

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

2017 Pre-budget Consultation

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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. 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 a recent meeting of leaders from the private and community sectors, is focused on the creation of a pro bono network and enabling platform designed to bring high quality, high-impact pro bono service to social change organizations in every part of Canada.

This as an opportunity for collaboration and social innovation involving all sectors – private, public and community – and a worthy goal for Canada’s sesquicentennial.

Executive Summary

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

Our vision: to create a Canadian pro bono network that builds on Canada’s abilities in all regions and all sectors.

This initiative will engage every size of change maker organization, including those in the far north and amongst Canada’s Indigenous communities. Our intent is in fact to name this initiative in consultation with Indigenous elders. 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 and leveraging the work of the Taproot Foundation in the US, 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 technology 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 \$10M federal investment over five years to build and operate a national pro bono network. This investment will fund the discovery phase, development, incubation, implementation, and evaluation of a Canadian pro bono network based at MaRS Discovery District.

It will be used to establish the backbone of the network, including a high profile office and professional staff who are skilled in systems transformation and social innovation; an enabling technology platform leveraging existing global platforms; and a national, bilingual, high-impact social media campaign. This work will be done in consultation with key stakeholders including those already operating in civil society.

The promise this national initiative holds for Canada is to create the kind of transformational change already experienced in other countries. The Taproot Foundation has been monitoring its progress in the US since 2003 and in that time they have engaged 17,000 professionals, supported over 7,000 projects, and secured 1.5M donated hours valued at over \$160M.

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.

Our sesquicentennial provides a historic moment for Canadian leaders to call for a national pro bono movement that leads to transformational change, economic growth, and social innovation.

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 other 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.

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

Co-hosted by the Brueinger Foundation, in partnership with the Taproot Foundation, the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, the BMW Foundation, and MaRS Discovery District, the gathering brought together Canadian leaders from the corporate, small business, philanthropic, and social sectors. In addition to these co-hosting organizations, participants included individuals from RBC, AIMIA, the Boston Consulting Group, Capacity Canada, Dexterity Ventures Inc., Accenture, Bénévoles d'affaires, Parachute, the Ontario Trillium Foundation, Innoweave, Bridgeable, Endeavour, The Arthritis Society and LEAP.

What emerged from this gathering was a new vision for a Canadian pro bono network, 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, innovation, 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.

Being from across the country, the participants at the gathering 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 expansion, innovation and prosperity goals, and thereby contribute to economic growth in the country. The federal government is also seeking to identify measures that would ensure communities throughout Canada enable residents to make their desired contribution to Canada's economic growth.

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

By working with the Global Pro Bono Network and based on the work of the Taproot Foundation, this initiative will build the capacity of Canada to excel as an innovation nation. We will do this by creating skills-based volunteering opportunities for professionals to partner with social change organizations. Through use of an enabling technology platform and skilled staff, the pro bono network 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 network 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 network will also make an important contribution to Canada's economic and innovation 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 base 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.

A Bold Vision for Canada: Request for Federal Investment

We are seeking a \$10M federal investment over five years to build and operate a national pro bono network.

This investment will fund the discovery phase, development, incubation, implementation and evaluation of this national initiative. It will be used to establish the backbone of the network, 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,
- an enabling **technology platform** leveraging existing global platforms, and
- a national, bilingual, regionally sensitive, high-impact **social media campaign**.

This social enterprise will work with 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.

Our sesquicentennial provides a historic moment for Canadian leaders to call for such a movement – a Canadian 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, and have already received a provisional commitment of up to \$1M from one interested donor. We will also tap into existing Taproot global pro bono funders to engage them in the Canadian marketplace. 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 movement.

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 Canada's sesquicentennial.