extend for a second three-year term and David McKinnon elected to retire from the Board after two years. To replace them, the AGM ratified the following new members:

Gwyn Kutz
Olivier Nicoloff
Scott Proudfoot
Chris Thornley

It is worth noting that all four new Board members have retired in the past three years. In part this reflects the reality that recently retired people are more willing to take on new volunteer roles. But it also reflects a conscious choice of the Nominating Committee and the Board to seek out new members who can assist us in recruiting other recently retired Heads of Mission to join the Association. In this way renewal in the Board helps us stay in touch with the changing composition of our wider membership.

New Vice-President

This summer, we also had to find a new Vice-President to succeed Kathleen Mackay, who had served in the role since February 2022. At the AGM, I expressed my deep appreciation to Kathleen for her service over the past three years. She took the lead in recruiting Diane Godard and then Karin Reinecke as our Virtual Office Manager and she maintained a steady eye on our finances through several changes in Treasurer. She chaired the Membership Committee and closely tracked our performance in recruiting and retaining members. She organized all of our AGMs and served as our official host at last December's holiday gathering in Ottawa. Her relentlessly practical approach to all issues and her good humour will be missed by all of us on the Board. Fortunately, Alison LeClaire was willing to replace Kathleen, and we confirmed Alison as our new Vice-President in our first Board meeting after the AGM in June.

Membership numbers

As of mid-May the total membership of the Association stood at 357. This is slightly down from our high point last year of 363 but we anticipate reaching that level as new people retire this summer and decide to join the association. Eleven new members have joined us since January 2025, as follows:

Rajani Alexander
Caroline Chrétien
Graeme Clark
Ariel Delouya
Wendy Gilmour
Benoit-Pierre Laramée

Mark McDowell
John Mundy
Lilly Nicholls
Donica Pottie
Philippe Rheault

Financial Situation

As our Treasurer reported to the AGM, the Association is overall in a healthy financial situation. We ended 2024 with a positive balance of \$4968.54 in revenues over expenses. We also have built up over the past five years a cushion of \$35,000 in GICs. Accordingly, the Board agreed in February that we should actively look for projects to spend some of this surplus in ways that will advance the goals of the organization. It was decided that the AmbCanada - CIPS policy conference would be an appropriate use for these funds and the Board approved spending \$6000 for this purpose. Given this expense plus some anticipated extra costs for the virtual office this year due we project a deficit at the end of this 2025 of \$6898 which we can cover, if needed, from our GICs.

One specific point to flag is the Board's decision in May to only accept payment for future events (such as our lunches) by credit card. We found that it was costing considerable extra time for our Virtual Office Manager to track payments by e-transfer into our bank account and correlate them with the registration lists for each event. The small amount we lose per transaction in- credit card fees is more than offset by the time saved by Karin if we put all payments on this basis. We appreciate members' understanding of this decision.

Foreign Service Coat of Arms

A high point of this year's AGM was the presentation of the newly approved Coat of Arms for the Canadian Foreign Service by the Chief Herald of Canada, Dr. Samy Khalid, and the Miramichi Herald, Fabienne Fusade, who worked with our steering committee throughout the design and approval process. Ian Burchett, who has been AmbCanada's lead for this initiative, has agreed to be the custodian of the Coat of Arms. At Ian's initiative, we have produced very attractive note cards with the Coat of Arms in packages of ten for sale to our members at cost for \$10.00 per package. We will be selling these at our in-person events in Ottawa this autumn. If you would like to buy some, please contact Karin Reinecke at info@ambcanada.ca.

Board Committee Structure

As part of the transition in the Board this summer, the mandates of our Board committees were reconfigured to align more explicitly with the objectives of the association. With our governing structure now well established, I proposed that the Governance and External Relations Committee be merged with the Communications Committee and that the newly

merged Committee be charged with advancing our first objective of promoting to Canadians the value of diplomacy. I also proposed that the mandate of our Membership Committee be expanded to address all services to members, as well as recruitment, consistent with our second objective of sustaining a community among former professional colleagues . The Board agree to these changes in June, and the newly constituted committees have now had their first meetings. We are always interested in hearing from members who are interested in serving on one of our Committees. If this is of interest to you, please write to me directly at michael.small.2010@gmail.com.

Program Events

Since last September we have held five well-attended events in the National Capital Region with: former Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy, former Foreign Minister Marc Garneau, journalist Paul Wells, current Deputy Minister of National Defence Stefanie Beck and former Canadian Ambassador to Mexico Graeme Clark. Thanks to Board member Doug George, we have been able to open these events to virtual participation, making them accessible to a wider audience of our members across Canada and internationally. We also held our always-popular Authors Lunch in November with five foreign service writers presenting their latest books. Recordings of their talks can be watched after the fact if you log onto the Members Only page from our website and then click on the link under Webinars.

Based on feedback from our membership survey last year, we also experimented in March with a more informal, roundtable event at Beechwood over morning coffee and at everyone's favourite price point – namely free. The talk was delivered in French by political philosopher and now foreign service officer, Philippe Bernier Arcand, on the rise of populism in Quebec, in Canada and beyond. In this regard, we followed a model used with great success by our colleagues at the Foreign Service Alumni Forum, whom we invited to join us. While there remains a dedicated audience for our lunch-time meetings at the Royal Ottawa Golf Club in our traditional format, our intention is to do more events at Beechwood in the coming year following this model. We will also do more events in partnership with the Forum and PAFSO.

I regret that we were not able to organize any speaker events outside of the National Capital region this past year, as a number of members urged us to do through the membership survey last year. In part this is because it is challenging to find a venue at an affordable price that will support live streaming which is essential for our events. Partnering with a university to co-sponsor an event as we did for the policy conference is probably the best way to address this. The Board will continue to work towards this goal in the coming year.

Our Program Committee led by Alex Bugailiskis is developing an impressive list of events for the coming year, which will be kicked off on September 9th with a lunch with John Hannaford who retired from public service this summer as Clerk of the Privy Council. If you

have suggestions for speakers (especially if you can assist us in reaching out to them) please forward their names via info@ambcanada.ca.

Regional Co-ordinators

Our total membership is almost evenly divided between those living in or near the National Capital Region and those living elsewhere in Canada or beyond. We have long had a tradition of a regional co-ordinator for members in Quebec and another for those living on Vancouver Island. This summer our Quebec co-ordinator, Pierre Guimond, stepped down from the Board. Fortunately, a new member, Benoit-Pierre Laramée, has agreed to replace him as our co-ordinator in Quebec. Earlier this year, David Drake agreed to succeed Sarah Hradecky as our co-ordinator for Victoria and the Islands, and he recently organized an elegant summer party for our members in British Columbia at the home of Marc and Patricia Lortie. Kathleen Mackay will be organizing a gathering in Toronto in September for members in the GTA and southern Ontario, and Scott Slessor has offered to be the contact point for members in the Halifax area. Alison LeClaire will be reaching out to all of these volunteers to find out what the expectations are of our members in these different areas of the country and how we can support them. If you have ideas on activities that might be of interest to AmbCanada members who live near you, please get in touch with Alison.

Mentorship Initiatives

Over the past year, we have focused our mentorship activities on newly appointed Heads of Mission and people considering applying for those jobs. While the Canadian Foreign Service Institute has been very open to our suggestions, progress has been slow. We were able to convene two focus groups in the spring, one with four experienced former HOMs and another with five recently appointed HOMs to discuss their respective interest in a dialogue around the tradecraft of diplomacy. We intend to follow that up in the autumn to determine if there is sufficient interest on both sides to make this a more regular offering.

Fortunately, the Institute this year was able to return to the past practice of convening the Heads of Mission training course in person. This time not only were two of our most experienced HOMs given an opportunity to deliver a session to the first-time HOMs, but twenty of our members were then invited to have lunch with the group, organized in tables by the country or region where the course participants expected to serve. Our aim is to make this lunch involving a wider cross-section of our members a regular feature of the HOM course going forward.

Recently, one of our members, Tim Martin, has helped us launch a pilot proposal for a mentoring initiative with third- and fourth-year cadets at the Royal Military College (RMC). The purpose is to give these future military leaders a broader appreciation of diplomacy and international relations. We are looking for about six mentors from AmbCanada who could be partnered with RMC cadets for around six one hour one on one sessions between

November and April. If you are interested in volunteering for this initiative, please write directly to Tim at tim@diplomaticcounsel.com by September 5, 2025.

Future Event with the Governor General

We were delighted that the Governor-General, the Right Honourable Mary Simon, accepted our invitation last year to become AmbCanada's first Honorary Member. Along with Bob Hage, I met with Her Excellency in January to discuss organizing a public event with her for members of our Association. The idea which emerged from that meeting was to organize a panel discussion between the Governor-General, one or two former Heads of Mission and one or two past winners of Deborah Chatsis Scholarship for indigenous graduate students at Carleton University. The audience for this panel would include not only our members but also university students who might be interested in studying international relations and potentially applying for the scholarship in the future and/or a career in the foreign service. We are now in active discussions with Rideau Hall and Carleton University to work out a date and place for this event. Look out for a further announcement in the autumn.

Annual Holiday Reception

This event is among the highlights of the AmbCanada calendar for many of our members. The 2024 event was no exception. It was very well attended by 140 members, as well as a number of senior departmental officials, including the Deputy Minister who offered thoughtful and insightful remarks during the brief formal segment of the event. A transcript of those remarks was later sent out to all members. I am delighted to confirm that the Deputy Minister has already agreed to host us again on the 9th floor, on either 2 or 3 December 2025. Stay tuned for a save the date coming this fall.

Sincerely,

Michael Small
President
Canadian Ambassadors Alumni Association (AmbCanada)