

September 2, 2016

To:

Task Force on Puerto Rico's Economic Development
United States Congress

Sent via prtaskforce@mail.house.gov

Dear members of Congress:

We would like to take advantage of this opportunity to congratulate the Task Force. By requesting the submission of proposals and recommendations, you have allowed a commendable and necessary process of civic participation in the economic transformation of Puerto Rico.

ConPRmetidos is a non-profit organization that focuses on creating public-private partnerships to advance the economic development of the Island. Our team of leaders in the government, private and non-profit sector believe that knowledge sharing and peer-to-peer collaboration are both key to harnessing our human capital and stimulating the growth of our local industries.

Our main initiative—Puerto Rico Global—seeks to address the challenge of Puerto Rico's brain drain and its implications in the Island's recession. **Puerto Rico Global is the only worldwide network that leverages the knowledge and connections of talented Puerto Ricans abroad to achieve a better insertion of local industries in the global knowledge-based economy.**

Our research and benchmarking efforts have shown that diaspora communities can add significant value to economic development efforts in their countries of origin by building relationships with businesses, policymakers, professionals, and institutions in those countries and by transferring knowledge that contributes to industrial development and economic competitiveness.

Background

On August of 2014 the Pew Research Center published a study on Puerto Rico's population indicating that, between the years of 2000 and 2013, the Island's population decreased by 200,000 people. Meaning that two thirds of Puerto Rico's municipalities lost population during these years and the U.S. Census Bureau predicts that the Island will gradually continue to lose population until 2050.

According to Puerto Rico's Institute of Statistics, the Puerto Rican Diaspora constitutes one of the biggest migrations in modern era, with more Puerto Ricans living abroad than on the Island. As recent as July of 2015, the Institute confirmed that 166 people leave the

Island daily. For some municipalities this means one out of every ten of their residents and for Puerto Rico a reduction of 7% of its population.

A Pew Research Center analysis on the U.S. Census Bureau data also concluded that the search for economic opportunities is the most common explanation Puerto Ricans give for migrating to the United States. The study found that 42% of the respondents gave work-related answers when questioned about their decision to leave the Island.

In *Diaspora networks and the international migration of skills: how countries can draw on their talent abroad*, the Vice President of the World Bank Institute, Frannie Léautier, states that the issue of international migration is one of growing importance and that the transition to a knowledge-based economy has created a comprehensive market for skills and talent. But as talent and skills are the most prized possession for the world economy, the brain drain in developing countries continues to intensify.

The book highlights that governments must develop an agenda to promote political reform and institutional innovation in collaboration with members of their diaspora. Reforms in the public sector, innovation in the education system and social services, and promoting a private sector based on knowledge, are just some of the areas in which the diaspora can work with the government to promote an agenda of collaboration that manages to reduce poverty.

According to the "Migration Policy Institute" there are 400 government institutions and associations in 56 countries that have directly engaged their diaspora in the economic development agenda of their countries of origin. Puerto Rico Global was inspired by:

- *Connect Ireland* - This initiative has strategically engaged the Irish diaspora to promote Ireland as a business destination for foreign companies. They currently have 74,819 connectors and 2,107 new jobs are being created.
- *Chile Global* - A Chilean professional network that brings together entrepreneurs, students and professionals from the diaspora and links them with the Chilean community so that they can contribute to the country's development. The community offers internships for Chilean students, supports local entrepreneurship and publishes local jobs so that they community abroad can know where to find the opportunities.
- *GlobalScot* - GlobalScot is a worldwide network of business contacts who are experts in their field, and driven to help Scottish companies develop, expand and thrive in a competitive international market. The network has added about \$50 million in gross value to Scotland's economy.



Why Puerto Rico Global?

Puerto Rico currently lacks an infrastructure to capture, develop, and disseminate knowledge and other resources from its diaspora and the ability to create and maximize opportunities for joint diaspora-home projects. After witnessing how other countries have successfully inserted their diaspora in their economic development strategies, we believe that with the designation of appropriate resources, the support from your administration and our local government, Puerto Rico Global can create the proper infrastructure to effectively transform the Island's "brain drain" into a "brain circulation".

As we previously mentioned, Puerto Rico Global was created by ConPRmetidos to connect Puerto Ricans around the world. It is a diverse network of professionals, students, entrepreneurs, artists, investors, philanthropists, 'Boricuas' and friends of Puerto Rico, who have been brought together by the common purpose of collaborating in support of the Island's development and ultimately: (i) promoting collaboration among Puerto Ricans in the Island and abroad, (ii) attracting investments to the Island, and (iii) attracting and retaining competitive talent to spur the innovation and growth of local industries.

Members of Congress, you just assigned a Fiscal Control Board with seven experts in finance and administration to oversee the Government of Puerto Rico's budget, its management and spending. We currently have 5.1 million Puerto Ricans living abroad, many have expertise in science, technology, agriculture, green energy, green building, education, health, business, banking, among others, and are valuable assets to the economy that we want to build. Some specific areas we already identified are the need Puerto Rico based companies have of exporting their products and services, finding new customers and bringing in external capital and how it is much easier to enter a new market when there is an influential, established Puerto Rican on the other side who can help make the right connections. This is why, last year, we launched a matchmaking platform, puertoricoglobal.org, that allows users to "Get Help" and "Give Help" by "Creating Tasks" that filter their search for field experts based on their skills, experience, and current location. We've also noted that while young professionals continue to leave the Island in search of job opportunities, Puerto Rico based companies are struggling to find right talent and skills. The digital platform allows local job postings and is designed to promote collaboration, facilitate the exchange of knowledge and connections. However, our reach is still limited by the resources that are available to us as non-profit organization.

We hope that you find Puerto Rico Global as a worthy proposal for the Task Force as it seeks to transform Puerto Rico's economy by tackling core challenges like the brain drain. It is important to mention that possible solutions to the brain drain issue should not be limited to finding ways to retain talent in the Island. If the global knowledge-based economy's most important asset is, precisely, the knowledge and exposure of human capital, and Puerto Rico has a large number of human capital abroad gaining new knowledge and interacting with the global economy, if we can effectively transfer back home the knowledge and connections acquired abroad, we can transform what we



currently see as a development challenge into an asset and even a competitive advantage for our economy.

We remain available to answer any questions or suggestions about Puerto Rico Global. Please receive our best regards and those of our generation for the Task Force's efforts to transform our beloved Puerto Rico.

Sincerely,



Isabel Rullán
Managing Director

