



pro bono
students canada

étudiant(e)s pro
bono du canada

A photograph of a young man with dark hair and glasses, wearing a dark sweater, smiling broadly while sitting at a desk. He is looking down at some papers in his hands. The background shows a window with a grid pattern. A large blue gradient overlay covers the bottom half of the image.

FIVE-YEAR 2021 - 2026 STRATEGIC PLAN



University of Victoria
University of British Columbia
Thompson Rivers University
University of Calgary
University of Alberta
University of Saskatchewan
University of Manitoba
Lakehead University
University of Windsor
Western University
University of Toronto
Osgoode Hall Law School
Queen's University
University of Ottawa
(Common Law)
Université d'Ottawa
(Droit Civil)
Université Laval
Université de Montréal
McGill University
Université de Sherbrooke
Université du Québec à Montréal
University of New Brunswick
Université de Moncton



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Introduction: Letter from the National Director



Canada's access to justice crisis is complex, systemic, and growing. As I write this letter, the COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating long-standing inequities and exposing our legal system's weaknesses. At the same time, the prevalence of anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism is fuelling public distrust in our profession. We, the legal industry, have reached an inflection point. We can choose either informed progress or complacency. Pro Bono Students Canada (PBSC) is choosing progress, and this Strategic Plan is our roadmap.

PBSC was created 25 years ago to breathe life into the Latin phrase *pro bono publico*, which means "for the public good." Our work centres on the opportunity for law students – future lawyers and leaders – to go beyond the classroom and cultivate social justice. It is about connecting with humanity and serving those in need with their interests at heart.

In the past five years alone, PBSC's national network of volunteers provided approximately 650,000 hours of free legal support to nearly 50,000 people facing barriers to justice. While we are proud of PBSC's long history of impact, we recognize that there is still much work to be done.

"Canada's access to justice crisis is complex, systemic, and growing."

This Strategic Plan is designed to drive PBSC forward in a way that is cohesive, effective, and sustainable. It will help guide decisions, mitigate challenges, and ensure PBSC's continued evolution as a leading access to justice organization in Canada. As we embark on this ambitious journey, we will strive to embody our three core values of dignity, equity, and humility. We hope you will join us.

Brittany Twiss
National Director

Strategic Plan at a Glance

VISION

We envision a society with accessible legal systems, where the dignity and rights of every person are upheld.

MISSION

PBSC is on a mission to provide free legal support to people and communities facing barriers to justice.

VALUES

PBSC values dignity for all; stands for substantive equity in all its forms; and prioritizes humility and self-reflection.

ENHANCE IMPACT



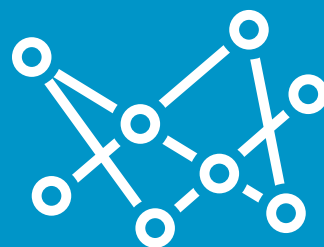
- Review and refine our internal structures and policies to strengthen organizational capacity.
- Develop new ways of assessing and prioritizing projects to strengthen our focus.
- Expand the use of technology to increase the accessibility and reach of our services.

STRENGTHEN VALUES-BASED LEADERSHIP



- Integrate an equity and anti-racism framework to foster diversity and inclusion at every level of the organization.
- Expand training and mentorship opportunities to promote our core values.

BROADEN RESOURCES



- Diversify our funding to build long-term stability and capacity.
- Amplify our brand across Canada to increase awareness and engagement.



"*Pro bono* services must be community-centred; they must maintain community voice and respond to community-identified needs. This call to action requires a steadfast commitment to community development and engagement, and the adoption of cultural humility into frameworks for service delivery and practice."

JESSIE STIRLING, PROGRAM COORDINATOR,
INDIGENOUS HUMAN RIGHTS PROGRAM (2019-20)

Background

PBSC was established in 1996 at the University of Toronto Faculty of Law. At the time, it was the first and only *pro bono* organization in Canada. The founding objective of PBSC was to combine education and public interest volunteer work with the goal of ensuring that each new generation of lawyers would enter the profession committed to *pro bono* philosophy and practice. The visionary support of the Faculty and the Law Foundation of Ontario was instrumental in launching PBSC into a nation-wide movement. Today, PBSC has 22 Chapters operating in partnership with law schools throughout Canada ("Participating Law Schools").

In late 2016, PBSC moved to a new governance model that includes a nine-member national Advisory Board, and a Memorandum of Agreement between the Governing Council of the University of Toronto and PBSC's Participating Law Schools. The purpose of the Memorandum of Agreement is to regulate the governance of PBSC and outline the roles, rights, and responsibilities of the National Office ("PBSC National"), Participating Law Schools, and local Chapters.

A photograph showing a group of people, mostly women, standing in a line and looking towards the left. They are in a large, ornate room with high ceilings and wooden beams. Some are holding glasses, suggesting a social event or reception. A blue text box is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Student Program Coordinators from Western University, the University of Ottawa (Common Law) & the University of Manitoba join former CEO of the Law Foundation of Ontario, Tanya Lee, for opening remarks at our 2019 National Training Conference.



At its inaugural meeting, the Advisory Board agreed to develop PBSC's first-ever strategic plan. In January 2020, PBSC retained Karen Cohl, an experienced strategic planning and access to justice consultant, to facilitate and assist in this significant endeavour.

The first part of this Strategic Plan articulates our vision, mission, values, approach, and impact framework. These "Guiding Principles" were developed by PBSC's leadership team through a process that included research, facilitated meetings, stakeholder consultations, and discussions with the Board.

The second part of this Strategic Plan contains three strategic directions to be implemented over a five-year period. The directions were informed by an environmental scan conducted by the National Director and consultation with board members, PBSC National, law school Chapters, and selected stakeholders. In total, over 70 interviews, a staff focus group, and three Board sessions were conducted between January and June 2020.



"Serving as a Program Coordinator of PBSC has been the most memorable aspect of law school so far. I've experienced first-hand what Montreal organizations do to help close the access-to-justice gap that exists in marginalized communities. The gaps in Canada's legal systems disproportionately impact people experiencing systemic oppression, intersectional inequities, or with limited financial means. Equitable access to justice is critical to a healthy, democratic society. I am honoured to work with an organization dedicated to advancing this goal."

(Photo courtesy of Alex Tran Photography)

JEMARK EARLE, PROGRAM COORDINATOR,
MCGILL UNIVERSITY (2020-21)

PART 1: Guiding Principles

We envision a society with accessible legal systems, where the dignity and rights of every person are upheld.

We are on a mission to provide free legal support to people and communities facing barriers to justice.

OUR VALUES



DIGNITY

We believe that every person is entitled to respect, to have their voice heard, and to fully enjoy their rights.



EQUITY

We stand for substantive equality, inclusion, and diversity in all its forms. We focus on impact (not just good intentions).



HUMILITY

We prioritize listening, learning, and self-reflection. We value the wisdom of the communities we serve, and their lived experiences inform our work.

OUR APPROACH

VISIONARY

We cultivate future leaders and advocates through training and experiential learning opportunities.

“One of the most visionary undertakings I have seen in my 40 years at the bar.

JUSTICE ROSALIE ABELLA, SUPREME COURT OF CANADA, SPEAKING ABOUT PBSC'S MISSION & IMPACT (2017)

COLLABORATIVE

We engage 1,700+ law students annually to provide free legal information and services in partnership with 450+ community organizations and 580+ supervising lawyers.

RESPONSIVE

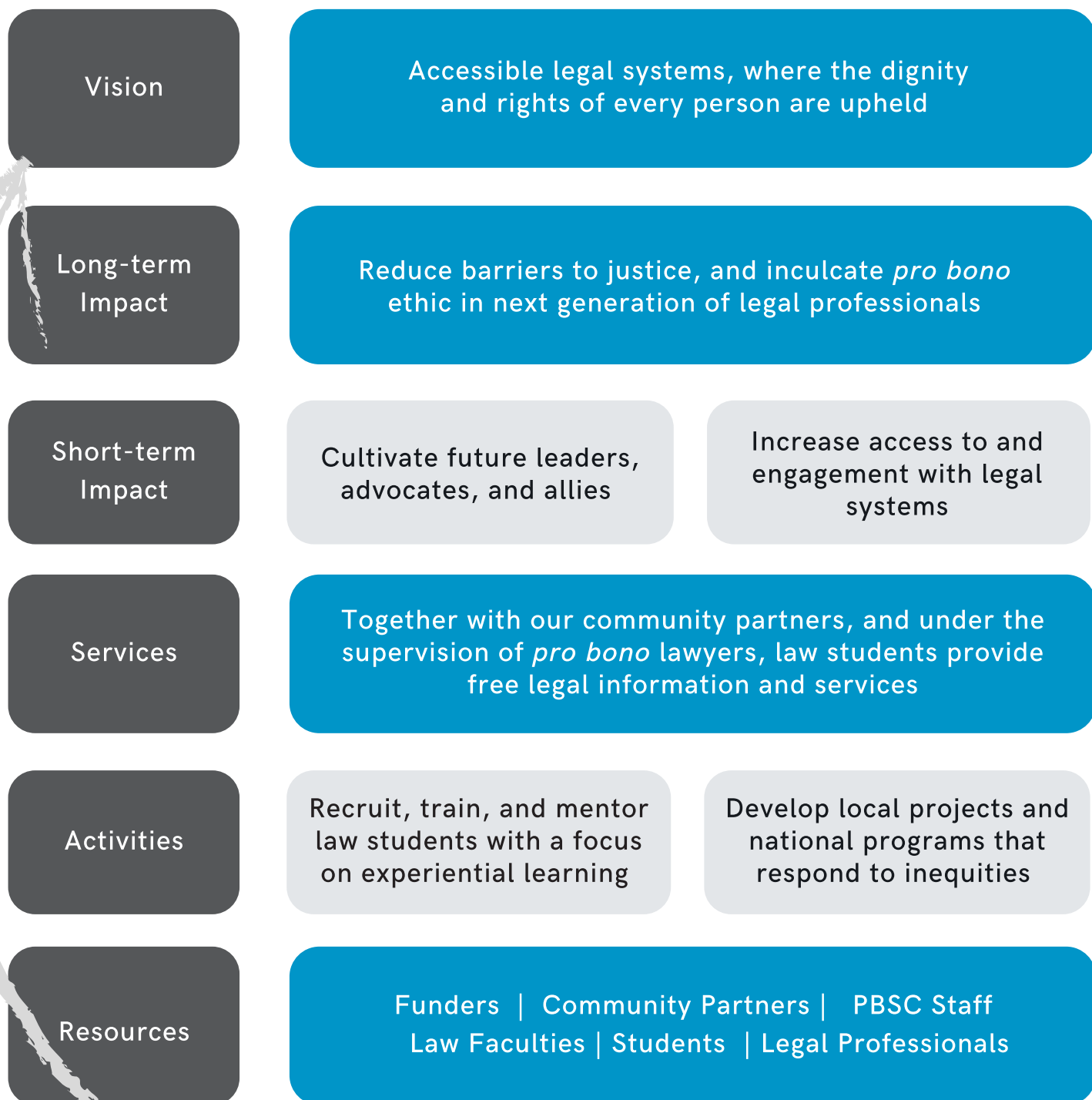
Our student-led Chapters at 22 law schools across Canada support local communities facing barriers to justice across all areas of law. Our National Office addresses complex and systemic inequities through projects that support families in crisis or transition, Indigenous peoples, racialized groups, LGBTQ2S+ communities, and newcomers to Canada.



"Pro Bono Students Canada, while a national organization, recognizes the importance of identifying and responding to the unique region-specific needs across Canada. Offering meaningful *pro bono* services means never implementing a one-size-fits-all approach. It also means we must place impact above intention to ensure that we are not only serving those who need assistance, but that we are also providing services that properly address each need."

HOLLY KEGEL, PROGRAM COORDINATOR, UNIVERSITY OF
CALGARY (2020-21)

IMPACT FRAMEWORK



PART 2: Strategic Directions

Over the next five years, PBSC will enhance impact, strengthen leadership, and broaden our resources to promote our organization's sustainable development and influence on access to justice. PBSC's three Strategic Priorities are described below along with a rationale and proposed actions.





Silas Lee, PBSC Volunteer, Osgoode
Hall Law School (2019-20)

ENHANCE IMPACT

I) Enhance Impact

Rationale

PBSC has grown steadily since our inception in 1996, expanding to 22 Chapters and 585 projects in 2019-20. As a mature and complex organization, it is now time to take stock of our successes and challenges and consider whether new approaches may be necessary to advance our mission in the most effective and cohesive ways.

Proposed Actions

1

Review and refine our internal structures and policies to strengthen organizational capacity.

- Review the terms and goals of PBSC's Memorandum of Agreement.
- Assess the sustainability of existing risk management policies.
- Evaluate management and governance structures.

2

Develop new ways of assessing and prioritizing projects to strengthen our focus.

- Improve PBSC's processes to evaluate the success and impact of our work.
- Use a consultative process to develop priorities for PBSC projects and training programs that local Chapters can adapt for their communities.
- Update guidelines for project development and approval with a focus on quality over quantity.

3

Expand the use of technology to increase the accessibility and reach of our services.

- Adapt projects where necessary, feasible, and useful to promote virtual service delivery.
- Collaborate with community organizations to reach rural and remote areas that are not in close proximity to law school Chapters.
- Partner with community organizations and technology experts to create and champion longer-term technology solutions for the delivery of services that facilitate access to justice.
- Implement strategies to streamline and share information internally and with partners.

A woman with long brown hair, wearing glasses and a necklace, is smiling and talking to a group of people. The background shows a room with wooden beams and a large window.

Sophie Toor, Program Coordinator,
University of British Columbia
(2019-20)

STRENGTHEN VALUES-BASED LEADERSHIP



II) Strengthen Values-Based Leadership

Rationale

PBSC's scope, expertise, and reputation uniquely position our organization to elevate the knowledge and skills of future leaders for the benefit of the communities we serve. We aspire to lead by example and embody the change we want to see in the legal profession.

Proposed Actions

1

Integrate an equity and anti-racism framework to foster diversity and inclusion at every level of the organization.

- Build capacity and competency to challenge systemic inequalities.
- Implement procedures in recruitment, hiring, training, and retention so that the diversity of the communities PBSC serves is better reflected in our leadership team. This includes our volunteers, student staff, PBSC National, and Board.
- Prioritize program development that is sensitive and responsive to the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples and equity-seeking groups, including Black and other racialized people, and that promotes respect and appreciation for the differences that arise out of these experiences.

2

Expand training and mentorship opportunities to promote our core values.

- Build upon existing training opportunities for students, and develop training opportunities for legal professionals.
- Launch a volunteer retention strategy to establish a roster of mentors and ambassadors committed to our vision, mission, and values.
- Increase efforts to support and collaborate with partner organizations to share best practices and resources, and to avoid duplication.



Sara Cruz-Mendes, Family Law Program
Coordinator, Université de Moncton
(2019-20)

BROADEN RESOURCES

III) Broaden Resources

Rationale

PBSC is fortunate to receive significant financial and in-kind support from our long-standing partners – including law foundations, law schools, law firms, and others – who are committed to student *pro bono* as a component of access to justice. However, a more diverse funding base and greater awareness of our organization will promote sustainability and support efforts to intensify our impact and leadership on a long-term basis.

Proposed Actions

1

Diversify our funding to build long-term stability and capacity.

- Continue to nurture relationships with current funders and partners.
- Develop a national fundraising plan.

2

Amplify our brand across Canada to increase awareness and engagement.

- Enhance communications about PBSC and our impact to maintain and generate interest in becoming involved, whether as a funder, community partner, lawyer supervisor, or student volunteer.
- Provide additional support to Chapters to strengthen PBSC's brand within law schools and local communities.
- Promote systemic change by sharing stories, tools, knowledge, and ideas with the public and access to justice sector.

The Right Honourable Richard Wagner, P.C., Chief Justice of Canada, making remarks at PBSC's inaugural Chief Justice Richard Wagner Awards ceremony in Toronto (March 2020)



Welcome to the First Annual **Chief Justice Richard Wagner Awards**

Presented by Pro Bono Students Canada

Celebrating leaders driving #ActionforJustice



"I had the pleasure of working with PBSC all three of my years at law school, including as a Program Coordinator, so it always felt like *pro bono* work was a manageable but fundamental part of my professional life. That's how it should be for everyone; we owe a duty to society to use our privilege to promote and embody the *pro bono* ethic wherever and whenever we can."

CHRISTOPHER DIAS, PROGRAM COORDINATOR,
OSGOODE HALL (2019-20)

Conclusion: Letter from the Chair

It has been a quarter century since Pro Bono Students Canada was established and our mission remains as important as ever.

As the oldest and largest *pro bono* organization in Canada, we have the opportunity - and responsibility - to build on the lessons we have learned and set new standards for both service delivery and leadership in the profession. Anchored in our core values, this Strategic Plan will guide PBSC in a rapidly changing world.

One of PBSC's greatest assets is and always has been our dedicated front-line volunteers. While the passion and efforts of law students alone cannot solve the access to justice crisis, their work does make a difference. The experience of a client at one of PBSC's Trans ID Clinics is just one example:

“

As a transgender woman and newcomer to Canada, the service offered to me at the clinic was life changing. As a trans woman I have faced many challenges, including numerous experiences of discrimination. Being able to access a free legal service in a space where I felt comfortable and welcomed was a very affirming experience.

The goal of this Strategic Plan is to achieve more and better results for the thousands of people served by PBSC each year.

On behalf of PBSC's Advisory Board, I would like to thank Karen Cohl for facilitating this important process, as well as our staff, partners, and volunteers for your support and guidance.



Edward Iacobucci
Former PBSC Board Chair

PBSC ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS 2021

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Pro Bono Students Canada

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Cover photo: Matías Contreras León, PBSC Program Coordinator 2019-20

Inside cover: Maxine Thomas, PBSC Volunteer 2019-20

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Special thanks to our provincial funders: the Law Foundation of British Columbia, the Alberta Law Foundation, the Manitoba Law Foundation, the Law Foundation of Saskatchewan, and the Law Foundation of New Brunswick.