

Keith LaBossiere, CEO & Managing Partner at TDS Answers your Questions About the COMPASS Pro Bono Program

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TDS has recently launched a pro bono program called COMPASS that offers up to \$10,000 in legal services to local organizations who have a reputation of giving back to the community and have been financially affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and need legal assistance to recover. Keith LaBossiere, CEO and Managing Partner of TDS answers commonly asked questions about the program.



Why did TDS launch the COMPASS program?

KL: Two years ago, we moved into the True North Square and invested in technology that would allow all the lawyers and staff to work effortlessly from anywhere. Little did we know, that two short years later, we would be amid a global pandemic. We feel extremely lucky that we have been able to get through this pandemic and operate as usual. We continue to engage with the community that we work in and live in. That is why we have launched COMPASS. We are offering \$40,000 in complimentary legal services to four small businesses within Manitoba, who are dealing with or trying to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. We felt that \$10,000 of legal services for each organization is an amount that could make a difference, and really help them get back on course.

Where did the inspiration for COMPASS come from?

KL: When we learned about the Adopt a Business Program that Sherpa, Direct Focus, Bold, McKim, and other local firms were participating in, we thought this was a great idea. In addition to having marketing needs during the pandemic, we knew that many struggling local businesses also had legal needs.

What does COMPASS stand for?

KL: We saw local marketing agencies support the community through a program offering marketing services to local businesses and this inspired us to launch a similar program for legal services. We see that local small businesses are having to reimagine their businesses. We want to be partners with them and help them reimagine their business. We also understand that restructuring their businesses is something that normally costs money and that is a burden currently. We want to help them with that.

Why is it called COMPASS?

KL: COMPASS is an acronym containing the components of the program. COVID-19, Optimism, Manitoba, Pro Bono, Advocacy, Support, and Service. A compass is associated with guiding and finding direction in uncertain times.

Who can apply for COMPASS?

KL: Small businesses with 50 or fewer employees, less than five million in sales, who have been in business for at least three years and who need legal advice, but cannot afford it right now, can apply for this program. We are going to be selecting four different businesses. We are reserving two spots for existing clients and the other two spots are open to any qualifying business, charity, or not-for-profit.

Why is COMPASS only offered to small businesses?

While it is not possible for us to help every single organization in need, we can help some organizations, so we wanted to focus on where the greatest need was. We reached out to the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce to ask which industry sectors, including charities and not-for-profits, were experiencing the greatest impact from COVID-19. The feedback we received was that while most organizations across every sector have had some impact from the pandemic, most large and mid-sized organizations have been able to weather the storm so far, but small businesses were being hit especially hard. The Chamber also provided us with a general definition of a 'small business', which includes the annual revenue and number of employees referenced above.

How will you select the four organizations?

KL: We have an application form online. It is open now and available until Friday, July 31. We are going to be looking at those companies and match their culture with ours. To pay-it-forward, we are looking to partner with the applicants who are community-minded, share our diversity and community values, and have struggled through the pandemic.

On the application form, it asks if your organization is owned by someone from a visible minority or underrepresented group. Is that a requirement to apply?

KL: A core value of TDS is diversity. We are going to be paying close attention and reaching out to entrepreneurs from black, indigenous, or people of colour in our community, as well as the LGBTQ2IA+ community. Our hope is, just as it was our hope when we moved into this building to help the revitalization of downtown, we can help some businesses recover through the pandemic. One of the goals of moving into True North Square was recruitment. The management of TDS set specific diversity targets for both our lawyers and staff and in 2019 we achieved those targets. Including a diversity component within the COMPASS program is aligned with our diversity core value.

If you are an organization focusing on recovery due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and meet the requirements of our application, we would like to help you get back #oncourse.

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