Open Government Initiative Public Engagement Feedback.
Clarenville-Bonavista Region, September 9, 2014

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

- Website being user friendly; searchable database and no need to know which department owns the data/information.
- Searchable, whereby it crosses several departments and the site would show all the pieces related to the topic that is searched. Needs to be categorized like when you google a word it gives back everything that is relevant to that topic.
- Needs to be in a usable format so that people can use the information like in the example of United States that was given.
- Reports and information are different from data. When reports are published, they should be made available to citizens and data needs to be put in a format that people can use.
- Something as simple as press releases is sometimes not there if they're not recent. The old way of how press releases were done was better for accessing press releases.
- Need to be strategic in how the backend is done to ensure that it gives people what they want.
- Community accounts have a wealth of information but it's very complex to navigate through.
- Technology is good but missing an age group of the older generation who rely on the younger generation to get the information for them.
- Applications and websites limit certain age groups
- Need to keep some of the old ways, as well as new approaches to providing information/data.
- Example: did a search for "what are your rights as a patient", got back over 800 on government website but which one is the right one? Need to ensure that this gives people what they are looking for and that it is current and correct.
- Small amount of print, large size font. There is too much on government website. It is overwhelming
- Need some way of organizing the information and data. There are things linked, like housing. The ability to put in your keyword and be able to keep narrowing your search several times whereby how you have narrowed it prior is still there, plus the additional pieces that you've have added in
- Loads of data and information become a burden. Are we talking about interpretative data or raw data? It is about providing raw data in its purest form.
- Online is not the only way that is needed. Should be a 1-800 number for people to call to make a request and get the information they require to sort

through the amount of information that people are looking for such as "what crown land is available around an area?"

- Government provides service and that should be the first priority of government. it should be simple, for example the 1-800 number for those not comfortable with using website.
- Frequent requests should be out front on the website.
- Need to be careful about the level of technology that is needed to navigate through the website; broadband format, etcetera.
- Training from Advanced Education and Skills for volunteer groups that have to use the new system to report to Advanced Education and Skills.
- New system in place for volunteer groups in contracts with Advanced Education and Skills, there was no training provided.

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

- Engage kids in school because what happens in school will be brought home and there would be a ripple effect. Discussion happens at kitchen table, then in friend circles, work, and etcetera.
- Different generations will require different engagement.
- Communication is complex. There are so many people that need to be engaged in so many different ways. Government needs to be flexible in how it engages certain audiences, school-aged children different from adult engagement. Providing the opportunity to become engaged is key. The perception of making yourself available and truly seeking feedback/input is critical. This needs to be demonstrated overtime and done in an honest form. The responsiveness piece of government, government idea of what a timely response is and the public's idea of what is a timely response is, are completely different. For a citizen, this should be gotten back to within a couple of days of how long this will take to get this information and when they can expect information because of the request. People are respectful of this in most cases.
- When talking about a timely response, people are just asking for a *truthful* response.
- Community organizations need to be engaged during work hours. Coming out at night, people have families. Why aren't we going where they are, informal engagement, show up at others events.
- Go to where the people are.
- Going into schools has a ripple effect.

- Find ways of going to the people. Need to identify some champions to connect with. Don't need to be a 2 hour session, could be a question, a 10 minute piece, a 30 minute piece depending on what and how people are gathered.
- Identify the informal leadership in communities.
- The social media on government website, we know that we have a wide range of demographics. The younger generation doesn't read newspapers, they're online. The media does this through Facebook and Twitter. Now that mom and dad are on, these kids switch to Instagram and Tumblr.
- Don't know what kind of discussions government is having on Facebook. It is a two way communication. You need to get people to come and sign up to your page and then need to keep them engaged. Twitter, same thing.
- Part of the challenge is getting the word out on the online tools such as Facebook and Twitter that government are on these and state the topics being discussed.
- People engage when interested.
- When feedback is given, people need to know what has been done with that feedback.
- Past experience of engagement has left a negative impression on individuals. Example: during the cod moratorium there were interviews upon interviews and no feedback came back from them.
- What is engagement? Is it a 2 hour session, a conversation with an individual within a government department? Want government employees to know how they should act when people approach them. There are different levels of engagement. Try to create situations whereby people in the public engage with one another.
- If people have a good encounter with government when they engage with them, then perhaps that will make them open in the future. There needs to be a standard of practice for government employees
- In the last decade it is harder and harder for media to get information to provide information for their story. This information needs to be available to the media so that the public can better understand it. Use the media to help tell the story to the public so that public understands the issues but the media needs to be educated and seen as an avenue to use by government to tell that story.

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

- Feedback in a timely manner.
- Releasing control. Government pushes grass roots ideas taking ownership and control over their own destiny, but the government always holds the financial

piece over their heads. There needs to be trust, they cannot hold the financial piece over innovative approaches to doing things in communities.

- Government needs to be where the client is, having offices in rural NL makes a difference in the level of buy-in about what the opportunities are locally.
- Amount of efforts to bring people "in town" up to speed to understand the dynamics of rural communities is a major challenge.
- Having presence in rural communities is key and then trust the capacity of those in the regions that they will do what is best for the community.
- With the world becoming more high-tech it is essential to have a person here that understands the rural communities.
- People being able to contact the local person is a good thing.
- Situations where skills are imported; people from St. John's coming in to deliver a service when the skills are available within the region.
- Need to identify the skills that are within the community and how they can be used to deliver services
- There should not be a cookie cutter approach. Something that is working in one part may not work elsewhere.
- Decisions are done by MHAs when it comes to project funding.
- Proposals should be based on the merit of the proposal not an MHA decision.
- Need to have engagement with those submitting proposals so that the client receives feedback on the proposal.
- Government states that it is not a partner with a third party in contracts because of risk and liability.
- How can government provide and be open with information to the public that they want.
  Most people want to know about an issue of importance (Why is water not fit to drink? Why pay more for garbage collection? etc) this is where government needs to work on openness and provide this information.
- Collaboration is a confusing word.
- Need to get this at the municipal level and work up.

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?

- Frustration when people go to public relations within government and they're not able to talk to a person. Always asked to put it in email and then what is given back is not quotes but department perspectives and makes it questionable about the story and information received.

- Federal governments are easier to get info to and talk to someone on the issue for an interview compared to provincial governments.
- Not given opportunity to ask questions that arise from the answer to the question posed. There is no dialogue in provincial government.
- Government of today sets the example. If the government of today doesn't give you that information, then it trickles down to municipal. Since the privacy act came into play it is almost like there is a fear of what can be done /discussed with the public
- Misconception out there of what the public has a right to know. This is a role and obligation of government; to let the public know this as well as people like municipalities of what they are obligated to give to citizens if requested.
- Email on thanking and follow up.
- Needs to be a standard of practice of how government is responsive when it engages the public and provides a response.
- Needs to encourage a two way engagement both ways, from the government and from the individual thanking government for speaking with them.
- There is a lot of apathy out there when it comes to engagement.

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

- Don't say it if you don't mean it.
- Fun launch event.
- Communication is lacking within government and outside of government.
- Consider all of the users
- Improve communication with media and tell them the truth. If you don't know, then say you don't know.
- Issue with the word "open" because it sets a negative impression that government is now *closed*.