

**Section 2.4
e-Council Best Practices Guide**

Introduction

This guide is aimed at enabling municipal governments to introduce electronic services into their council operations to benefit councillors, municipal staff and constituents. The topics and concepts provided below are based on research into industry best practices and on lessons learned from a number of municipalities within Nova Scotia who have implemented electronic services into their council operations.

1.1 Background

Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations (SNSMR) retained Unisys Canada to prepare a report on the best practices and considerations for the adoption of e-Council within municipal governments. For further information on the company www.unisys.com.

This report was prepared after consultations with the Town of Wolfville, Town of Truro, Cape Breton Regional Municipality, Halifax Regional Municipality and Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations.

1.2 What is e-Council?

In virtually all business and government sectors, more and more processes are being performed with technology and/or supported by technology every day. The term ‘e-Council’ refers to the use of information technology services within the council operations of a municipal government. E-Council does not refer to any specific set of products or processes. It refers to a wide range of scenarios, from the very simple (e.g. using email to facilitate communications among councillors, staff and constituents) to the very involved (e.g. having a paperless council operation where every process is conducted in an electronic or digital fashion). Many municipalities in Nova Scotia and across Canada have begun to implement e-Council concepts into their operations. This guide will delve into those concepts, considering the technology, processes and physical setups and dependencies to support e-Council operations.

e-Council refers to a wide range of scenarios

1.3 High level benefits and challenges of e-Council

The benefits of e-Council are varied, and to a large extent, depend on the types of technologies and services you introduce to your council operations. Below is a high level description of some benefits and challenges that would be expected in a larger, full-scale introduction of technology to council operations.

Some potential benefits:

- Smoother operation of your council proceedings (better recording of voting, minutes, etc.)
- Easier information flow among constituents, councillors and staff
- Reduction in the use of paper for your council operations
- Increasing the professionalism of your council operations through improvements in technology and/or council chambers
- Improved access by your constituents to their councilors
- Improved access by members of the press to your council proceedings
- Improved access to information by your constituents and the ability for constituents to review your documents and view council proceedings without the need to be physically at your municipal offices/council site

Some potential challenges:

- Limited budgets for technology acquisition
- Limited on-staff expertise to support technology
- Resistance among councillors who are used to working in a paper-based fashion both within the council chambers (i.e. during meetings) and outside of council chambers
- Physical space restrictions in your council chambers for the introduction of new technologies
- Training of your staff and councilors on the use of new technologies

1.4 How to use this guide / goals of this guide

This guide is intended to provide you with the following:

- Lists of services and functions for you to consider adding to your council operations
- A guide to the process by which technology can be introduced into your council operations
- A series of checklists to ensure that at each step of the process you

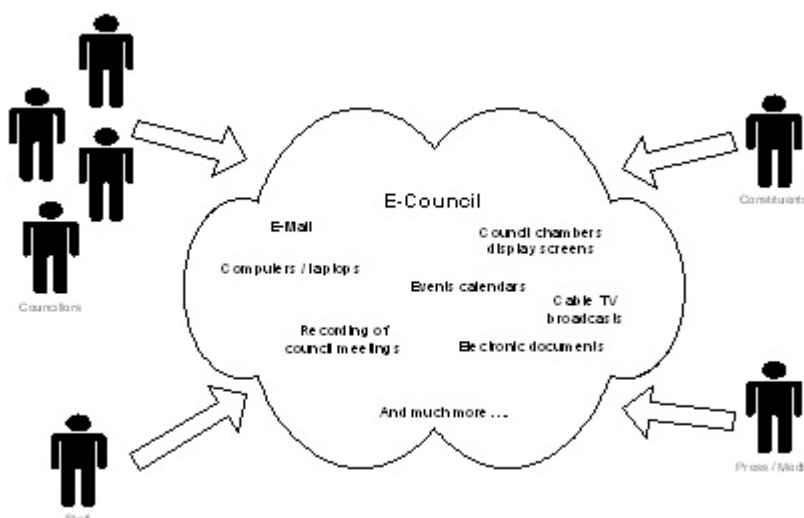
are keeping critical considerations in mind as you progress toward introducing technology into your council operations.

This guide is designed so it can be used by a municipality interested in starting the process of introducing some technology services into their council operations or by a municipality that already has a number of technologies in use for their council, but is looking to grow and expand their offerings to their councillors and/or constituents.

Ways you can think about e-Council

2 e-Council Technology and Services Views

Your e-Council initiative must take into account all of the stakeholders it will affect. The diagram below shows how an e-Council initiative is situated among your municipal councillors, your staff (administrative, legislative, etc.), your constituents and the press/media that help in informing your constituents.



When beginning to plan your e-Council project, you should think about it in two streams that are described below:

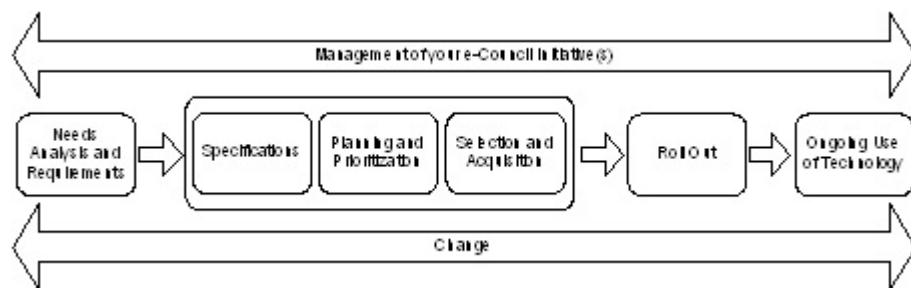
- e-Council Lifecycle – This will guide you through the phases of your e-Council project from conception through to the operation of your e-Council. This will help you with the *process* of introducing technology and services into your council operations.
- E-Council Inventory – This will help you to think about the potential services and technology you may want to add to your

The process of introducing e-Council technologies and services

council operations. This will help you identify *what* you wish to modify or add to your current council operations.

2.1 e-Council Lifecycle

Starting the process of introducing technology into your council operations can be intimidating. In beginning to examine modernizing your council operations, consider the life cycle shown and described below.



Throughout your project, you will need to **Manage** the initiative (i.e. ensuring contractors complete work as agreed, coordinating suppliers, etc.) As with any project, the first step in this lifecycle (**Needs Analysis and Requirements**) is where you should gather and validate your requirements and determine your needs. From this, you will progress to more detailed thoughts on your requirements (**Specifications**) that will make your ideas one step closer to being able to be implemented. The next step (**Planning and Prioritization**) will be to do the detailed planning for the introduction of the service(s) and determine priorities among competing services. The **Selection and Acquisition** phase is where you reach a final decision on the product(s) and service(s) to purchase. At this point in the lifecycle, you are now ready to implement the technologies and services (**Roll-Out**) and have your councillors and/or staff begin to use them. At the point your roll-out is complete, the “last” stage in the lifecycle (**Ongoing Use of Technology**) is the use of the technologies/services where you should expect to support the technologies and your users. At any time during the lifecycle, expect **Change** to occur (i.e. changes in priorities, change in a currently used technology).

e-Council technologies and services you may wish to adopt

The lifecycle above can be thought of and used in one of two ways:

- 1 To gather your thoughts and enable you to plan a larger-scale, multiple service/technology introduction (i.e. a full-scale introduction of e-Council) to your council operations
- 2 To gather your thoughts and enable you to plan a single service/technology introduction (i.e. email for councillors) to your council operations

More detailed explanations and examples of each stage as well as detailed checklists for considerations at each stage of the lifecycle are provided in section 4 below.

2.2 e-Council Inventory

Another way to think about introducing new technologies and services into your council operations is by examining possibilities. Below is a comprehensive list of potential services and technologies to introduce into your council operations as well as considerations for the council chambers. You can use this list to begin the discussion of the needs and requirements that are unique to your situation. Each of these services and functions will be discussed in more detail in Section 5 to follow.

TOPIC	SERVICES, IDEAS, CONSIDERATIONS
Council Chambers Facilities (physical setup):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrangement and layout of council chambers • Furniture • Cabling • Public gallery • Space for presentations from the public and staff • Sightlines • Space for the press • Other potential uses for your council chambers
Equipment and Services for Direct Use by Councillors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laptops • LCD screens / monitors • Printers • Provision of internet access • Email / Calendars

TOPIC	SERVICES, IDEAS, CONSIDERATIONS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document management / retrieval • Policies for use of technology • Operation of your e-Council during meetings
In-Chambers Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audio • Video (displays, screens) • In-chambers networks • Fixed computers • Recording of proceedings • Speaker priority / management • Voting • Facilities for community and staff presentations
Cable Television Broadcasts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical setup • Equipment required • Camera placement • Storage and technology requirements • Lighting
Municipal Web Site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Web-casting • Publishing • Events calendars • Issues tracking • Public compliant submission • Public submission of comments • Polls

Things you should keep in mind throughout introducing e-Council technologies and services

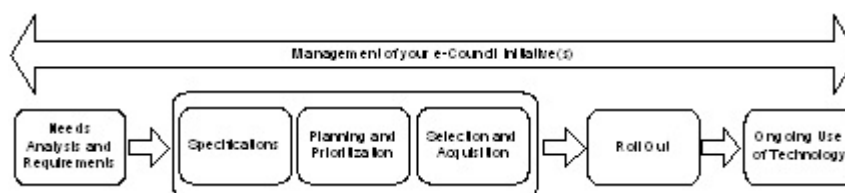
2.3 Considerations for e-Council Initiatives

In addition to thinking about the process of how to introduce e-Council (i.e. e-Council Lifecycle) and the potential services you could introduce (i.e. e-Council Inventory), you also need to consider the following concepts that relate to a number of stages in the lifecycle and to a number of the services in the inventory. Below is a list of considerations which will be fully explored in Section 5 to follow.

- Security – Your e-Council technologies may store sensitive information. This section will provide you some items to take into consideration relative to securing your information resources.
- Backup and Recovery of Information – As you become reliant on technology to operate your council, the backup and recovery of the information managed by your technology products becomes a critical factor in allowing you to have long term access to your records.
- Business Continuity - As you become reliant on technology to operate your council, you will need plans for how you can adapt to technology problems if and when they arise.
- Legislative Requirements and FOIPOP – Your council operations currently exist in a legislative framework. The introduction of technology creates some new issues to consider.
- Records Retention – You will need to devise policies and procedures for records retention for the electronic records generated and maintained by your e-Council technologies.
- Patriot Act – If you are considering the use of a service provider who may store data in the United States, you should take into account current understandings on the Patriot Act.
- Support for Technology – The ability for you to support your technology and your councillors and staff in their use of technology needs to be taken into consideration.
- Training – In order to ensure your councilors can successfully use the new technologies you will implement, you will need to consider the manner in which you will train and educate your users.
- Growth and Extensibility – To maximize the return on the investment you will make in e-Council, you will want to ensure that the technologies and products you purchase can grow and support your operations over the long term.
- Technology Standards – Taking technology standards into account will allow you to make smart purchases, minimize support costs and ensure your purchases will be usable over the long term.
- Working with Vendors – You will need to work with many different types of vendors throughout your e-Council project. This section will provide some tips on how to successfully engage and secure services from your vendors.

3 e-Council Lifecycle

Starting the process of upgrading your council operations from a traditional paper-based model to one incorporating more modern electronic services is a daunting task. You will be faced with budget and timeline pressures, resistance to change on the part of your councillors and staff, not to mention the challenges inherent in determining what you want and need to do and the analysis and selection of complicated technology tools.



Before you begin to think in detail about changes to your council operations to introduce new technologies and practices, review the checklist below to see if some of the initial indicators are positive for you to begin your e-Council project.

Items to Consider – Starting Your E-council Project	
Do you have a champion for your e-Council project? • Many municipalities have found it a key success factor to have a visionary who can set the strategy to ensure their e-Council project got off the ground and continued to progress even during difficult times.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Read this guide and discuss the concepts with your team. Try to arrive at an agreement for the common goals for your e-Council project.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discuss what you can reasonably afford before starting your e-Council project.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Determine and document what is driving you to adopt e-Council practices, technologies and operations (e.g. improved efficiency, demands by councillors, improved communications, improvements to facilities, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Determine who you want to be part of your team. • Decide on participation of staff, councillors and external parties. • Ensure you understand what each person brings to your project.	<input type="checkbox"/>

The sections that follow will walk you through some high level steps to help guide your thinking through the process of implementing e-Council services.

3.1 Management of your e-Council Activities

You need to keep a number of considerations in mind throughout the introduction of your e-Council services. Review the checklist below to see some of the key management concepts that can help you keep your project on track.

Items to Consider – Management of Your E-council Activities	
Managing the expectations of your councillors, your staff and your constituents is a key to success. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure they are aware of the status of your activities and ensure you are continually seeking their opinion and advice. 	<input type="checkbox"/>
Expect the timelines for the following items to take longer than you might originally expect and insure you have adequate time in your schedule to mitigate the inevitable issues that will occur in a project: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquisition and delivery of computers, network components and other technology products • Installation and configuration of technology products • Completion of custom furniture • Completion of construction changes to your physical council chambers 	<input type="checkbox"/>
Plan to coordinate the activities of a large number of players during your e-Council activities. You should expect to be managing the activities of the following people (among others): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction crews • Technology vendors • Architect • Stakeholders (councillors, media, staff) 	<input type="checkbox"/>
Treat your e-Council activities as a project. Expect to assume a role of “general contractor” to ensure all of the pieces come together.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Identify expertise you have on staff or with your	

