

New organization takes the CAN-do approach to enhancing public policy in the sector

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Linking volunteers with high-level expertise to charities that require pro-bono services is never a clean-cut process—especially when it comes to public relations and public-policy work. A new organization seeks to bridge the gap by acting as a connector, ensuring that external relations goals across the sector are achieved.

The [Canadian Advocacy Network](#) (CAN) is an organization run by a team of volunteers with backgrounds as diverse as the sector itself. The one thing they all have in common is the desire to provide support to organizations that don't have the resources to access the services they require.

“There are people with the right skill sets that want to volunteer their time and add input to the needs of charities,” says Philip Cartwright, member of the advisory board for CAN.

“Fundamentally, we are matching up those volunteers to charities based on similar areas of interest.”

Services that CAN offers through its volunteer base revolve mostly around public policy work. They include everything from policy development (i.e. white papers) and government relations to corporate communications and public relations.

“We hope it signals to the sector that public policy belongs to everyone,” clarifies Philip.

How it works

The process to become engaged with CAN begins by filling in information. There are two sections on the website, one for those interested in volunteering and the other for those seeking pro-bono services. CAN assesses the information and makes a connection between the volunteer and the organization.

Once a connection has been made, CAN's involvement comes to an end. Two parties who would otherwise not have met will make a valuable connection, to the benefit of both. It is up to the volunteer and the organization to develop a structured work plan and build a working relationship.

“These relationships will grow organically and can transition into something long lasting,” adds Philip.

How it all began

The idea to develop a connecting platform began two years ago, when a few volunteers banded together to brainstorm on a way to formally build connections between organizations and volunteers. They approached several leading players, including Imagine Canada, in order to pitch the idea and get a sense of the need for this kind of platform. Feedback indicated that there was, indeed, a market for this kind of work. From there, a launch date was set and now the organization is working on building awareness.

“We’re still in early days and hope that people will find time to give feedback so that we can apply lessons learned,” says Philip.

CAN currently has more volunteers than it does organizations seeking pro-bono services.

“This proves our initial assumption, that there are a lot of people with the desire to volunteer,” concludes Philip.

Michelle Jondreau is a communications professional with an avid interest in all things HR. On top of that, she hails from the nonprofit world and as such has a keen understanding of sector trends and issues. Follow her [@majondreau](#).