Building Leadership for Canada’s Future

THE FIRST FIVE YEARS | 2002–2007
A June flight aboard a DND Hercules aircraft transported the '05 Fellows to Canada’s most northerly inhabited site—the Canadian Forces Station at Alert—as part of their visit to Nunavut exploring issues relating to Canadian sovereignty, the Northwest Passage, and Inuit culture and economy.
“Action Canada is a model of leadership development, through mentorship and understanding of public policy in our country. We know that the federal partnership in this program is delivering value for dollars for Canada and Canadians.”

— THE HONOURABLE BEVERLEY ODA, MINISTER OF CANADIAN HERITAGE AND STATUS OF WOMEN

THE VISION
Action Canada was created five years ago by Vancouver businessman Sam Belzberg and Simon Fraser University president emeritus Jack Blaney. Their goal was to build leadership for Canada’s future by identifying young Canadians who had shown ability, initiative and commitment to Canada, and by developing their skills, enriching their understanding of the country and establishing a Fellows’ network for the future.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP
The federal government responded favourably to this vision and formed, with Sam Belzberg, a public-private partnership that made Action Canada possible. 2007/2008 is the final year of the initial partnership agreement. Federal government support includes not only financial contributions, but the invaluable advice and participation of senior public officials.

The partnership has been a resounding success and a powerful foundation has been created to connect and nurture future leaders for Canada.

THE DIRECTORS
The board of directors includes Co-Founders Samuel Belzberg, OC, Chair of the Board and President and CEO, Gibralt Capital Corp. and Jack Blaney, OBC, Secretary Treasurer. Clay Horner, Co-Chair, Osler, Hoskin and Harcourt was appointed Deputy Chair of the Action Canada Board in April 2006. Jodi White, President, Public Policy Forum, is a Director. Andrew Treusch, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Human Resources and Social Development Canada, is the ex-officio federal government representative.

Frances Belzberg, CM and Ann Cowan, Executive Director, Simon Fraser University Vancouver, co-chair the Action Canada Advisory Council.

Sam Belzberg and Jack Blaney selected Cathy Beehan, a recipient of the Prime Minister’s Outstanding Achievement Award for Excellence in the Public Service, as the leader to implement this precedent-setting initiative.
The Right honourable Adrienne Clarkson (centre), then Governor General, shared her wealth of experience as a Canadian leader in a private roundtable dialogue with the ’04 Fellows during the Ottawa Working Conference.

“The remarkable diversity of the Fellows became more evident in our working group sessions. My five-member team comprised a former Privy Council staffer, a commander in the Canadian Armed Forces, an Aboriginal leader, an environmental think tank director, and a children’s rights activist.”

— CRAIG KIELBURGER, FELLOW

THE FELLOWS

Each year a maximum of 20 emerging leaders are selected to be Action Canada Fellows. They are top candidates from a nationwide call for nominations. Many have legal, medical or business degrees. Some are Rhodes scholars. A few have never pursued post-secondary education. What they share in common is demonstrated engagement with public policy and a clear commitment to Canada.

The 86 Fellows who make up the Action Canada Network to date represent the Canadian mosaic of gender, ethnicity, language and geography.

THE PROGRAM

Each Fellow is awarded a $20,000 fellowship and participates in a 10-month program focusing on leadership development, public policy and nurturing a greater understanding of Canada.

Fellows undertake policy projects as a tool for developing teamwork and other leadership skills. In task force teams they work on a specific policy issue. They define the issue and devise practical solutions to these real-life challenges.

There are three, eight-day working conferences: one in Vancouver, one in Ottawa and one elsewhere. To date, the third conferences have been in Newfoundland and Labrador, Yukon, Nunavut and Alberta. During these conferences Fellows interact with leaders from government, industry, the media, academia and NGOS. Fellows in these meetings increase their knowledge of leadership, major Canadian issues and the diversity of the country.
“It was particularly remarkable to visit the oil sands and fly over the mines in a helicopter. So few Canadians have the opportunity to see this surreal landscape. I am grateful to have had a chance to better understand the enormity of the impact that the oil sands have had and will have on Canada.

This experience highlighted for me just how important it is to interact with an issue—to see it first-hand, and to talk to those involved and those affected—so as to fully understand it.”

— SANA HALWANI, FELLOW

LEARNING FROM TODAY’S LEADERS

Canadians who have shared their knowledge with Action Canada Fellows include Manulife Financial President and CEO Dominic D’Alessandro who, during a dialogue dinner at the TSX, called on government to protect Canadian businesses from foreign buy-outs (“an historic moment in Canada,” said The Globe and Mail business writer Jacque McNish); former Opposition Leader Preston Manning called for preservation of Alberta’s water resources using market-driven mechanisms; and 2010 Olympics CEO John Furlong outlined his vision of how sports can inspire champions for innovation and progress in Canada.

“Working with Action Canada has been a wonderful experience. Action Canada stands out as one of the most positive influences that I have seen in relation to young Canadians.”

— MARY SIMON, PRESIDENT, INUIT TAPIRIT KANATAMI AND FORMER AMBASSADOR FOR CIRCUMPOLAR AFFAIRS
Phil Fontaine, National Chief, Assembly of First Nations (right) leads a dialogue on Aboriginal health issues.

"With Action Canada I learned to approach issues considering realities affecting the country as a whole. This national perspective is critical and necessary in order to find joint and creative solutions. Travelling throughout this land and becoming familiar with issues faced by a number of regions in Canada made me realize just how much we share a common destiny, from managing our groundwater to dealing with labour shortages."

— STÉPHANIE YATES, FELLOW

UNDERSTANDING CANADA’S DIVERSITY
The working conferences create opportunities for Fellows to explore Canada’s diversity and the challenges facing different regions of the country. Visiting Vancouver’s downtown eastside focused attention on how three levels of government, with community organizations, can work together to improve the lives of individuals in need. Exploring Voisey’s Bay nickel mine in Labrador showed how new approaches in resource management can protect the environment and local cultures, while achieving strong economic development. Travelling throughout Nunavut highlighted the emerging issues Canada and the territorial government are facing as the Northwest Passage becomes a near future reality. Touring Alberta’s oil sands and Fort McMurray demonstrated the great challenges posed when rapid economic development and natural resource management intersect.
“Reflecting on my year, Action Canada was about maturing and shaping the passion I have to make the world a better place. As Purdy Crawford at our Ottawa conference said ‘fire in the belly’ is what defines an entrepreneur; for me Action Canada was about building that fire, refining it, and learning how to use it better.”
— DAVID KELTON, FELLOW

CREATING LEGACY AND EFFECTING CHANGE
Fellows’ team projects have inspired Canadian practice and policy. A sampling of project legacies includes:

DreamCatcher Yukon, an e-mentoring and leadership pilot project designed to keep Grade 9 Yukon kids in school proved so successful it received ongoing funding from the Yukon government and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

In 2007, 55 students participated in six schools. The 2008 goal is 100 students in 10 schools. A Canadian DreamCatcher volunteer mentor, working and studying in Australia, is seeking to adapt the project to indigenous Australians.

Stop the Traffic, a project on human trafficking included a workshop that brought together, for the first time, representatives from academia, NGOs, media, the federal government and the United Nations to discuss issues around human trafficking. It was key to inspiring important 2006 reforms to Canadian policy regarding the victims of human trafficking.

Selamat!, a project featuring two short documentary films and a policy paper exploring Indonesian and Pakistani perceptions of Canada, was presented to the International Council for Canadian Studies 2004 biennial conference’s foreign policy session. The films were also featured at the Canadian Independent Short Film Showcase in Toronto in 2004.
Foreign Affairs Minister Peter Mackay welcomed Fellows and guests for the 2006 Ambassadors Dialogue Dinner, an annual event during the Ottawa Conference where Fellows meet Ambassadors to Canada from around the world.


Notes from Canada’s Young Activists: A Generation Stands Up for Change, published by Douglas and McIntyre was reviewed 1 July 2007 in The Globe and Mail. This book, compiled and edited by ‘04 Fellows, tells the stories of 25 Canadian youth who have taken action to change the world. John Ralston Saul paid tribute to the book at its Toronto launch, praising its optimism and its contribution to intellectual discourse. It has received significant media attention and triggered invitations to present at writers’ festivals.

“The experience of working on this team project was great for many reasons, notably the fact that I was able to work with the strongest set of teammates I’ve ever been associated with, both in my university and work lives.... I consider the lessons learned from this process to be invaluable and among the most important reasons why this Action Canada experience has been so rewarding.”

— BART KASOWSKI, FELLOW

“[Before] I was so focused on stopping things, and through Action Canada I’ve become much more interested in starting things, creating positive change.”

— SARA EHRHARDT, FELLOW

In keeping with the fellowship year theme of Enterprise in Canada, ‘06 Fellows and co-founder Sam Belzberg were pleased to open the TSX during their visit to Toronto.
“I think Action Canada is a wonderful program for taking some of Canada’s best young minds and exposing them to the challenges and opportunities of the entire country.”

— JEFFREY SIMPSON, NATIONAL AFFAIRS COLUMNIST, THE GLOBE AND MAIL

FELLOWS IN ACTION

Action Canada Fellows are now using their passion for Canada and their newly acquired leadership knowledge and networks to enhance success in business, their professions, volunteer work and government service.

Six alumni now work for the federal government, most hired under the Recruitment of Public Policy Leaders program. Graham Flack, Assistant Deputy Minister at the Department of Finance, calls the Action Canada’s Fellows’ acceptance rate “phenomenal,” and describes them as having “a wonderful mix of demonstrated academic ability to deal with challenging issues, leadership potential, a commitment to Public Service and ethics, and an interest in serving the public.”

Since inception, Action Canada has developed to include various innovative components such as workshops on writing op-ed and commentary articles. Fellows have worked with leading Canadian journalists including Jeffrey Simpson, Alain Dubuc, Jacquie McNish, Roy MacGregor and Andrew Cohen. Approximately 12 articles on policy issues have been authored by Fellows during their fellowship year and published in newspapers including The Globe and Mail, Calgary Herald, Toronto Star and Halifax Herald.

Craig Kielburger ’05, co-founder of Free the Children (FTC), the world’s largest organization of children helping children, drew on his Action Canada experience to initiate FTC projects at home, including a project to develop leadership capacity in Canadian aboriginal communities.

Denise Taschereau ’03 used her $20,000 Action Canada fellowship to start a business selling ethically-sourced and environmentally responsible promotional products. She won the grand prize in the Small Business BC 2006 business plan competition for her new business venture.

Anil Patel ’04’s Framework Organization, which encourages volunteerism among young Canadians, has partnered with other Action Canada alumni to expand Timeraiser events, a means to raise volunteer hours. Participating organizations and alumni include Ben Peterson ’03’s Journalists for Human Rights, George Roter ’04’s Engineers Without Borders, and Kris Frederickson ’04 in partnership with the United Way of Calgary’s Youth Committee.
I believe [Action Canada] is the most significant thing I have ever had the good fortune to be involved with. Every day I think about that and I try and emulate in some way the values and aspirations of Action Canada—about making a difference and making our country better.”

— RICK NIELSEN, FELLOW

“It is with a mix of joy and sadness that I write to you at the end of this 2006/2007 fellowship year. Sadness because this wonderful, life-changing experience is coming to an end...great joy because I’ve had the privilege to participate in this remarkable program. I’m moving into the future with new skills, amazing new friendships, and greater ability to make a meaningful contribution to our country’s progress.”

— BART KASOWSKI, FELLOW
The Fellows experienced the oil sands from an aerial tour while in Fort McMurray, June ’07, demonstrating the policy challenges and opportunities in a large-scale resource industry.
“Fellows become those rare Canadian leaders who can move between academia, business, government, and NGOs and understand how the country works from a holistic perspective. This is Action Canada’s greatest contribution—it may just create the first network of Canadian leaders who lead not only a university, business, government department or NGO, but who can lead the country.”

— BENJAMIN SHINEWALD, FELLOW