

Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the Upcoming Federal Budget

By: Salar Chagpar, CEO & Chief Visioneer of **Prepr
Foundation**

What measures could the federal government take to restart the Canadian economy, as it recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic?

List of Recommendations:

Recommendation 1: That the government develops a Canada-wide knowledge and innovation exchange network.

Recommendation 2: That the government provide funding for challenge-based, experiential learning in the amount of \$2,000 per post-secondary student.

Introduction

Given the current situation, with provinces and federal divisions implementing various relief and recovery efforts, it is critical that Canada cements its position as an innovative knowledge economy to attract talent and foreign investment and export made-in-Canada products and services.

The strength of our knowledge and innovation economy is driven by both access to talent, as well as the ability to collaborate across sectors and regions. It is also directly related to our access to talent, and particularly our ability to engage and nurture young talent.

“According to the World Economic Forum (WEF) Human Capital Report, Canada's youth benefit from a globally competitive educational system while its adults lead the world in levels of post-secondary attainment. The annual human capital index rates Canada ninth out of 130 countries and second in the G20, ahead of Germany (11th), France (17th), United Kingdom (19th) and U.S.A. (24th). With a score of 81.95, Canada's talent scored more than eight points higher than the G20 average and more than a point higher than the G7 average.”¹

Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 the potential advantages that Canada's youth have been afforded are at risk with fewer opportunities for young people to develop their skills and portfolios.

“The youth unemployment rate jumped to 27.2 per cent in April, from 16.8 per cent in March, while student unemployment was even higher, which the statistics agency said was “signalling that many could face difficulties in continuing to pay for their studies.”²

Prepr offers two recommendations to help strengthen and restart the Canadian economy, including fostering cross-sector innovation and ensuring young adults entering the workforce receive the support and opportunities to succeed.

¹<https://www.investinontario.com/spotlights/canada-ranks-high-world-economic-forum-human-capital-report>

² <https://www.toronto.com/news-story/9985174-youth-unemployment-rate-spikes-amid-pandemic/>

Recommendation 1: Support the development of a Canada-wide Innovation and Exchange network to support individuals, SMEs and academic institutions in collaborating to develop Made in Canada solutions.

Canada stands to benefit from the development of a national research and innovation exchange network. An innovation exchange network, such as proposed here, would support the development of Canadian innovation ecosystem needed to both preserve and build human capital. As we move towards economic recovery, it will be important for Canada to retain the best global talent and mitigate brain drain.

The proposed innovation exchange network could support businesses and individuals in the workforce with the visibility to research and development initiatives that are currently siloed in post-secondary institutions and other organizations and government bodies without the means for scale. This would help increase trust, transparency and collaboration with Canada's regional development agencies, network centres of excellence, innovation superclusters, incubators and accelerators, and research and innovation technology transfer offices of universities and colleges.

While many individuals, businesses and organizations are working towards the development of innovative solutions, there is currently limited visibility of solutions at different stages of development - from inception to scale. These innovations can also be sorted by sector and region. By improving visibility we can in turn improve knowledge mobilization, as well as cooperation across organizations. As innovations mature, they can be better identified and supported, resulting in increased commercialization of Canadian solutions.

Such a solution would also help to build regional, national and global connections to support not only the development of innovations, but also the internationalization of Canadian innovations.

Recommendation 2: That the government provide funding for challenge-based, experiential learning in the amount of \$2,000 per post-secondary student.

Looking at the work that organizations like Innovative Solutions Canada do, we recommend establishing an accessible and open network of public and private sector challenges that will provide youth with meaningful experiential learning opportunities.

This network would provide classified and categorized challenges for youth as they co-innovate and collaborate to co-solve the challenges of the future while building their skills. Many employers, if not on a hiring freeze, currently lack the structure or capability to provide meaningful, on-the-job training that will prepare youth for the digital economy and future of work that has been accelerated by COVID-19.

Research has shown that student-centered learning approaches are efficacious in improving student learning. In particular, the challenge based learning (CBL) methodology proposed by Apple Computer Inc., which employs a multidisciplinary approach in encouraging students to use their knowledge and technology to solve real-world problems, has reported to yield outstanding results.³

Supporting employers in both public and private sector through triangular cooperation around common challenges impacting their industry, market and internal business operations by connecting the young people of this great country with the opportunity to showcase their talent and learn to solve problems that will impact their local communities and businesses around them. Challenges will act as a conduit to further train and enhance the skills of youth and will ensure a systematic approach and investment into the digital future of Canadian youth. We need to follow suit with countries like Ireland who are aggressively investing in talent as an insurance policy to ensure the success of their economic sustainability and growth.

Minister Mitchell O'Connor of Ireland said:

"Since Higher Education is pivotal to underpin Ireland's future economic success and social development, I am delighted today to announce an additional €150m package including a further €74 million from NTF investment. Higher education needs to be in a prime position to respond to the impacts of Brexit and meet our digital skills needs by enabling institutions to focus on upskilling, reskilling and lifelong learning."⁴

³ L.F. Johnson, R.S. Smith, J.T. Smythe, R.K. Varon "ChallengeBased Learning: An Approach for Our Time", The New Media Consortium, Austin, Texas. [Online]

⁴<https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/f8dcf2-record-investment-in-education-and-skills-with-hundreds-of-new-teach>