



Advocating the voices of Canada's entrepreneurs to government

Contents

Introduction	2
About Startup Canada	2
Startup Gov 2021	3
Have your Voice Heard Activities	5
Methodology	5
Sample Size	5
Findings and Common Themes	5
Recommendations	7
Conclusion	8
Appendix	9

Introduction

Canada is one of the most entrepreneurial countries in the world and there is no doubt about the importance of SMB's and their roles in powering Canadian economic growth. Yet, many entrepreneurs in Canada find entrepreneurship difficult to navigate. The pandemic brought rough tides and a need for a stronger support system for SMB's. Many sailed through these tough times but there's a long journey ahead of them.

This document is a result of continuous consultations with Startup Canada's audience, specifically communities who lead at the grassroots level and support entrepreneurs with tools and resources to grow their businesses and connect with like minded entrepreneurs. This report offers compiled and candid comments, concerns, and suggestions around what entrepreneurs need to recover from the pandemic and the resources that can help them succeed. Being a national convener, we pride ourselves on supporting entrepreneurs in better accessing support in the ecosystem from both the private and public sector and connecting the dots where needed. This report has supported Startup Canada in the enhancement of programs for 2022 and will remain a valuable resource for our advocacy efforts.

About | Startup Canada

Startup Canada is the gateway to Canada's entrepreneurial ecosystem. We're here to connect entrepreneurs with the support, community, and tools they need to build a successful business in Canada.

Since our inception in 2012, Startup Canada has grown to support more than 122,000 entrepreneurs annually and an ever-growing grassroots community network from coast to coast to coast. Through our flagship and digital programs, we provide guidance, eliminate barriers, and champion the needs of each and every entrepreneur to private and public sector partners. Startup Canada supports entrepreneurs in starting up and scaling up to ultimately make Canada the best place to start and build a business.

Startup Gov 2021

Startup Gov (formerly Startup Canada Day on the Hill) is one of Startup Canada's flagship programs. It connects a pan-Canadian cohort of entrepreneurs to government representatives, with the support of our network of private-sector partners. This program gives every entrepreneur a voice to the government to create the conditions necessary for entrepreneurial success in Canada.

In 2021, Startup Gov supported entrepreneurs to:

- Have their voices heard federally and provincially
- Provide concrete recommendations on how they can be better supported by both the public and private sector
- Develop skills and training to grasp government relations 101
- Hear directly from government both provincially and federally pertaining to how they are supporting entrepreneurs
- Connect with international governments, including Israel, the United States of America, Switzerland, New Zealand, and Poland

Startup Canada Communities

Startup Canada's Communities Program is a flagship program supporting and connecting entrepreneurship networks that fuel a culture and environment for entrepreneurship at the grassroots level.

How we do it:

- We provide entrepreneurs with opportunities to connect with support, mentors, resources, and financing;
- We rally local entrepreneurship organizations to foster collaboration, information sharing, and opportunities;
- We connect with the national Startup Canada network to provide new partners, opportunities, and initiatives to local entrepreneurs; and
- We grow exposure across Canada and around the world

To date, Startup Canada has 40 communities nationally, including:

1. Startup Moncton
2. Startup PEI
3. Startup Guelph
4. Startup Collingwood

5. Startup Hamilton
6. Startup Kingston
7. Startup Sarnia-Lambton
8. Startup Sault Ste Marie
9. Startup Kenhteke - Ontario
10. Startup Waterloo
11. Startup Peel
12. Startup Social Enterprise
13. Startup Grey Bruce
14. Startup Niagara
15. Startup Francophone Ontario
16. North Forge Technology Exchange - Winnipeg
17. Startup Bow Valley
18. Startup Calgary
19. Startup Llyodminster
20. Startup *Medicine Hat & District Chamber of Commerce*
21. *Young Women in Business, Calgary Chapter*
22. *Startup Columbia Valley*
23. *Startup Revelstoke*
24. *Startup Surrey*
25. *Black Entrepreneurs and Business Society (BEBC)*
26. *Startup Vancouver*
27. *Startup Yukon*
28. *AGE-WELL network*
29. *Canadian Small Business Women*
30. *Rural on Purpose*
31. *Startup 50+*
32. *Startup Saas*
33. *Startup Fashion*
34. *Mixing Babies and Business*
35. *Startup Montreal*
36. *Startup CleanTech*
37. *Startup SETSI*
38. *Startup Ottawa*
39. *Startup Halifax*
40. *Startup Newcomers*

Have your Voice Heard Activities

From summer to fall, 2021, Startup Canada met with Startup Community members and discussed what key aspects they would like to see the federal government and other support organizations do to better support them. The notes and key recommendations will be packaged and sent to their local MPs and used for federal advocacy and in ongoing federal meetings.

Methodology

These consultations were facilitated by Startup Canada and were capped at 10 participants, spanning 45 minutes to ensure each attendee could share their feedback. We also provided the opportunity to complete a survey should a meeting not have been possible. The survey can be found [here](#).

Several questions were posed during the sessions enabling Startup Canada to better assess and understand what each community's biggest pain points were and what they require to ensure they are set up to continue to innovate and contribute to the Canadian economy.

Sample Size

Through live consultations and the survey, feedback was collected from over 60 participants representing Startup Canada communities from coast to coast to coast.

Findings and Common Themes

The main topics from these consultations ranged from funding, flexibility of programs, mentorship and advisory support, digital literacy, talent retention, procurement and overall support. Below you will find a summary of these themes.

1. Funding Programs

- a. Lack of funding, especially for early stage entrepreneurs
- b. Funding decisions take time, there is no support in the process. There's lack of time and knowledge of the programs avail both in private and public sector

2. Flexibility around funding programs:

- a. Existing funding programs are not inclusive and don't account for specific demographics like seniors, social impact businesses, women as tech founders. R&D focused funding is usually for technology or manufacturing industries, would like social innovation included
- b. Loan program payback period of 2-5 years included 2021, but this year was equally difficult for SMB's. Some flexibility around the payback period would relieve many businesses from the pressure of paying the loan back in the year where their business still struggled.

3. Mentorship & Advisory Support

- a. Understanding covid protocols
- b. Transitional programs for mid-career new entrepreneurs coming from conventional corporations or people who are coming back to entrepreneurship after years, there should be some program to support their transitions.
- c. Ensure entrepreneurs have access to advisory and mentorship support, especially for women who have been disproportionately impacted by the effects of the pandemic.
- d. Mental health support for entrepreneurs

4. Digital Literacy

- a. Digital Literacy is a huge challenge for entrepreneurs from all demographics. The pandemic accelerated the need for digital literacy and forced many entrepreneurs to invest time in relearning and upskilling themselves.

5. Talent related support

- a. Keeping talent in Canada
- b. Retain talent with so many moving decisions by the govt on back to office guidelines is challenging
- c. lack of immigrants who are talented to be hired is tough because of delayed immigration process

6. Procurement

- a. Matching or connecting to organizations that can support, help from the government. on reducing on-off fees by these organizations instead of the government. could deal in bulk and offer cheaper prices to SMBs
- b. For e-commerce of product businesses: buying in bulk and getting good rates is tough, subsidies around that, or govt. Helping with large costs.

7. Creating a support ecosystem through Entrepreneur Support Organizations

- a. Very limited options to small, early-stage startups, angel groups focus on portfolio companies. Thus, a lot of innovative companies are moving to US based incubators, accelerators for advanced funding support.
- b. Limited information was available about funding, covid restrictions/guidelines, which made it difficult to offer support to our clients
- c. Streamlining how information is shared that can benefit small business owners and entrepreneurs

Recommendations

Canadian entrepreneurs are optimistic and are seeking the silver lining. With thoughtful implementation and ongoing government support it can be ensured that existing SMB's are not just able to recover but thrive in the time to come, and Canada's entrepreneurial ecosystem attracts a strong pipeline of emerging businesses driving Canada's economic growth.

Recommendations from these consultations combined with [Startup Canada's 2020 Census findings](#) aim towards an immediate need for:

- A resource tool that equips entrepreneurs with the foundational tools and resources required to set up successful businesses that will eventually create jobs and vitalize economic development.
 - Entrepreneur Support Organizations like BDC have comprehensive resources to help entrepreneurs navigate minute functionalities of a business.
 - Our consultations with entrepreneurs and support organizations nationally have provided useful feedback and revealed a crucial need to have a tool that consolidates existing resources and makes navigation easier for entrepreneurs. Entrepreneur support organizations like [Sheo](#), [WEKH](#), [CGLCC](#), [CAMSC](#), [WEOC](#), to name a few have existing

resources to support small-medium businesses in their industries and demographics. To create a platform that consolidates this information and directs entrepreneurs in the right direction, Startup Canada is launching **Business Owner's Toolbox** that will ensure a larger group of entrepreneurs have their businesses in order for the future, consequently creating greater eligibility for government relief should there be a future pandemic, as well as providing entrepreneurs with the resources they require to set up their companies properly – all in one simple toolbox.

- Mentorship programs/resources that are inclusive and accessible to all demographics especially marginalized communities
 - Startup Canada's flagship programs namely **Startup Women**, **Startup Global**, and **Startup Gov** have been instrumental in connecting individuals with industry, demographic focused mentors and offer them networking and learning opportunities. Startup Canada Communities like Startup Yukon, Startup Calgary, Startup Social Enterprise, Startup Llyodminster have also actively embedded mentorship in their programming. Mentorship will continue to be a crucial aspect of our programming in 2022 and beyond.
- Flexible and inclusive funding programs packaged with operational resources to equip entrepreneurs with the foundational tools and resources required to set up successful businesses that will eventually create jobs and vitalize economic development.

Conclusion

Startup Canada welcomes the chance to share these findings with both private and public sector leaders and work in partnership to remedy some of the ongoing pain points entrepreneurs face. In 2022, Startup Canada is scaling its existing programming to an *annual structure* supporting entrepreneurs through economic recovery, focused on connecting and convening support across the entire ecosystem. We will continue to build and connect local ecosystems from coast to coast to coast, empower women to catalyze change, offer mentorship and advisory support, and bridge the gap between entrepreneurs and the Private Sector, and Government of Canada. We will continue to strive to implement programs based on the needs of the communities we serve, and look forward to growing the entrepreneurial base in Canada.

Appendix

Questions asked :

1. What have been the largest pain points for you during pandemic ?
2. What support are you looking for as it relates to economic recovery?
3. What do you want to see the government do more or less ?
4. How interested are you in connecting with your local MPP or MP?
5. What do you want to see more of from govt and private sector leaders as it relates to support for entrepreneurs and startups?
6. What were some of the hurdles you faced in receiving support during the pandemic?
7. What kind of support would you like to see from entrepreneur support organizations?
8. What challenges are you facing in the reopening stages of your business?
9. What were some of the key points of contact in your community to access support?
10. Are there any training resources you would like the government/entrepreneur support organizations to provide?
11. Were you able to digitize your business during the pandemic? If yes, were there any gaps that you'd like to share.

Themes

- COVID adaptation experiences
- Reopening stage
- Collaboration and communication with local government
- Feedback for the government and ESOs
- Support and resources from government and entrepreneur support organizations
- Business sustainability and stabilization after economic recovery