



compass
rose

Working together to provide support and hope in an unprecedented crisis: A brief from Compass Rose

Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Industry (INDU)

Re: Committee study of matters related to the government response to COVID-19

June 19, 2020

Submitted by Jacqueline (Jacquie) LaRocque, Principal, Compass Rose Group

613-614-6339

jlarcque@compassrosegroupp.org

About Compass Rose

Compass Rose is an Ottawa-based public affairs and communications firm supporting businesses, associations and organizations across Canada in a wide range of for-profit and non-profit activities including finance, culture, transport, forestry, agriculture, health, export, rural organizations, and more.

Compass Rose would like to take this opportunity to comment on the government response to the COVID-19 pandemic and provide insight into how our team, working alongside Canadians and the federal government in this unprecedented situation, was able to rapidly transform our information and support services to provide a new level of proactive, up-to-the-minute service to clients and other partners in a time of need.

Helping Canadians navigate an unprecedented situation

From the start of this crisis, we have seen through both our own experience as a small business and through our clients and partners how this new reality has affected Canadian organizations — from sole proprietorships to Canada's largest employers, from local Indigenous arts groups to national non-profits. Everyone has suffered the consequences of widespread economic disruption.

As part of our company's lived mandate to find the common good, Compass Rose has been offering some pro bono services to hard-hit organizations, especially small local businesses here in our Ottawa community. These companies have needed assistance to navigate the support programs offered by the federal and provincial governments, and a significant amount of our focus has been on tracking and navigating these supports as they are introduced and implemented. While a lot of concrete information on what supports are available and how to access them is now easy to find, in the early months of the pandemic, many Canadians and organizations had difficulty figuring out how to get the help they needed to survive.

We believe that our provision of daily real-time, user-friendly information on the support programs offered by the federal and other levels of government has proven extremely valuable in the vital effort to address the uncertainty, hardship and fear generated across the socio-economic spectrum by the pandemic.

Collating and sharing all the available information on support programs and funding from federal departments and provinces in one place has been of immense use to stakeholders. It is still updated daily and we have been pleased to see it used widely by Canadians seeking assistance. For your information, the [chart is available here](#).

Compass Rose continued to improve and refine the chart as needs grew and gaps in existing programs were revealed. Our chart now has detailed reopening plans for every province and territory. We named an in-house, resident expert who could answer a call on a moment's notice for those needing help interpreting the information. We delivered webinars and daily updates to clients based on the news of the day.

For many organizations, quick, appropriate support from the federal government during the crisis has clearly been the difference between sustainability and complete collapse. And it will be equally important in the recovery period ahead. We want to continue to be a partner in this recovery for the clients we proudly work with, our community and our country.

Appreciation of government response: getting programs as right as possible

We would like to express our deep appreciation of the government's response to the crisis. Its fast, wide-reaching and flexible approach with regard to support mechanisms, coupled with the immediate interchange of practical, timely information, has been extremely valuable. It has enabled organizations such as ours to provide clients and other groups with a crucial measure of confidence and hope in the face of a business and economic shut-down threatening their operations and very existence.

And we appreciate the federal government's commitment to getting programs as right as possible. For instance, some Compass Rose clients or community neighbours represent smaller for-profit and non-profit organizations involved in important business sectors and the provision of public services. Lowering the payroll requirements for the Canadian Emergency Business Account (CEBA) and implementing the Regional Relief and Recovery Funds (RRRF) through the Regional Development Agencies have helped many small businesses and sole proprietorships keep afloat.

Looking forward, we at Compass Rose hope the exemplary response and willingness to consider innovative proposals and pro-growth ideas when it comes to SMEs will be a continuing hallmark of the approach by the government and departmental officials as we begin to return to more normal activities.

Please allow us to outline the needs we hope to see movement on in the coming days and weeks.

Recommendations

1. Supporting Canadians' mental health

We are deeply grateful for the work the federal government has done already to provide Canadians with mental health support in this time of crisis. Mental health is as important as physical health, and experts are well aware that movement in this area — at federal level too — is needed to urgently help Canadians, even as COVID-19 infection rates drop. We strongly encourage the federal government to further fund mental health support programs on a national scale, including exploring the opportunity of scaling-up programs that are already operating at the provincial level. Programs delivered by the Canadian Mental Health Association and others could be expanded to help even more isolated populations, employees who lack support, or even House of Commons members or government officials themselves.

2. CEWS and emergency relief for airports, ports and forestry sectors

While support programs like the Canadian Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) have helped many Canadian businesses, entire sectors — even those deemed essential services — are not able to access the support they need and are at risk of collapsing. Essential services like airports, ports and forestry companies are still trying to confirm what relief they can access, making even short-term business planning extremely challenging. As of this writing, for example, we are hearing:

- Airports are experiencing extreme financial hardship due to COVID-19, even after implementing cost-cutting measures. Rent relief and liquidity support will be crucial to sustain operations and position airports for the economic recovery ahead.
- Due to low commodity prices, the Canadian forestry sector is already in difficult economic shape. Because of this, many forestry companies do not meet the revenue loss criteria to qualify for CEWS. Liquidity and financing support is needed to help the forestry sector recover.
- Canada's Port Authorities (CPAs) that require the wage subsidy are still awaiting answers about whether they will even be able to access that much-needed relief. A few of Canada's ports are facing extreme challenges as a result of the pandemic, while others are working on getting through the crisis while also planning ahead to help the government with the eventual economic recovery.

As the government considers how to expand CEWS to cover the reality on the ground for Canadians businesses, it must ensure that these industries are either included in CEWS or that the

government offers alternate or scalable forms of emergency support so they can continue to operate. We also invite the committee to investigate these sectoral gaps in COVID-19 supports.

3. Businesses struggling to hire students

There are currently serious obstacles for businesses to hire students, while at the same time, many students are unable to find either summer or post-graduation jobs and instead must rely on the Canada Emergency Student Benefit (CESB).

While we appreciate the energy around the Canada Summer Jobs program, the program is massively oversubscribed, and many businesses, ourselves included, were not able to take part in the program. Compass Rose was hoping to hire two students to help with our pro bono work for non-profit organizations, work that has increased since COVID-19. Without a doubt SMEs across the board could benefit from student help, and students would gain critical work and life experience. We recommend the government increase its program capacity to help SMEs hire students.

Putting our people first

With a fully digital team and remote management and business tools already in place, Compass Rose was able to make a seamless transition into a new way of working for the indefinite future.

Our resilient clients and partners rose to the challenges equally, supporting their teams, staff and continuing to provide goods and services to Canadians. Our communication was constant and work together continued — increased — despite COVID-19. Many of these clients remain essential services themselves and are working to keep our country strong.

We are only as strong as our dedicated team of Public Affairs Counsellors. Ensuring their health, wellness and safety throughout this time remains our top priority and the best way to ensure we serve our clients to the absolute best of our abilities, despite the additional stress of working in a new way. Compass Rose was able to access and take advantage of key mental health resources through the MHCC and the CMHA, sharing them with our team and ensuring that our staff felt fully supported. We offered adapted schedules, flexible hours and opportunities for Compass Rose-funded self care initiatives—including team yoga classes and personal training sessions. We were also able to offer modified and reduced work schedules at full pay to accommodate team members with children at home.

It truly takes a community to support each other through a crisis like this. We wish to extend our deepest thanks to our landlords at One York who kindly offered rent help immediately. Though we did not need to take them up on their gracious offer, it was appreciated during these challenging times. We thank Canada's telecommunications providers for keeping businesses like ours as well as

Canadians connected through this challenging time. We continue to commend and thank our front line workers and the research community working to secure treatment or vaccination against COVID-19.

Conclusion

We hope that pending concerns will be addressed by the government as it adjusts and implements its support programs. Working together, we have shown that the combination of an agile, resolute government and an innovative, determined private sector can be instrumental in overcoming even the most daunting challenge while opening the way to positive results for all Canadians.

Thank you for your time,

Jacquie LaRocque, Principal
Compass Rose
<http://compassrosegroup.org>

1 York Street, Ottawa, ON
613-614-6339
jlarcque@compassrosegroup.org