

# Open Government Initiative Public Engagement Feedback

## Regional Councils of the Rural Secretariat

Q1. What ideas do you have to make The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador more open?

- Having people answer phones; answering machines and voice mail can be frustrating
- Have an entry point when contacting government
- Some information is not for public consumption
- Perception issue that GNL is not open and they need to do something about it
- Is open government a proactive strategy or is being seen as a reactive ...if done for the wrong reason it will show
- Everything can't be released immediately at the moment it is being asked for...can't pick and choose what is released
- There is a cost associated with being open and that should be communicated
- Salaries, etc. should be put up on the site without being asked for
- All budgets, travel, etc. should be posted, should be easily found/identified. Websites are complex, not user friendly
- Develop a mechanism for recalling your member for the House of Assembly.
- Better access to information on how much is spent within a district.
- Proposals should be evaluated on the value of the project versus the input of politicians.
- " I just know they need to be".
- "Stop the run-around" – have a telephone number that makes it easier for getting the right information in a timely manner.
- Make departmental contact information more user-friendly.
- Develop a tracking tool to monitor the status of requests for information and/or assistance.
- Make decisions within a collaborative approach.
- Create more openness at the public servant level
- Better customer service- treating electorate like they are your customers.
- Creating a non-threatening environment for communication.
- Create/re-open regional offices which allows for citizens to access regional knowledge.
- What information I've ever needed I've gotten
- What Gov/OPE is currently doing is on the right track
- Nalcor – Connection between Muskrat Falls and Emera
- A communications plan
- Seniors would have trouble getting information from computers. We need to consider this population when putting details out.

- Education of Open Government
- Information on the internet but we also need to ensure those that can't access computers can still have the information
- There is a lot of information out there that people don't know is out there or how to access.
- If collaborative then you are going to have to meet.
- How to be open so that it can be for the benefit of the residents of the Province.
- Who is going to draw the line – what information?
- Create data base of all advice documents submitted to GNL; which would include date received, consequent action/ impact resulted from the advice given, and date when GNL official met with Council to discuss impact and subsequent actions of advice document. Acknowledgement letters are no longer acceptable.
- Allow department personnel to have the authority to talk to the people.
- Government departments are closed shops and the personnel are afraid to speak.
- Government works in silos and no one seems to talk to each other.
- Find ways to listen to the people; listen to the school boards, municipal governments, seniors, fishers, RC members. The structures are in place, now listen to them.
- Commit to listening to the people.

## Q2. What criteria should government consider in deciding when to engage citizens?

- No need to engage on everything
- When it affects everyone--muskrat falls, school board changes
- Target topics and consider broader issues; may not be concerned with mill in a town but concerned with overall environmental issues
- When government decisions are communicated effectively there may not be a need to engage
- Government has to listen!
- Engagement should be a very strategic exercise
- What criteria are used in other open governments? Looks at best practices.
- Needs high level of public interest but not necessarily. Provincial issues need to be discussed. Use Council's when there is not a wide public interest.
- Address the apathy of the public that think they are not going to have any impact.
- Let people know how their input is used
- It's generational – many are used to a top down process vs an expectation that public can have a say.

- When citizens opinions will add value. When citizen have the information to provide input.
- Not to be so fooled by the media. Be media savvy.
- Issues that are highlighted by citizens.
- Engage those that will be impacted most by change.
- Engage those impacted most by the decision
- Provide appropriate notice
- Have engagements at appropriate times of the day. Have it for the convenience of citizens not government workers
- Depending on the magnitude of the issue, more time should be given to publicize the engagement
- Put more effort in publicizing an engagement, it should be well publicized.
- Engagements need to be hosted sub-regionally not just at one regional community; distance has to be considered
- Use clickers to get information, everyone can have input and it is anonymous.
- Have town hall meetings, people would rather that than using technology, people don't engage using technology ( having online input).

### Q3. How could GNL create a culture of collaboration within the Province? (outside of funding)

- Setting the seeds
- People have to feel they are being listened to
- Has to lead by example
- Has to provide feedback
- Has to build trust
- Use social media
- Politicians need to get involved and out meeting with people in their districts.
- People need to see where there efforts are going.
- Create the space/forum for collaboration to happen.
- Open governance – managing resources to the best of the ability of the people.
- Someway of demystifying the office of the MHA or civil servant – remove the power imbalance. Education helps.
- Social medium to connect on issues, concerns. i.e. Facebook. Take the good with the bad.
- Need to develop a degree of trust. Seems decisions are made top down and uncertain the degree of engagement leading to these decisions. (I.e. consolidation of the school board. Was this a collaborative effort? Were citizens engaged? What was the process? Were people aware of it? If they were would they trust it more?)
- An example of collaboration in the area that did work; When having a local meeting you only had to call and the MHA would show up to support the district

work. Once MHA became Minister they became inaccessible to the district. Need someone else to fill the void or play the role in the collaboration piece.

- Civics in the school system – understanding the process.
- Genuine process of collaboration not just the pretense.
- Have more town hall meetings with government, health authorities, and any group that is in a position of power or influence. Government has to be out there doing it.
- Government bureaucrats, those that have long term influence, need to be out and hear the citizens.
- Deputy Ministers should be attending forums when making policy.
- Remove political parties away in meetings. Things need to be decided on logic rather than by political influence.