Proposal for an
**Information Incident
Research Approach**
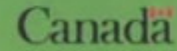
February 9, 2024

CANADIAN
DIGITAL
MEDIA
—
RESEARCH
NETWORK

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Canada

Information Incident Research Approach

Agenda

1) Canadian Digital Media Research Network **Activities to date**
2) **Defining an incident** in the Context of Information Ecosystems
3) Information Incident Research **Framework**
4) Implementing an Information Incident Research **Process**
5) Alignment and **Next Steps**

Goal: **Alignment** between PCO needs and CDMRN activities

- Gather **feedback** on proposed Information Incident Research Framework
- Collect **considerations and ideas** to help further develop model

1) The Canadian Digital Media Research Network
Activities to Date

Information Incident Research Approach | **CDMRN Progress**

In the first year of operation...

New model for collecting and understanding the Canadian media ecosystem across a diversity of platforms;

Canadian **Community of Practice** focused on information ecosystem health;

Numerous projects fostering resilience, research excellence, and deepening Canadian capacity to understand and respond to information threats;

Benchmark of overall health of the Canadian information ecosystem;

Canadian information ecosystem map that provides time-varying evaluations of information ecosystem health, influence, and core health measures through cross-platform data collection;

Ground-breaking method of detecting foreign information interference.

Information Incident Research Approach | CDMRN Progress

CDMRN Spotlight Projects

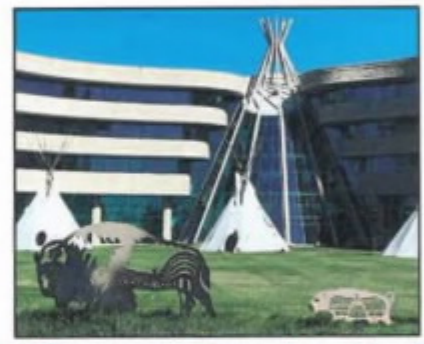### DisinfoDigest Online Platform

DisinfoWatch

Monitoring and reporting on global mis/disinformation targeting Canada, our interests, and allies abroad

Computational Social Science Summer School

Toronto Metropolitan University

Building research skills to understand public discourse through social media using computational approaches

Indigenous Peoples, Media, & Democracy Conference

First Nations University

Examining the role of indigenous peoples in media and challenges faced in media creation

Information Incident Research Approach | **CDMRN Progress**

CDMRN Additional Projects

Assessing the Impact of Labels on AI-Generated Content in Canada
The Dais (TMU)

Analyse de contenus radicaux et extrémistes sur les réseaux socio-numériques au Québec et au Canada
UNESCO-PREV

Collecting & Analyzing Data through Data Fluencies tools and methods
Digital Democracies Institute

Policy Interventions to Improve Platform Governance for Election Integrity and Health Communication
Centre for Study of Democratic Institutions

Table-Top Exercise: Multistakeholder Collaboration during Information Events in Election Periods
Canadian Network on Information & Security Research

CAN035445

2) **Defining an incident** in the Context of Information Ecosystems

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Information Incident Research Approach | **Defining an incident**

What is the function of information in a democracy?

In a democracy, information plays a critical role in ensuring informed decision-making, facilitating deliberation, and promoting transparency and accountability.

It empowers citizens, enhances government responsiveness, and the shared factual understanding it engenders contributes to social cohesion.

The systematic processes and structured activities aimed at ensuring the continuous flow and integrity of information are essential for the maintenance of a healthy democratic system.

Information Incident Research Approach | **Defining an incident**

What is an information **incident?**

Disruption in the information ecosystem, including both sudden and prolonged interruptions, that significantly impacts the normal flow and/or integrity of information, leading to potential or actual harm to the public, government, Canadian democracy, and/or the broader information ecosystem.

Information Incident Research Approach | **Defining an incident**

How are incidents graded?

Information incidents can be characterized by:

REACH AND SPEED
The rate disruption impacts a population, and the reach (size and diversity of population affected)

INTERVENTION EFFORT
The scope and scale of resources (e.g. human, economic, political) required to contain and/or manage a disruption

NATURE OF IMPACT
Impacts on the system, including social, political and/or structural shifts, combined with the length of the refractory period (short- to long-term)

Information Incident Research Approach | **Defining an incident**

How are incidents graded?

	REACH AND SPEED	
Small or niche community		Diverse, national audience
Slow spread	← →	Rapid spread
Limited to single platform		Across all social platforms

	INTERVENTION EFFORT	
Internal response		Widespread multi-stakeholder collaboration
Minor intervention needed (e.g. fact checking, moderation)	← →	Significant intervention needed (e.g. major platform and/or government action)

	NATURE OF IMPACT	
Limited social, political, or systemic impact		Massive systemic impact, e.g. social, political, diplomatic harm
Confusion or minor chilling	← →	Societal disruption
Quick recovery		Serious long-term impacts

Information Incident Research Approach | **Defining an incident**

Classification of information incidents

Minor

Example: coordinated harassment of a small number of Canadian parliamentarians on Twitter for a short period of time

Moderate

Example: systematic misinformation and harassment following an important geopolitical event

Major

Example: foreign interference attempt during an election, Meta blocking news across their social platforms

3) Adapting an Emergency Management **Framework** for Information Incidents

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Information Incident Research Approach | **Framework and operations**

Emergency Management Cycle

Emergencies are managed through
four interdependent phases:

I.   Prevention & Mitigation
II. Preparedness
III. Response
IV. Recovery

Phases are undertaken concurrently or
sequentially, with core activities and
outputs associated with each phase.

Information Incident Research Approach | **Framework and operations**
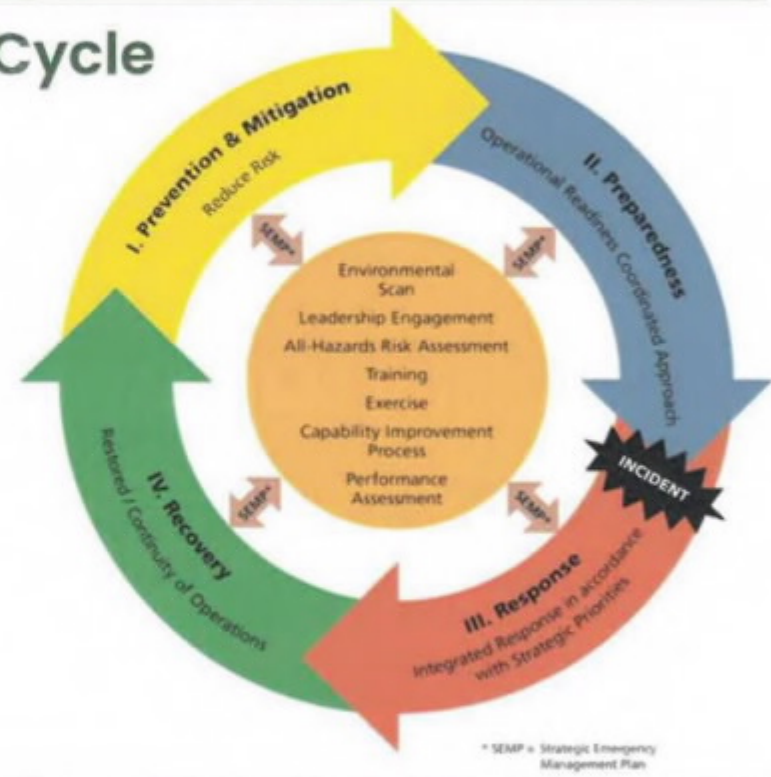
Adapting the framework for information incidents

A. Preparedness   **B. Response**

Information Incident

D. Prevention/Mitigation   **C. Recovery**
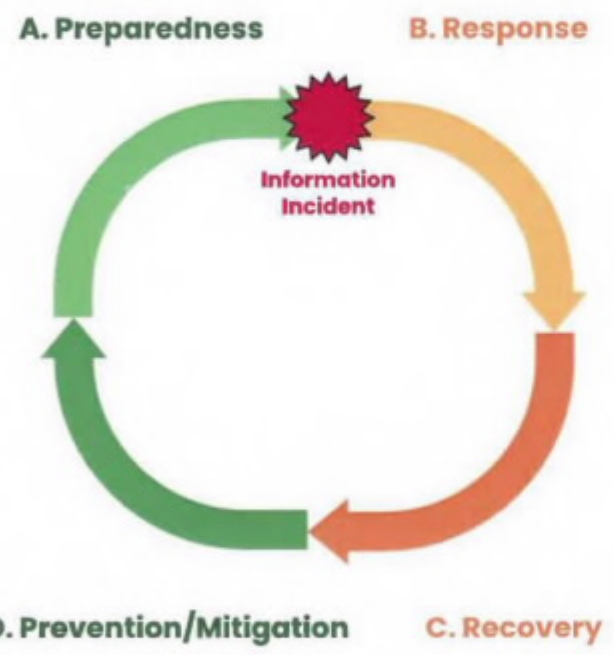
Information incidents can be "managed" using the same four functions.

The CDMRN is already producing outputs aligned with each function.

Information Incident Research Approach | **Framework and operations**

Research Network operations during cycle

A. Preparedness

B. Response

Information Incident

Normal operations

Incident operations

D. Prevention/Mitigation

C. Recovery
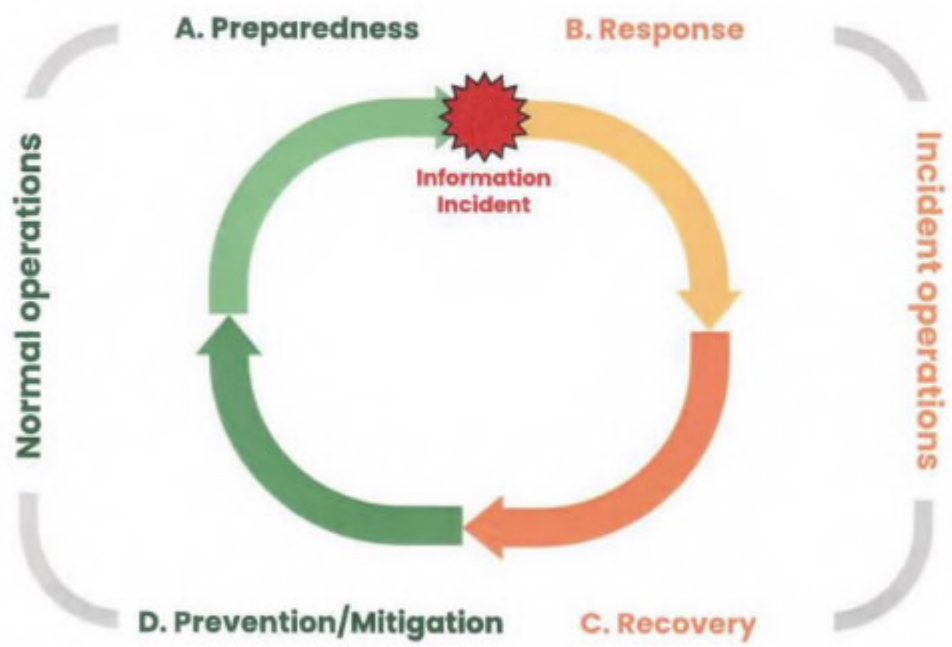
Normal Operations
- Continuous knowledge, capacity, and resilience building across the entire information ecosystem.

Incident Operations
- Research and knowledge mobilization regarding the characteristics, impacts, and responses to incidents.

4) **Implementing** an Information Incident Research **Process**

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Information Incident Research Approach | **Implementation**

Research Network outputs and process

A. Preparedness

B. Response

Normal activities

Incident activities

D. Prevention/Mitigation

C. Recovery
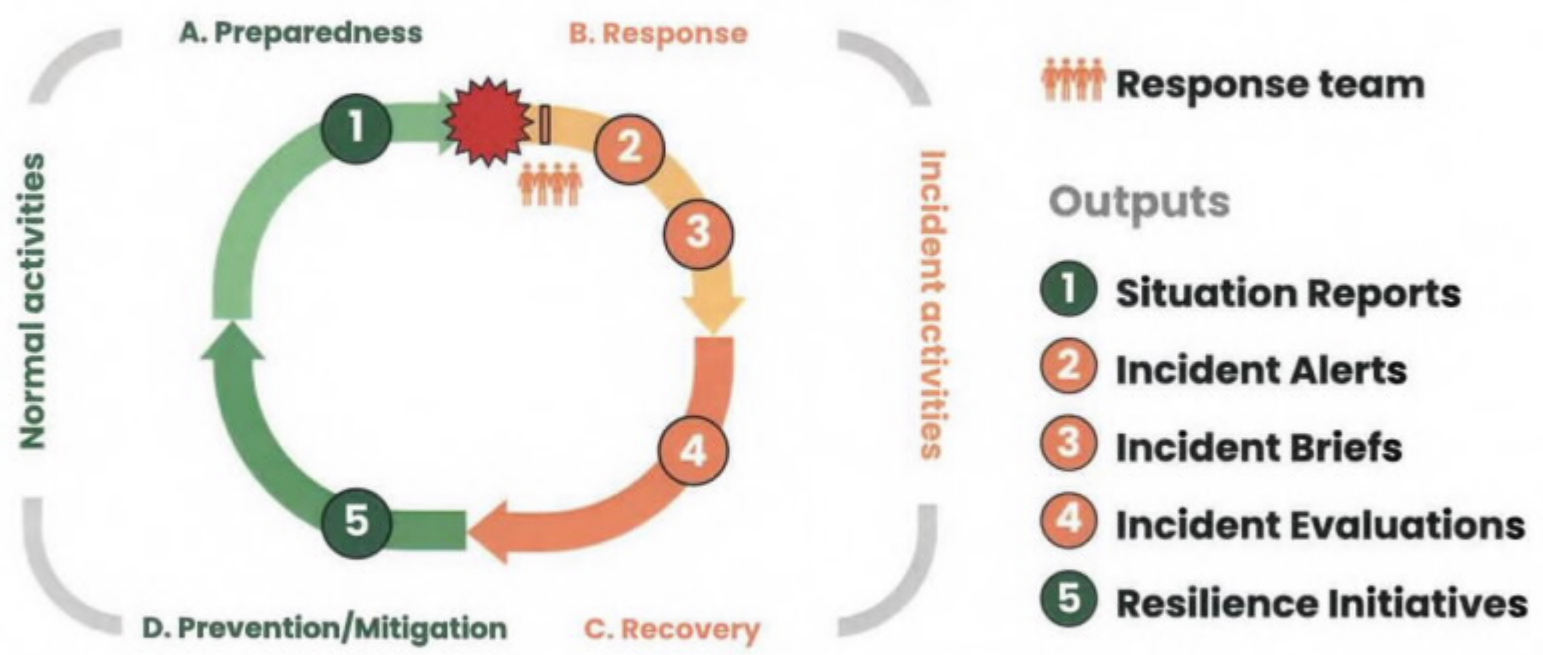
Response team

Outputs

1 **Situation Reports**

2 **Incident Alerts**

3 **Incident Briefs**

4 **Incident Evaluations**

5 **Resilience Initiatives**

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Information Incident Research Approach | **Implementation**

Preparedness activities

A. Preparedness
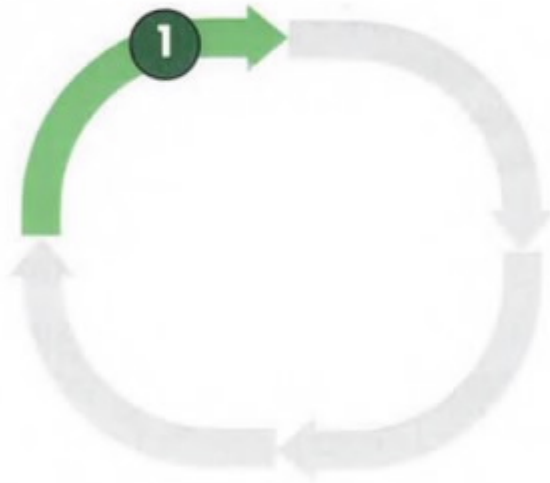
(1) Situation Report

Monthly public–facing reports highlighting overall information ecosystem health, trends, issues, including a specific focus on mis/disinformation and foreign interference.

- ☐ Information ecosystem **metrics**
- ☐ Information **trends**
- ☐ Evaluation of **risks**

Information Incident Research Approach | **Implementation**

Preparedness activities: situation report

STATE OF THE INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM
I. METRICS

Proposed contents:

- ❏ Trust measures*
- ❏ Prevalence of Misinformation, Disinformation, & Decontextualization*
- ❏ Perception of foreign interference*
- ❏ Platform usage and engagement*
- ❏ Engagement with and usage of news and government content
- ❏ Characteristics of the information ecosystem

Would this be useful for your work?

If so, how would you use it?

If so, what are the most important elements?

Is the timing aligned with need?

Is there any content missing or unnecessary?

What considerations are important when producing this?

Information Incident Research Approach | **Implementation**

Preparedness activities: situation report

STATE OF THE INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM

II. TRENDS

Proposed contents:

- ❑ Issues Canadians are thinking and talking about*
- ❑ Key topics of interest in online spaces
- ❑ Who is at the center of key and emergent topics
- ❑ Anomalous behaviour detection
- ❑ Key events and their relevance

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Information Incident Research Approach | **Implementation**

Preparedness activities: situation report

STATE OF THE INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM
III. RISKS

Proposed contents:

- ❑ Top misperceptions*
- ❑ Prevalence of misinformation, disinformation, and decontextualization narratives among political influencers
- ❑ Foreign entity centrality and any changes over the previous month
- ❑ Qualitative assessment of emergent risks and threats

Would this be useful for your work?
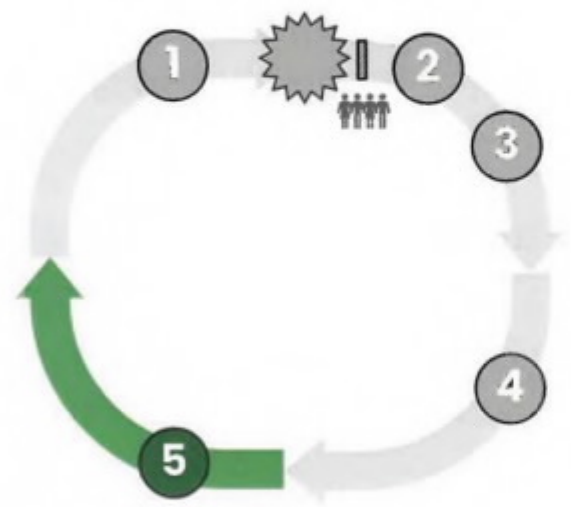
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Information Incident Research Approach | **Implementation**

Response activities: An incident occurs

B. Response
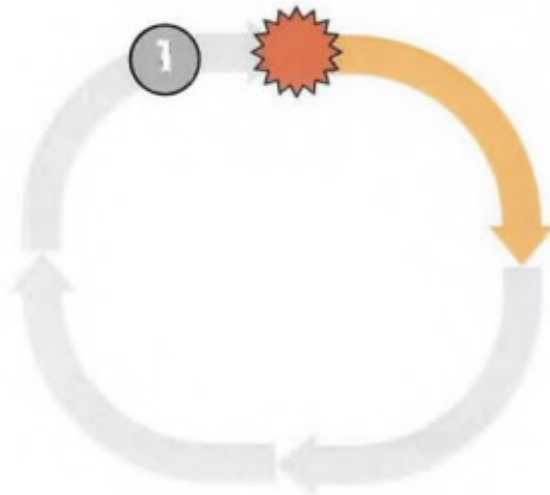
1) **Disruption** in the information ecosystem, including both sudden and prolonged interruptions,

2) that significantly **impacts the normal flow and/or integrity of information**

3) leading to potential or actual **harm**

4) to the public, government, Canadian democracy, and/or the **broader information ecosystem**.

Information Incident Research Approach | **Implementation**

Response activities: initial assessment of incident
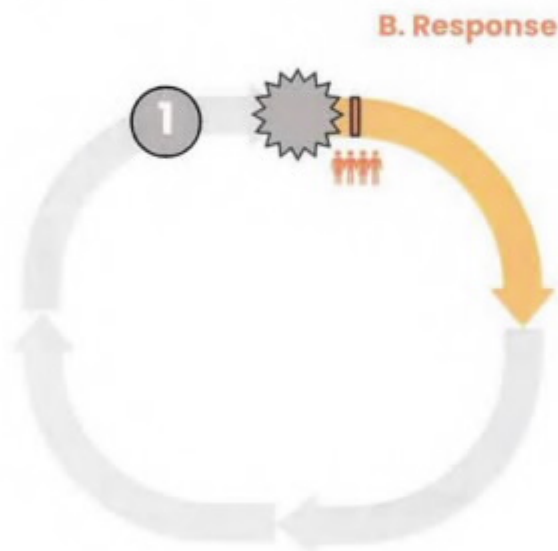
B. Response

Information Incident Response team

Activates after an incident to determine:

- ❑ Initial grade of incident
- ❑ If an incident alert is necessary
- ❑ Rapidly develop incident alert
- ❑ Initial response plan (subsequent activities, outputs, resources and timing

Information Incident Research Approach | **Implementation**

Response activities: alerts to the media and public

B. Response
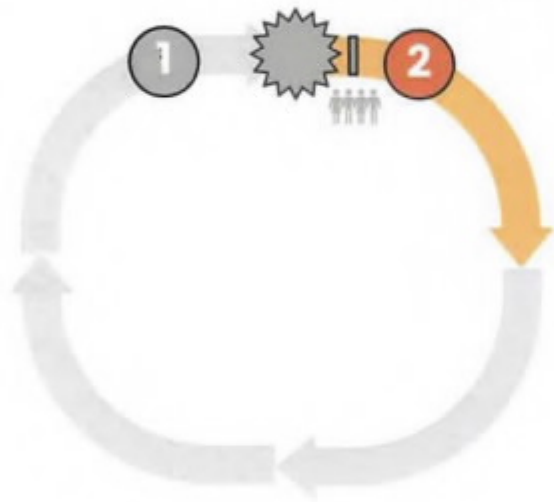
(2) Incident Alert

Public alert acknowledging incident and helping inform the first wave of public coverage and discussion

Information Incident Research Approach | **Implementation**

Response activities: alerts to the media and public

CANADIAN DIGITAL MEDIA RESEARCH NETWORK
INCIDENT ALERT

Proposed contents:

- ❑ Incident summary
- ❑ Background and broader context
- ❑ Key observations
- ❑ Observed and anticipated Impacts
- ❑ Emerging questions
- ❑ Expert contact information

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What considerations are important when producing this?

Information Incident Research Approach | **Implementation**

Response activities: briefs as needed

B. Response
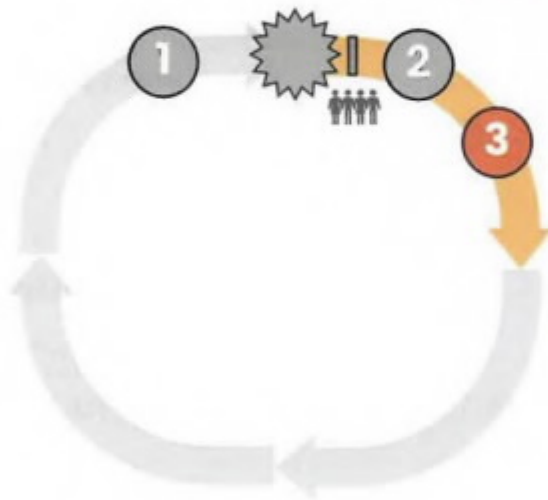
(3) Incident Briefs

Short reports or briefings for key stakeholders on evolving situation.

Briefs will provide emerging insights from analysis of survey and social data as an incident evolves

Information Incident Research Approach | **Implementation**

Response activities: briefs as needed

CANADIAN DIGITAL MEDIA RESEARCH NETWORK
INCIDENT BRIEFS

Proposed contents:

- ☐ Public awareness and perception of the incident
- ☐ Social discussion of the incident
- ☐ Evaluation of media and government response
- ☐ Ongoing severity, including reach and initial impact evaluation

Would this be useful for your work?

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Information Incident Research Approach | **Implementation**

Recovery activities: evaluations
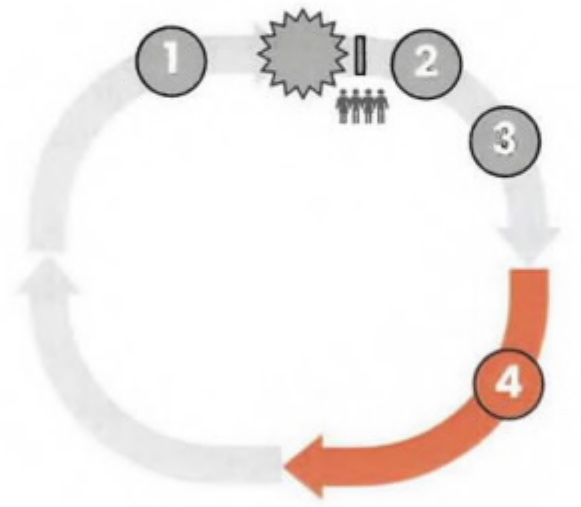
(4) Incident Evaluations

For major incidents, we will deliver a full public-facing debrief paper that focuses on evaluating the impact of the incident on the information ecosystem.

C. Recovery

Information Incident Research Approach | Implementation

Recovery activities: evaluations

CANADIAN DIGITAL MEDIA RESEARCH NETWORK

INCIDENT EVALUATIONS

Proposed contents:

- ❏ Full analysis of public awareness and perception of the incident
- ❏ Full analysis of social discussion of the incident
- ❏ Shifts in population-level attitudes
- ❏ Shifts in online information environment

Would this be useful for your work?

If so, how would you use it?

If so, what are the most important elements?

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What considerations are important when producing this?

Information Incident Research Approach | **Implementation**

Prevention/Mitigation activities: resilience initiatives

D. Prevention/Mitigation

(5) Resilience Initiatives

A broad range of research-driven activities aimed at building a more resilient information ecosystem

Information Incident Research Approach | **Implementation**

Prevention/Mitigation activities: resilience initiatives

CANADIAN DIGITAL MEDIA RESEARCH NETWORK
RESILIENCE INITIATIVES

Proposed :

- ❑ Digital literacy campaigns
- ❑ Policy and governance evaluations
- ❑ Research training
- ❑ Journalism training
- ❑ Capacity building
- ❑ Whole-of-society coordination

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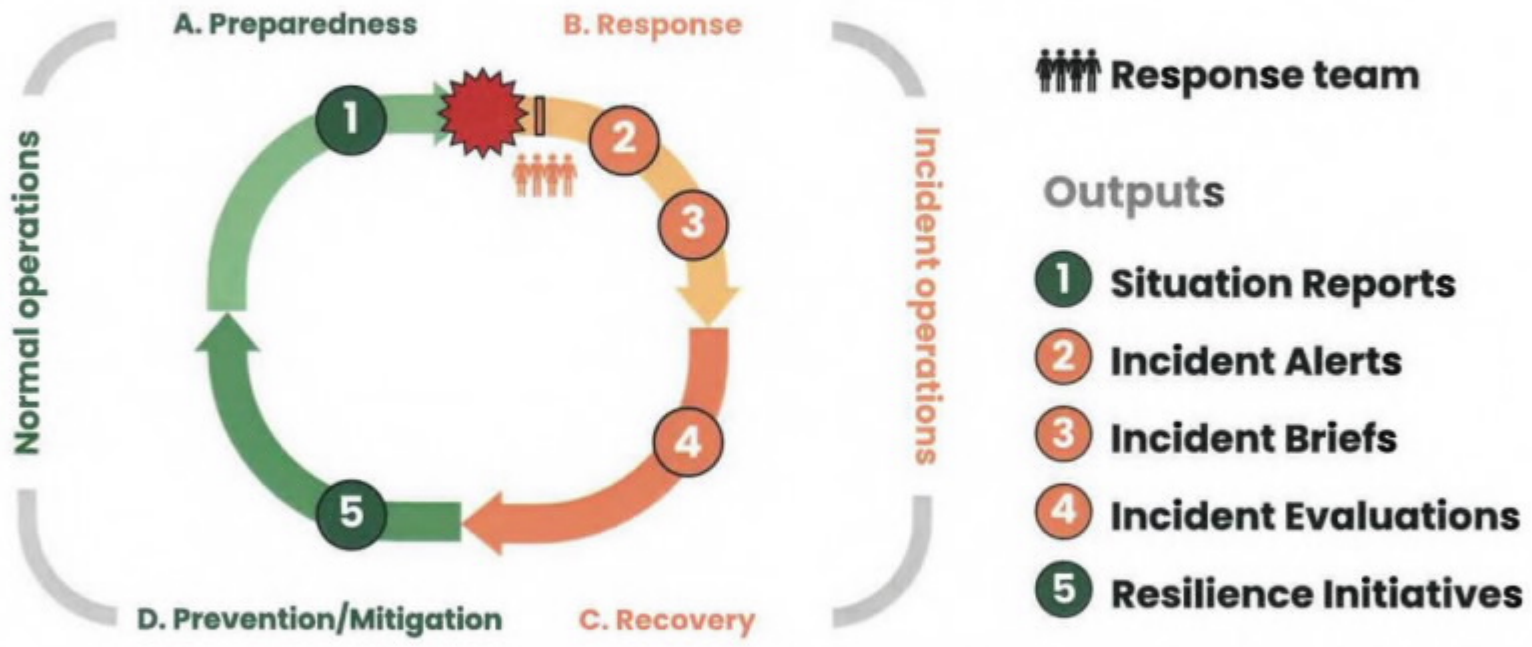
5) Alignment and Next Steps

Information Incident Research Approach | Alignment and next steps

PCO-CDMRN Alignment

	Response Team	1 Situation Reports	2 Incident Alerts	3 Incident Briefs	4 Incident Evaluations	5 Resilience Activities
What is the **prevalence of disinformation** in the Canadian information ecosystem?		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
What are, in real time, the **most significant disinformation narratives** circulating in the Canadian information ecosystem?		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Going forward, can we **measure the impact of the Government's interventions** in trying to correct specific false narratives?				✓	✓	✓
How do **disinformation narratives impact specific communities** (e.g. diaspora, Indigenous peoples)?		✓			✓	✓
How will you determine when there is **a significant disruption** in the baseline info ecosystem in Canada?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
What will be the **process for identifying whether the source** and amplification is foreign or domestic?	✓				✓	
What will be the **criteria used to determine when to alert** the public (including the GC)? How will it be **communicated**? Can this be done "in real time"?	✓		✓			
What measures of success will be deployed?					✓	✓

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Information Incident Research Approach | **Alignment and next steps**

Next steps

Circulate among existing network partners;

Finalize definitions, detailed scope, and thresholds;

Prepare response team;

Release first situation report;

Publish first incident evaluation;

Monitor for incidents.