



2026

PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATION

Leading the world in public digital
infrastructure for human contribution.



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RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: That the Government of Canada formally recognize Canada as the permanent host jurisdiction of the Contribution Exchange's global secretariat and governance operations, including through a Prime Ministerial or ministerial letter of recognition.

Recommendation 2: That the Government of Canada direct the Privy Council Office to coordinate an interdepartmental federal engagement strategy with the Contribution Exchange, involving Employment and Social Development Canada; Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada; Development Canada; Global Affairs Canada; and the Department of National Defence.

Recommendation 3: That the Government of Canada authorize and support the exploration of a Canadian National Contribution Exchange as a chartered national entity within the Contribution Exchange's global governance framework.

BODY *of* SUBMISSION

WHO WE ARE

The Contribution Exchange is an international organization headquartered in Ottawa, Canada, structured as an international federation. It is building the first global system for indexing human contribution and mapping the knowledge and skills developed through it to employment and training standards. Contribution includes paid work, caregiving, volunteering, trades, cultural stewardship, and other purposeful activities recognized as valuable within their contexts. The Contribution Exchange exists to make that contribution, across civic, community, cultural, and economic contexts, visible, trusted, and portable through interoperable public digital infrastructure. The Contribution Exchange is currently active in the United States — including an emerging national US Contribution Exchange — and is seeing growing interest from the United Kingdom, Australia, and South Africa.

It is not an educational provider. It is a nonpartisan NGO that independently manages a public digital infrastructure, operating a global index and repository that allow jurisdictions to maintain sovereignty while participating in an interoperable global recognition system.

CONTEXT

Against this backdrop, Canada has entered a period of global reordering with impact on trade relationships, defence readiness, labour mobility, and geopolitical alignment. Global governance institutions and public digital infrastructure are not neutral assets in this changing environment: where they are housed determines who sets the agenda, who holds convening authority, and which jurisdictions carry long-term institutional legitimacy.

The Contribution Exchange has reached a point of accelerated international engagement. We are in the moment when other jurisdictions are recognizing the strategic value of hosting a global body and may attempt to replicate, relocate, or politically capture emerging governance functions. Canada has a narrow window to secure the Contribution Exchange's global mandate before competitive hosting dynamics harden.

This submission is anchored in the Contribution Exchange's mandate as a worldwide organization, not in any single domestic delivery program. National Contribution Exchanges, including a prospective Canada Contribution Exchange, are official national bodies chartered under the global Contribution Exchange's international governance framework; they implement

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contribution recognition domestically but are not part of the global Contribution Exchange itself. Recommendations 1 and 2 ask the government to secure and coordinate Canada's role as global host. Recommendation 3 asks for something narrower and sequential: authorization to explore, alongside the Contribution Exchange, what a chartered Canadian Exchange would require. That is a first step, not a funding commitment, and one that only makes sense once Canada's role as a global host is confirmed.

WHAT WE BUILD AND STEWARD

The Contribution Exchange stewards two public-benefit infrastructure systems that make skills and learning visible across systems while preserving user agency.

WBLNS™ (Work-Based Learning Numbering System) is a persistent identifier framework that indexes work-based learning objects, standards, and assessments, keeping them traceable and portable across contexts.

PathLedger™ is a sovereign digital ledger that lets contributors own their validated training and contribution records.

Together, WBLNS™ and PathLedger™ ensure that contribution recognition remains a public-benefit system rather than a commercialized or private, extractive platform model. Recognition stays sovereign while what is recognized can still move across domestic and international borders.

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR CANADA'S WORKFORCE AND ECONOMY

Start with the cost of doing nothing. Unfilled skill vacancies cost the Canadian economy an estimated \$25 billion in unrealized value — and the hardest skills to find are as often foundational, like communication and problem-solving, as narrowly technical (Conference Board of Canada, 2022). Small businesses, which make up 97.4% of Canada's workforce and 36.7% of private-sector GDP, are hit hardest and served worst: most training programs are built for organizations large enough to have an HR department to navigate them (Statistics Canada).

Meanwhile, 11% of Canadians 15 to 29 are classed as NEET. This translates to roughly 700,000 young people not in employment, education, or training (Statistics Canada). These youth are disproportionately early school leavers, young mothers, Indigenous, rural, and children of recent

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immigrants. Additionally, skilled newcomers face a related problem: non-recognition of foreign credentials is the single strongest driver of “deskilling” after arrival in Canada, pushing trained nurses, engineers, and tradespeople into unrelated, lower-wage work (Karki, 2026).

This is not unique to Canada, and naming it does not devalue post-secondary pathways. Colleges, universities, and registered apprenticeships remain essential, and nothing in this submission asks government to divert from them. However, governments worldwide are reaching the same conclusion: *a complete workforce needs more than one entry point*. The OECD is now urging vocational systems to build in the flexibility to serve learners that formal pathways were never designed to reach (OECD, 2023), and the European Union already treats skills built through work, caregiving, or informal training as potentially as valid as skills built in a classroom (CEDEFOP, 2023). This is true for Canada as well: Employment and Social Development Canada's own Canadian Apprenticeship Strategy is already built on the premise that skilled trades are a first-choice pathway, not a fallback (ESDC, 2026). Formal education is not the problem. Being the only funnel is.

NEET youth, newcomers, equity-deserving individuals, women, older workers, etc. — none of the people within these groups lack skill. What they lack is a system that can recognize the skills they already have, log and verify them, so they can be proven to an employer, a regulator, or a hiring agent. That is the specific problem WBLNS™ and PathLedger™ solve. Together, they are digital infrastructure that takes learning gained through contribution that would otherwise stay invisible and turns it into a skill record that is visible to employers, trusted by institutions, and portable across provinces and borders. Employers are already asking for this: three in four say they would hire without a formal credential (Wilson, 2022). The demand side of this problem is not in question. What has been missing is the infrastructure to supply it — and that is what anchoring the Contribution Exchange in Canada provides, building here first.

WHY THESE RECOMMENDATIONS MATTER TO CANADA

These three recommendations matter to both Canada as an institution and to everyday Canadians. They will determine whether the systems used to recognize what people know and can do are shaped in Canada, governed in the public interest, and designed around the realities of Canadian workers, newcomers, caregivers, small businesses, and Indigenous Nations and communities.

Recommendation 1 - Letter of Recognition

Hosting determines where global decisions are made and which jurisdiction serves as the default steward of the trust infrastructure. A formal letter of recognition costs nothing to issue but secures Canada's standing as the anchor host before another jurisdiction moves to claim it. It is the single lowest-cost, highest-leverage action available to the government this budget cycle.

For Canadians, this means a global system built under publicly accountable governance, rather than inherited from a commercial platform.

Recommendation 2 - Coordinated Federal Engagement

Without a coordinating mandate, federal engagement with the Contribution Exchange risks fragmenting across departments. Directing the Privy Council Office to coordinate engagement with Employment and Social Development Canada, Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, and the other named departments ensures that the Contribution Exchange has a single stable federal interface rather than several disconnected ones.

Coordinated federal support creates the conditions for all stakeholders, including NEET youth, to encounter a coherent national direction rather than disconnected policies and programs.

Recommendation 3 — Canadian National Contribution Exchange

This is an exploratory step, with no funding request. Once Canada anchors the global secretariat, the next natural question is: what would it take to put this infrastructure to work for Canadian workers? That includes the potential for Indigenous Nations interested in establishing chartered recognition systems aligned with their own cultural and governance structures. Authorizing this exploration now costs nothing and spares Canada the need to catch up later, without compromising the sovereignty-first design that distinguishes this infrastructure from commercial credentialing platforms.

Exploring a Canada Contribution Exchange is the step that connects global infrastructure to practical Canadian needs, including making existing skills easier to document, verify, and use when seeking employment, advancement, or recognition.

CORE STRATEGIC VALUE TO CANADA

Anchoring the Contribution Exchange in Canada pays off in concrete governance terms. Canada chairs the global assemblies, technical committees, and working groups that set the rules for this field, rather than adopting rules set elsewhere. Canada becomes the home jurisdiction for two

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new professional credentials — Chartered Work-Based Learning Designer (C.WBLD) and Certified End-Point Assessment Assessor (C.EPAA) — that will govern who is trusted to verify contribution internationally.

Globally, this strengthens Canada's role in advancing lifelong learning, equitable employment, and social justice, aligned with the objectives of the International Labour Organization, UNESCO, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Canada would show that national sovereignty over contribution recognition and international interoperability are not in tension — a model other jurisdictions are expected to adopt as workforce mobility systems evolve.

RISK OF INACTION

If Canada does not act, the risk is not abstract. Work-based learning recognition is moving quickly from a niche practice to an engaged field of international standard-setting: the International Labour Organization adopted its first-ever labour standard on quality apprenticeships in 2023, and global employers now name skill gaps as their top workforce barrier, with governments and funders actively seeking durable systems rather than one-off programs (World Economic Forum, 2025). Anchoring the Contribution Exchange's secretariat here would put Canada in a leadership position within the professionalized employment and training field rather than outside it altogether.

If another jurisdiction secures the hosting role first, that country decides how contribution is defined, verified, and moved across borders — not Canada. Canadian workers, immigrants, and small businesses would then have to conform to standards, data rules, and credentialing models Canada had no hand in writing, quite possibly built on a commercial or state-controlled platform model rather than on the publicly accountable, sovereignty-first governance structure the Contribution Exchange was built to protect. Hosting decisions, once made, do not reopen; headquarters, committee composition, and rule-making authority lock in for decades. Canada should not assume it can wait and still have a seat at the table.

CONCLUSION

Canada has a timely opportunity to become the global home of the Contribution Exchange and its public digital infrastructure. This unique position will give Canada a leadership position in two emerging fields: work-based learning as an autonomous learning system and professional employment and training (PET). Together, these two fields bring to light the contributions

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Canadians are already making and the urgent needs of organizations from coast-to-coast-to-coast regardless of size, rather than leaving them invisible and unused.

As skill gaps widen, Canada cannot afford to leave potential contributors on the sidelines. The most direct path is to formally anchor the Contribution Exchange's international mandate in Canada through a letter of recognition, coordinated federal engagement led by the Privy Council Office, and authorization to explore a chartered Canadian National Contribution Exchange once that mandate is secured. This approach carries minimal cost and risk, puts Canada inside the rooms where international standards for this field are being set, and secures Canada's position as the long-term custodian of contribution recognition within public digital infrastructure.

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