



## **OPEN LETTER**

December 18, 2008

Dear Elected Politicians,

Canada is on a precipice, with an urgent need for an economic stimulus to put the country back to work. It is crucial that the stimulus package builds and strengthens our communities so that they are well positioned for the future.

Canada's nonprofit sector is a vital part of our economy: More than one in every ten Canadians works in the sector. There are 161,000 nonprofits in this country, and each of them has a double or even triple bottom line—contributing economically, socially, culturally and environmentally. As a critical part of the fabric of our nation, the nonprofit sector is uniquely positioned to help the country bounce back.

**The Ontario Nonprofit Network (ONN) connects and gives voice to this vibrant sector. ONN is calling on Canada's leaders to see the nonprofit sector as an essential part of the economic stimulus solution for Ontario and Canada.**

Canada's nonprofits and charitable groups do their work at the grassroots level in communities, providing people with essential support services. They offer safety net services such as food banks, shelters and child welfare; remedial services such as violence prevention and mental health care; and community services such as recreational sports, community kitchens and assistance to Canada's newcomers; as well as back-to-work services such as daycare, employment retraining and job search support.

There's more. The nonprofit sector is home to innovators in sustainable energy, carbon footprint reduction and healthy local food. These leaders support community-based renewable energy projects, help farmers find local distribution for their produce, assist newcomers put their farming skills to good use, and promote biking in cities—to highlight just a few of the many enterprising nonprofit organizations in our communities.

Arts and culture are growth industries in Canada, outpacing other industrial and commercial sectors by a factor of three. Arts and cultural groups nurture talent and enrich the lives of many, serving as mainstays of Canadian communities. Visual and performing arts organizations, museums and historic sites all contribute deeply to Canada's unique value as a place to live and visit. We know that social and economic development is profoundly connected to and dependent on cultural development.

Economic stimulus in the traditional sense of supporting failing industries and rebuilding crumbling sewers and bridges are part of the equation, but it is only one part. The other critical element is the nonprofit sector. If Minister Flaherty's economic stimulus package is to be innovative, forward looking, community-focused and provide multiple bottom-line returns, it must invest in cutting-edge organizations that keep on giving back to the people of Canada year after year. That means involving, in a fundamental way, the nonprofit and charitable sector.

Now is our opportunity to make a difference over the long term—with investments in social services, environmental enterprises, young people, and arts and culture. Capital investments in the nonprofit sector remain in the public domain.

You will hear detailed proposals for specific stimulus measures from the various segments of the nonprofit sector. They will provide the detail on these essential components of an effective stimulus package for Canada:

- Invest in our cities as they are the engines of our economy. Focus on *public transit, clean energy, clean water, and strengthening communities*.
- Support *local agriculture and local distribution strategies* that improve the quality of our food and support our small- and medium-sized enterprises.
- Pull Canada's poor *out of poverty*. Not only will that enable them to participate in the recovery, they will help get the economy moving.
- Create financing tools and tax incentives to support *social enterprises*. This will create jobs, build communities, solve environmental problems and create economic sustainability for nonprofits and those most vulnerable.
- Invest in the retrofitting and programming of *arts and cultural facilities* and create community-wide economic benefits. We know that every \$1 invested in the arts will net \$8 in benefits.
- Build and retrofit *social housing* to create new homes and to improve the functioning and energy efficiency of existing housing for those in need.
- Invest in *social services* and *sports and recreation* programs. This will create jobs and create engagement and opportunities for young and vulnerable people.

The current economic and employment crisis demands an innovative response that both addresses short-term problems and establishes a foundation for long-term solutions. This unprecedented

challenge offers an unprecedented opportunity: To invest in our communities and rebuild the nation from the ground up. Canada's nonprofits and charitable groups are there, wherever and whenever they are needed, promising multiple returns on each and every dollar invested. And they are needed, more than ever, in times of stress, particularly in an economic downturn.

The strength of the nonprofit sector is critical to Canada's recovery—and it must play a significant part in the upcoming economic stimulus budget.

Sincerely,

Tonya Surman and Peter Clutterbuck,

Co-chairs, Ontario Nonprofit Network