

Open Government Initiative Public Engagement Feedback.

Burin Peninsula Region, September 22, 2014

Question 1: Do you have other ideas or suggestions about how government information and data could be made more accessible and user friendly?

- Better collaboration between ATTIPP office and departments.
- Need to go to a number of entities to get answers. Need to streamline. Central contact.
- Rules need to be more open.
- Talk to a real person, not a machine. Calling departments to get info, leave message, wait for call to be returned.
- Assumes everyone uses, or knows how to use a computer.
- Important government information should be made available in accessible format, not just online. More information in print form.
- Resource person needs to be at local level. When information is made available, need an on-the-ground resource to walk people through forms and processes.
- Help navigate. Important as population gets older. Support general public and volunteers.
- User-friendly means more than making just a 1-800 number available. Need someone to point people in the right direction.
- Funding information needs to be made available well in advance of deadlines. If government is going to be open, need to give people ample notice.
- Current information needs to be provided. Data/information is sometimes dated. Information that is available needs to be updated on a regular basis.
- Need to limit the amount of information to pertinent information. Limit useless info. Identify what's important to individuals and groups.
- Pertinent information needs to be easily accessible. Not through various layers i.e. multiple layers.
- Technical elements e.g. JCP (Job Creation Partnership) forms and applications declined because they are submitted in wrong format.
- Need info/data that is useful at the local level, not just provincial level. Practical info.
- No "cross connectedness" between multiple departments. Frustrating when submitting applications for government programs. Lack of consistency between departments.
- Obstacles need to be reduced in the application process, and information needs to be easily accessible. This is important in supporting the work of volunteers.
- Even for those who are "technical", navigating government departments are still challenging i.e. not easy to find forms.

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Question 2: Do you have other ideas or suggestions about how government can do a better job of engaging the public?

- Make the time people put into consultations worthwhile. People put time and energy into preparing for consultations, but it doesn't seem it is listened to.
- Budget consultations need to be done well in advance so input can be used. Everyone knows decisions are made by the time consultations occur.
- It appears that organizations that are recognized in the community have less influence than those on open line.
- Change focus of government communication to dissemination of info, not how it is communicated. Spend too much time controlling the flow of info.
- Not everyone is tech-savvy. If a consultation is occurring, needs to be communicated beyond online.
- Consultations do not always adequately capture regions or communities e.g. Burin Peninsula residents having to travel to Clarenville to participate in a session.
- Burin Peninsula communities are not always covered if just one session is held in Marystown.
- It is recognized that consultations can't occur in every community. Coming together in central location is necessary. But it is becoming increasingly difficult to get people out.
- Sessions need to be advertised in more ways than just through technology. Not everyone has email i.e. flyers, newspapers.
- Provincial and federal representatives need to come out to their constituents more often. And they need to bring Deputies and/or high level decision makers. They should be more available. That aspect of engagement is often missing.
- As new initiatives are introduced, Ministers need to get out into regions, even regions within regions, to communicate the info. Example: set up a google account, type in a question, and get an immediate answer.
- How do you keep young people in the community? Engagement piece is important.
- Volunteers are getting older. Need to improve youth engagement. Getting youth involved in as much as possible, example: set up a youth planning committee in certain areas. Valuing youth opinion. Need to see that advice that is given by youth is valued. Bill 6, getting youth involved in Councils.
- Bill 6. How to implement? Not clear.
- Cynicism of the process. "Putting jam on moldy bread".

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Question 3: Do you have any ideas or suggestions on how government can be a better partner when collaborating with external groups?

- Make the point of contact more respectful of those on the other side.
- Every time try to get info, there is a policy change. This needs to be communicated. It is difficult to stay abreast with so many changes occurring.
- Take the politics out of government.
- Change over in government e.g. Assistant Deputy Ministers, leads to steep learning curve.
- Put out stuff with realistic timelines e.g. towns need time to put together funding proposals.
- Need a "live" person to deal with.
- Significant reliance on volunteer sector. Work is often done by a few people. Need to get input from external groups that are actually doing the work. Especially before decisions are made.
- Respect for volunteers that put the time into initiatives.
- Leadership and training opportunities at the grassroots level.
- More people would get involved if they had the resources to be engaged. Community groups and volunteers are consulted to death.
- Government needs to be respectful and recognize that volunteering takes time and money. They need the necessary supports.
- Rural Secretariat has done great work producing reports. Advice documents need feedback i.e. how they are used by government.
- Government needs to understand what collaboration means. If community is going to collaborate with government, government has to work with volunteers, not against them. Need to eliminate roadblocks, which are disrespectful.
- Volunteers put in a lot of hours. Sometimes disrespected by government, and also community.
- Government has to educate public on important role of volunteers.

Question 4: Do you have other ideas or suggestions about how government could be more responsive or proactive when it comes to informing you of the outcomes of public engagement activities?

- Government should respond to individual groups regarding the advice they provided during pre-budget consultations e.g. it was used to influence decisions, or government couldn't do it because of lack of money.
- Groups put their time into providing feedback on issues and solutions, but consultations do not feel genuine. Decisions are already made, or those consulting know there is no way suggestions can be implemented.

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- Need to level the playing field between organizations. Some organizations have the staff to fill out applications, but others may not, or miss the deadline, and then they miss out on funding opportunities.
- The real challenge is getting information out at the local/ground level.
- Getting information out is critical. Deadlines for various programs need to be put into a current, single calendar so an organization can see all the deadlines for various programs. Should also include the links to the current program information and application form.
- This could also apply to current policy and policy changes.
- Need to ask participants what types of information and data they actually need.

Question 5: Do you have any additional ideas re: possible actions that the GNL should consider when developing its first Open Government Action Plan?

- This is a good first step, but it is only as good as the end result. The results from the consultation cannot sit on a shelf. The action plan needs to follow, and people need to be made aware. Participants need to know that their contribution to the process was not a waste of time.
- Shouldn't have to pay to get information regarding what government is doing. Even elected MHAs in opposition, as they are also a part of government.