Accountability Framework
for NWT Community Governments
2014-2015 Annual Report

Government of
Northwest Territories

Background

Since the implementation of the New Deal for Northwest Territories' (NWT) Community Governments in 2007, community governments have been in control of their own infrastructure priorities. Building on the ideas and intentions of the New Deal, MACA developed an Accountability Framework for NWT Community Governments with key input from the NWT Association of Communities (NWTAC) and the Local Government Administrators of the NWT (LGANT). The Framework emphasizes and reinforces the goals of the New Deal initiative, and supports the Legislative Assembly's priority of building stronger relationships with community governments.

The Framework is designed around the four core areas of community government responsibility supported by MACA: Good Governance; Comprehensive Planning; Sound Financial Management and Administration; and Safe, Healthy and Vibrant Communities.

The Framework identifies a series of key indicators within each of the four core areas that are used to measure the success and/or capacity of a community government in that area. In addition, the Department provides, under each key indicator, information about why the indicator is identified as important, a listing of potential outcomes that may result from successful community government performance, and suggestions about how MACA can engage with community government to support their success in each area.

Within each key indicator, MACA has established three categories into which community governments, depending on their practices, may fall. These categories are based upon a stoplight analogy and are as follows:

- **Green:** when the performance of a community government under any one of the key indicators in the Framework is categorized as green, this indicates that operations are going well and MACA's role is to support the community government to maintain good performance through ongoing support for capacity building and training.

- **Yellow:** when the performance of a community government under any one of the key indicators in the Framework is categorized as yellow, this is an indication that the community government has some indication of "caution" and that MACA can offer to assist or engage with the community government in that particular area.

- **Red:** when the performance of a community government under any one of the key indicators in the Framework is categorized as red, this is an indication of serious issues at the community government level which need to be addressed, potentially including the legality of operations, health and safety of residents, or a lack of planning efforts required for long term success of the community government.

2013-2014 Pilot Implementation

Figure 1: 2013-2014 Accountability Framework Results

	LEGEND: Key Activity Areas		
Good Governance		**Sound Financial Management & Administration**	
1	Effective Use of Authority	8	Procurement Processes
2	Lawful and Appropriate Decisions	9	Quarterly Reporting
Comprehensive Planning		10	Annual Audits
3	Strategic Planning	**Safe, Healthy & Vibrant Communities**	
4	Human Resource Planning	11	Drinking Water
5	Capital Planning	12	Fire Protection
6	Emergency Planning		
7	Asset Management Planning		

After a series of workshops to introduce the tool, MACA completed a pilot year of implementation in 2013-2014 with significant engagement by community governments. There was interest by community governments in using the Accountability Framework tool as a means of establishing priorities and work plans for the upcoming year. The tool also provided significant information to MACA on common areas of concern for community governments across the NWT.

The roll-up of results (see Figure 1 above) for 2013-2014 were presented at the 2015 NWTAC Annual General Meeting, and community governments received their individual results in the spring/summer of 2015.

As part of the consultation prior to implementation, community governments requested that the individual community names be removed from the roll-up reporting. Community governments, instead, would receive an individualized report at a Council meeting that would identify community specific opportunities for improvement and engagement with MACA. Community governments then have the opportunity to use their individual report as a means of reporting progress to their residents in a manner appropriate to each community.

MACA's public roll-up reporting is intended to identify overall trends among community governments to be used to support strategic decision making at the departmental level. For example, the results of the 2013-2014 pilot year showed that community governments needed additional support and training in the areas of strategic and human resource planning (key activity areas 3 and 4), asset management (key activity area 7) and fire protection (key activity area 12). At the operational level, MACA regional staff use the individual community government reports to establish annual work plans with each community government.

Reflections on the Pilot Implementation in 2013-2014

After the pilot implementation was complete in 2013-2014, the department carried out a review in which a number of areas for delivery improvement were identified.

As part of this evaluation, all of the questions used to gauge community government progress under each key activity area were reviewed to ensure that the intent of the question was clear, and that the positive answer to the question was a "yes".

In addition, the department reviewed and considered whether the twelve identified indicators were correct and appropriate, and whether any key activity areas had been overlooked. Through the evaluation, two new indicators that reflect the important role of community governments in the provision of sport and recreation programming, as well as community events and engagement were added (see Key Activity Areas 13 and 14 in Figure 2).

Finally, the process of actually completing the Accountability Framework as a community government was discussed and a recommendation made to put the tool into a web-based format, making it simpler to complete the tool, and to review results with Council for consideration and approval prior to final submission to MACA. Working with the Bureau of Statistics, MACA developed an online tool that would be used to collect Accountability Framework submissions from community governments in the 2014-2015 fiscal year.

Overall, the evaluation indicated that the Accountability Framework had accomplished the objectives set by the department: it provided a method to identify specific areas where MACA could engage with each community governments based on their individual needs; and it gave the department the ability to identify trends among community governments where MACA may consider providing enhanced across the board support (such as the areas of Strategic Planning and Asset Management identified by reviewing trends that became apparent during in the pilot phase).
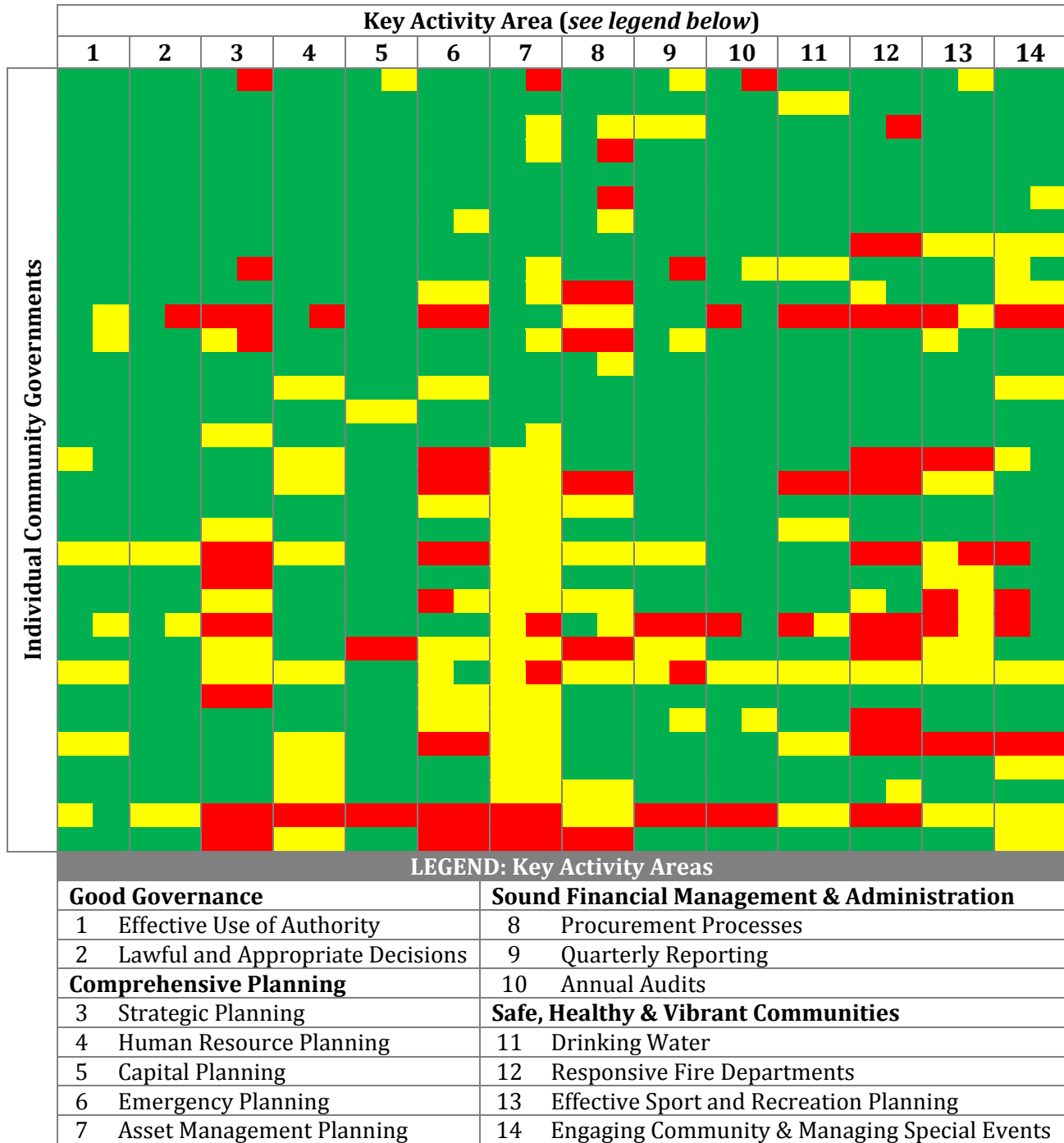
2014-2015 Implementation

The 2014-2015 implementation of the Accountability Framework was rolled out in the spring of 2015. A letter was sent to community governments that provided information about the changes made to the Framework and the tool as a result of the evaluation, and provided information about how to access the web-based tool for results submission. Community governments were given until July 31, 2015 to work through the amended tool and to provide their submissions to MACA.

As a result of the summer timeline for responses provided to community governments, many were late in submitting responses. In some cases this was due to staff holidays or fewer available opportunities for Council to approve submission due to reduced summer meeting schedules. A few communities had to be repeatedly encouraged to respond and in some cases responses were not received until December of 2015.

In the pilot year, MACA found that there were reported responses that were not correct as the community government didn't understand the questions included in the reporting tool. In other cases, MACA did not agree with some responses provided by community governments based on additional information accessed by the department. In order to address these issues, as part of the 2014-2015 implementation of the Accountability Framework, MACA completed a review/validation of community government responses. Through the completion of this validation exercise, MACA was able to identify specific areas where a follow up conversation with a community government was required in order to confirm the response. In some cases, community governments had misunderstood the question being asked by the reporting tool and the response was changed. In other cases, MACA was either unable to confirm with the community government that there had been a misunderstanding, or the Department scored the community government differently based on the information available to the department. Information about these discrepancies was provided to affected community governments.

Detailed and individual reports on the results were then prepared for each community government. These individual reports provide information on the year over year change in results (2013-2014 results as compared to 2014-2015 results), as well as a written description of community government performance which detailed positive results as well as areas for improvement. If MACA had assessed the community government differently than the community government's self-assessment, this information was also included in the individual community government report as an impetus for further conversations with the department on those indicators. Finally, the community government reports identify 3-5 areas where, based on the results of the assessment, MACA will offer to engage with and support the community government over the coming year.

Figure 2: 2014-2015 Accountability Framework Results

LEGEND: Key Activity Areas	
Good Governance	**Sound Financial Management & Administration**
1 Effective Use of Authority	8 Procurement Processes
2 Lawful and Appropriate Decisions	9 Quarterly Reporting
Comprehensive Planning	10 Annual Audits
3 Strategic Planning	**Safe, Healthy & Vibrant Communities**
4 Human Resource Planning	11 Drinking Water
5 Capital Planning	12 Responsive Fire Departments
6 Emergency Planning	13 Effective Sport and Recreation Planning
7 Asset Management Planning	14 Engaging Community & Managing Special Events

MACA encouraged community government Councils to review their reports, and then to have discussions with their Regional to determine which areas for department engagement the Council supports. These discussions will form the basis for the regional and community work plans established by each regional office and will ensure that the department is responding to and focusing on the actual needs of individual community governments.

The figure above shows community government results for 2014-2015 in each of the 14 Key Activity Areas. Each indicator is split into two columns to show where MACA may have assessed an individual community government differently than the community government self-assessment.

Reflections on the 2014-2015 Implementation

The Accountability Framework provides a result for 462 indicators (14 indicators for each of the 33 communities). In 2014-2015, there were 50 instances (of 462) where MACA assessed a community government differently than they had assessed themselves. As discussed previously, there are two potential causes for these discrepancies. An example of such a discrepancy may be that a community government may have indicated that complete financial statements are submitted quarterly, whereas MACA's records may indicate that the quarterly reports are not filed on time and they do not have the necessary back-up attached. This type of situation would result in a significant follow-up effort with the community government staff to attempt to explain the discrepancy in reporting.

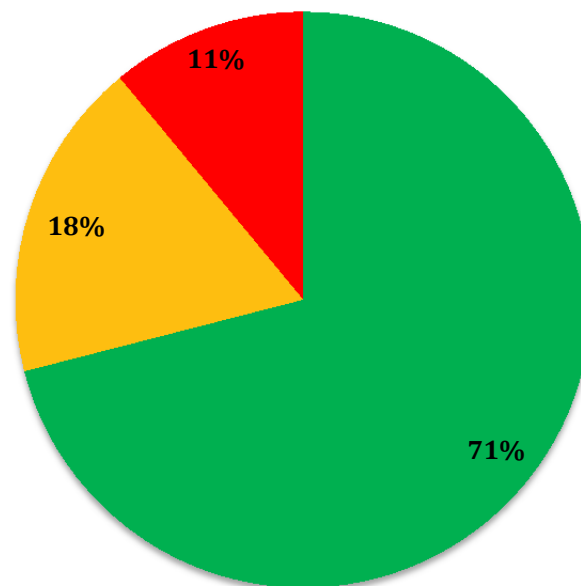**Figure 3: 2014-2015 Self-Assessed Community Government Responses**

Figure 3 shows the results of the community government self-assessment submitted through the web-based response tool. In these self-assessments, of the 462 indicators (14 indicators for each of 33 community governments), 71% of the indicators were self-assessed as "green", demonstrating that the community governments is performing well in that indicator area.

18% of indicators were self-assessed as a "yellow", meaning that there was a mix of positive and negative responses to each of the questions under that indicator, and it was likely that some attention needs to be paid to that specific area within the community government.

The remaining 11% of indicators were self-assessed as a "red", meaning that community governments answered the majority of the questions under each key activity area in the negative. This type of result is a strong indication to the department that engagement with and specific support to the community government is required in these areas.

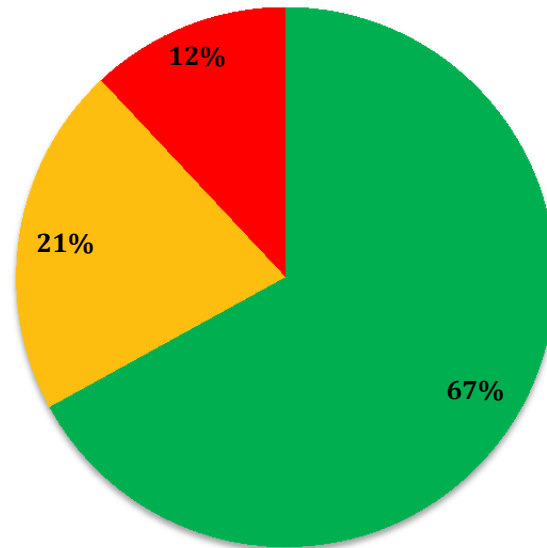**Figure 4: 2014-2015 Validated Community Government Responses**

Figure 4 takes the same 462 responses and adjusts for the 50 responses noted above where MACA identified a discrepancy between the community government's self-assessment and the department's assessment. This validation exercise results in some slight variations to the number of indicators in each of the three categories (green, yellow and red). In the individual community government reports, MACA highlights these areas for further discussion to determine what the appropriate response is for the specific indicators.

Year over Year Result Comparisons

To facilitate a year over year analysis, the two new indicators (13 and 14) are removed from the calculations, as there is no 2013-2014 information with which to compare them. After the removal of the results from the new indicators, a positive trend emerges. The net change from 2013-2014 to 2014-2015 is shown in Figure 5 below:

Figure 5: Year over year change from 2013-2014 to 2014-2015

2013-2014	2014-2015	Net Change
Green – 59%	Green – 67%	Increase 8%
Yellow- 27%	Yellow – 21%	Decrease 6%
Red – 14%	Red – 12%	Decrease 2%

To further break it down, the Figure 6 shows the number of Green, Yellow and Red Responses per indicator – demonstrating year over year change in individual indicators.

Figure 6: Year over Year change by indicator 2013-2014 to 2014-2015
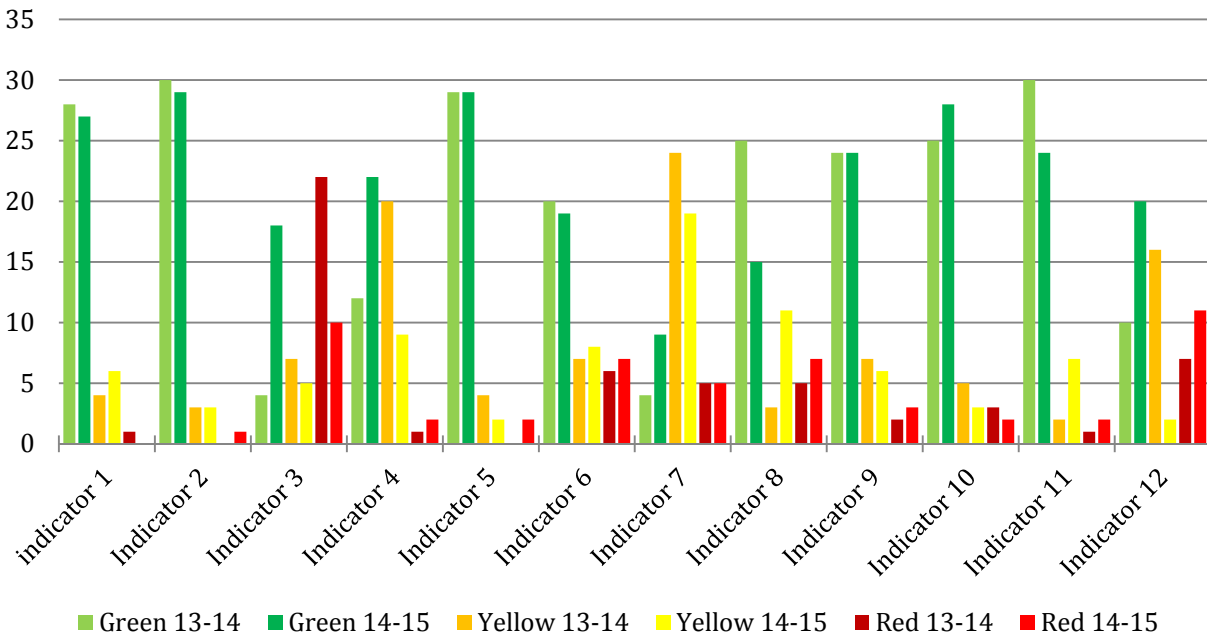
There is positive change noted in the year over year numbers, but with only two years of data collected through the Accountability Framework tool which is still evolving, MACA is hesitant to draw firm conclusions about the reasons for the change noted.

It is possible that the noted changes may reflect MACA's increased focus on the delivery of such things as Strategic Planning Workshops as well as the development

of community specific work plans through each of the regional offices. It may also reflect a focus by community governments on the indicator areas because they know MACA will be requesting information and tracking these areas. It may also just reflect changes in capacity at the Council or community government level.

The results do generally show improvements in some of the key indicator areas highlighted as broad areas for support in the pilot delivery of the tool, such as Strategic Planning, Human Resource Planning and Fire Protection. Small improvements have been seen in procurement practices as well.

There are a couple of areas, where the trend shown has been negative when comparing 2014-2015 to 2013-2014. These include indicators 8 (Procurement Bylaws) and 11 (Safe Drinking Water), where a number of communities went from reporting "green" performance to "yellow". MACA will engage with community governments on these downward trends immediately to identify possible issues and seek corrective action or activities that may be supported by the Department.

In addition MACA has heard anecdotally from Senior Administrative Officers and elected Council members that the Accountability Framework provides them with a baseline to use as a starting point for their Strategic Planning exercises as well as providing a basis for preparing staff work plans and measuring staff performance throughout reporting cycles. Although the department is not measuring those uses, it is satisfying to hear that the tool and the community government reports have had many positive benefits for community governments across the NWT.

Moving Forward

There were numerous delays in completing the reports for community governments as well as the annual report for 2014-2015. MACA has already begun the work of updating the Framework in preparation for the 2015-2016 data collection. This work includes clarifying some the questions asked under certain key indicators which were still causing problems for community governments.

The use of the electronic tool was successful in 2014-2015 and MACA is enhancing that tool by adding text boxes so that community governments will have the ability to expand on their response and identify actions underway to address a "no" response as opposed to waiting for MACA's validation exercise.

MACA found the validation exercise useful to help clarify answers with community governments but the time required needs to be built into the reporting cycle in a way that it does not delay the provision of individual reports to community governments. MACA recognizes the need for the AF reports to be provided to community governments in sufficient time to allow for any required engagement to be built into annual work plans and meeting/training cycles.

In addition, MACA will need to establish and implement tracking tools that will support the continued implementation of the Accountability Framework tool and will also allow for the tracking the department's engagement with community governments on specific indicators. These types of tools will also allow MACA to do a better job of engaging with community governments on some of the operational reports (such as quarterly reports and minutes) that should regularly be received by the Department.

MACA is very pleased with what the Accountability Framework tool has done in terms of allowing the Department to build baseline information on the status of community governments and then to engage with community governments based on their own unique needs. The Department looks forward to continued delivery of the tool and ongoing enhancements to make it as useful as possible to community governments and to the Department in future.