

**Government Accountability Document - September 2002**

Communications Nova Scotia

Annual Accountability Report For The Fiscal Year 2001-2002

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### **Accountability Statement**

The accountability report of Communications Nova Scotia for the year ended March 31, 2002, is prepared pursuant to the Provincial Finance Act and government policy and guidelines. These authorities require the reporting of outcomes against our business plan information for the fiscal year 2001-02. The reporting of Communications Nova Scotia's outcomes necessarily includes estimates, judgments and opinions by department/agency management.

We acknowledge that this accountability report is the responsibility of the Agency management. The report is, to the extent possible, a complete and accurate representation of outcomes relative to the goals and priorities set out in Communications Nova Scotia business plans for 2001/2.

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Minister

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Deputy Minister or Agency Head

### **Message From The Executive Director**

The most significant development in provincial government communications during 2001 - 2002 was the move to a corporate structure that would address the government's needs. Every director, advisor and communications officer in the provincial civil service became a member and an employee of Communications Nova Scotia.

The change brought dividends right from the start. The planning and co-ordination of government communications has improved significantly, partly through the efforts of three managing directors. We have been able to respond to shifting priorities by placing communications expertise where it is most needed. Our employees now participate in more, better-focused professional development activities than ever before. Every employee receives formalized feedback on their performance.

We also made significant progress on other initiatives: an examination of government printing services that will ultimately lead to cost savings and improved efficiency; the development of a (yet to be formalized) Plain Language Policy; a customer-satisfaction survey to guide our continuing efforts for improved service.

## **Introduction**

This accountability report is based on the goals, priorities and outcomes set out in the 2001 - 2002 business plan of Communications Nova Scotia.

The purpose of this report is to provide an account of the progress that has been made in the pursuit of the objectives set forth in the business plan. We are able to report the achievement of all major priorities and considerable progress toward the rest.

CNS fully implemented the reorganization of government communications that was approved by cabinet in 2001 -2002, by transferring all communications personnel from departments to the central agency. This move supports the objective of ensuring government communications is cost-effective, clear and consistent.

Communications Nova Scotia also undertook a comprehensive review of the resources devoted to print services across government. This review provided the intelligence that was required to rationalize these services in order to save taxpayers' money and improve efficiency - an effort that is well underway.

## **Department Progress and Accomplishments**

### **Our Goals**

1. Through quality communications, help Nova Scotians understand the actions of their government.
2. Enhance opportunities for economic growth in related private-sector communications fields.
3. Obtain the highest quality and best-value communications products and services for government.
4. Expand and strengthen internal and external communications.

### **Core Business Functions**

- Communications Planning: strategic communications advice and planning.
- Creative Services: service delivery and subcontracting for video, graphic design, audio, photography, editorial and Internet design
- Media Services: service delivery of media monitoring, logistical support, distribution of news releases and communications support
- Publication Services: service delivery, provision and subcontracting of government printing and Publishing requirements

### **Priorities**

#### Organization of communications planning and delivery

The Communications Strategy as approved by government in 2000/1 was implemented in fiscal 2001/2. We integrated communications human resources into the central agency to maximize a team approach for service delivery. All communications positions in government were brought in under one of three managing directors in Communications Nova Scotia. Through the coordinated central management of the communication resources, we have been able to place communications expertise where it is most needed and to coordinate cross-departmental communications initiatives and planning. The objective was to ensure that government communications would be cost-effective, clear and consistent. Financial and human resources are now assigned by CNS on a cooperative basis with client departments. The coordinated approach of communications planning delivery by all government departments and agencies has resulted in the reduction of conflicting and confusing messages being issued by the government as indicated by fewer inquiries to communications officers after press releases have been sent to the media. A further step toward clear messages was the completion of our policy and guidelines on Plain Language in government information delivery in all media. Although the policy has not been formalized, the guideline was posted on the website. Starting in 2002/3, the managing directors will work with the communications personnel to develop departmental and agency communications plans that support the corporate objectives. In addition, during 2002/3, the central IT application to link all departmental representatives with a database of their communications projects is scheduled to be completed. This database will assist in the timely delivery of products, financial management of print and electronic information, and, facilitate information sharing among CNS staff.

#### Goals supported:

- Through quality communications, help Nova Scotians understand the actions of their government.

- Expand and strengthen internal and external communications.

Rationalize print service delivery within government

Communications Nova Scotia completed the review of all government print operations and services by working with individual departments to review their service requirements and upgrade service levels in terms of turnaround (print on demand) and technology (digital printing). Recommendations were made to government concerning the level of service required, the economical feasibility of the current operations and viable alternatives. This has resulted in equivalent or improved service and satisfaction where production level machines have been removed (Community Services, the Law Courts, Health). This equipment was either returned to the suppliers or moved to the Queen's Printer where they are used more heavily serving all departments. Currently, CNS and Health have or are being networked to the Docutech for direct print-on-demand service from desktop. (Education has had this capability for some time) Active discussions are being held now with Education, Public Service Commission, Justice, Environment and Labour, and Natural Resources to remove their machines and network them to the Docutech or send their requirements to QP Young Street. In anticipation of this broader network, the Docutech contract has been upgraded and extended for two years to allow technological upgrades to accommodate the above networking. Through lease expiries which have not been extended or replaced and machines consolidated, lease costs to the government have been reduced by roughly \$80,000 per annum. The financial and human resources required, were reallocated from within the system. In 2002/3, CNS will continue to work with the departments and agencies with our ultimate goals of : (1) removing production level facilities from departments and migrate those volumes to the Queen's Printer - either at the Young Street facility or the Xerox Docutech facility on Brunswick Street - and; (2) reducing the overall cost of printing by means of making more efficient use of fewer printing assets. The central IT database referred to in our first priority also supports continuation of comparable service delivery to client departments through project tracking, financial management, and access to this information.

Goals supported:

- Enhance opportunities for economic growth in related private-sector communications fields.
- Obtain the highest quality and best-value communications products and services for government.

**Financial Results**

Authority	\$3,200,000	Actual	\$3,092,415	Variance:	\$91,585
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Competitions for some of the positions, that had been budgeted to be filled as part of the centralization of the communications staff in government, were completed in the second and third quarters of fiscal 2001/2. The under expenditure in the salary allocation together with some savings in travel and equipment resulted in a \$91,585 variance.

## **Client Satisfaction**

This measure is relevant to all of Communications Nova Scotia's core business functions: Communications Planning, Creative, Media and Publication services. The desired outcome that falls within the core business areas is "Clear and open communication to Nova Scotians of government's initiatives and services." The value of efficient delivery of clear and consistent information to Nova Scotians from all departments and agencies demonstrates responsible accountable governance across government.

### **WHAT DOES THE MEASURE TELL US?**

With the assistance of the statistical personnel in the Department of Economic Development, we composed a survey. A list of clients was compiled from the project files in each division. The survey was sent to them asking if we had been efficient, creative in our approach to their communications needs. Did we provide them with the expected quality of service and product they needed? Were they aware of all our services? Were there additional services they would like us to provide? And, did they have any suggestions for improving our existing services? 101 surveys were completed and returned to Economic Development for analysis.

### **WHERE ARE WE NOW?**

Evaluation and interpretation of the responses indicated that 68% of our clients felt that their expectations had been met, while a further 23% indicated that the service they received exceeded their expectations. A smaller percentage (7%) indicated that they felt their expectations had not met. Recommendations from the survey suggested that we educate both our current and potential clients about our services, build on our successes and strengthen our weaknesses, recognize excellence in our staff and continue to assess client service using the results of this survey as our baseline for measurement.

### **WHERE DO WE WANT TO GO/BE IN THE FUTURE?**

Our target is to achieve an 80% satisfaction rating. We have organized a number of professional development sessions and presentations of our services for the communications professionals across government. We have acted on suggestions made by clients in the survey such as providing an electronic clipping service. We have increased our follow-up contacts with clients to ascertain if all aspects of our service for them have been satisfactory. Where problems arise, we can now be proactive to ensure the issue is not repeated. We are also preparing a new client survey to measure the effect of our endeavours.

## **Plain Language - Training Communications & Policy Officials**

This measure is relevant to all of Communications Nova Scotia's core business functions: Communications Planning, Creative, Media and Publication services. The desired outcome that falls within the core business areas is "Clear and open communication to Nova Scotians of government's initiatives and services." The value of efficient delivery of clear and consistent information to Nova Scotians from all departments and agencies demonstrates responsible accountable governance across government.

### **WHAT DOES THE MEASURE TELL US?**

The primary measure of clarity in communications is that your audience responds as you had expected; and, you are not faced with an inordinate number of requests for clarification or expressions of anger from stakeholders. Plain language organizes ideas, avoids jargon, presents concepts logically; and calls for well-thought-out efficient processes.

Research by Communications Nova Scotia showed that Nova Scotia government documents commonly score at about a grade 12 reading level. Some have scored up to 17 years of education. The 1994 International Adult Literacy Survey, indicated the following about Atlantic Canadian adults' ability to understand and act on written materials:

- C 15% can deal easily with complex materials, understanding, synthesizing and analysing written information.
- C 33 %: read well but might have difficulties with complex texts and tasks
- C 27 % : can read but not very well. They can deal with materials that are written simply and clearly laid out.
- C 25 % have great difficulty reading and they have few of the essential literacy skills needed to understand use written materials.

This means that government's written communications risks missing 50 to 80 per cent of our audience.

After working with a cross-departmental committee that included representation from the Department of Justice and the Legislative Counsel, Communications prepared and put forward for approval a Plain Language Policy and guideline.

### **WHERE ARE WE NOW?**

Plans are in place to implement Plain Language training through the Public Service Commission for communications officers and other key contacts within departments. Members of the steering committee (Justice, Education, Health, Service Nova Scotia and Community services) are poised to act as resources for those government employees in need of Plain Language training. The guideline has been posted on the Communications Nova Scotia Internet and Intranet sites ([www.gov.ns.ca/cmns/plainlanguage/](http://www.gov.ns.ca/cmns/plainlanguage/)).

### **WHERE DO WE WANT TO GO/BE IN THE FUTURE?**

It is our target to have the policy and guideline officially sanctioned by government. The policy provides a roadmap: Plain language will change the culture in government: the way we write reflects who we are.

## **Central database application**

This measure is relevant to all of Communications Nova Scotia's core business functions: Communications Planning, Creative, Media and Publication services. The desired outcome that falls within the core business areas is "Clear and accurate information to Nova Scotians on government initiatives and services ." The value of efficient delivery of clear and consistent information to Nova Scotians from all departments and agencies demonstrates responsible accountable governance across government.

### **WHAT DOES THE MEASURE TELL US?**

Communications Nova Scotia's staff is located in various departments and agencies located throughout the Halifax Metro Area and, in some cases, across the province. To enable the staff equal access to information on publication, media and creative services production, a central database is required. The information in the database would be input as projects are produced thereby providing an effective common project entry and tracking, cost recovery, budgeting, partial billing, and better management of the growing cross-divisional projects. This project will eliminate both the duplication of systems and some manual processing extant in the Agency.

### **WHERE ARE WE NOW?**

Communications Nova Scotia has worked with the IT CSU to define and prepare the business model. The project has involved staff from every division within the Agency. The business model for the application has been completed.

### **WHERE DO WE WANT TO GO/BE IN THE FUTURE?**

Our target is to undertake the final phase of the central management system in the fall of 2002 with completion targeted for the spring of 2003.

## **Business Plan for Print Service delivery to Government**

This measure is relevant to the Publication Services component of the core businesses of Communications Nova Scotia. The desired outcome that falls within this core business area is “Efficient and economical delivery of print services to the government”. The value of this desired outcome is the demonstration of responsible and accountable governance of government’s publications for all departments and agencies.

### **WHAT DOES THE MEASURE TELL US?**

The printed word has remained an effective tool for government to inform the public and business of the laws, opportunities and cautions relevant to their sector. The printing technology has changed substantially in recent years as has the investment required to provide print services. Communications Nova Scotia provides a central expertise of print consultation and service delivery for government departments and agencies. We inventoried the number, costs, usage and locations of high speed production printers within the government. After consultation with Nova Scotia Government departments, the print industry and other provincial/federal governments, we found that the most cost effective and efficient method of acquiring print for the government was through the central coordination of this service delivery . The coordination of the service by knowledgeable professionals ensures government’s print resources are efficiently used and that the print sector delivers quality products at a fair price to government. Publications Services has made their main business plan priority to work with individual departments, review their service requirements and upgrade central service levels in terms of turnaround (print on demand) and technology (digital printing). Our target is to provide equivalent or improved service to departments and agencies at a lower cost to government.

### **WHERE ARE WE NOW?**

Where production level machines have been removed (Community Services, the Law Courts, Health) our clients received equivalent or improved service and are as satisfied if not more satisfied with our service delivery. This equipment was either returned to the suppliers or moved to the Queen's Printer where they are used more efficiently serving all departments. Currently, Communications Nova Scotia and Health have or are being networked to the Docutech for direct print-on-demand service from desktop. (Education has had this capability for some time) In anticipation of this broader network, the Docutech contract has been upgraded and extended for two years to allow technological upgrades to accommodate the above networking. Through lease expiries which have not been extended or replaced and machines consolidated, lease costs to the government have been reduced by roughly \$80,000 per annum.

To compliment the capability of the private sector, we are currently carrying on the practice of setting up standing offers for such printed commodities as envelopes, labels, letterheads, business cards, etc which are common to all departments. No new standing offers have been set up with vendors for other products due to the unique specification requirements from document to document. Our Co-publishing continues to

grow with the addition of publications, usually books, at the rate of roughly four per year.

### **WHERE DO WE WANT TO GO/BE IN THE FUTURE?**

Implementation of the business plan continues with active discussions being held with Education, Public Service Commission, Justice and Natural Resources to remove their machines and network them to the Docutech or send their requirements to QP Young Street. Planning for standing print offers for Health documents is underway. It is our target to complete these negotiations and realize further savings to government through the reduction of copier leases while maintaining and improving client satisfaction with all our clients.