

# Open Government Initiative Public Engagement Feedback.

Rocky Harbour Region, September 16, 2014

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

- What department to go to. If all in one place it would be easier to find.
- Key word search in the title of the report.
- For a lot of people, research can be difficult to conduct.
- Municipalities do not necessarily have that issue, but it is an issue for a lot of people.
- Where to go to find information can be frustrating at times.
- All-purpose website may not be desirable.
- Sometimes you don't know what department you are looking for. Something more like a google front-end might be good.
- Education of awareness of front line people.
- Internal reviews. Content of reviews should be made public and not kept internal.
- Clean front end that allows you to easily sort through the government information.
- The default now is tourism and news that may not be appropriate.
- You have to look through a list now. The current search sucks.
- More conversation on new ideas.
- Volume of information.
- Timeliness of report can vary especially when using AITIPP.
- Don't use provincial website much, more the federal.
- Unless you type exactly what you are looking for, you don't get what you want.
- Current search does not do a good job unless you get exact wording.
- You should be able to say 'no press releases' or 'recent results only'.
- Many people to go through to get a response. Front line people should be able to divulge information.
- Should be able to see recent popular search topics.
- Should have a 'simple search' and an 'advanced search' (like google has).
- The search engine is really important.
- Wait times could be in excess of 2 weeks to get information you need.
- A problem is that government departments change names, which complicates search. Similarly program names change.
- Not everyone comes in with the same knowledge.
- For example: a person may not know the department they need to be talking to/searching in.
- Frustrating when front line workers do not have the necessary information; one person acting in many roles.

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- Sometimes it is easier to just google it instead of using the government website because government website moves stuff around (links), it is easier to use google to search for the document.
- Front line workers are not properly trained.
- Streamlining front line workers in different fields may be of assistance.
- Would be good if the way information was presented and the amount of it was nuanced. For example: initial search might be just giving pictures to click on, and the user could select, but deeper searches get more detailed.
- This is related to the issue that you don't always know what you are looking for.
- One-stop-shop idea is great, but who would create it and maintain it?
- Another discussion involves how different demographics will use the site. For example: How a senior citizen uses website will be different than a young (internet savvy) person will.
- Example given of how senior citizens have a hard time with technology, and they don't want to know. How do they get their information (libraries were mentioned in this discussion)?

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

- More open forums. Online does not engage. Come to town and engage people and talk openly.
- Go to where the people are to follow up is important.
- Online information may not be available to seniors due to access issues. Go to where they are too.
- Go to where the people need you are.
- Open forum; give lots of notice and make sure you can reach all the people you need.
- The government is viewed as a little hard to approach.
- Not sure an app will fix that.
- Another problem with the app is that it can be abused. For example: what if someone from Québec or New Brunswick downloads the app and provides feedback as a Newfoundlander?
- How do we ensure that the voices coming forward are representative of the people of the province?
- Need to know that what I said this evening will make an impact. Following you.
- Using only an application for this disadvantages those who don't know technology or can't afford it.

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- It's one thing for the tools/technology for access to be there, it's another thing to know how to use it.
- Each government then worthwhile, but if there's no follow up then what is the good in it?
- Not looking for that type of information will not see it.
- Has complaint service. People will submit feedback.
- Go where the people are. Are seniors' facilities capable of technology to hear their concerns?
- The tool used to gather information will have a bias associated with it. For example: applications will be favored by tech people or the young.
- We need 'gathering areas' (for example: libraries, community halls) as part of this.
- Also regarding libraries, the librarians can help guide people through the technology. Also gatherings tend to foster communication and generate more ideas.
- Some remote rural areas especially don't have reliable internet.
- There won't be a 'one size fits all' solution for this.
- Surveys do not work well.
- Seniors sometimes appreciate a phone call.
- Easier access to government officials, i.e. visiting communities, meet and greet, and town hall meetings.
- See people come when there are issues.
- Also the library, or gathering places, approach is not faceless. Some people feel more engaged this way.
- People mentioned the 'CAP' program. Community Access Program?
- "If we ran our personal lives, the way government is run we would be in limbo."

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

- Faster government response times on Q&A posted.
- Time frame should be reasonable in which to get a response time.
- Time caps put on response times i.e. 10-14 days.
- Time caps on response time and information needed.
- Cross-training of government employees.
- There was some discussion that the questions are a little broad. Hard to answer.
- It's nice when there is follow up. Example of where person was involved in participation and was later contacted with a thank you and other follow up. It showed the party was excited and made you want to participate more.
  - Also a prize was offered for giving response.

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- Good when government defines their role in the partnership. Less ambiguity.
- Changing response times is challenging.
- Make people accountable to deadlines.
- Organize symposiums, empower front line staff to make decisions.
- In small places, the clarity is extra important.
- Are you offering money, or service?
- For example: suppose a community group is doing a festival. When someone comes in from the government it needs to be clear what can be offered versus just offering ideas. For example: what is this person from the government at the table for? What specifically can they offer? A lot of time it depends on money, for example: is money being offered or not?
- There was discussion about the government helping broker other partnerships. It doesn't just have to be about the money. Sometimes just direction is helpful, or networking and help with collaboration.
- Cross-training recommendations there for reviews can be done quicker.
- Bring in project partners from the outset.
- Having a liaison to connect with. People appreciate face to face or a phone call.
- 1-800 numbers for information wherein what you need or know are a difficult way to obtain.
- Trust the people who are doing the job to actually do it.
- Realize as government *working for the people of the province*.
- Power struggles have negative impact on getting work done. Put that aside and get the job/project/initiative solved.
- Consistency is the key in working for the public.
- Sometimes, because of shifting priorities in government, even the government employees are not sure what can be funded, whether the program changed, etcetera. It can be frustrating.
- Also related to this, new government employees don't always know enough to answer questions in an engagement situation.
- Discussion about centralization of information about issues; the 'file' for an issue, anyone could come into your job if they have the file.
- Discussion about the nature of government means priorities are always in flux. So changes in structure and programs happen. Changes have to trickle through the hierarchies of government.

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### **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?**

- Responding, in and of itself, in a timely manner is key!
- More speedy response times.
- Provide a deadline in which to provide feedback.
- How will government provide that timely response.
- Response times may be an accountability issue.
- Would be nice if there was somewhere you could go to get information about initiatives that are ongoing and get information about them.
- Now it's a little delayed you don't get information back on an initiative until the end, when the report is written.
- Faster in responding to issues. Not letting them accumulate.
- Slow response times cause more work in the end.
- Is the person hearing my complaint? Are they genuinely concerned?
- Would be nice if you could 'subscribe' to get information about initiatives. Like a blog or website or twitter or notification. To be able to subscribe to particular press releases. Not necessarily technology but also paper versions of this.
- If back burner long enough, the issue will go away.
- To ensure priority in response time, use deadlines to date to ensure accountability.
- In the context of subscribing, the Flipboard application was mentioned.
  - This app pulls stuff together from various sources and kind of makes a magazine out of it.
  - Might be a way to do this for government initiatives and information on press releases.
  - The Feely application was also mentioned in this context.
- Results from input can spur further sessions and engagement
- On the issue of subscribing, instead of having to go to the website or the blog, the information is pushed to you.
- Having many from one , cuts back on ordinary people input.
- It's nice to know that something is being done, so some kind of feedback from the government while the process goes on is good.
- Important that information coming out of the government is massaged appropriately (by a marketing/communication professional).

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

- Rebuild trust between the populace and government. End reliance and building of blind trust among the uninvolved and uneducated on the issues at hand.
- Increase willingness for government to engage with the public, and build trust.
- ABOLISH BILL-C29.
- Allow greater access to information to the public in general. Increase open policy making (don't make decisions behind closed doors.).
- Streamlined forms.
- Streamlining community grants and forms.
- Government not listening, and open government is a direct result of government being closed.
- Information on community accounts is hard to decipher and interpret.