



Accountability Report 2021–22

Communications Nova Scotia



© Crown copyright, Province of Nova Scotia, September 2022

Accountability Report 2021–2022

ISBN: 978-1-77448-390-9

Contents

Accountability Statement.....	3
Message from Minister	4
Financial Results	5
Measuring our Performance.....	6
Evaluation and Measurement.....	7
COVID-19 Response and Vaccine Delivery.....	7
Web Strategy.....	9
Support for Government Priorities.....	10
Accessibility & Inclusive Communications	14
Appendix A - Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act	20

Accountability Statement

The Accountability Report of Communications Nova Scotia (CNS) for the year ended March 31, 2022, is prepared pursuant to the Finance Act and government policies and guidelines. These authorities require the reporting of outcomes against CNS's Business Plan for the fiscal year. The reporting of CNS's outcomes necessarily includes estimates, judgments and opinions by CNS management.

We acknowledge that this Accountability Report is the responsibility of CNS management. The report is, to the extent possible, a complete and accurate representation of outcomes relative to the goals and priorities set out in the CNS 2021-2022 Business Plan.

Original signed by

Hon. Brian Comer
Minister, Communications Nova Scotia

Original signed by

Donna MacDonald
Associate Deputy Minister, Communications Nova Scotia

Message from Minister

Nova Scotians rely on government programs and services to support their health, education and economic well-being. Every Communications Nova Scotia employee understands that it's their job to help get important information to Nova Scotians about these programs and services and how to access them.

CNS staff, working alongside other public servants, do important work behind the scenes every day. This year, and over the course of the pandemic, Nova Scotians became more aware of that good work than ever. Nova Scotians counted on government for information they needed to stay healthy and safe.

People tuned in – in record numbers – to about 200 daily briefings that CNS webcast live across the province. They visited government's website for information – also in record numbers – which sometimes changed hourly, knowing it was the most reliable source of up-to-date information on the pandemic in the province. They followed us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and TikTok and shared our posts with their friends and followers.

This team rose to an incredible challenge, at times, working seven days a week. These are the people behind the numbers and behind the scenes.

CNS will continue to be here to meet its mission – to help Nova Scotians understand what their government is doing and why.

Original signed by

Hon. Brian Comer
Minister, Communications Nova Scotia

Financial Results

	2021-2022 Estimate	2021-2022 Actuals	2021-2022 Variance
Program & Service Area	<i>(\$thousands)</i>		
Departmental Expenses:			
Office of the Associate Deputy Minister	753	727	(26)
Client Services	969	890	(79)
Communications Planning	2,072	2,154	82
Communications Services	822	979	157
Marketing	3,555	3,491	(64)
Total: Departmental Expenses	8,171	8,241	70
Additional Information:			
Ordinary Revenue	0	0	0
Fees and Other Charges	0	0	0
Ordinary Recoveries	51	0	(51)
Total: Revenue, Fees and Recoveries			
TCA Purchase Requirements	0	0	0
Provincial Funded Staff (FTEs)	96	105.2	9.2
<u>Departmental Expenses Variance Explanation:</u>			
Variance primarily due to workforce adjustments.			
<u>Revenue, Fees and Recoveries Variance Explanation:</u>			
Variance due to end of recoverable projects for agencies and commissions			
<u>Provincial Funded Staff (FTEs) Variance Explanation:</u>			
Variance due to required additional staff.			

Measuring our Performance

Communications Nova Scotia is government's central communications agency. We help Nova Scotians understand what government is doing and why. We also market provincial programs and services and create pathways to information for citizens, communities and businesses.

Goals:

- **COVID-19 Response:** Strategic communications planning and marketing will reach Nova Scotians with information they want and need, ensuring they understand and can follow public health advice to keep themselves, their families and communities safe.
- **Vaccine Delivery:** Strategic communications and marketing will help to build public trust, address issues and provide clear and concise information to support the success of the Province's largest public vaccination program in our history. This will include providing targeted, inclusive and culturally competent communications.
- **Web Strategy:** Government's web strategy will continue to be implemented, making additional information about government programs and services more accessible to all users.
- **Support for government priorities:** New approaches and tools to effectively reach and engage audiences will be proactively identified, tested, implemented and evaluated.
- **Accessibility & Inclusive Communications:** There will be continued focus on increasing awareness about accessibility (in government and beyond), building capacity for further change and removing barriers to government communications. It is important that all Nova Scotians see themselves reflected and represented in communications from government. CNS will focus on making its workplace more diverse and inclusive through specific activities including, but not limited to, review of internal policies and procedures, succession management planning and hiring processes. CNS will also undertake consultation, research and planning initiatives with the overall objective of delivering more inclusive communications to Nova Scotians.

Evaluation and Measurement

As a central agency, CNS supports corporate and departmental priorities by developing and delivering on strategic communications and marketing plans that help ensure Nova Scotians are aware of government priorities, programs and services and how to access them. CNS provides an integrated, full-service marketing communications approach to all significant initiatives.

CNS continues to focus on delivering more accessible and inclusive communications to Nova Scotians, which in 2021-22 included expanding government's citizen-centered website, where access to information on priorities, programs and services is easy to find and readily available.

COVID-19 Response and Vaccine Delivery

Evidence drives decision-making. As government's central communications agency, CNS uses research to test communications efforts and evaluate their effectiveness. We also use digital analytics to ensure we are reaching Nova Scotians with information they want and need. For example, web analytics were used to determine the effectiveness and impact of information presented on the government website, including vital COVID-19 and vaccine information.

Some of the results detailed below are from March 15, 2021 to March 31, 2022 (i.e. from the second anniversary of the first probable case of COVID-19 in Nova Scotia to the end of fiscal 2022).

Actions: Communications and marketing efforts focused on sharing clear and concise information on COVID-19 and the how, where and when of the vaccination clinics, tracking and quickly responding to new issues and barriers, and communicating directly with target groups. Paid advertising, such as social and radio were used to promote community clinics.

Results: In the second year of the pandemic, CNS:

- Reached Nova Scotians over and over again, with eight in ten Nova Scotians following COVID-19 closely and commonly identifying our coronavirus site as a trusted source of information (public opinion research)
- Produced 63 livestream COVID updates, 92 videos, 11 multilingual audio fact sheets and 21 radio ads
- Issued 937 news releases on COVID-19 (also available in French)
- Published 4,200 web updates across coronavirus, reopening and promotional campaigns (in English and French)

- Supported the user experience of 14 COVID-19 related digital services and apps, creating start content, alignment of service content and ongoing upkeep
- Served more than 50 million pageviews on the web
- Made more than 10,000 posts about COVID-19, the vaccine program and related guidance on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter
- Answered more than 50,000 questions from Nova Scotians through direct message and countless more via social post comments
- Earned more than 230 million impressions of social media posts and over 20 million video views on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter
- Ran 15 large multi-media campaigns updating, informing and encouraging Nova Scotians using all mediums (print, online, social, out of home, television and radio) in all regions of the province, in French and English, with countless 'one-off' ads on social media, print and radio based on new information and announcements
- CNS, in collaboration with the Faculty of Medicine at Dalhousie University, created two short video series from January to April 2021:
 - COVID-19 Explained for Nova Scotians
 - COVID-19 Myth Busters for Nova Scotians

These video series were hosted by students who explained in simple terms facts about COVID-19, dismantling disinformation and misinformation surrounding the approved vaccines, and further highlighting the need for the health measures to Nova Scotians who get their news online and are between the ages of 18 and 34. Every week, CNS and the Dal team engaged on what the best focus was for questions that week, based on insights from Government social media networks. The diversity of Nova Scotia's communities were also reflected in the products.

- Translated approximately 400,000 words into French
- Led a network of 400+ staff answering thousands of questions across government and Nova Scotia Health using common sets of Q&As. Provided this information through regular email updates to about 2,000 stakeholders and all MLA offices.
- Further developed our research program, collecting thousands of useful datapoints on public health knowledge and compliance, pathways to information, vaccine intentions and attitudes related to recovery and reopening (telephone surveying). We also started studying the long-term impacts of the pandemic on the health and wellbeing of Nova Scotians, with a special focus on persons with disabilities.

Since we started measuring public opinion on COVID-19 in the fall of 2020, government and public health have consistently earned high approval ratings (9 or more out of 10), with communications playing an influencing role. Awareness of, and compliance with, public health measures, has consistently tested in the high range (public opinion research). Eight in ten Nova Scotians were able to identify Dr. Strang as our Chief Medical Officer of Health (unaided); and large numbers watched our “COVID briefings” and checked the coronavirus site regularly.

Web Strategy

Web analytics help determine the effectiveness of information on the government website, and inform decisions about ongoing content retirement, improvement and migration. This year, as we furthered work toward transforming government’s web presence in alignment with the web strategy, analytics illustrate improved access to the programs, services and information that Nova Scotians are looking for.

Actions: Throughout the year, more content moved to beta.novascotia.ca, and where appropriate, content was retired or developed to meet user needs and support government initiatives. These efforts were balanced with ongoing updates to the COVID-19 website (novascotia.ca/coronavirus), improvements to website accessibility and the development of other dynamic web platforms.

Learn more about the scope, progress and status of government’s web strategy at beta.novascotia.ca/web-strategy-overview.

Results: In total, 24 government departments have migrated to beta.novascotia.ca. This includes publishing 3,420 pieces of content and translating 752 pieces of content. In the 2021-22 period, visitors to the beta website increased more than 16% and new visitors increased more than 13%. Mobile traffic (including tablets) increased more than 20% to 659,024, and visits from organic search have increased more than 24%, from 726,097 to 906,588.

Support for Government Priorities

In helping the government deliver on its mandate and priorities, CNS concentrated on new approaches and tools to effectively reach and engage audiences, focusing efforts on areas with the biggest impact.

2021-22 highlights:

Healthcare and Skilled Trades Recruitment Campaign

On September 27, the Province of Nova Scotia announced a \$2.5-million marketing investment to attract newcomers who can help build our economy: specifically healthcare workers and skilled trades workers.

Actions: In December 2021, a recruitment campaign was launched targeting workers across Canada in key occupations. Ads on television, on billboards and online directed interested people to liveinnovascotia.com where they could learn more about living and working in Nova Scotia. Advertising carried key messages about Nova Scotia's enviable coastal lifestyle and the availability of jobs.

Goals

- Increase awareness of Nova Scotia, not just as a nice place to visit, but as a great place to live.
Specifically targeting:
 - Canadians in key healthcare and trades occupations
 - Younger workers, 25-40
 - Audiences in major Canadian urban centers
- Provide information to those looking to know more about Nova Scotia
- Make real people available to answer questions or otherwise help facilitate a move to Nova Scotia

Timing

- Campaign Start Date: December 20, 2021
- Campaign End Date: March 31, 2022

Results: The campaign drove more than 150,000 users directly to the website, split evenly between the healthcare and skilled trades pages. 521 inquiries were received from the website and a further 179 direct messages were fielded on social media. These inquiries led to personalized conversations with dedicated navigators to answer questions about moving to Nova Scotia.

Across paid tactics, the campaign generated over 102,000,000 impressions, 381,000 ad clicks and 26,000,000 video views. The average click through rate was 0.40%.

The tactics most likely to drive form inquiries and website results were Google Search, Facebook/Instagram and LinkedIn. Facebook/Instagram, YouTube and television were most likely to educate users through conversation or video messaging. The top tactics that assisted in spreading the reach of the campaign were TikTok, television, out-of-home, programmatic display and digital audio.

Users from the following geographies drove the most traffic to the site from the campaign ads:

- Toronto
- Montreal
- Calgary
- Ottawa

Website analytics show that the average time spent on the website was 33 seconds with users generating an average of 1.22 pages per session.

Virtual Care Campaign

Actions: *VirtualCareNS* expanded to Central and Eastern zones beginning in December 2021. The pilot program launched in Northern and Western zones in spring 2020.

To help inform Nova Scotians without a family practice about this new healthcare service, content was created and shared on social media and advertising channels. Content focused on directing Nova Scotians to the *VirtualCareNS* webpage and explaining:

- What virtual care is and how it works
- How Nova Scotians without a family practice can get access to the service

Results: While in market, paid advertising performed above average compared to other government campaigns. Results were as follows:

Social Media:

- Impressions Served: 1,742,905
- Engagements: 10,280
- Engagement Rate: 0.59%

Search Engine Marketing:

- Impressions Served: 44,924
- Clicks to Website: 5,515
- Click Through Rate: 12.28%

Online

- Impressions Served: 714,227
- Clicks to website: 1,653
- Click Through Rate: 0.23%

Google analytics show that while in market the website received 20,426 page views and of that amount 84% were unique. On average users spent 3 minutes and 39 seconds on the page and visited 1.2 pages per session. The top ways people entered the site were as follows:

- Referral
- Paid search
- Direct
- Organic search
- Social

Canada-wide Childcare Grant Campaign

Nova Scotia has entered into a \$604.9 million federal agreement to participate in the Canada-wide system for early learning and childcare (Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreements). For families and caregivers, this means they will have access to:

- a 50% reduction, on average, in family childcare fees by Dec. 31, 2022,
- \$10 a day, on average, childcare fees by 2026,
- 9,500 new childcare spaces by March 31, 2025, including more spaces in under-served areas of Nova Scotia, and;
- have more access to the Before and After care in Pre-Primary for ages 3-5.

Actions: A multimedia marketing campaign was developed and ran for approximately one month in March 2022. The campaign primarily focused on the 50% reduction in childcare fees with materials reflecting the key concepts of: affordability; accessibility; inclusion, and quality. A tagline was created - "Childcare that cares for everyone" - to emphasize these pillars.

The goal of the campaign was to generate awareness of the upcoming reduced childcare fees, as well as drive traffic to the web page where people could learn more about the childcare grant and upcoming changes to childcare fees and accessibility.

The marketing strategy included newer tactics such as podcast advertising via DAX audio and Spotify, mixed with other traditional and digital mediums like out of home (transit ads in Halifax and Sydney), social media, and search engine marketing (Google Ads).

Results: The Canada-wide Childcare Grant paid campaign performed on par with other government campaigns. The paid results are as follows:

Social

- Impressions served: 3,192,029
- Engagements: 5,532
- Engagement Rate: 0.17%

Digital Audio

- Impressions served: 861,479

Search Engine Marketing

- Impressions served: 43,890
- Clicks to website: 1,617
- Click through rate: 3.68%

Google analytics show that while in market the website had 1,077 sessions. On average users spent 3:04 minutes on the page and visited 1.25 pages per session. The top ways people entered the site were as follows:

- Direct
- Organic Search
- Social
- Referral
- Display

Seniors Care Grant Campaign

The Seniors Care Grant is a new annual grant program of up to \$500 to help cover the costs associated with household services for lower income seniors. This grant provides support that seniors need to stay in their homes. It can be used to reimburse costs for such things as snow removal, home repairs, lawn care, and/or grocery delivery.

Seniors were required to apply for the grant and meet certain criteria.

Applications for the grant became available on December 1, 2021. The deadline for this year's grant was May 31, 2022.

Actions: A marketing campaign was developed with the assistance of an external vendor. The campaign took an empathetic approach to reach seniors and their loved ones who may be overwhelmed with being able to stay on top of household chores.

The campaign's main objectives were:

- Generate awareness of new grant program and its eligibility requirements
- Drive traffic to the website for applications & more information

The marketing strategy included a mix of traditional and digital media to best reach our target demographic. This included print, radio, social media, search engine marketing (i.e., Google Ads). The department's communications plan also included stakeholder engagement.

Results: Paid advertising performed above average compared to other similar campaigns (i.e., Heating Assistance Rebate Program), with higher engagement and click through rates. Paid advertising results are as follows:

Social

- Impressions served: 564,266
- Engagements: 8,016
- Engagement Rate: 1.42%

Search Engine Marketing:

- Impressions served: 28,470
- Clicks to website: 5,851
- Click Through Rate: 20.55%

Website analytics show that the website had 7,260 page views, most of which were unique (87%). On average users spent 4.22 minutes on the page and visited 1.54 pages per session. The top ways people entered the site were as follows:

- Organic search
- Referral
- Direct
- Social
- Paid Search

Accessibility & Inclusive Communications

CNS focused on its continued efforts to remove barriers to government communications and increasing public awareness. Raising awareness about the value and importance of accessibility, equity, diversity and inclusion is key to making real change.

2021-22 highlights:

Integration into day-to-day operations, guidelines, policies and procedures

Accessibility, Diversity & Inclusion lead at CNS

Actions: Early in 2021-22 senior management at CNS recognized the intersectionality between the work being done on accessibility and in the diversity, equity and inclusion space. A decision was made for the CNS Diversity, Equity and Inclusion lead to take on the day-to-day accessibility work for CNS to ensure that intersectionality was thoughtfully considered in what we produce.

Results: In September 2021, a communications director was reassigned as lead for this combined file. The director plays a lead role in the design, implementation, and monitoring of accessible and inclusive communications guidelines and operational principles and practices and ensures CNS adherence to government accessibility, diversity and inclusion legislation, commitments, programs and policies.

Draft Guiding Principles on Accessible Communications

Actions: During 2021, CNS worked with teams across the agency to develop a set of guiding principles to support the goals of the Accessibility Act. It establishes four guiding principles that will inform the work of the agency with clients and ensure that accessibility is always part of project planning. Sessions were held with staff in summer 2021 to test the draft and gather input and suggestions.

Results: The draft principles were reviewed by senior management and the Minister in fall of 2021, with the draft being approved. The next step will be to test the draft with stakeholders in collaboration with the Accessibility Directorate in fall 2022 and then with clients. As a result of the work on the principles, CNS teams are now developing checklists to help implement the principles on project work. The first is a checklist for published documents and will form a basis for similar checklists for other production work.

ASL and CART Implementation

Actions: CNS continued to ensure American Sign Language (ASL) and Communication Access Real-time Transcription (CART) services were provided for all COVID-19 briefings during the year. In addition, to ensure broader access to additional government information, ASL and CART services were used for other government announcements and initiatives where CNS was involved.

Results: In 2021-22, ASL services were used for all 63 COVID-19 live streams and 20 additional government events, including but not limited to:

- supportive housing
- affordable childcare
- built environment and education accessibility standards
- the swearing-in ceremony
- some job postings

CART services were also used for the COVID-19 live streams, along with 6 additional government events.

Staff training

Accessible Design and Video Training

Actions: In November 2021, CNS staff participated in the Design + Accessibility Summit provided virtually by CreativePro. The summit is geared towards design professionals and covers resources that comply with international accessibility standards. CNS purchased a license for all staff to either attend the course live during the week of November 29 – December 2, 2021 or access the course content for one year. Topics covered included:

- Accessible Graphic Design (including social media, Microsoft Office, Adobe, Infographics)
- Accessibility for Video and Audio
- Website Accessibility
- Alt Text

Results: Staff across the agency have participated in many of these courses and have access to the course content until November 2022. As a result of the training, participants discovered tools and resources to help check documents and media for accessibility, as well as providing a network of knowledgeable speakers for research purposes.

Public awareness campaign on accessibility

Access Includes Everyone in Everyday Life

Actions: CNS worked closely with the Accessibility Directorate and a private-sector partner to develop a public awareness campaign on accessibility. The goal of “*Access Includes Everyone in Everyday Life*” is to increase awareness of accessibility as a human right, challenge stigmas and remove barriers to accessibility through inclusive and diverse representations of disability.

Results: The launch of this campaign was originally scheduled for fiscal 2021-22, however, it was delayed to fiscal 2022-23 due to COVID-19 restrictions that were in place preventing production of the third and final element of the campaign. This third element involved on-location filming inside a car (to demonstrate the assistive devices in a vehicle). Social distancing and masking restrictions in 2021-22 prevented earlier capture of this footage. Once those restrictions were loosened, production proceeded, and the campaign was launched April 25, 2022.

This campaign runs until the end of the year, with a mid-campaign report expected in September 2022. Early indicators show that the campaign is performing well with some 19,000 video completions and over 1.6 million impressions online, as of June 21, 2022.

Enhanced collaboration

Development of Built Environment Standard

Actions: CNS has worked closely with the Accessibility Directorate and other impacted departments to provide input to the drafting of the first accessibility standard for Nova Scotia, specifically related to the built environment. This is one of five standards that will be developed by 2030 and will guide government and private sector entities on their work to increase accessibility in public spaces. In early 2022, CNS met several times with the consultant working on the draft to review the section dealing with signage and wayfinding, providing input and advice on proposed content.

Results: Significant work remains to finalize the section on signage and wayfinding. CNS will continue working with the directorate in 2022 as they complete drafting the standard. Eventually, CNS will work with the directorate on a standard for information and communications.

Interdepartmental Committee on Accessibility

Actions: CNS participates as a member of a cross-government committee that works on initiatives and provides advice and input to the work of the Accessibility Directorate. The committee usually meets quarterly. A major focus of the committee has been developing commitments for the next Government of Nova Scotia Accessibility Plan. Each department, including CNS, was required to submit draft commitments for the new plan by December 2021.

Results: CNS submitted its draft commitments to the directorate in December 2021 and the new plan will be released sometime in 2022.

CNS Diversity and Inclusion Committee

The Diversity & Inclusion Committee is a group of communications professionals within CNS who seek to influence and educate people about diversity—both internally and externally. The committee takes on a leadership role in how government communicates by demonstrating and promoting best practices, and ensuring inclusive representation in our language/words, ideas/visuals.

Actions: The committee strives to raise awareness while increasing knowledge and understanding of a variety of topics. Some ways this is accomplished are through:

- Organizing important discussions
- Researching and sharing valuable resources
- Identifying ways, the committee can help CNS deliver on its diversity plan
- Quarterly book club to discuss books that align with guiding principles for diversity and inclusion
- Organizing an annual diversity bursary (planning, promoting, asset creation, posters/social graphics and judging submissions)

Results: Over the course of 2021-22, several resources were shared with all CNS staff by email. The topics covered included:

- Truth and Reconciliation Day
- Proper use of pronouns in communications
- Pride Month
- National Indigenous History Month
- African Heritage Month
- Emancipation Day
- Transgender Awareness Week

In addition, the committee administers a book club, with a focus on books that spur conversation in the diversity, equity and inclusion space. In 2021-22, the books read and discussed were:

- *The Skin We're In* by Desmond Cole
- *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga

CNS also awarded three post-secondary students with \$1,500 bursaries for their submissions on the theme of "Change".

Appendix A - Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act

Annual Report under Section 18 of the *Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act*

The Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act was proclaimed into law on December 20, 2011.

The Act provides for government employees to be able to come forward if they reasonably believe that a wrongdoing has been committed or is about to be committed and they are acting in good faith.

The Act also protects employees who do disclose from reprisals, by enabling them to lay a complaint of reprisal with the Labor Board.

A Wrongdoing for the purposes of the Act is:

- a) a contravention of provincial or federal laws or regulations
- b) a misuse or gross mismanagement of public funds or assets
- c) an act or omission that creates an imminent risk of a substantial and specific danger to the life, health or safety of persons or the environment, or
- d) directing or counselling someone to commit a wrongdoing

The following is a summary of disclosures received by Communications Nova Scotia:

Information Required under Section 18 of the Act	Fiscal Year 2021-2022
The number of disclosures received	0
The number of findings of wrongdoing	0
Details of each wrongdoing	N/A
Recommendations and actions taken on each wrongdoing	N/A