Automation & Robotics Mobilization – ARM for BC

Executive Summary — A Program to Accelerate Automation and Robotics Adoption by BC SMEs

With **$6M over three years** (April 2027 to March 2030), matched **50% PacifiCan / 50% private industry**, Circle Innovation, with SFU, BCIT and industry support from Novarc, Misty West, ABB and Electromate, proposes **ARM for BC** (Automation & Robotics Mobilization). ARM for BC supports BC small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) overcome the barriers to adopting automation and robotics through three core activities: industry projects, HQP upskilling and training, and ecosystem capacity development. Further, it lays cornerstones for growing the BC Robotics Cluster.

The opportunity

Canada's productivity trails the US by nearly 30%: the business sector generated about $74.70 per hour worked in 2023 versus $97.00 in the US. BC generates 14% of Canada's GDP, making its productivity gap a national, not just provincial, priority. BC's manufacturing, resource, marine, agri-food, construction and logistics industries face labour shortages, safety pressures and slow technology adoption. Automation and robotics are among the most direct ways to close the gap. BC already has robotics suppliers, strong universities and many potential buyers. What is missing is the connective tissue and implementation capacity to turn automation intent into working deployments.

The barrier — and why a program solves it

The Canadian Robotics Council is clear: ***"the most urgent need is to incentivize robot adoption among SMEs."*** SMEs see automation as daunting and risky. Many lack an ROI case, stable processes, usable data, an integration partner, financing or workforce confidence. Small, high-return projects fall between advisory services and large capital projects, and there is limited local evidence of what works. ARM for BC de-risks adoption, resolves specific barriers, trains the workforce, connects buyers with sellers and publishes ROI evidence.

The proposal: a demand-led program

Circle's barriers programs typically support companies building and selling technology - ARM for BC faces the other way: it focuses on the barriers of companies that **buy and use** automation. BC's roughly 40 robotics suppliers and integrators benefit as solution providers, some taking part directly, because every adoption project creates a qualified buyer, a real use case and a reference customer. The strategy was developed from community consult and through events such as the round table of 42 BC leaders in September 2025, with unanimous support for a coordinated program for robotics.

Circle Innovation's SWAT methodology

ARM for BC is delivered through Circle Innovation's proven *SME Workforce And Technologies (SWAT)* co-creation model. Across PacifiCan-supported programs, SWAT has helped bring **150+ products to market**, generate **$80M+ in new revenue** and train **1,600+ highly qualified personnel**. Rather than offering a fixed menu, SWAT starts from each SME's situation and moves it through six stages: *qualifying*, *assessing needs*, *designing* an industry-led project, *building a team* of suppliers, integrators, faculty and experts, *resourcing and co-funding* the work, and *managing to deliverables*, with Circle as project manager and resource broker.



Typical SWAT criteria for participating SMEs: BC-incorporated, operating 2+ years, 5 to 500 T4 employees, market revenues and cash flow to carry their share. Criteria are loosened for Tier 3 and ecosystem activities with earlier and smaller firms able to participate.

Three tiers of SME engagement

Tier	What the SME receives	Indicative scale
1. Significant adoption projects	A co-funded SWAT project from ROI case and process readiness through solution selection, piloting, integration, safety, cybersecurity and team training, with KPI-gated go/no-go checkpoints.	9-12 projects; 6–9 months; co-funding for up to $500K in eligible expenses
2. Adoption readiness engagements	Reduced-scale SWAT engagement resolving leading barriers (ROI, process and data, solution selection, safety, cyber, financing via Circle's Stage 1 due diligence), ending in a documented next step.	18–25 engagements; co-funding for readiness projects up to $30K
3. Workforce and leadership development	Cohort learning with 1:1 advising, technical skills and micro-credentials with SFU, BCIT and industry, leadership and workforce-transition support.	70 additional SMEs; aiming for up to 1,500 trained

Behind the tiers, **ecosystem capacity development** (monthly meetups, CEO peer forums, sector pilot events and links with outside robotics groups) connects buyers and sellers and feeds qualified engagements. It is a pathway built from the bottom up: SMEs enter where they fit and move up as readiness grows. ARM for BC directly advances four of the BC Robotics Cluster's eight strategic pillars: SME adoption, exports, awareness and impact measurement.

Aligned with PacifiCan's 2026–2028 Strategic Plan

ARM for BC is built for PacifiCan's three priorities. It **invests in B.C.'s strengths** by accelerating adoption of innovation in advanced materials and manufacturing, one of PacifiCan's named strategic sectors, and in marine, agri-food, resources and logistics. It helps **supply Canada** by strengthening BC firms and their BC robotics suppliers as major project, defence and homebuilding investments drive demand. And it helps **grow exports** through a drive to increase in export intensity among participating SMEs.

The ask fits PacifiCan's investment lens: *catalytic*, de-risking adoption that SMEs would otherwise defer and attracting follow-on capital; *targeted*, concentrating $6M on three core activities with measurable tiers; and *aligned* with Look West, BC's Manufacturing Action Plan, the Advanced Manufacturing Workforce Alliance and NGen. It produces direct economic benefits rapidly: SMEs supported, job, revenue and export growth, strengthened regional assets and investment attracted.

The ask

$6M over three years: $3M from PacifiCan's RIE program and $3M in private industry cash, for 50% non-government leverage. Expressions of interest from private industry identify a **$4.3M pool** of contributions plus 15 ecosystem partner letters.

Key Performance Indicators (by March 2031, 12 months after delivery)

	100+	**BC SMEs materially supported**		**30+**	**SMEs in cost-shared Tier 1, 2 engagements**
	120	**new BC jobs (2:1 HQP / non-HQP)**		**1000+**	**professionals trained**
	$50M	**added investment**		**15%**	**revenue growth, participating SMEs**
	15%	**relative growth in export intensity**		**ROI**	**case studies published from projects**

ARM for BC

CONTACT

Sylvain Moreno, PhD
CEO, Circle Innovation
E: sylvain.moreno@circleinnovation.ca

