

# **A Bold Vision for Canada: Building a Canadian Pro Bono Marketplace**

**2018 Pre-budget Consultation**

**A Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance**

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## **Introduction**

Pro bono services - the provision of professional services at no cost to those who cannot afford them - is a well-established public service within the legal profession. Today, this model is used globally by many other professions, companies, and associations to increase their productivity, competitiveness and capacity for innovation. Although there are a small number of notable exceptions, including LEAP, The Centre for Social Impact; Framework Foundation; and Endeavour, the global trend to organize a pro bono marketplace has yet to be taken up in Canada.

This proposal, the result of numerous meetings of leaders from the private, public and community sectors, is focused on the creation of a pro bono system designed to bring high quality, high-impact skills-based volunteering service to social change organizations in every part of Canada thus increasing the productivity and competitiveness of all the participating players. Cross-sectoral collaboration is key to increasing our social innovation capacity and is reinforced in the Strategic Innovation Fund.

If we want Canadians to be more productive in their workplaces and communities, we need to give them opportunities to use existing and develop new skills. Skills-based volunteering, including secondments and interchanges, are a critical way to do just that.

Corporate employees engaged in skills-based volunteering bring new innovation capacities back to the business. While gaining these skills they are also serving their community. A situation that also helps to attract and retain top talent. Skills-based volunteering is also a key method for realizing Canada's skills agenda.

## **Executive Summary**

Since July 2016 an influential group of multi-sector participants has gathered to discuss a bold idea: *the creation of a pro bono system that will bring high quality, high-impact pro bono services to social change organizations in Canada.*

Our vision: to create a pro bono system that helps accelerate social innovation in Canada while increasing the productivity and competitiveness of all participating players and realizing our skills agenda.

This initiative will engage every size of change maker, including those in the far north and amongst Canada's Indigenous communities. This work will contribute to positioning our corporate and civil society leaders on the world stage, and enable Canada to become a leader in a rapidly growing global network of countries that are already reaping the productivity and social rewards of an organized pro bono system.

By working with the Global Pro Bono Network, this initiative will build the capacity of Canada to excel as an innovation nation. It will do this by creating skills-based volunteering opportunities for professionals to partner with social change organizations.

Through use of an enabling platform and skilled staff, the pro bono network will connect highly skilled professionals, individually and in teams, to work with social change organizations to create greater social impact.

We are seeking a \$2M federal investment over five years to build and operate a national pro bono system. This investment will fund the development, incubation, implementation, and evaluation of a Canadian pro bono system leveraging the networks of the MaRS Discovery District and JW McConnell Family Foundation.

It will be the backbone of the system, offering a high-profile office and professional staff who are skilled in systems transformation and social innovation; an enabling platform leveraging existing global platforms; and a national, bilingual, high-impact social media campaign. This work will be co-created by key stakeholders from across sectors.

The promise this national initiative holds for Canada is to create the kind of transformational change already experienced in other countries. The US-based Taproot Foundation has engaged 17,000 professionals, supported over 7,000 projects, and secured 1.5M donated hours valued at over \$160M over the past several years.

The federal investment will be the catalyst that reshapes Canadian civil society. It will enhance the innovation capacity of Canadian corporations and give Canada a competitive advantage in an era of globalization fully linked to the Innovation and Skills Plan, particularly as related to work-integrated and life-long learning and getting ready for the changing nature of work.

Now is the time for a national pro bono movement that leads to increased productivity for Canadians and increased competitiveness of our businesses.

## **A Bold Vision for Canada: Building a Canadian Pro Bono Marketplace**

### **Background**

Today's pro bono movement is an organized, global phenomenon, with 29 participating countries. The creation and growth of this global network has been spearheaded by a partnership between the US-based Taproot Foundation, the BMW Foundation, LinkedIn, and many others who collectively define pro bono services as "*donated professional services benefiting organizations working to improve society.*"

In the US alone, Taproot estimates that over \$160M in pro bono services has been donated since 2003 with over 17,000 professionals supporting 7000 projects, making it the fastest growing volunteering program in the US.

Since July 2016 an influential group of multi-sector participants have gathered to discuss a bold idea: *the creation of a pro bono system that will bring high quality, high-impact pro bono services to social change organizations in Canada.*

Co-hosted by national and international foundations the gatherings brought together Canadian leaders from the corporate, small business, government, philanthropic, and social sectors. In addition to these co-hosting organizations, participants included individuals from RBC, Tata Consulting Services, AIMIA, the Boston Consulting Group, Capacity Canada, the Province of Ontario, Accenture, Bénévoles d'affaires, CESO, the Ontario Trillium Foundation, Innoweave, Bridgeable, Endeavour, The Arthritis Society and LEAP among many others.

What emerged from these gatherings was a new vision for a Canadian pro bono system, alongside an understanding of what it will take to scale this work across our country. The group was energized by the potential for pro bono services to contribute to Canada's economic, productivity, innovation, competitiveness, community and cultural goals by:

- providing social change organizations access to sophisticated marketing, technology, data analytics, planning and strategy resources to accelerate their social impact,
- giving individuals and corporations an opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to social change organizations, and
- driving innovation and enhancing the capacity of small businesses and corporations by providing exposure to new ways of thinking and doing through robust partnerships with social change organizations.

The national participants also gave careful thought to the necessity of bilingualism, the ability to reach northern and Indigenous communities, and the need to adapt approaches to different regional, geographic, and cultural needs and opportunities.

### **Alignment with Federal Government Priorities**

The federal government is seeking to identify measures that will assist Canada's businesses to meet their productivity and competitiveness goals, and thereby contribute to economic growth in the country.

*We believe that federal investment in a national initiative to create a pro bono system will help achieve these goals.*

We can help Canada succeed as an innovation nation by creating skills-based volunteering opportunities for professionals to partner with social change organizations. Through use of enabling technology and skilled staff, this pro bono system will connect highly skilled professionals, individually and in teams, who want to contribute to Canadian civil society by working with social change organizations to create greater social impact.

A Canadian pro bono system will make an important contribution to community and cultural infrastructure across Canadian society, and provide access to critical resources for Canada's social change organizations.

A Canadian pro bono system will also make an important contribution to Canada's productivity and competitiveness goals. In order to enhance the innovation capacity of corporations and small businesses, we need to ensure exposure to new ways of thinking and doing. Pro bono partnerships not only allow for reciprocal learning and talent retention, but also increase the receptor capacity of corporations for innovation.

Through the creation of pro bono opportunities, we would increase the pool of talent and skills required for Canada to succeed in the innovation economy. This includes thinking at the systems level, accelerated skills sharing, experiential learning, the acquisition of cross-cultural knowledge and competence, and reducing the skills gap so clearly articulated by corporate Canada.

Pro bono services are a way to accelerate exposure to the complexity of working across sectors in an era of globalization, giving Canada a competitive advantage. It is a way of enabling lifelong learning in a manner that increases our capacity for innovation, while accelerating growth.

- The type of job skills that volunteers acquire is associated with their perceptions of improved chances of job success. Some 54% who gained managerial skills said volunteering improved their chances of success on the job, compared with 28% who did not gain such skills.
- Similarly, it was more common for employees who gained office or communication skills to say their volunteering had improved their chances of success on the job.

<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-008-x/2012001/t/11670/tbl05-eng.htm>

**Stats Can: Canadian Social Trends.  
Matt Hurst, 2012**

### **A Bold Vision for Canada: Request for Federal Investment**

We are seeking a \$2M federal investment over five years to build and operate a national pro bono system.

This investment will fund the development, incubation, implementation and evaluation of this national initiative. It will be used to establish the backbone of the system, including:

- an **office** based at MaRS Discovery District, Canada's largest innovation hub,
- **professional staff** who are skilled in systems transformation and social innovation to provide thought leadership,
- **outreach** across Canada, engaging service providers and recipients,

businesses, and local, regional, national and international networks and collaborators, as well as civil society partners already operating in this sector,

- **training** and assessment and reporting on progress,
- use of enabling **technology** leveraging existing global platforms, and
- a national, bilingual, regionally sensitive, high-impact **social media campaign**.

This work will be led by corporate Canada and civil society partners to develop pro bono programs for their communities. We will also develop the next generation of pro bono consultants by working with business and design schools across the country so that new graduates will become life-long skills-based volunteers.

The promise this national initiative holds for Canada is to create the kind of transformational change already experienced in other countries. For example, in 2008, a meeting of leaders at the White House resulted in a bold call for businesses to pledge their time and talent and lead transformational change in corporate community involvement. In less than two years, the US experienced the largest commitment of pro bono services in history, with more than 500 companies delivering over \$2B worth of services to nonprofits addressing critical community needs.

Impact 2030 offers a similar and bold vision for engagement of corporate Canada in these efforts and participation in this work will be a key enabler in helping Canada support the Sustainable Development Goals.

Now is the time for a national pro bono movement that leads to transformational change, economic growth, and social innovation.

### **Matching Investment**

We recognize the importance of seeking financial investment from corporate, philanthropic, and public sectors. To that end we will build on the support of the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation who have pledged \$1M over 5 years. We are also negotiating with other partners to support this work. We understand financial sustainability is key to our success, and anticipate strong participation, including financial and service contributions, from the private sector in Canada.

Taken together, these investments will enable Canada to scale existing initiatives to a national level, leverage global experience and capacity including business models and technology, drive participation and contributions across sectors, and develop the backbone for a sustainable pro bono system.

### **Conclusion**

This proposal, supported by an influential group of leaders from the private and community sectors, sets out a bold vision and opportunity for collaboration and social innovation across all sectors, regions and communities.

This national initiative will be a catalyst that reshapes Canadian civil society and enables Canada to be a leader in a rapidly growing global network of countries already reaping the productivity and social rewards of a pro bono system. It will enhance the innovation capacity of corporations, support our social change organizations, and give Canada a competitive advantage in an era of globalization.

We believe this national initiative holds great promise for Canadian civil society, and is a worthy goal for consideration in the upcoming federal budget.