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# Mehnaz Tabassum, BBA, PMP®

Mehnaz Tabassum is an award-winning Canadian social entrepreneur, food systems leader, and technology strategist working at the intersection of food security, innovation, public policy, and inclusive economic development. With over a decade of experience spanning the federal public service, nonprofit leadership, and entrepreneurship, she has dedicated her career to building organizations, creating opportunities for underserved communities, and bringing people together to solve complex challenges.

She is the Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer of **NL Eats Community Outreach Inc.**, a nationally registered Canadian charity working to address food insecurity, equip young people with future-ready skills, and advance innovation across Canada's food system.

What began as a grassroots response to food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic has grown into a national organization connecting community needs with longer-term solutions in workforce development, sustainable agriculture, food technology, and economic participation.

Under her leadership, NL Eats has supported the distribution of more than 10,000 meals, provided learning opportunities to over 3,000 individuals, created more than 300 employment and placement opportunities, and supported over 4,000 community members. Through programmes such as FOODFIT, Road to Success, and community-led Food Innovation Challenges, the organization helps individuals build healthier lives, supports youth career development, and provides microgrants of up to $5,000 to advance promising solutions in the food sector.

Mehnaz is also the Co-Founder of **FOOD FORWARD SUMMIT**, a national food systems platform established under NL Eats Community Outreach. The initiative brings together leaders from agriculture, fisheries, food manufacturing, technology, research, government, and civil society to strengthen

cross-sector collaboration and advance practical solutions to some of the most pressing challenges facing our food systems.

In 2026, she led FOOD FORWARD's expansion into a three-city national summit series across St. John's, Ottawa, and Toronto, engaging more than 1,000 participants, 100 speakers, and 55 exhibitors. The initiative has cultivated relationships with over 150 partners and stakeholders, creating opportunities for collaboration on food security, climate-resilient agriculture, cold-chain infrastructure, trade, sustainable food production, and emerging technologies.

A central focus of her work is addressing the gap between promising ideas and their implementation. She advocates for stronger coordination across sectors, greater access to resources for smaller innovators, and more meaningful participation by young people, women, and underrepresented communities in decisions shaping the future of food.

Her growing contribution to national food policy was recognized in October 2026 when she appeared before the **Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry of Canada**, contributing to its study on food security. Her recommendations emphasized regional collaboration, access to capital and markets for emerging innovators, and the importance of translating policy commitments into measurable improvements for producers and communities.

In 2026, Mehnaz was named one of the **Queen Elizabeth II Commonwealth Trust's 100 Young Leaders**, recognizing her contributions to community development, youth empowerment, and food-systems innovation. She was honoured at the official awards ceremony in London and subsequently met **His Majesty King Charles III and Queen Camilla** at a Commonwealth reception held at St James's Palace.

That same year, she was selected as one of five inaugural recipients of the **Foodservice Women's Alliance SHIFT Awards**, recognizing women whose leadership, innovation, and contributions are shaping the future of the food industry.

Her engagement in international food-systems and climate discussions has continued to grow, including participation at COP31 in Antalya, Türkiye, where she has pursued opportunities for collaboration on food security, climate adaptation, and inclusive innovation. She is also exploring partnerships across Europe and Latin America to connect Canadian expertise with locally led food-systems initiatives.

Alongside her nonprofit leadership, Mehnaz is the **Co-Founder, Founding Investor, and Fractional AI Strategist at CogniCo AI Consulting**, a Canadian technology consulting firm helping nonprofits, small businesses, and public-sector organizations responsibly adopt artificial intelligence, automation, and emerging technologies to improve operations and scale their impact.

Drawing on her experience in digital transformation, organizational strategy, and social innovation, she provides strategic guidance on AI adoption, business development, and responsible innovation.

In 2026, CogniCo AI received an Honourable Mention in the G7 GovAI Challenge, recognizing the team's contribution to applied AI innovation.

Before transitioning to full-time entrepreneurship, Mehnaz built a successful career in the **Government of Canada**, where she served in senior information technology and project management roles. As one of the youngest professionals to hold a senior IT management position in her organization, she led complex digital transformation initiatives across human resources, finance, account security, and organizational learning. Her public-service experience continues to inform her approach to organizational governance, strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, and results-driven leadership.

Mehnaz holds a **Bachelor of Business Administration and a Certificate in Public Policy from Memorial University of Newfoundland**. She is a certified Project Management Professional (PMP), Certified ScrumMaster (CSM), and Certified Scrum Product Owner (CSPO). In 2026, she also completed the Institute of Corporate Directors' Governance Essentials Program, delivered in partnership with the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management, with support from an RBC Foundation scholarship.

Beyond her professional ventures, Mehnaz is deeply committed to mentorship, leadership development, and creating opportunities for others. She has mentored newcomers through the Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO), coached emerging professionals on career development, and supported young leaders entering the workforce. Her previous leadership and advisory roles include Vice President of Operations with PMI Ottawa Valley Outaouais Chapter, the Food Policy Council, the Premier's Youth Policy Council of Newfoundland and Labrador, and Global Vision.

Her earlier recognitions include **Most Inspiring Immigrant in Atlantic Canada (2024), the Canada Revenue Agency Award of Excellence (2022), Memorial University's Chancellor's Undergraduate Leadership Award (2021), Women of Distinction (2020), Young Entrepreneur Award (2019), and the Feeding 9 Billion Award (2018)**. She has also received nominations and recognition through national leadership and entrepreneurship programmes, including the CanadianSME Business Woman of the Year, Diana Award, Atlantic Top 50 CEOs, and IPAC Emerging Leader Award.

Having immigrated to Canada from Bangladesh at a young age, Mehnaz understands both the opportunities and barriers that newcomers and emerging leaders experience. Her journey from building a career in a new country to leading national initiatives has shaped her belief that talent and innovation exist everywhere, but access to opportunity is not equally distributed.

Today, she continues to build bridges between communities, institutions, and industries, guided by a belief that meaningful progress requires more than good ideas. It requires the relationships, resources, and collective commitment to turn those ideas into lasting change.

For Mehnaz, leadership is ultimately about creating opportunities for others and building systems that enable more people to succeed.