

Better Forms for Better Regulation

Improving forms is good for business, citizens, and government

Forms are important tools for government and for the citizens and businesses we serve. They provide information for licences, certificates, and permits that allow businesses and citizens to proceed with activities within the province's regulations and programs.

The opportunity

Sometimes forms are not so easy for people to complete or for government to process. In fact, in some cases forms are incomplete up to 80 per cent of the time. When a form isn't completed correctly, time is lost and frustration can build. Ultimately, better forms save time and irritation for businesses, citizens, and government alike. That's why the Better Regulation Initiative is working to improve forms.

Better Forms for Better Regulation will

- improve the quality, consistency, and user-friendliness of forms
- make forms faster and easier to find and complete
- reduce the number of forms businesses must complete

How we're making better forms

Many forms are designed well, so that they are easy for people to understand and complete. However, we can improve them by adopting common standards that follow well-researched best practices for forms.

10 factors for success

- 1 Reduce the overall number of forms clients need to fill out.
- 2 Ask only for information that is truly needed, to reduce the length of the form and the burden of filling it out and managing the data.
- 3 Make it easy for clients to find and obtain the necessary forms.
- 4 Post forms online in formats that clients can fill out electronically, save for their records, and e-mail to government.
- 5 Identify the purpose of the form and the agency responsible for it.
- 6 Write and design forms so they are easy for clients to understand and complete.
- 7 Make it clear on forms who clients can contact if they have questions or need help filling out the form.
- 8 Make it clear how to pay when a cost is involved.
- 9 Make it clear how and where clients should submit their completed forms.
- 10 Assign each form a unique identification code and version number or revision date—to aid version control and support client inquiries.



The benefits

Government, businesses, and citizens all benefit when forms are completed properly.

Government

Making forms more consistent and easier to find, read, understand, and complete saves time and money by ensuring fewer forms are returned with missing or incorrect information. It also means better compliance with regulations and a more satisfying interaction with the businesses and citizens we serve.

Businesses and citizens

Better forms means businesses will spend less time on paperwork and be able to dedicate more time to competitiveness, productivity, and innovation.

Government's improved efficiency in processing forms reduces the irritation factor and also ensures businesses and citizens get served within a defined service standard.

A more consistent look to government forms not only presents a professional image, but it also helps businesses and citizens to easily recognize official government forms.

The commitment

All government departments are expected to apply the Better Forms for Better Regulation guidelines to their documents beginning early in 2009. The process has begun with training sessions to give staff the skills they need to develop user-friendly forms that have a common look that clearly identifies them as official documents of government.

Vision for the future

Currently, most government forms are paper based. Many have PDF versions posted online, but these are still paper documents until an actual submission can be made electronically. As technology advances, our vision is to have more electronic forms that allow clients to make direct submissions and provide them with more direct interaction with government.

This technology would also allow for a more streamlined forms submission process. A single-window approach for specific industry sectors would eliminate the need for clients to navigate across multiple government departments to determine the forms they need and in what order they should be submitted. This approach would also mean information like name and address can be submitted once and used numerous times for multiple licenses and permits.

To learn more about the Better Regulation Initiative and the Better Forms guidelines, visit www.gov.ns.ca/betterregulation



Better Regulation Initiative