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**MEDIA RELEASE**

## **Actua hosts youth, Minister of Science and top industry leaders for roundtable on Government's Innovation Agenda**

*Ottawa, September 15, 2016*

Local Ottawa high school students had the opportunity to meet with the Minister of Science, Kirsty Duncan, Parliamentary Secretary, Greg Fergus, and top science and technology industry leaders, to share their views on why youth engagement and diversity need to be at the centre of the Government's upcoming Innovation Agenda.

The event was hosted by Actua at Shaw Communications Inc., where the youth participants met with the Minister of Science and Parliamentary Secretary for a roundtable that is part of the ongoing consultations happening on the soon-to-be released Innovation Agenda. The discussion focused on the role youth see science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) playing in their lives, the barriers they face in pursuing STEM careers, their ideas for future innovations and recommendations of how the government can better support youth innovation.

"In my robotics class, there's only a handful of girls out of 80. Social stigma around girls in science classes gets worse with every year. There's less and less girls," said Kira Noel, grade 11 student at Longfields-Davidson Heights Secondary School. The Minister's response to this was, "When someone tells you it's impossible, it's a dare."

Having role models in STEM of the same background was identified by many of the youth participants as being important. "Back home, the people filling positions in the hospital are not from Nunavut and that creates this false image that only people that aren't from Nunavut can do these science careers," said Isaiah McKeown Philip, Student at Nunavut Sivuniksavut, and Actua Outreach Instructor.

After the roundtable, youth participants got to meet with industry leaders from Google, Shopify, the Information and Communications Technology Council, The University of Ottawa, Queen's University, Brookfield Institute, SHAD, Shaw Communications and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for a round of "Innovation Speed Dating" where youth got to ask the questions, including how they got to where they are today, what barriers they overcame, what problems they are currently solving at their workplace and what qualities and skills these workplaces are looking for when hiring.

"How we engage with Canada's youth on the value of STEM and, specifically, computer science will ultimately chart this country's future growth. As Canada strives to build an economy defined by innovation, it's never been more critical that we give our children the tools they need to become Canada's innovators of tomorrow," said Lauren Skelly, Senior Policy Analyst at Google Canada.

The industry leaders got their turn to share their views on youth, diversity and innovation directly with the Minister of Science and Parliamentary Secretary, Greg Fergus, in the afternoon. The discussion was centred on why youth engagement needs to be at the centre of the Innovation Agenda and specific recommendations of how the federal government can better support youth STEM engagement efforts in Canada.

“The opportunity cost of not increasing support for youth engagement in STEM will be directly reflected in the innovation outcomes for Canada. We must engage diverse youth to achieve our full innovation potential in Canada - this includes specific and ongoing efforts to engage girls, Indigenous youth, youth living in rural and Northern communities and youth facing socio-economic barriers. What we heard loud and clear from youth was that they need opportunities outside of school to apply what they have learned inside of school and that they want to apply these to some of the world’s largest challenges - healthcare, third world development and the environment. These youth need our support,” said Jennifer Flanagan, President and CEO of Actua.

**About Actua:** Actua is Canada’s leading science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) youth outreach network representing 34 university and college based members. Each year 250,000 young Canadians in over 500 communities nationwide are inspired through hands-on educational workshops, camps and community outreach initiatives. Actua focuses on the engagement of underrepresented youth through specialized programs for Indigenous youth, girls and young women, at-risk youth and youth living in Northern and remote communities. Actua’s major funders include: Google Canada, Suncor Energy Foundation, the Government of Canada, GE Canada, Ontario Trillium Foundation, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, Status of Women and Lockheed Martin. For more information about Actua, visit [actua.ca](http://actua.ca).

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