May 12, 2016

The Honourable Navdeep Bains
Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada
C.D. Howe Building
235 Queen Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0H5
By email to: Navdeep.Bains@parl.gc.ca

Re: Creation of a Grants and Contribution Data Standard; Submission to Canada's Action Plan on Open Government

Dear Minister,

We understand that the Government of Canada is currently seeking public input on its upcoming Action Plan on Open Government. We recognize that it is the third Open Government Action Plan and we understand it is binding in that Canada is a member of the international Open Government Partnership; noting that its commitments will be registered and the results publicly documented. **As part of its Action Plan, we would like to support the proposal put forward by PoweredbyData to develop and implement a grants and contributions data standard.**

The Ontario Nonprofit Network (ONN) brings the diverse voices of the nonprofit and charitable sector to government, funders and the business sector to achieve our vision of a strong and resilient nonprofit sector, thriving communities, dynamic province and inclusive country. ONN activates its volunteer base and the network to develop and analyze policy, and work on strategic issues. ONN convenes across the approximately 55,000 nonprofit and charitable organizations in the province of Ontario and collaborates with similar organizations in other provinces and nationally. Our mission is to engage, advocate, and lead with — and for — nonprofit and charitable organizations that work for the public benefit in Ontario.

The ONN is currently developing a data strategy for Ontario's nonprofit sector as we recognize the vital importance of open data. Data offers another way to see the systems we work in, create new knowledge, and use that knowledge to serve our communities better. As part of our strategy development, we have identified a few core principles that

must guide the strategy as a whole. Two specific principles that relate to a data standard for grants and contributions include:

- **The default position on data in the nonprofit and government sectors should be open**. Work needs to be undertaken to develop standards to make this data readable and accessible for use and to assist nonprofit and government data holders open up their data.
- **Data use and analysis for public good purposes needs to be publically owned and open**. A nonprofit consortium of government, nonprofit sector, funders, academics/universities, private sector and data managers should develop data mechanisms for the public domain.

Based on data strategies developed in other areas and on early international and Canadian projects, we have also identified the four essential components of a successful data strategy, of which the first one is "standards". Other components include: policy; skills and resources; and leadership.

Data standards — and open data standards in particular — matter because they ensure data is published in a way that allows it to be used by others. Standards give us ways to categorize, sort and store data in ways that other computer programs and humans can access and process. Without them, data often goes unused for lack of time, money, energy — and even the awareness that the data exists at all.

Information regarding federal government spending through grants and contributions is essential information that should be publicly accessible in an appropriate searchable web platform. We have identified four reasons why this information is critically important to the nonprofit sector.

1. This data will help nonprofit and charitable organizations avoid duplication and develop innovative partnerships by allowing them to see what projects and funding is currently being provided on issues that are of importance to Canadians, such as homelessness, international development support, investments in sport, etc.

2. The availability of this information will allow the nonprofit sector and our government counterparts to identify and address issues where there may be a gap in funding or program support, as well as identify trends and issues that are impacting Canadian communities.

3. Publicly available data about grants and contributions will be a stepping stone to further analysis that will help us all understand effective outcomes, what works, and provide information that can lead to significant partnerships to respond to emerging issues.

4. We have long recognized the lack of data available about the sector, including but not limited to grants and contributions, is putting our sector at risk in terms of our ability to innovate, evaluate, identify gaps and risks, and support our communities for the future.

It is important to emphasize that we believe it is essential that, together, a data standard is co-designed that will meet all of our needs (government, nonorofit sector and the public). The only way that these benefits are achieved is if this data is published in a robust data standard designed specifically for these use cases. Publishing basic machine-readable data along the lines of what is currently available will not provide these results. We support an advisory group to be put in place to develop this standard. Fortunately, Canada has deep expertise in this area, having been involved as a key contributor to many internationally recognized data standards.

Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to engaging with your department further on this issue.

Sincerely,

Cathy Taylor
Executive Director

ONN's Towards a Data Strategy for Ontario's Nonprofit Sector:
http://theonn.ca/our-work/our-partnerships/data-strategy