

What We Heard

Open Government Initiative



December, 2014


Newfoundland
Labrador

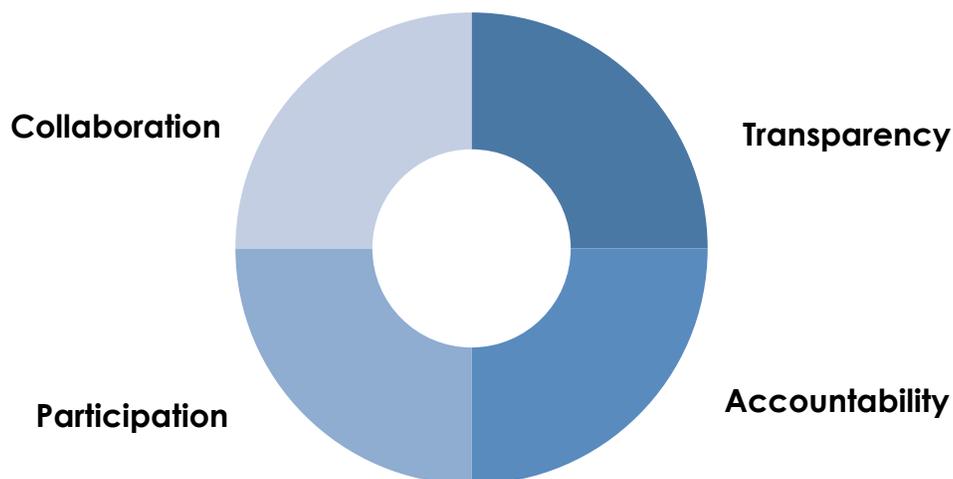
Introduction

Open government is an international movement sweeping across Western democracies and beyond. It is based on the concept that governments can benefit from the input, knowledge and expertise of the public, and that this can lead to improvements in government operations, better decision-making and enhanced policy-development processes. An 'open' government is widely considered to be a government that uses innovative approaches and strategies to increase public access to information and data. It is also one that provides better engagement opportunities for the public and takes steps to enhance collaboration with its partners.

British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, the Government of Canada, and various municipalities across the country all have variations of open government initiatives.

Open government approaches and principles have been widely adopted within Canada and internationally. The creation of the Open Government Partnership illustrates this growth. Consisting of eight countries at its launch in 2011, this world-wide global initiative has grown to include over 65 nations. As part of the Open Government Partnership, governments commit to take steps to become more transparent, accountable, participatory and collaborative. While membership in the Open Government Partnership is limited to national governments, many sub-national governments (such as provinces and municipalities) have designed and implemented plans to follow generally-accepted principles of open government.

In March 2014, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador launched the Open Government Initiative, designed to further the principles of: accountability; transparency; participation; and collaboration.



Open Data	Open Information	Dialogue	Collaboration
Open data refers to the release of government data, with an open license, which is free of charge for anyone to use and reuse for any purpose.	The proactive release of government documents in a timely manner and in user-friendly formats.	Interactive engagement activities that ensure the public's ideas, insights and expertise inform government policy and decision-making.	Meaningful relationships between entities – both formal and informal – that arise when those with a common or complementary purpose agree to work together to achieve something no single entity working alone could achieve.
Key Goal Underpinning Each Pillar			
To promote proactive disclosure of data and encourage innovation through sharing.	To make more information available and improve its accessibility, organization and usability.	To create more, better and different opportunities for dialogue and participation.	To build and support new collaborative activities and processes.

Practically speaking, Newfoundland and Labrador's Open Government Initiative strives to bring about change in four areas (or pillars): Open Data; Open Information; Dialogue; and Collaboration. The table above describes or defines each pillar and lists the key goals underpinning or guiding each.

Through the Open Government Initiative, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has committed to work with community organizations, stakeholders, and citizens including government employees, to improve the way it does business. Specifically, government aims to do this by:

- enhancing access to information and data;
- improving and expanding opportunities for public dialogue with the public; and,
- improving the way government collaborates with community organizations, stakeholders and citizens.

As part of the Open Government Initiative launch in March 2014, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador committed to undertake an extensive public engagement process to inform the development of its first open government action plan. This public engagement process has so far resulted in:

Over **4,600** website users with over
20,000 page views on the open.gov.nl.ca website. Four online
questionnaires were developed,
of which there were **308** completed,
as well as a web-based Ideas and Input form, which resulted in **6**
submissions. The Office of Public Engagement also held
42 in-person engagement sessions, which resulted in
more than **700** participants providing their input
and ideas.

This What We Heard document provides a summary of the main ideas, suggestions and comments that were gathered from the varied public engagement activities held to date. This input, as well as any additional input received from this document, will inform the development of a draft action plan, which will also be released for public comment. Following feedback on the draft action plan, a final open government action plan will be presented.

Engagement Process

Shortly after the launch of the Open Government Initiative, the Office of Public Engagement began a province-wide engagement effort to inform the creation of the province's first open government action plan. This process was designed with the principles of open government in mind and focused on engaging citizens, stakeholders and government employees over a number of months – and in varied ways – to obtain their views, insights, and recommendations on how to make government more open.

A number of different approaches and techniques were used to engage people across the province. The broad goal was to involve the greatest number and variety of participants as possible, while ensuring that any citizen, stakeholder or employee who wished to provide input was given an opportunity to do so. The following section describes what the engagement process entailed and the tools and methods used. It also provides a demographic profile of the participants, and outlines how the input was collected and analyzed.

Overall Approach

The engagement approach was multifaceted and comprehensive. It relied on both online and in-person methods. It was generally developed as a three-stage process: preliminary engagement; focused engagement; and analysis. Specifically, it began with preliminary engagement activities that aimed to seek broad input and ideas on open government from the public. Then, in later sessions and activities, it concentrated on in-depth, targeted and focused activities where participants were asked to 'dig deeper' into key ideas and themes emerging from the earlier sessions. All comments from participants were anonymously recorded.

As activities were being conducted, and after they were completed, organizers of the engagement process would meet to review and analyze all input gathered. They would look for singularly unique ideas as well as for patterns in the data. Clusters of similar unique ideas would sometimes be given a category- or theme-label. Generally, a theme would emerge when multiple participants across numerous sessions and/or activity types would say the same or similar things about a question or topic. Preliminary themes appearing in the early engagement sessions were discussed with participants in the latter focused engagement sessions to see if how they would be received.

Tools and Methods

No single engagement activity method or tool is likely to appeal to all members of the public. While some are comfortable with online tools, others prefer in-person methods. Similarly, while some may like town-hall meeting group-discussions, others may prefer opportunities to make comments in writing. With this in mind a variety of engagement options were offered to accommodate the preferences of diverse participants. They included: audience response electronic keypad polling; small group roundtable discussions; individual writing exercises; requests for input via social media; online questionnaires; an online Ideas and Input Form; and public information sessions where time was allotted to ask questions and make comments. Sessions or specific activities either focused on an individual pillar (Open Data, Open Information, Dialogue or Collaboration) or were developed such that participants could provide input on any or all four pillars at once. All information gathered informs this What We Heard document and will guide the development of the action plan.

Tools and Techniques	Description	Number of Participants
Roundtable Discussions	Small group discussions related to Open Data, Open Information, Dialogue and Collaboration. These often included individual writing exercises.	368 231 citizens 137 employees
Audience Response Keypad Polling	Participants were asked multiple choice questions or asked whether or not they agreed or disagreed with a statement. Results were automatically reported.	568*
Online Questionnaires	Questionnaires, administered electronically, that sought to explore the views of participants on a variety of open government topics.	308 completed
Online Input Form	A form was provided on the open government website, where citizens could submit input, thoughts and ideas.	6
Information Sessions	Information sessions were held during the first several months of the Open Government Initiative to familiarize both citizens and employees with the new initiative.	255 65 citizens 190 employees**

* This number reflects the number of participants who used the polling technology; participants had the option to abstain.
 ** The number of employees attending the Information Sessions is estimated.

Generally speaking, in-person engagement sessions combined the techniques of small-group discussions with interactive keypad polling. In such sessions, participants were first provided with an overview of key concepts and principles related to open government. They were then asked to reflect on some key questions, and to write down individual answers to them if they so desired. Next they would be asked to share their ideas with others at their respective tables, and to engage in table-discussion - or deliberation - on the questions or topics at hand.



“Roundtable discussions, forums and face-to-face events with multiple stakeholders in attendance provides an excellent opportunity for feedback that considers all angles of the big picture.”

- Questionnaire Respondent

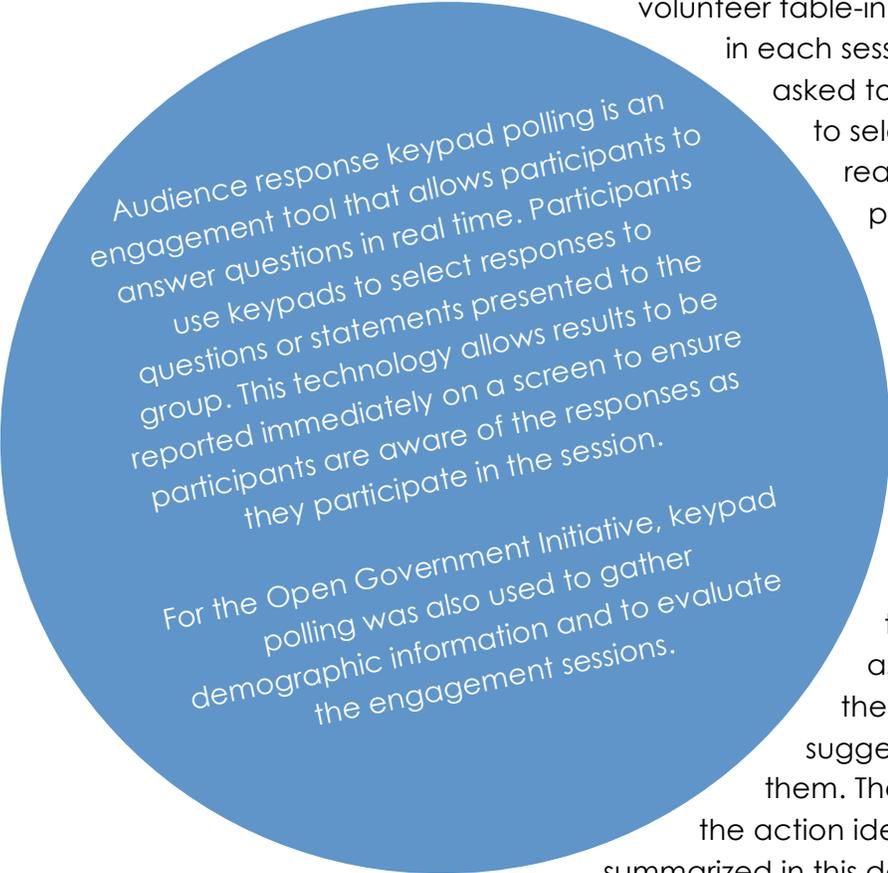
Discussions would be guided or supported by a volunteer, neutral table facilitator, while all ideas and suggestions were captured by an individual acting as

volunteer table-input recorder. At various points

in each session participants would be asked to use their individual keypads to select responses to questions, or reactions to statements,

prepared by the public engagement team. Overall, this process, using both polling and dialogue, ensured participants could share their ideas with one another, and develop thoughtful new ideas related to open government.

Participants were also asked to identify issues or challenges associated with one or more of the pillars and to offer concrete suggestions on how to address them. These issues, as well as many of the action ideas organized by theme, are summarized in this document.



Audience response keypad polling is an engagement tool that allows participants to answer questions in real time. Participants use keypads to select responses to questions or statements presented to the group. This technology allows results to be reported immediately on a screen to ensure participants are aware of the responses as they participate in the session.

For the Open Government Initiative, keypad polling was also used to gather demographic information and to evaluate the engagement sessions.

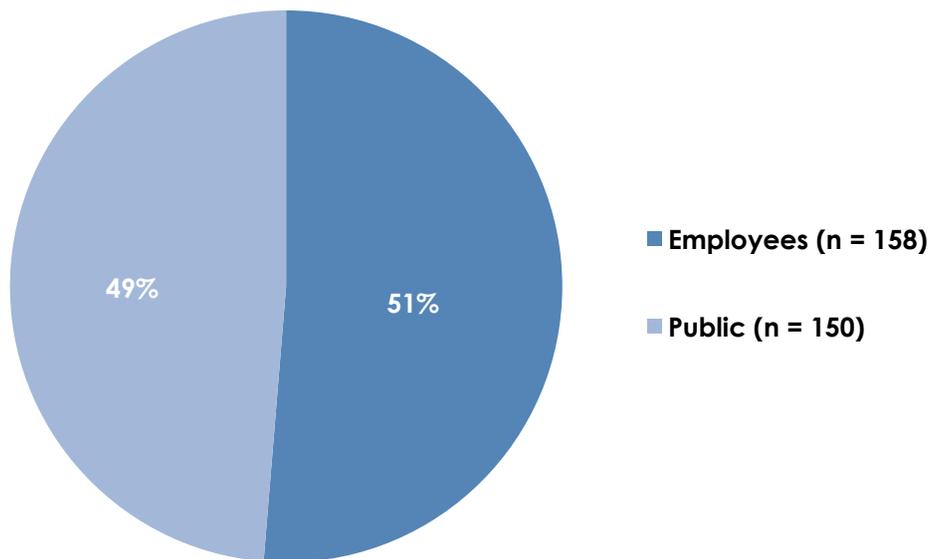
In terms of online engagement, a number of different activities were offered including an online 'Ideas and Input Form' and online questionnaires. The Ideas and Input Form featured a number of multiple choice and open-ended questions which captured the thoughts and ideas of citizens who did not wish to or could not attend in-person sessions. In terms of questionnaires, four unique questionnaires were developed: two

focused on collaboration and dialogue for government employees; one asked questions about government dialogue efforts and targeted the general public; and one other, focused on data and information, was created specifically for government employees and the public.

As well, social media was used to prompt people to participate in the online or in-person activities noted above, or to remind them to send input directly to the Office of Public Engagement. Furthermore, the open government website (launched in March 2014) asked the public to make their views about open government known.

Employees represented 51 per cent (158) of survey respondents, with the general public accounting for the other 49 per cent (150).

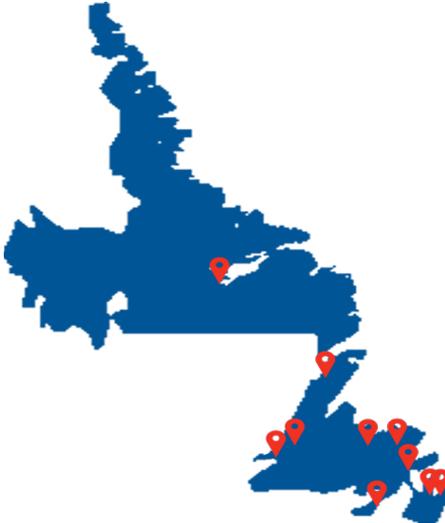
Questionnaire Respondents by Sector



Participants

The Open Government Initiative engagement process was designed with regional representation in mind. In-person sessions were held in each of nine Rural Secretariat regions of the province. This resulted in a broad geographic range of participants. Sessions were held in the following 11 locations:

- St. John's
- Clarenville
- Corner Brook
- Cupids
- Gander
- Glovertown
- Grand Falls – Windsor
- Happy Valley – Goose Bay
- Marystown
- Plum Point
- Stephenville



In-person sessions were targeted at either government employees (internal) or the public (external). In total, there were 25 public sessions and 17 employee sessions.



In-person sessions were divided into two sections: initial or early sessions, held from May to August 2014, were designed to seek broad input on topics and themes, whereas later topic-focused sessions in September and October were designed to 'dig deeper' into the themes identified in the earlier sessions.

The tables on the following pages outline the number of participants who attended each of these sessions and the completed questionnaires, by region.

Employee and Public In-Person Session Attendees by Region				
Region	# of Employee Sessions	# of Employee Participants	# of Public Sessions	# of Public Participants
Labrador	1	6	2	11
St. Anthony - Port au Choix	-	-	1	9
Corner Brook - Rocky Harbour	1	19	3	18
Stephenville - Port aux Basques	-	-	1	22
Grand Falls - Windsor – Baie Verte - Harbour Breton	-	-	4	38
Gander - New-Wes-Valley	1	6	2	31
Clarenville - Bonavista	1	9	3	19
Burin Peninsula	-	-	1	9
Northeast Avalon	12	322	7	77
Rural Avalon	1	30	1	8
All Regions	17	392	25	242
Total # of Sessions	42			
Total # of Participants	634			

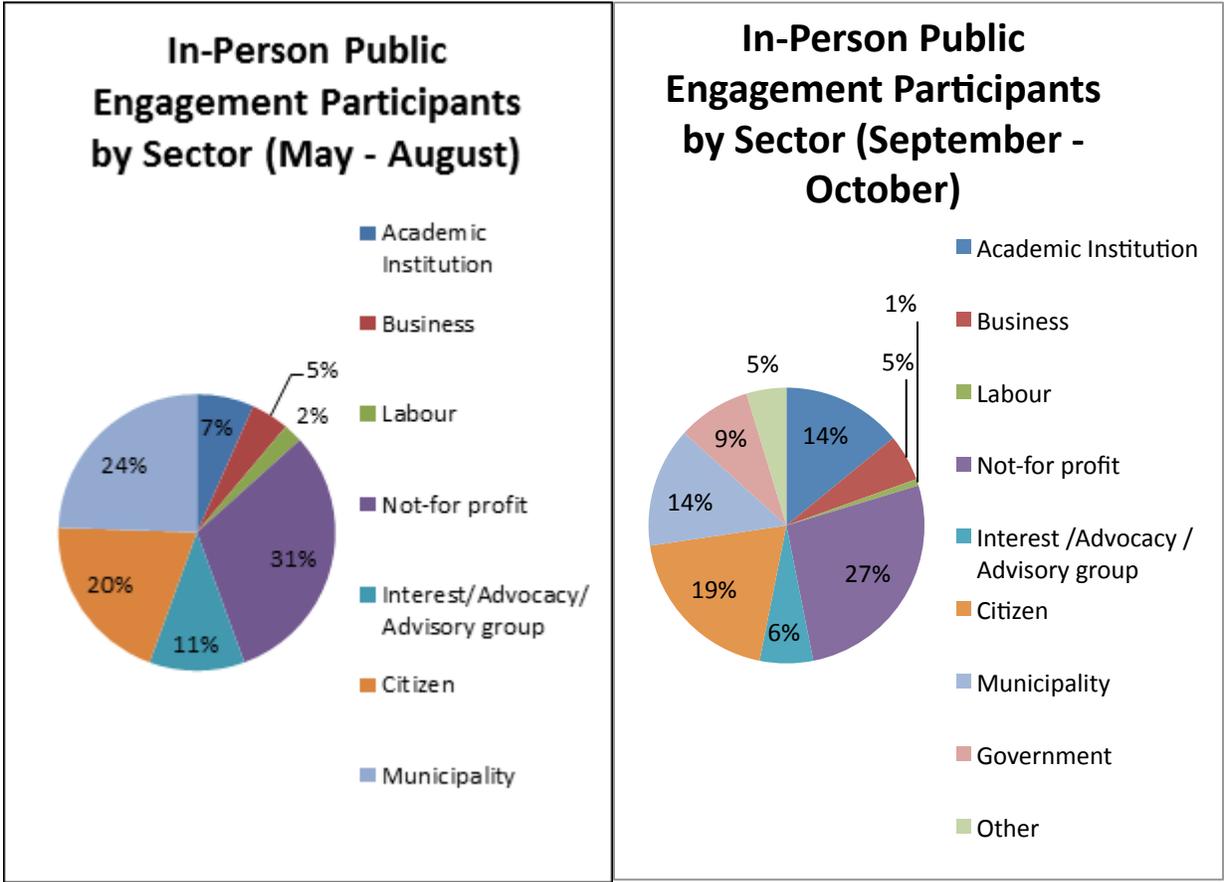
In terms of in-person public sessions, the highest percentage of attendees was on the Northeast Avalon, with 77 (33 per cent) of total attendees. At the employee sessions, the vast majority of attendees were from the Northeast Avalon as well (322 attendees, or 82 per cent of total employee session attendees). This can likely be attributed to the large number of employees located in that region.

Public Questionnaire Respondants by Region		
Region	#	%*
Labrador	4	3
St. Anthony - Port au Choix	15	10
Corner Brook - Rocky Harbour	20	14
Stephenville - Port aux Basques	6	4
Grand Falls - Windsor - Baie Verte - Harbour Breton	5	3
Gander - New-Wes-Valley	30	20
Clarenville - Bonavista	13	9
Burin Peninsula	6	4
Northeast Avalon	42	28
Rural Avalon	7	5
All Regions	148	100

Note: two respondents did not indicate their region (total completed questionnaires = 150)

When examining the rates of completed questionnaires, the highest percentage of respondents was also located in the Northeast Avalon with 42 respondents (28 per cent) of total respondents. Respondent levels were also relatively high in Gander–New–Wes–Valley, with 30 respondents (or 20 per cent of the total).

During the in-person sessions, participants were asked to respond to the statement “Today I am or am representing...” Participants represented a wide range of sectors and professions. In the ‘digging deeper’ sessions, extra categories were added to this question to further clarify which sector participants felt they best or ‘most’ represented.



Those identifying with the not-for-profit sector remained the largest group of respondents overall, representing 31 per cent (14 of the 45 public polling respondents) in the May – August sessions and 27 per cent (34 of the 128 public polling respondents) in the September – October sessions.

Though participants were from different geographical regions and backgrounds, a number of themes became apparent upon analysis of the data and information. These are explored further in the sections below.

Analysis

Using a variety of engagement techniques and methods led to the collection of diverse types of information, both quantitative and qualitative. This document includes information that emerged from online questionnaires, the 'Ideas and Input Form,' polling data, questionnaire results, as well as the information collected from in-person engagement sessions. Both the qualitative data (e.g., written comments) and quantitative data (e.g., questionnaires and polling results) were examined separately – as well as together – to gain insight into the topic of open government in Newfoundland and Labrador as seen through the eyes of the respondents.

The analysis process entailed reading polling question results, in-person session notes via recorders, and written submissions submitted via online options to identify key issues, themes and possible or proposed actions. A 'coding team' of analysts was assembled, and utilizing NVivo - a qualitative data analysis program - members identified recurring ideas, comments, topics and words to identify possible trends in the data. Common or similar ones were then grouped together into identifiable categories or themes. Generally speaking, a theme-category was created when many participants, across multiple engagement opportunities – both in-person and online – said the same or similar things, explicitly or indirectly, about a topic or question.

Theme-categories were also created for words, ideas and topics that, though less frequent, aligned with international best practices in open government (i.e., large numbers of participants may not have articulated them but they are commonly cited in open government documents as being important and worth considering). While some comments and ideas did not fit neatly into identifiable categories, all input received will be considered in the drafting of the action plan. To read all comments in their entirety, or to see polling or questionnaire results, please visit the Open Government Initiative website at: open.gov.nl.ca/dialogue/whatweheard.html.

What We Heard

As the Office of Public Engagement analyzed the information received during the engagement process, a dominant 'macro-theme' emerged: for openness to truly emerge within government a fundamental culture shift will be required. Transitioning to an open government will require a major effort. It won't occur overnight although many things can be done now. True openness will require a government-wide commitment as well as broad and deep buy-in on the part of departments and employees.

Government will need to think and act differently. Government will need to adopt and use technology in new and innovative ways so that data and information are made more accessible. Government will need to engage the public differently, and collaborate with organizations, stakeholder-interests and communities in new ways. All of this will also require additional human and financial resources.

Notwithstanding the above macro-theme emerging from the engagement process, it is important to note that participants also broadly indicated that 'open government is not a one-way street.' Certainly, if government wants to increase and improve dialogue and collaboration with the public it must change the way it operates in these relationships. However, citizens and partners must also do their part to build new and different relationships (e.g., participate in new engagement; be clear about what it expects; work with government to build better partnerships). The table below outlines the main themes that emerged.

Themes Emerging

- Major Theme-Category #1: Government Needs to Improve Data- and Information-Openness
 - Theme: Capacity
 - Theme: Accessibility/User-Friendliness
 - Theme: Information and Data Exchange/Coordination
 - Theme: Proactive Disclosure

- Major Theme-Category #2: Government Needs to Improve Its Public Participation and Collaboration Efforts
 - Theme: Awareness and Apathy
 - Theme: Government Responsiveness
 - Theme: Participation Processes/Use of Technology
 - Theme: Commitment
 - Theme: Understanding/Need for Control
 - Theme: Capacity/Resources

Many of these themes are interrelated. The boundaries between themes are often not firm boundaries as aspects of the ideas can also be seen in others. Still, for the purposes of analysis and understanding, organizing input according to themes reflects ‘what the public said’ through the engagement process.

These themes are organized into two broad sections: Government Needs to Improve Data and Information-Openness; and Government Needs to Improve Its Public Participation and Collaboration Efforts. Specific themes discussed and suggestions for improvement are provided in tables. Direct quotes relating to the major themes and which illustrate the type of comments received overall, are featured in speech balloons. Finally, circle graphics highlight unique ideas that are provided as examples of the type of action ideas provided by participants overall.

Government Needs to Improve Data and Information Openness

As noted, participants had a lot to say about the need for a culture change in government if true openness is to be achieved. With regards to data and information, numerous participants noted that a broad shift in government approach is necessary for substantial change. In terms of Open Data and Open Information, a wide range of input was received with the themes below emerging.

Capacity

Public sector participants noted that in order to gather data and information, ensure its accuracy, and provide it in a format that can be effectively used, additional resources are required. They noted that they may be overwhelmed with new and different work to institute ‘new’ open data and information policies. There was frequent discussion among public sector participants

Participant Ideas About Data and Information, Collaboration and Culture Change
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change comes from the top down; challenge departmental executives to foster a culture of collaboration within their departments;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a stronger information-sharing practice amongst all government employees;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen interdepartmental collaboration by making collaboration a priority and eliminating competitive mindset, where it exists;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote and reward collaborative excellence by rewarding leaders for their efforts; and,
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equip government employees with sufficient resources, time, and flexibility to undertake open information and data efforts.

that ATIPP coordinators require more training and resources, particularly if government intends to become more proactive in data and information release. Citizens and public servants both strongly supported the idea of government adopting an 'Open by Default' approach (i.e., the proactive publishing of all government data and information unless there are privacy, security or legal reasons for not doing so) when it comes to data and information.

Accessibility/User-Friendliness

Many public participants stated that it is often difficult to find the information they are looking for. Many comments were received relating to challenges experienced when accessing data and information online. Regarding data, they noted that even if they can find it, it is often in a format that is not user-friendly or difficult to manipulate. For both data and information, the need for a single point of access, such as a web portal, was frequently noted by both citizens and public servants. While most participants overall agreed that government data should be more freely available, there was no agreement as to what state the data needed to be in prior to release. Some stated that data should be released in a 'raw' format, while others noted that data should only be released after some preliminary analysis had been completed on it. The topic of privacy was also frequently raised in the context of data and information. Many

participants agreed with the idea that it is necessary to balance personal privacy needs against the need for public release of data and information.



"Make [the] data collected by government available through a single web portal."

- Engagement Session Participant

Information and Data Exchange/Coordination

Public service participants noted a need for departments to better engage and collaborate with one another if the proactive sharing of data and information is to become the default position of government (i.e., if departments cannot share internally, how can they share externally with the public?). Some suggested that this would require the development of a culture of information-sharing between and among government employees. Some others called for a coordinated approach to collecting data and information to avoid duplication and increase efficiency overall.

Participant Input and Ideas: Information/data management

- Provide guidance to departments on how to manage government data and information so that it can be captured appropriately and released publicly;
- Provide access to employees to assist the public in locating desired data/information;
- Provide supports to enable departments to effectively and efficiently identify and provide information to the public; and,
- Information management staff, such as ATIPP coordinators, require more supports to become better able to proactively release data and information.

Proactive Disclosure

Participants – both internal and external to government – stressed the need for government to release more data and information proactively. They emphasized their desire for more data and information to be placed online. They described how there is too much dependence on the ATIPP process for data and information release. Notwithstanding this, participants also noted the need to establish privacy criteria in relation to such a policy shift.

Specific Data and Information Improvement Actions Proposed

Participants proposed numerous actions for making government more open in relation to data and information. The following outlines some of the proposed actions that offer possible means to address open government issues identified.

- Utilize plain language whenever possible; avoid technical jargon and acronyms;
- Create a dedicated centralized ATIPP body, with dedicated officers, similar to Cabinet Officers, to advise on ATIPP requests;
- Provide more information on how public input has impacted decisions;



"[Government needs to] build capacity in gathering data to know what to do with it and put it in the format that it can be used in the best possible way."

- Engagement Session Participant

- Provide a 1-800 number where citizens can speak to a person (no machines) in order to assist the public in locating desired data/information;
- Create software applications (apps) that allow users to access government data and information, and ensure government informs employees/the public how to use it;
- Utilize 'wiki' sites to manage information – particularly geospatial data (e.g. the crowdsourcing information where users can edit content);
- Make contracts/agreements open to public scrutiny via the web (subject to privacy provisions);
- Develop a 'citizen dashboard' related to data (i.e., a visual representation of the latest data pertaining to certain government services);
- Provide new resources to departments so that they can more effectively and efficiently identify and provide information to the public.

Participant Input: Key action ideas about how to be more open with data and info

- Provide clear guidance to departments on how to manage government data and information so that it can be captured appropriately and released publicly;
- Provide supports to the public so they can locate the data and information they desire;
- Provide supports to departments so they can more effectively and efficiently identify and provide information to the public;
- Better support for information management staff, such as ATIPP coordinators, so they are better able to proactively release data and information.

Many comments were received relating to challenges experienced when accessing data and information online. Participants identified a number of specific concerns, many of which centered on ease of access and user-friendliness. The table on the following page lists a variety of concerns by category, as well as specific suggestions for improvement.

Participant Concerns and Ideas: Issues with access to information and data

Concern:	Participant Suggestions for Improvement:
Difficult to find the information you are looking for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redesign the Provincial Government website; • Create a better search engine for the Provincial Government website; • Add more keywords to documents so it is easier to locate the document and to search for information within the document;
Website is not user-friendly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a software application (app) that allows users to access government data/information and ensure employees and the public know how to use it; • Utilize 'wiki' sites to manage information; • Develop a web portal for a single point of access for data and information, and use this portal to assist the public to identify and participate in engagement opportunities; and
Information comes in a format that is not easily manipulated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish data and information in forms that are accessible (e.g., Excel).

A number of suggestions on how to improve the accessibility of information centered around how the existing website and features might be simplified by using more appropriate tools (such as apps or 'wiki' sites) and by making existing features (such as the search function) more effective.

Government Needs to Improve Its Public Engagement and Collaboration Efforts

Participants had a lot to say about how government engages and collaborates with citizens and stakeholder groups. They had even more to say about how government might improve these efforts. By keeping participants well informed and providing a number of flexible options for engagement (including online opportunities), government can improve public engagement efforts. In terms of collaboration with external partners, participants noted that government needs to provide training and other supports to help government employees better understand what is required to work collaboratively.

Regarding participant input related to the pillar of Open Dialogue, participants put forth the view that quality engagement including enhanced public dialogue has the ability to improve the quality of government decision-making. It can also ensure that

government officials and the public can learn about and from one another, and this can enhance trust and understanding. Participants generally concurred with the notion that with better awareness and trust, government and the public can more effectively harness opportunities and address challenges facing our province.

Public Engagement

The desire of the public to actively participate in government decision-making has increased over the past several decades. Government interest in improving its public engagement processes has also increased over this period. Although there is much work still to do, this shared interest bodes well. The interrelated themes below emerged from the input received from citizens, stakeholder groups and public servants.

Awareness and Apathy

Participants stated that government needs to increase both the number of opportunities as well as awareness of the opportunities for the public to provide input into decision-making. They indicated that government should provide the public with greater choice with regards to how they wish to be engaged (i.e., better understand that different publics require/need/desire different public engagement approaches). Many noted that there is a need to ensure participants are well prepared to provide input on the topics or issues under consideration, and that this can be done by providing clear and non-technical information in advance of the engagement activity.



“[There is a need to] address the apathy of the public that think they are not going to have any impact.”

- Engagement Session Participant

Some participants also suggested that many people likely do not participate because they do not believe they will be heard by government. They noted that information about how government actually makes policy-decisions needs to be more widely-shared so the public is better able to determine how to best contribute. Several public participants also argued that there is now a common perception among citizens that government engages the public only to 'check a box'. Finally, a number of participants suggested that there is a need for more 'what we heard' summary-reports to be developed and shared for comment, in a timely manner, as these will help demonstrate government's overall commitment to meaningful engagement.

Government Responsiveness

Many participants suggested that government needs to continually improve its approach to public engagement through the use of innovative tools and methods. They also noted that the public should be engaged only when they have an opportunity to impact a potential decision as engaging for the sake of 'rubber stamping' a decision is clearly 'unacceptable'. Many citizens stressed the need for government to close the 'feedback-loop', in a timely manner, after engaging the public. They stated that it is important for government to provide clarity about how input was used and/or considered. They added that if input is not used the public needs to be given an explanation.



"[Government] need[s] to be proactive [in order to] let [the] public know what's available."

- Engagement Session Participant

Some participants noted how limited access to public service employees restricts or limits the amount of information that can be shared with the public, and how this can negatively impact engagement. They mentioned how they often do not have the information they need in advance of sessions and cannot get it from officials. Some added that there is a need for less 'communications spin' and more factual information sharing and dialogue with the public.

Participation Processes/Use of Technology

A number of participants stressed the importance of ensuring locations for engagement activities are accessible so that persons with disabilities are able to more fully participate. Some suggested that the public should primarily be engaged when there is a high-level of interest in a topic, or when a topic is controversial. No one said the public should be engaged in everything. Many participants noted that a variety of engagement methods should be used to properly obtain the views of the public and that sufficient notice of opportunities need to be provided.

Participants also observed that approaches such as town-hall meetings tend to draw the same people repeatedly, and that given this, efforts need to be undertaken to ensure multiple and different opportunities are provided such that varied voices are heard. Still others discussed a need to be aware of public 'consultation fatigue'. Many voiced concerns about the authenticity of engagement activities. They were cynical about their ability to influence the decisions around which the engagement process centered. Several noted they often feel like they are being asked to participate after decisions have been made.

Participant Concerns and Ideas: Strengthening engagement efforts

Concern:	Participant Suggestions for Improvement:
The public needs to be better informed on the engagement topic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information before events take place; • Develop pro/con 'fact sheets' related to key decisions of GNL and make available to the public;
The public is unaware of upcoming engagement opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase awareness of and promote public sessions more extensively; • Provide (online) a list of government initiatives requiring public input, including whom to contact with input or inquiries, as well as their stage of progress;
Public engagement opportunities require a more diverse set of participants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be proactive to get youth interested/involved in policy and decision-making; • Hold engagement events at appropriate times and ensure locations are accessible for all – make it convenient for citizens to attend and participate;
Belief that public engagement has no impact on policy or program outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure follow-up is a priority; • Promote widely the results of all engagement events; • Provide more information on how public input has impacted decisions;
Government documents are often difficult to understand or overly complicated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use more visuals and infographics in public engagement activities and materials; and, • Use plain language whenever possible – avoid technical jargon and acronyms in documents.

Participants suggested that proposals/policy documents could more regularly be put online for public feedback/input (e.g., asking for written comments or asking participants to vote on options). Many noted how social media could be better utilized for engagement purposes, but how it should not replace in-person options. Many described how the government website is not currently designed to reach out to people (i.e., not user-friendly or easy to navigate). Some noted how the push to put government online actually serves to disengage some people (i.e., those not online). Others noted how in public events or online, polling technology is a 'step in the right direction' as it allows the public to see results instantaneously, and this tends to reinforce that they are actually being heard.

Specific Public Engagement Improvement Actions Proposed

Participants proposed numerous actions for improving public engagement and dialogue. The following outlines a summary of some of the proposed actions:

- Better promote dialogue opportunities – particularly when an important topic is being considered;
- Provide (online) a list of government initiatives requiring public input, including whom to contact with input or inquiries, as well as their 'stage of progress';
- Provide employees with more latitude to communicate directly with the public.
- Ensure follow-up with participants is a public engagement priority;
- Hold engagement events at appropriate times and ensure locations are accessible for all – make it convenient for citizens to attend and participate;
- Increase awareness of and promote public sessions more extensively;
- Develop a downloadable app that people can use to engage with government;
- Use common/plain language in all public engagement documents;
- Be proactive to get youth interested/involved in policy and decision-making;
- Use different engagement methods for different populations (e.g., generations);
- Hold more frequent, smaller community sessions versus larger regional sessions;
- Implement a 'progress tracker' on engagement initiatives;
- Promote widely the results of all public engagement events;
- Ask the people being engaged how they wish to be informed of the outcomes;
- Utilize more visuals/infographics in public engagement activities and materials;
- Make pro/con 'fact sheets' related to key decisions of GNL and policies under review/developed available to the public;
- Create a better search engine for the government website;

Collaboration

Collaboration is a necessary undertaking in an era where complex problems are prevalent. The oft-cited benefits of collaboration, such as increased trust and understanding, have the potential to address such issues. However, it is important to avoid viewing collaboration as a 'cure-all', and to ensure that such efforts are conducted in a suitable context (i.e., that the parties involved have identified common goals, objectives and/or activities that can only or best be addressed by the parties working closely together). A number of themes emerged from the input received from citizens, stakeholder groups and public servants in relation to the topic or pillar of collaboration.

Commitment

Generally speaking, there appeared to be strong recognition that things need to change to make government more collaborative.

Indeed many participants did not appear to think of government as a partner at all. Rather they saw government as simply a funder, or as

an entity that has difficulty sharing the decision-making power

required for collaboration. Numerous participants noted that in order for government to collaborate better with stakeholders, officials involved must be able to make decisions - and take action - related to the collaboration (i.e., they must have the authority to participate fully in the process as a true partner). It was suggested that officials should not always have to seek approval before making simple decisions related to the day-to-day partnership activities as these delays can create frustration among other members. Others were of the view that officials must be able to do more than simply 'talk about collaboration'.

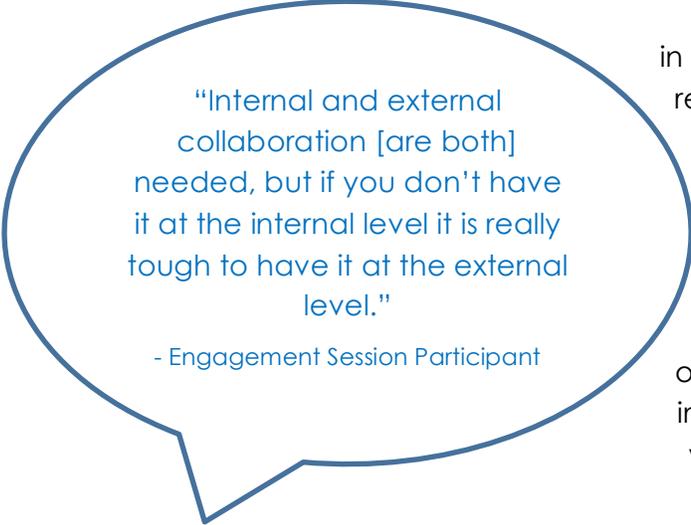


"[There is a need for] genuine process[es] of collaboration not just the pretense [of collaboration]."

- Engagement Session Participant

Understanding/Need for Control

It was frequently indicated that government does not appear to adequately understand the true meaning of collaboration. As one participant noted 'you do not create a partnership by simply providing funds'. Participants noted that government



"Internal and external collaboration [are both] needed, but if you don't have it at the internal level it is really tough to have it at the external level."

- Engagement Session Participant

should not always assume to be the 'lead' in any partnership in which it is involved as responsibility should be shared. Many also agreed with the idea that government should improve its internal collaborative efforts before initiating new partnerships with outside groups.

Participants also noted that government often appears to lack understanding of the important issues facing some of the entities with whom it partners. A lack of general understanding of the realities of non-profit partners, poor understanding of how

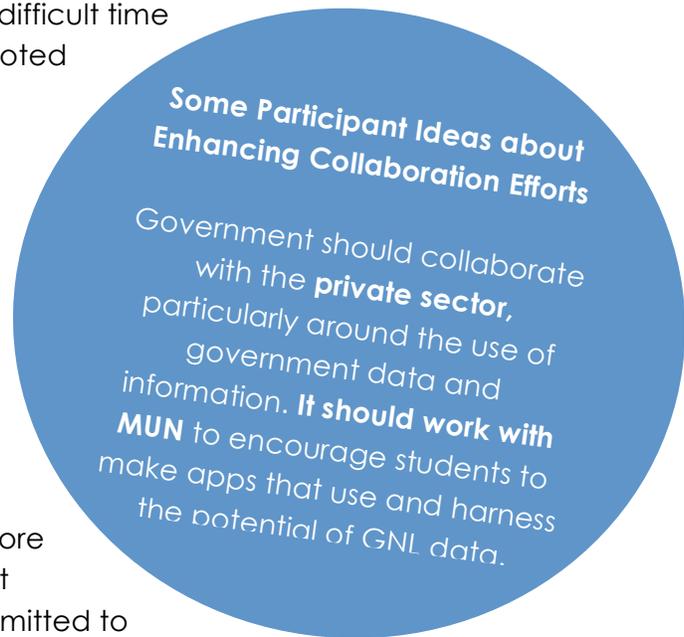
collaboration often requires new resources, and weak awareness of how new collaborative efforts can tax the existing resources of struggling non-profits were all cited. Additionally, some participants stressed that government needs to do a better

job of ensuring the right type of public servants are involved in collaborative efforts (i.e., experienced; knowledgeable; generally open to collaboration).

Finally, some participants acknowledged that there are understandable structural or systemic reasons why government has a difficult time collaborating with outside groups. They noted that it is not necessarily because public servants do not want or are not able to collaborate effectively, but rather that rules and responsibilities prevent officials from sharing decision-making control when public funds are involved.

Capacity/Resources

Overall, participants generally believed that government should and could do a better job of collaborating with others. More specifically, many participants noted that government often does not appear committed to the time, energy, travel and financial resources required for partnership work (i.e., government talks about the importance of collaboration but does not deliver with the necessary resources). They also noted that officials often do not have sufficient training required to collaborate effectively. Internally, public service participants noted that government departments need to work better together and take steps to eliminate the competitive inefficient mindset where it exists. Still others noted the need for dedicated resources if collaborative work is to be made more effective. Finally, a number of participants described how it is particularly difficult to collaborate with government in current times, given that government has cut funding to many of the very groups that government considers to be 'its partners'.



Specific Collaboration Improvement Actions Proposed

Participants proposed numerous actions for improving collaboration in relation to government. The following outlines a summary of some of the proposed actions:

- Establish clear guidelines regarding how employees should collaborate with outside groups; ensure those given the task of building partnerships have the decision-making authority necessary to ensure effective collaboration;
- Collaborate more with the private sector, particularly around the use of government data and information;
- Collaborate with MUN in order to encourage students to develop apps that use and harness the potential of GNL data made available through open data efforts;
- Collaborate more often and in new and different ways with stakeholders during development of programs/policies;

- Create a public service award explicitly for collaboration (e.g., an award for the best collaborative project in the government system);
- Identify 'collaboration champions' within government to improve both internal and external collaboration;
- Inform and educate public servants as to the meaning of and principles underlying internal-external collaboration;
- Ensure that people empowered to make decisions on behalf of government are involved in partnership development;
- Provide, where necessary, resources to outside groups to enable them to effectively collaborate with GNL (e.g., special collaboration funds for travel costs);
- Challenge and incent departmental executives to foster a culture of collaboration within their departments.

Participant Concerns and Ideas: Making partnerships more effective	
Concern:	Participant Suggestions for Improvement:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External partners feel misunderstood or ignored. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide more training to employees engaging in partnerships; • Government should not always assume it is the 'lead' in a partnership; responsibility should be shared.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government employees appear unable or unwilling to be true partners in collaboration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that the right public servants are involved in collaborative efforts (i.e., experienced; knowledgeable; open to collaboration).

Summary: Where to From Here?

The Open Government Initiative is a dynamic and ongoing process. The open government draft action plan, currently under development, will be based on the input government received (and continues to receive) from citizens, stakeholder group representatives and public service employees. The proposed actions will also incorporate research and best practices relating to open government in other jurisdictions, both nationally and around the world.

We ask that you consider what you have read in this document and consider the following questions: Does it generally capture your thoughts and views about open government? Do you have additional specific actions to propose for the action plan? Do you have anything to add to this dialogue?

There is still time to have your say and to ensure your perspective is reflected in the open government action plan. To have your say, we would appreciate receiving your input by December 31, 2014.

To view detailed polling, questionnaire and in-person session information gathered during the Open Government Initiative public engagement process, please visit the following website: www.open.gov.nl.ca/dialogue/whatweheard.html. If upon reviewing this data you see an idea or theme that has not adequately been reflected in this document please feel free to contact us www.open.gov.nl.ca, e-mail at ope@gov.nl.ca, or visit Twitter @OPE_GovNL.

Thank you for your input to date, and for taking the time to read this document. Please visit the Office of Public Engagement to learn about new and ongoing opportunities for public engagement in Newfoundland and Labrador.