



CHAIR'S MESSAGE

## Moving ACEC's strategic priorities forward



As we reflect on an unprecedented year and all that we have accomplished in its wake, we now look ahead to the role that ACEC, our members and our industry will play in the ongoing COVID-19 response and recovery phase. To ensure our industry is best positioned to aid in these efforts, we will

continue to support our members into the 'next normal' that lies ahead.

I am honoured to lead this effort as the Chair of the ACEC Board of Directors for the 2020-2021 term and look forward to steering us into the new year as we continue to implement our strategic plan. ACEC's mission is to promote a business environment that recognizes and rewards our members' expertise and their contributions to society. To fulfil this mission, our strategic plan focuses on four priorities: *advocating for members; profile building; providing value to members; and increasing diversity.*

ACEC works diligently at *advocating for members* to achieve a more favourable public policy and business climate for consulting engineering companies. We do this by influencing the federal government and collaborating with national stakeholders on a host of issues to help ensure that Canada remains competitive and prosperous. As we continue to monitor and respond to the federal government on industry issues impacting the sector, we will update our members on important government policies and programs.

I encourage you to support our advocacy efforts by participating in the Parliamentary Partners program. This initiative leverages local connections through meetings between members and their Members of Parliament. With the program now offered in a virtual format, it is even easier to participate.

Increasing the stature and influence of our member firms by showcasing the impact of their contributions to Canada's social, economic and environmental quality of life is an essential aspect of our *profile building* priority. The Canadian Consulting Engineering Awards, which showcase the year's best projects by member firms, make ACEC one of the highest profile industry associations in Canada. These achievements are showcased through the media with features in *Canadian Consulting Engineer* and press releases we develop, along with our month-long #20DaysOfExcellence in Engineering social media campaign

showcasing a different award-winning project each day. We look forward to celebrating these achievements virtually in 2021.

Creating opportunities for our members to develop, participate in and utilize programs and services to support their business needs is the pillar of our *providing value to members* priority. Along with keeping members informed of industry trends, offering knowledge opportunities and providing helpful standard contracts and agreements, we work directly with members, soliciting their input and supporting them on industry issues. We will continue to work with the Provincial and Territorial Member Organizations to deliver these opportunities to our members in the coming year.

ACEC expanded its strategic priorities to include *increasing diversity* and has committed itself to concrete action toward diversity and inclusion of gender, backgrounds, perspectives and expertise within the association's leadership. Our goal is to also promote the need for and the benefits of diversity and inclusion in decision-making throughout the consulting engineering sector. To date, ACEC has amended its bylaws and board policy to ensure up-to-date and inclusive language that removes institutional barriers to increasing diversity. When considering candidates for the board and executive committees, the mandate of the nominating committee expressly makes diversity an objective throughout the process. ACEC is also endorsing '30 by 30,' an Engineers Canada initiative with the goal of raising the percentage of newly licensed engineers who are women to 30% by the year 2030. An ACEC Board member and the Chair of the ACEC Young Professionals Network represents ACEC as its '30 by 30' Champion.

During my time serving on the ACEC Board, I have witnessed the progress we have made over the years pertaining to the above noted priorities. Outlined in the next few pages are the accomplishments of the ACEC staff under the guidance of our dedicated Board of Directors over the last year. Based on the work of ACEC's dedicated team in service of our members and in support of our industry during this time, I know that we are well positioned to face future challenges. The Board and I are confident that ACEC is prepared for the year ahead and we are very optimistic for the long-term success and contributions of our members for the benefit of the communities we serve together.

ANTHONY KARAKATSANIS, P.ENG.  
CHAIR, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, ACEC-CANADA



# YEAR IN REVIEW

## A LOOK BACK ON 2020

**W**hen speaking of 2020, it is impossible not to consider the impact of COVID-19 on our industry, our communities and all of Canada. This retrospective offers a snapshot of the advocacy activities that shaped ACEC's response and its efforts to support the consulting engineering industry through the crisis.

### March 2020

As the country went into lockdown, ACEC quickly recognized the need for action. Outreach was made to the federal government and stakeholder partners to discuss possible policy responses to assist businesses to ensure both their immediate and long-term survival. ACEC also had specific discussions with Infrastructure Canada to share the main messages being made to the government in the initial weeks of the crisis. These included:

- that planning, design, construction and operation of important infrastructure are essential services nationwide.
- that infrastructure in general and the consulting engineering sector in particular are critical to Canada's resilience to and recovery from crisis.
- that our industry has significant capacity to work remotely to ensure the health and safety of employees and adherence to the government's social distancing requirements.
- that designing will need to start six months to two years before there are shovels in the ground should the government decide to drive stimulus through infrastructure.
- that the federal government should continue implementing its infrastructure plans and encourage provinces and municipalities to stay the course on infrastructure.

During these discussions, ACEC also suggested that in the longer term, to facilitate the recovery, accelerating/re-profiling some of the infrastructure investments from the later years of the program into the next two or three years could result in a more even distribution of investments over the remainder of the program.

As well as its own outreach, ACEC collaborated closely with the Canadian Chamber of Commerce and over 60 other business associations that make up the Canadian Business Reliance Network, participating in a joint statement of support for national efforts to protect jobs. While ACEC was pleased that many of these recommendations were addressed in the economic relief programs announced by the end of March and into April, there were

concerns over the eligibility periods of the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) program. In response, ACEC corresponded with the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Small Business to outline specific recommendations to address these concerns.

### April 2020

ACEC communicated with the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities to extend our assistance and stress the important role and expertise our industry could play in assisting the government with its economic recovery plan. The letter also raised many of the recommendations made to Minister Morneau and Minister Ng regarding the eligibility periods of the CEWS.

### May 2020

ACEC was invited to participate in the Construction Industry Roundtable convened by the federal government. This gathering of stakeholders was one of the key requests ACEC made to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities in its April outreach. It brought together stakeholder groups in the infrastructure and construction industry, as well as various labour and construction organizations. Elected officials, political staff and senior civil servants from Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC), Infrastructure Canada and Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) also participated.

The meeting allowed for open discussion and dialogue on potential ways forward for the construction industry during and after the COVID-19 crisis. It also allowed supporting industry organizations to provide clarity and certainty on how sectors like ours are ready and able to support major infrastructure projects. ACEC President & CEO John Gamble and Vice President Martine Proulx stressed that the effectiveness of infrastructure investments depends on a robust and sustained project pipeline, thus allowing all project partners - owners, designers and constructors, labour and supply chains - to retain expertise and capacity and allocate their resources effectively.

This was an opportunity for ACEC to further establish itself as an important stakeholder to the government. The Parliamentary Secretaries were very receptive to the points raised by industry participants and welcomed the opportunity for further dialogue in the near future through



ongoing meetings and discussions. ACEC is pleased to have been at the table at the subsequent meetings, as this will be an important forum to ensure the voice of the industry is heard and considered.

### June 2020

Throughout the month of June, ACEC continued to communicate with leadership within the federal government and with key stakeholder partners. ACEC joined with other leaders of the Canadian construction industry in support of temporary sick pay coverage during the COVID-19 pandemic within a letter to the Prime Minister. In a joint letter with the Canadian Construction Association (CCA) and the Canadian Council for Public-Private Partnerships (CCPPP) to the Prime Minister, ACEC also reiterated the need for economic stimulus and the importance of moving infrastructure projects forward during and beyond the crisis. ACEC also took part in a public consultation on the CEWS to help inform potential changes to the program to maximize employment and meet the needs of both employers and employees.

### July and August 2020

ACEC invited Andy Fillmore, MP and Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, to an exclusive digital townhall with the ACEC board and CEOs of several member firms. This hour-long interactive discussion explored how the consulting engineering sector could help navigate the COVID-19 crisis and contribute to Canada's economic recovery.

To strengthen and amplify our advocacy initiatives, ACEC continued to participate in targeted coalition-building and push for more comprehensive economic recovery measures. With some of its stakeholder partners, ACEC looked to harmonize industry efforts through the Building For Recovery coalition, which seeks to stabilize Canada's construction sector, invest in Canadian infrastructure over the long-term and create inclusive training and employment. The group collaborated through the summer and into early fall to create a grassroots advocacy plan around three core pillars: resources for communities, jobs for workers and improving quality of life.

As part of direct efforts to shape policy, ACEC submitted its 2021 Federal Budget Recommendations to the fed-

eral government to spur economic recovery and growth. In particular, ACEC's submission highlighted the need for investments that enable: economic prosperity and a stable recovery; procurement best practices to achieve quality and innovation; the reinstatement of the National Guide to Sustainable Municipal Infrastructure; the harmonization of federal and provincial approvals; and the implementation of a national corridor to accommodate multiple infrastructure assets.

### September 2020

The September 23 Speech from the Throne focused largely on the protection and restoration of the physical, societal and economic health of Canadians. To continue promoting the importance of infrastructure investments being timely and balanced between "social" and "economic" infrastructure, ACEC conducted targeted advocacy outreach to moderate, "pro-business" Liberal Members of Parliament (MPs). The meetings generated positive response and ACEC continued to meet with key stakeholders within the Liberal caucus to ensure its key messages continued to permeate the government's economic response.

### October 2020

For its October virtual annual general meeting, ACEC hosted the Honourable Catherine McKenna, Minister of Infrastructure and Communities. This was an opportunity to continue to build on the strong relationship developed with the Minister and her office. During her address and subsequent Q&A, Minister McKenna shared the government's vision and plans for infrastructure investment moving forward.

As a direct component of our government relations strategy, the ACEC Parliamentary Partners program was relaunched. While ACEC's direct advocacy efforts have strengthened its position with the MPs, meaningful connections at the local level are critical to further grow political power. As COVID-19 has forced many Parliamentarians to place an even higher priority on the concerns of businesses in their local communities, this is the right move to enhance our grassroots advocacy during this tumultuous time.

ACEC's Parliamentary Partners program directly engages members in ACEC's advocacy efforts to demonstrate the effects of government decisions on projects in com-

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munities from coast-to-coast-to-coast. Unlike our Parliament Hill Day, where participants need to be in Ottawa, the program allows the association to leverage ACEC members' local connections in their ridings and communities. Through engaging them in advocacy on an ongoing basis, ACEC creates a pool of experienced "citizen lobbyists" on behalf of the industry. We have connected with dozens of our members to ask for their industry expertise and their participation in this important program. We received positive responses and scheduled several meetings for end of November and beginning of December.

#### November 2020

The Minister of Finance tabled the long-awaited Fall Economic Statement in the House of Commons, which provided a comprehensive

overview of Canada's fiscal position and presented new details on COVID-related relief measures. It also reaffirmed the government's commitment from the Speech from the Throne to continue supporting the economy and the hardest-hit businesses through this crisis. Minister Freeland indicated her government would pursue these activities while laying the groundwork for the post-pandemic stimulus and their long-term priorities, such as pharmacare, national affordable child care and addressing climate change.

ACEC was encouraged that the federal government is developing a plan to help Canada build back better through the investment up to \$100 billion in stimulus over the next three fiscal years. While it is anticipated that infrastructure investments will continue to be a significant element of the

proposed stimulus plan, few details were released with the statement. However, the government is expected to prioritize investments that support a green and sustainable economy and that result in demonstrable benefits to communities. While ACEC supports such investments, we will continue to encourage the government to also make investments that will rebuild and grow the economy so that its recovery plan is financially viable. ACEC is also looking forward to details on the government's role in continuing to help municipalities invest in traditional, core infrastructure and close the infrastructure deficit.

#### December 2020

ACEC has previously made its priorities for the economic recovery known to the federal government directly to the Prime Minister and his cabinet, as well as through consultations for the 2021 federal budget. ACEC continued its efforts to have its key messages recognized and implemented in the stimulus program announced in the government's economic statement by reaching out to the Clerk of the Finance Committee to request an opportunity to appear before the Committee on behalf of our industry. In light of the hundreds of requests the clerk received, outreach was also conducted with individual Committee members, requesting individual meetings with each.

#### Looking Ahead

In the coming weeks and months, ACEC will continue educating Ministers, Parliamentarians and senior bureaucrats on the important role infrastructure plays in driving the economy and improving the environmental and social quality of life of Canadians. ACEC looks forward to working with the federal government on following through on its commitments and to help ensure that its programs are efficient and effective.

## Digital agility: A new way for engineering firms to get ahead



By Rhys Morgan, Partner, RSM Canada | [rsmcanada.com](http://rsmcanada.com)

**D**igital agility is critical to establishing and maintaining a competitive advantage. By strategically using technologies to complement their workforces, companies can enhance revenue growth and productivity across five areas:

**Business operations.** Automated reporting, project management and resource allocation tools free employees to perform more value-added tasks.

**Employee enablement.** Employees want an innovative environment that provides tools to support business improvement and training. That also means embracing the ability to work from anywhere and using technology to facilitate it.

**Client engagement.** Clients are demanding enhanced service offerings, project transparency, collaboration and timely information.

**Stable and secure technology.** Networked systems, often providing client access, must be easy to use but also secure.

**Data analytics.** Information tools are rich sources of insights to identify opportunities and help resolve problem areas sooner.

Digital agility calls not just for investing in new technology, but also embedding technology into the business' strategy for responding to change.