

A Civil-Society–Led Plan to Build Trust, Inclusion, and Real-World Adoption

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Purpose

Mobilize a national, cross-sector effort that **co-governs** Canada’s AI strategy with civil society and Indigenous partners, **accelerates responsible adoption** across communities and sectors, and **builds AI literacy for all**—so AI tangibly improves lives, services, and outcomes across Canada.

Context: What’s Missing

- Canada helped invent modern AI—but **adoption, trust, and inclusion** lag when decision-making is concentrated among a narrow set of actors.
- AI is not a single industry; it’s a **foundational capability** that will run through every sector and job—more like electricity/the internet than a vertical—so policy must center people, not just products.
- To translate innovation into impact, Canada needs **national adoption infrastructure** (shared rails, guardrails, and supports) and a **trusted data environment** that communities can actually use.
- Skills are the **critical infrastructure of AI**. A whole-of-life **AI literacy strategy** (K–12, postsecondary, workforce, and community learning) is now table stakes—globally and for Canada’s competitiveness.

The Proposal: Three Pillars (Run Together, Not in Sequence)

1) Civil Society & Communities Council (Co-Governance)

Create a standing **Civil Society & Communities Council** that sits alongside the federal AI task force with **clear authorities** (agenda-setting, inclusion benchmarks, public-benefit test sign-off, transparency requirements). The Council must include Indigenous partners as **distinct rights-holders**, plus nonprofits, philanthropy, labour, disability advocates, youth, rural/remote communities, and service providers.

What it does (fast):

- Sets **inclusion and trust metrics** baked into all recommendations and funding calls.
- Publishes “**what we heard/what changed**” reports for every policy phase.

- Curates **regional roundtables/town halls** and digital dialogues (accessible, bilingual).
- Oversees an annual **12-month public review** to course-correct based on outcomes.

2) National AI Adoption Network (“Rails + Guardrails”)

Stand up a pan-Canadian network that provides **shared infrastructure, sandboxes, and supports** so organizations of all sizes can adopt responsibly.

Core components:

- **Trusted Data Commons**: sovereign, interoperable, privacy-by-design data/services layer to enable affordable, accountable deployment (consent, transparency, auditability).
- **Regulatory sandboxes & pilots** in priority domains (health, agri-food, resources, education, public services, nonprofits), with embedded ethics/safety and evaluation.
- **Mission-oriented capital** that funds applied AI where Canada can lead and deliver public value.

3) National AI Literacy for All (Lifelong & Community-Embedded)

Adopt a **National AI Literacy Strategy** that spans **K–12, post-secondary, workforce upskilling/reskilling, and community-led learning** (libraries, settlement agencies, Indigenous learning hubs, seniors’ programs). Align with emerging international frameworks (OECD/EU/G7) and ensure **teacher training**, equitable access to tools, and culturally responsive content across regions.

Indigenous Partnership—By Design, Not Invitation

Name Indigenous Peoples as **distinct partners** in governance and implementation; integrate Indigenous knowledge systems (reciprocity, intergenerational stewardship, community benefit) into the **Public-Benefit & Equity Test** used across programs and procurements. Fund Indigenous-led pilots (language, health, land stewardship, data sovereignty) and ensure Indigenous data governance choices are respected.

Implementation (12-Month Sprint, Then Scale)

Month 0–2

- Establish **Civil Society & Communities Council**; adopt inclusion/trust metrics.
- Launch **open call** for regional hosts (municipalities, community foundations, Indigenous orgs, libraries) to convene engagements and pilots.

Month 2–6

- Stand up **Trusted Data Commons MVP** and **three sector sandboxes** (e.g., municipal service delivery, community health, nonprofit operations).
- Begin **AI Literacy Wave 1**: teacher PD, community bootcamps, sector-specific micro-credentials.

Month 6–12

- Publish “**What We Heard / What We Changed**” compendium; iterate policy/funding.
- Scale pilots with **mission-oriented capital**; publish open playbooks and guardrails.

Success Metrics (report quarterly)

- **Inclusion & Engagement**: representation targets met; number of community/Indigenous-led engagements; “what changed” traceability.
- **Trust & Safety**: share of pilots meeting public-benefit & equity thresholds; independent red-team/ethics reviews; grievance/contestability usage.
- **Adoption & Value**: # of organizations piloting/using AI; time-to-value; cost/performance gains for nonprofits/SMEs/municipal programs.
- **Literacy & Capacity**: # of learners trained (K–12, workforce, community); teacher PD completed; credentials issued; self-reported confidence gains.
- **Data & Governance**: Commons participation; % projects using privacy-preserving methods; audit/trace logs published.

Why This Will Work (A Canadian Advantage)

- **Out-trust, not out-spend**: Canada can lead by aligning infrastructure with ethics, inclusion, and transparency from the start.
- **People at the center**: Treat **skills as critical infrastructure** and make literacy a public good across life stages.
- **Civil society co-governance**: Decisions that affect the public must be shaped **with** the public—especially Indigenous Peoples and equity-seeking groups.

What We’re Asking For (Immediate)

1. Cabinet-level endorsement of the **Civil Society & Communities Council** and its authorities.
2. Treasury support to launch the **AI Adoption Network** (Commons + sandboxes) and **National AI Literacy Strategy** (Wave 1).
3. A public commitment that **all major AI actions** will pass a **Public-Benefit & Equity Test**, with transparent “what changed” reporting.