PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT & TRANSPARENCY: OPEN GOVERNMENT POLICY: WHAT WE HEARD

At the beginning of the 18th Assembly, the Government of the Northwest Territories made a renewed commitment to enhancing public engagement, transparency and open government. As the first Minister Responsible for Public Engagement and Transparency, I have been tasked with developing an open government policy through a broad public engagement process. Open government has always been a basic part of consensus government and it is important to consider how open we are today and what we can do in the future.

Traveling the NWT to hear from residents and organizations was an important part of the development of the upcoming policy and informing future open government actions. One of the things that we heard consistently in every community we visited is that residents of the NWT care. Our residents want to be meaningfully involved in government decision making and want the opportunity to be engaged. In the 21st century expectations of government are changing, residents want more information and want a voice at the table. Modern governments are taking a proactive approach to resident engagement and this is something that has always been a priority for our government. While an open government policy might be new in the Northwest Territories, the concept of engaging the public and being open has been practiced for many years. It is important to consider what we've done, what we can do and how we can better meet the needs of residents.

The input we received in recent months will inform the development of our open government policy and much of the more specific feedback we received will gives us guidance for where we should focus our efforts next.

This era of increasing public engagement by governments across Canada is an exciting trend that the Government of the Northwest Territories wants to be a leader in.

The Honourable Louis Sebert

Minister Responsible for Public Engagement and Transparency

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The public engagement process for the planned open government policy demonstrated definite public interest in this important topic. In visiting each of the 19 constituencies that make up the NWT, there was input into the process from communities of all sizes with a wide variety of residents and organizations that attended meetings. The input received from individuals and organizations is important not just to the development of the policy, but also better informing all of this government's actions on open government.

The overall process provided feedback on a number of areas based on the discussion questions put forward by the Minister. In-person town hall meetings were held in 13 communities in every region of the territory, and additional feedback was sought in tow additional town hall sessions with non-government and media organizations. Community town hall meetings were held in Fort Smith, Hay River, Fort Providence, Norman Wells, Inuvik, Tuktoyaktuk, Fort McPherson, Fort Simpson, Nahanni Butte, Fort Liard, Behchokǫ̀, Fort Resolution, and Yellowknife.

Many of the same issues were raised in different communities which made it possible to identify consistent themes and areas of focus. The input from each community meeting is summarized later in this document with key questions, issues or comments included. This specific feedback from each of the community sessions was combined with written submissions submitted as follow-up from the sessions and organized into the original discussion questions that lead the conversations. Common themes and statements were grouped together to provide guidance for the policy development process and future open government efforts.

Each of the following recommendations indicated in this report are based on the engagement sessions and seek to ensure that the developed policy meets the expectations and needs of the public. Since so much of the feedback and input received went beyond the specific development of a policy, additional recommendations were included to help guide future actions that may be undertaken by this government.

RECOMMENDATIONS

POLICY

While much of the public input received through the engagement process was operational in nature and will be used to help determine future open government actions, there was some specific input specifically focused on the policy development process.

1. Regarding citizen participation (Principle #3) the principles should be amended to specifically include reference to meaningful participation. Meaningful participation is key to public engagement, as is understanding the government decision making process, when citizens are left wondering how decisions were made it reduces faith in the government.

2. The policy should clearly differentiate between public engagement and Section 35 *Duty to Consult* consultations. This came up multiple times throughout the engagement process as an important point to emphasize in the policy.

3. Participants understood that government-wide policies were formally the responsibility of the Premier; however, there was consensus that participants would look to the Minister Responsible for Public

Engagement and Transparency to continue to push for a more open government. Participants want the policy to include a clear point of responsibility and action that they can follow up with to address concerns related to open government.

4. In response to calls for framework of evaluation for the open government policy, a requirement for regular reporting should be included. While the policy may not include specific actions for individual departments to undertake, it would certainly set the tone for overall culture change and changing the default of government. Since individual Ministers and Departments will be responsible for implementing and demonstrating their approach to open government, the best way to provide for evaluation and feedback the policy could require an annual report on open government by made publicly available.

   This would be consistent with other government-wide policies (i.e. Negotiated Contracts Policy) and one method for building accountability directly into the policy. The report should include government-wide plans as well as individual Department plans for open government with specific outcomes and results.

5. Based on the feedback, regular reporting and follow-up on open government is important to residents. While the exact mechanism for this would likely not to be included in the policy, the international Open Government Partnership has an Independent Reporting Mechanism that could be used as a model methodology for evaluating progress. While not formally open to subnational governments, the methodology is publicly available as a way to move forward.

6. The policy should include specific details as to which departments, agencies, commissions, corporations, etc. that it will apply to. There are examples of this in other government-wide policies (i.e. Business Incentive Policy).

7. It is important that the policy indicate what a more open government will look like in the territory. Simply stating that the government is more open will not address the concerns raised throughout the public engagement process. Participants were eager to see results of this new approach to openness, real progress needs to be demonstrated through the policy. Often, participants asked, what's next after a policy?

GENERAL

While participants were pleased by the creation of a government-wide policy on open government, there was concern about what concrete changes this would actually create. A number of participants suggested a longer term strategy or specific plan as to how the government will be more open.

1. Participants generally thought that the Minister of Public Engagement & Transparency should be responsible for creating a more open government. Participants understood that the Minister would not be responsible for specific initiatives of each department, yet there is the expectation that the Minister continues to set an overall plan for open government. To demonstrate a clear commitment to open government, it is important to have an office or position with clear responsibility for the file. This would address concerns that action would be limited after the creation of the policy.

2. Another key recommendation in the area of public engagement is to investigate the creation of an office specializing in public engagement to set best practices and train departmental staff on engagement, or to

act as a single office to host all of the public engagements on behalf of specific program areas. Individual program areas would attend and provide subject-matter expertise, but the public engagement office would be able to provide advice on what types of activities to do and assistance with facilitating the engagements.

3. One of the key themes that came up in public engagement discussion was that while the purpose of the meetings is not always clear, the greater concern was the outcome of the meetings. To address this concern, a basic consistent basic process for public engagements should be established including follow-up on the decision that is taken. As well, there needs to be a more open approach to the decision process and rationale included with the final result with information about why particular decisions were made.

4. A number of the data or system suggestions that were raised in community meetings are already available on the GNWT, Legislative Assembly or Elections NWT websites. Some examples of this are community-based job alerts, Hansard, election records, and contract subscriptions. Often new systems are put in place with little promotion or training, even for government staff. More could be done to document and promote some of these exciting features, and perhaps training provided to Government Service Officers on what is available and how to use the services.

5. It is important to continue evaluating and expanding the Government Service Officer program. Many participants pointed to this position as an extremely beneficial role in helping them access their government. In the communities without a Service Officer there was a desire to have a single person or office to go to for government services. Many participants said that they thought the positions should be full time, or have more than one, to better deal with issues in the community.

6. The ability of Service Officers to help provide access to driver licenses in small communities without Transportation offices should be explored as a way to improve access to identification.

7. Develop an information strategy to ensure there is a single portal for data, information, publications and reports. The strategy should include plans for the digitizing of historical reports and other publications.

8. To be more accessible to the public, ensure that government employees utilize informative out-of-office messages in e-mail and voicemail that include information on who the next person to contact is (and that they are available).

9. Explore ways of increasing digital literacy and improving public access to the internet for those without home computers or mobile devices, or unable to afford access.

OTHER

Throughout the process, a number of areas were identified where there could be more information made available. Many of these were raised in multiple community meetings, and the list below highlights the items that came up most often:

- Single online calendar for public engagements with specific results/reports – filterable by community;
- Increased regularity of government contract reports and the inclusion of contracts of all values;

- Additional procurement information available online without specific requests (tender registers, bidder scores, etc.);
- Enhanced access to legislation (improved searchability);
- Improved searchability of corporate registry information;
- Quarterly report of all government publications in the quarter;
- Spatial and biological monitoring data;
- Easy subscription access to press release and/or Messenger service mailing list;
- Advance information on Ministerial travel to communities;
- Lease information from Mining Recorder's Office;
- Information on financial securities (as related to mineral, oil and gas developments); and,
- Cross-government guide to advertising and conducting public engagement sessions in each community.

NEXT STEPS

As discussed at each of the community meetings, the goal is to have the open government policy in effect before the end of the year. There are a few steps that need to happen first.

- Draft open government policy will be prepared and submitted to Cabinet;
- Once approved, draft policy will be referred to the Standing Committee on Government Operations for committee review; and,
- Final policy will be approved by Cabinet and come into effect.

There was considerable eagerness to see real action from the government on becoming more open. Much of the feedback from the public was seeking specific goals and outcomes which would not be a part of a policy. There are a number of possible ways to meet this public desire. Some of these possibilities are:

- Develop a government-wide public engagement plan/standard.
- Develop a government-wide Open Government strategy or action plan with specific departmental goals and outcomes included.

BACKGROUND

After the 2015 election, the newly formed 18th Assembly made public engagement and transparency a key priority for the new government. The creation of the Public Engagement and Transparency portfolio was an important first step in the Government of the Northwest Territories joining jurisdictions around the world making openness a priority.

The Minister Responsible for Public Engagement & Transparency was tasked with the creation of a government-wide open government policy that would be a first for any northern government. It was important that the development of this policy be informed by public input and consideration of best practices from across Canada. The general public and organizations are interested in issues that affect them directly, and the ways that the government engages them helps generate helpful feedback for policy directions from the people who are most affected by them.

While the phrase "Open Government" is new in the Northwest Territories, the Government of the Northwest Territories has been a leader in transparency and openness for many years. The government has published ministerial travel reports since 2004 detailing travel expenses of Ministers and regular MLAs that accompany them.

Ministerial mandate letters have been posted online since 2011, something that is only just now starting to happen in other Canadian jurisdictions.

In 2015, the GNWT began undertaking a number of actions to be more open including the creation of Cabinet Open Houses, where all of Cabinet visits a community to host an open house. This is a rare opportunity for residents to speak with any Minister regarding any issue of their choosing. This does not happen anywhere else in Canada. At the time of this writing, Cabinet hosted open houses in seven communities and plans to host an open house in each of the NWT's 19 constituencies before the end of the Assembly in 2019.

At the same time, public engagement and transparency has been identified as a priority for all Members of the Legislative Assembly. In response to this, Legislative Assembly Standing Committees have been undertaking a number of actions to make Committees more open and accessible to the public. Additional public briefings, live streaming, new websites and a commitment to holding open meetings by default are all positive changes that will help better involve residents in government.

The development of a government-wide open government policy compliments many of these past and new initiatives by the Government and Legislative Assembly. The policy will provide the direction for government departments to find new ways of being more open and accessible to the public.

As part of the engagement process in developing the open government policy, the following principles were created and used as a guiding point for discussions.

1. Government data, information, and decision-making should be accessible in a way that is responsive to the needs and expectations of NWT residents.
2. How open government is understood in the NWT should reflect territorial culture and priorities.
3. Citizen participation into potential government decisions should be encouraged.
4. Access to government data, information and dialogue should be timely, simple, and available across multiple platforms.
5. Increased accountability and transparency should result from open government policy and practice.
6. Use of government data and information, along with public participation in decision making, should help identify opportunities to improve programs and services.
7. Public services should be open by design, to build a government that becomes open by default.
8. Reasonable limits should be placed on information sharing to protect the unauthorized collection, use, or disclosure of information.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Each of the hosted sessions provided valuable input that benefits not only the upcoming open government policy, but provided input to the government in general. Participants fully endorsed the creation of the policy and the efforts to make a more open government.

There was a great deal of input received at each session and in many of the communities similar messages were heard. This was important since it identified specific ideas or issues that could address concerns across the NWT, not just any one area.

There is an expectation that modern governments are 'open by default', rather than closed like so many governments in the past. While the exact definition of this means varied by participant, the same basic tenets were there and has become more common across the country.

1. WHAT DOES AN OPEN GOVERNMENT MEAN TO YOU?

Open Government meant many different things to many different people, but nearly all participants ultimately considered an open government to be a government that meaningfully engaged residents in decision making and was open with information and decisions. Perceptions of openness differed greatly by community based on current events and past experience. In many communities, current events and the treatment of specific policy issues were the determining factor on 'openness' rather than considering the government's actions overall. This demonstrates the importance of consistent public engagement.

The difficulty in finding information online or requesting information and not receiving satisfactory replies was a common thread in many discussions. The growing expectation of participants is that they will easily be able to find any information they are looking for. This expectation comes from dealing with other governments and popular commercial services like Google.

While few specific concerns with the proposed open government principles were raised, there were comments about their length and clarity. The difference between 'open by design' and 'open by default' was confusing to some. Comments included that the policy should be iterative and that it required regular evaluation.

2. HOW CAN GOVERNMENT BETTER INCLUDE RESIDENTS AND OUTSIDE ORGANIZATIONS IN DECISION MAKING?

Participants had many different ideas about the best way to be included in decision making. The most consistent point raised was follow-up after a public engagement. Often, participants reported that they did not know what happens with input they provide. All participants said that more follow-up after the fact would improve satisfaction with the process.

Many participants indicated that they would like to be involved at the beginning of the decision making process, not just at the end. In a number of communities, participants commented on the way public sessions are advertised is not always equal or sufficient. There was concern that important meetings could be missed, or that different Departments each handle the opportunity differently.

In general, participants understood that sometimes the government needs to make decisions that don't involve public input, but the concern raised by participants was being consulted when there was no opportunity to meaningfully change the outcome. If the outcome cannot be changed by participating in the engagement, then participating becomes an exercise in frustration.

In some communities, residents indicated they would like to be consulted more or through different methods. Some residents indicated online forms or submissions would be useful. Other residents that did not feel comfortable or able to access the Internet suggested that oral submissions either through in-person sessions or from remote video links would provide participants opportunities to participate.

3. HOW DO YOU ACCESS INFORMATION ABOUT THE GOVERNMENT?

The majority of participants commented that they understood that most information and services would be available online. However, some also commented that having some basic information in libraries, or government service offices would be helpful. There was no expectation that all information would be available in hardcopy.

A number of participants did raise concerns about the availability of online access in more remote communities, or even for those in larger that might not have computers or mobile devices. A common suggestion was making more use of public libraries or adult education centres or even community schools to provide resident internet access. Expectations of connectivity from the Mackenzie Valley Fibre Line and recent expansions of 3G/4G cell phone access into smaller communities will lead to improved internet access levels.

For those that were not able to use the internet due to access or comfort, many went through Government Service Officers or through other government offices (i.e. Aboriginal government offices, or community governments).

Increasingly, participants are looking for timely information on Facebook, Twitter or other social media. For those that made use of social media information channels, many commented that the same information should be available elsewhere (i.e. on government websites).

4. DO YOU FEEL THAT GOVERNMENT VALUES PUBLIC INPUT? IN WHAT WAYS CAN GOVERNMENT IMPROVE THIS?

This discussion question generated very mixed feedback. Generally, groups felt that the government did value public input and there were some good examples of public engagement that addressed community concerns; however, there were just as many examples where people didn't know if their feedback had been used.

Often, public feedback focused on follow-up from engagement sessions they had attended in the past. The general sentiment was that any kind of follow-up after the meetings would be useful and improve engagement and buy-in.

Many commented that the rationale for decision making is not often clear, especially when the final decision is different than an organization or individual's particular input. Feedback on the input received would be informative in understanding how the decisions were made. This would also help address the common concern that public feedback is just a checkbox in the policy development process.

A consistent approach to seeking public input would be helpful, so each Department learns from the best practices of others. Often, the public does not know which Department is consulting, but just cares about the particular issue. Participants are happy to participate in meaningful engagement, but expressed frustration and perceived less meaningful engagement processes.

In a number of communities people commented on the large number of on-going consultations making it difficult to participate in all of them or keep track of what happened with the input they provided. A number of different ideas were brought up to address this concern including joint consultation meetings, information sharing between program areas, and funding for participants or expert submissions for more complex policy issues.

5. ARE THERE ANY PARTICULAR AREAS WHERE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE MORE OPEN INFORMATION AVAILABLE?

Suggestions for particular datasets came from a variety of sources for different reasons. Similar suggestions came from individuals and organizations that were present at the town hall meetings. A number of areas of information were brought up where data was already available, but there was no public awareness of the availability. One important area of information that was highlighted by a number of areas was historical information. Especially outside of the capital, it can be difficult to access information stored at government offices and not available online. A number of people commented that historical reports and studies could still be useful for analysis. Often reports prior to the last 10 years are not online, and efforts to look at digitally archiving printed reports could be considered. It was also raised that when the GNWT changes web platforms often older data isn't reposted to the new websites. Information can also be lost when programs are finished, or moved between Departments.

Some specific data areas raised by participants were:

- Information on current and past grants and contributions (to communities, non-profits, businesses, etc.);
- Upcoming Ministerial travel information;
- Upcoming/Past public engagements;
- Detail information about corporations and non-profits (board members, etc.);
- Press Releases;
- Messenger Service announcements;
- Information on Government Contracts (all values);
- Environmental studies;
- Historical Reports/Studies;
- Lease information from Mining Recorder's Office;
- Corporate Registries information for corporations and non-profits (i.e. board membership);
- Information created by government (analyses, white papers, background information, etc.); and,
- Completed ATIPP (Access to Information) requests;

6. IS THE INFORMATION YOU NEED EASILY ACCESSIBLE? WHAT WOULD MAKE IT EASIER FOR YOU TO ACCESS OR USE?

There were a number of comments linking information that needs to be accessed, for participants searching for general information, there were a number of comments that the websites can be confusing. Determining which Department provides a specific service can be challenging or confusing if participants did not understand the organizational structure of the government.

Many people commented that a one-window website portal would be easier to access than going to each Department separately. When searching for publications or data, those who had tried commented on having a number of issues trying to find information. In addition to a single portal for generally government services and access, similar requests for made for a singular data portal.

Often participants made use of Government Service Officers (where available) to find resources, but those without access to a Service Officer found information by e-mailing Departments, calling MLAs, or simply not finding it.

Removed information was raised a number of times and what's happened to it. Often, participants remembered information they had used that is no longer available online. There were concerns that the data had been lost and wouldn't be used in the future.

Data should be made available in a disaggregated format in all cases to enable independent analysis. Reports and publications with additional context and analysis should be published by government, but the original data needs to be published and available is a disaggregated format (where possible). The government collects considerable scientific and administrative data and more of this stored data needs to be made accessible to the public.

A number of comments were made regarding the accessibility of information and access to information (ATIPP) requests. Generally, the feedback was that unless there were considerable privacy concerns then information should be available online without requiring a request. There were concerns it was more difficult to access information that was more controversial in nature.

OTHER FEEDBACK

The creation of an Ombudsman came up in a number of community meetings, but with many different ideas of what the position should do and how it was related to open government. If the Government goes forward with the

creation of an Ombudsman there should be considerable public education as to what the position is/is not responsible for.

In a number of public sessions participants raised the idea of a lobbyist or meeting registry. Many were unaware of the government's current meeting disclosure format which addressed many of the concerns raised. However, there were concerns that it did not cover enough people and that it should be extended to regular MLAs and senior bureaucrats. Additionally, with respect to lobbyist registry the definition of lobbying in the northern context was not clear to many, and others expressed uncertainty at the definition of meeting (what types of meetings are included/not included).

Whistleblower protection was raised by multiple participants as a way to create a more open government for employees. There has been considerable discussion about this in the past, but it was felt that this could give employees more safety to speak out when they felt there was a problem.

Specific to the public engagement process, there were some specific comments on how the process could be developed:

- Public meetings should be advertised a set number of days before the meeting;
- Meetings should be listed in a single location online, and in a variety of places in each community;
- Notes from each community session could be made available within a set period of time;
- Notes should include summarized comments & response to comments, not simply verbatim quotes; and,
- Follow-up should be provided to include information on the final decision made and why.

Additionally, participants indicated that they would rather be told that the government would not go forward with a specific idea or suggestion from an individual or organization. Providing feedback and detailed rationale for policy decisions, not unlike a Judge's decision in court, would lead to more faith in the decision making process.

COMMUNITY SUMMARIES

Between December, 2016 and May, 2017, 15 meetings were held in 13 communities across the Northwest Territories. Meetings were held in Fort Smith, Hay River, Fort Providence, Norman Wells, Inuvik, Tuktoyaktuk, Fort McPherson, Fort Simpson, Nahanni Butte, Fort Liard, Behchokǫ̀, Fort Resolution, and Yellowknife. In addition to the public meeting in Yellowknife, there were also specific sessions held with media and non-government organizations.

Each community town hall meeting was advertised locally with a background handout with discussion questions (included in Appendix A) used as a guide to the meetings. Below are brief, high-level summaries from each meeting. This report does not include direct quotes from any participants, but instead focuses on the themes of each discussion.

FORT SMITH – DECEMBER 12, 2016

- Non-government workers have considerable interest in announcements and information that government workers receive, but are unable to access it.
- When searching online, ability to filter programs and services on a community level, rather than only seeing services not available or relevant to a particular community.
- Having a single website to access with information on local public engagement and visits by Ministers.

- Providing meaningful input is important, but there are concerns about what happens with provided input or how input is linked to final decisions that are made. Follow-up after public engagements are finished is extremely important to demonstrating value of public input.
- Important for government departments to be able to talk to each other about common clients to better serve them, not using privacy rules as a reason not to help the public.
- Aside from talking to your MLA, it is not clear how to raise concerns with particular programs or Departments. Does open government change the relationship with elected officials?
- With community newspapers disappearing, there needs to be more done to support community news or local reporting.
- Sometimes government makes policy changes without public consultation and residents are worried that their concerns are not a part of some of those larger decisions.

HAY RIVER – FEBRUARY 13, 2017

- Public engagement is important part of the process, participants all want to see follow-up after the fact to know what happened with the input, and expressed frustration at being asked for input when there is a perception the government has already decided on an answer.
- Consistent advertising methods should be used for all public engagements and a single portal online.
- The decision making process for some decisions is unclear. When communities have questions or problems their points of view are not taken into account.
- Meetings that impact local issues should be held in community whenever possible.
- Too often needless legal or privacy concerns keep information closed.
- It can be hard to find out information that affects a local community, like why a government position exists but is not filled.
- Important to be able to access information on grants, contributions and contracts at a community level.
- Knowing which channel to get information can be difficult, information should be available on a number of different channels (i.e. websites, Twitter, Facebook) (especially emergency information like forest fires).
- GNWT staff could take part in more local meetings (attend council meetings, or chamber of commerce meetings, etc.).

FORT PROVIDENCE – MARCH 13, 2017

- There were no attendees at the meeting, but the Minister spoke with the Member for the Deh Cho to discuss local issues to be impacted by the upcoming open government policy.

NORMAN WELLS – MARCH 27, 2017

- Important to focus on enhanced financial disclosure for government and related agencies (school boards, etc.), including salary disclosure.
- Can be difficult for government employees to find out internal information about upcoming changes.
- Being able to view access to information requests, written submissions or questions raised on particular issues would be valuable.
- Difficult to know what government is doing without easy access. For non-employees, access to services like Messenger (government internal announcement mailing list) would be beneficial.

- Government could provide more transparent and timely information as an employer, especially around Departmental amalgamations and moves.
- Information isn't useful if it isn't accessible.
- Central bulletin boards in government offices with current information would be a good way of informing staff and visitors to the offices.

INUVIK – MARCH 28, 2017

- Government has commissioned studies, how do we access those past and current reports, how can the public and government better use that information so it is not reinventing the wheel?
- Website is difficult to use, a single portal to all government services and information would be easier, especially having a single place to ask questions of government – like Government Services Officers, or Human Resource (HR) Help Desk services.
- Improving online and community-based legal resources is important as centralization of legal aid has made it difficult for those not in Yellowknife.
- Communities get very frustrated when decisions have already been made. Feel like they do not have a say. If there is potential for input, that needs to be made clear from the start.
- Clearly differentiate the difference between public engagement/consultation and Section 35 *Duty to Consult* consultations.
- Any job cuts or closures need to be better communicated. Show how impacts to the communities were considered. Same with amalgamation, what consultation took place, what training is available for those employees?
- Government Service Officers have experienced a range of engagement with residents, from almost no contact to having to read a residents mail to explain what needs to be done and assist in responding.
- Little data is available on social programs and socio-economic indicators especially including results from programs and evaluations.
- Single website portal with information on public engagements would assist with keeping track of sessions.
- Consultation fatigue is a serious issue in all communities, work could be done to combine meetings or share information across different government departments to minimize the need for separate consultations.

TUKTOYAKTUK – MARCH 29, 2017

- How does government engagement fit with role of Standing Committees and legislation in the government decision making process?
- Government Service Officer has been a significant resource in the community.
- Internet is the best way to access information, but accessing the internet isn't always easy.
- Single public website for the public to use to find information would be much easier than searching each department.
- Residents should be involved in the process of new/changing laws and regulations, and educated about the changes they introduce.
- Some people don't want to talk about policies or guidelines, but they do want to hear about and have a say in legislation or regulations.
- It is important for meetings to happen in communities and policy makers to meet with residents.

FORT MCPHERSON – MARCH 30, 2017

- Due to the early start of Peel River Jamboree the meeting had low attendance, although the Minister was able to follow up directly with the Member for the Mackenzie Delta on the importance of open government to communities in the riding.

FORT SIMPSON – APRIL 4, 2017

- Important for government to make decisions in the best interest of the public and to consult the public. Engagement can be expensive and costs need to be balanced against benefit, at the same time cheaper methods of engagement (remote video) should be considered.
- Regulations and guidelines in the NWT are perceived to be more complicated than in other jurisdictions and justifications for these difficulties are not provided, red tape makes doing business more difficult than it needs to be.
- It can be difficult to figure out where to get the most current government information (websites, Facebook, Twitter). All resources need to be kept up to date, especially regarding emergency information.
- Public engagement meetings need to be better advertised and more welcoming, as some perceive that government does not want attendance at meetings. Often, public engagement meetings are only to inform residents of decisions made rather than ask for input to the decision.
- Residents do not always understand the decision process or how long it can take to make decisions in a government environment. Explaining the process and what happens next would be useful at the end of engagement sessions.
- Government often asks for public input, but doesn't listen to what they hear. Follow-up after public meetings should be required to demonstrate the input was considered.
- Often, participants felt that when asking government a question they received pre-written or "bureaucratic" replies rather than replies that truly address their concerns.
- If data is already being collected and centralized for a Department, then it is easier to share publicly; and information such as spatial data or sensor data that is often difficult and more expensive for to collect could be prioritized for sharing.

NAHANNI BUTTE – APRIL 5, 2017

- Discussion held with Community Leadership focused on positive working relationship with the Government Service Officer.
- Concerns were raised regarding community engagement and working relationship with territorial government on issues with disagreement.

FORT LIARD – APRIL 5, 2017

- Community discussion covered many areas related to engagement and openness of government.
- Consider ways for government to consistently advertise in communities and get public input.
- Concerns that decision-making is "top down" and decisions are made without consulting communities or the decision has been made before community consultations happen. Previous successful public engagement did not follow-up to report on progress or next steps.

- Government websites often have out of date, or difficult to find contact information, and the online directory is difficult to use.
- The only transparency is complete transparency.
- Community desire to get information on contract and job opportunities specific to the community.
- Often participants received out of office replies to e-mails or voicemails and asking questions involved calling or e-mail a number of different people. This makes it frustrating to find information on a program or service or speak to someone in government.
- Certain forms require printing and sending which is difficult as many residents don't have printers and mail is much slower from small communities. Being able to submit forms directly online would address this concern.
- Even with a Government Service Officer it can be difficult to access services for formal identification. Small communities often don't have the proper photo resources and community members must travel. Service Officers could have the role expanded to provide additional services.

BEHCHOKǪ̀ – APRIL 10, 2017

- Determining what each level of government is responsible for can be confusing for residents. Shouldn't need to understand government organizational structure to get the programs or services they need. Residents aren't always aware of all of the programs available for them to make use of.
- Government Service Officer is a very helpful role, but access to services would be better if more community internet was available or access to technology/computers. Improving the availability of government services on mobile devices (phones, tablets) would better serve residents.
- Communication is an important part of engagement, community desire for more information on when Ministers or head office staff visit the community. Need to ensure that interpreters are available to ensure elders can provide feedback on programs.
- Community-based conversations around important programs like treatment options for those with problems need to happen so that residents feel engaged in the solution and local ideas can be a part of the solution. Improving the availability of programs and community involvement in determining the solution is important.
- Departments and programs should be more accessible with information online, toll free phone numbers and other community meetings to help inform people of services and receive feedback on existing programs.
- A single agency (like Service Canada) for accessing all government services would simplify accessing GNWT services.

FORT RESOLUTION – APRIL 19, 2017

- Having a community location to access the internet and government information would be useful for those without technical resources. Not all residents have computers or digital literacy to be able to search through government websites on their own.
- Having better access to past or historical reports and data would be of benefit to the community. It would also be useful to have more information on new reports and publications that are produced by government.

- Traditional knowledge isn't being used enough, we know everything about our land, we can help with anything.
- The decision making process often doesn't involve public engagement (i.e. tax rates), and the process followed in these causes significant concern amongst residents. For a government to be more open it needs to listen to residents and respond to their concerns about changes in policy.
- Follow-up from previous consultations is important to understanding what the final decision was (whether it's a policy, legislation or regulation); as often final decisions aren't clear to people who participated in the process.
- Departments operate in silos and do not often share information. Everyone working together would generate government policies that would better reflect the needs of residents.
- Cabinet Ministers should travel to communities and hear from residents about concerns with their departments or government overall.
- Public engagement is not a one-time event, it needs to be an iterative process where people and government have the opportunity to take feedback and respond.

MEDIA – MAY 3, 2017

- Access to Information Legislation is a very important part of open government and the act needs to be updated and policies changed to be more responsive to requests. The process is bureaucratic and not easily understood by those not well versed. Often information requests are referred to the ATIPP process even when there are no private or personal information concerns.
- Government communications (i.e. press releases) need to be clearer and include more information about the impact of changes.
- Departments are not always consistent in their replies, some offer interviews quickly, some take considerable time. The more controversial the issue, the more difficult it is to find information.
- It is important that whistleblower and Ombudsman legislation be considered so that people have avenues to talk publicly or appeal decisions.
- Responses sometimes take a long time, the approval process is overly cumbersome - if it is public information why is there such a long approval process.
- During emergency situations, like forest fires, more information is needed quickly.
- Important to consider how to get information into the public sphere, with certain announcements government staff that speak particular aboriginal languages could be utilized to provide announcements in that language.
- Press conferences should be held when major announcements are made so that media can ask questions and report on announcements in more detail.
- Important that websites are accurate, documents link to the proper document. Process for providing feedback about problems like this is unclear.
- Simple statement of rights for employees on when they can speak or what they can post on social media would be helpful.

NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS – MAY 15, 2017

- Ensure open government policy and actions take into account best practices in Canada and internationally.

- Information that is easily provided when requested by e-mail should be made available online without having to request it.
- Information may be available in hardcopy but without clear indexing very hard to find.
- Access to information protocols – What is the benefit of protocols – when are they needed and when are they not needed?
- GNWT Staff Directory should include emails for staff, needs to be clearer on how to contact individuals and departmental structure.
- Important for policy and science staff to be able to speak directly to the public so that people doing the actual work can speak to it.
- Set achievable goals for open government, rather than goals and outcomes that can never be achieved.
- Will there be one person responsible – an office of open government – this would be a tangible proof of taking this seriously.
- Needs to be regular reporting on improvements to open government and transparency, similar to reporting on the mandate.
- When you try something and it doesn't work, still important to publish report so someone else doesn't try it later.
- Government requires contractors make reports of scientific studies available and the same procedures should be followed for internal scientific work.
- Will policy be binding on arms-length agencies? Sometimes they are more open than regular government departments.

YELLOWKNIFE – MAY 17, 2017

- How does open government fit with consensus style of government since information has more steps to go through due to protocol agreements.
- Change management should factor into government's efforts to be more open and impact the government as an employer.
- Imperative to follow up with people to inform them of how information from public sessions was included in the decision making process. The process is clear, but does not always seem to follow the voice of the people. Rationale for decision making is not always clear and that makes understanding changes more difficult.
- Outside meeting registry should list what the meetings are about, what is discussed and should extend to staff in Departments.
- Information that is difficult to find or access is not truly open. For example, RFP process only the government can see who is registered on an RFP.
- Communication often focuses on problems of government, but successes also need to be communicated. There are some very well run programs that need to be discussed for their successes.
- Departments work in silos and don't communicate with each other, which makes integrated services for residents difficult to deliver.
- Important to "know your audience", many government reports are pages and pages of writing that may not communicate important information well. More effort should be made to include images, pictograms, charts, videos so that government information is better understood by the public.
- People feel brushed off by Government, can concerns be communicated to the public? More people may come forward with similar concerns, or find the answers they need to similar issues.

APPENDIX A: ENGAGEMENT METHODS

Public input was sought on the open government policy through a number of methods including the community meetings, individual conversations, and written submissions.

In person town halls provided the bulk of the input and each session was guided a handout with reference information and discussion questions. Session provided participants the opportunity to follow up on the meeting with additional written comments afterwards.

The handout used at the town hall meetings s included in the following pages.

Government of   Gouvernement des
Northwest Territories   Territoires du Nord-Ouest

Open Government Town Hall

Minister Responsible for Public Engagement and Transparency

The Minister Responsible for Public Engagement and Transparency was created in the 18th Assembly as a commitment by Premier Bob McLeod to make our government more open and accountable. The Honourable Louis Sebert is the first Minister to hold this position. The Minister is responsible for setting the government wide direction on engagement and transparency.

What are these meetings for?

The Minister is developing an Open Government Policy and strategy to set consistent direction for all Departments to being more open. The policy will apply to all government departments, but will be implemented by each separately. Work is also being done to develop a public engagement strategy that would apply to all government engagement activities. This will make sure that the government takes a consistent approach to including public input in the decision making process. The input from these public meetings will feed into that work.

What do we hope to achieve?

To help develop the Open Government Policy and strategy for the Government it is important that it reflects the values and input from the public. Even though many of the changes are going to be inside government, how all of that affects the public is the concern. Departments may have slightly different approaches depending on what their focus is, but all will be more open.

What is Open Government?

Open Government has three main areas of focus, each is involved in making government more open to the public. The three focus areas identified by the government are used around the world to help define open government:

Open Information – Refers to the information that the government makes available to the public. This includes everything from financial accountability information to reports and studies.

Open Dialogue – Refers to how government engages the public and involves individuals and organizations meaningfully in the decision making process.

Open Data – Refers to the way government publishes information, making sure it is in the formats you need it in to make use of it.

Key Principles

To start the consultation process, the Minister has developed key principles that will set direction for this new policy. They are:

1. Government data, information, and decision-making should be accessible in a way that is responsive to the needs and expectations of NWT residents
2. How open government is understood in the NWT should reflect territorial culture and priorities
3. Citizen participation into potential government decisions should be encouraged
4. Access to government data, information and dialogue should be timely, simple, and available across multiple platforms
5. Increased accountability and transparency should result from open government policy and practice
6. Use of government data and information, along with public participation in decision making, should help identify opportunities to improve programs and services
7. Public services should be open by design, to build a government that becomes open by default
8. Reasonable limits should be placed on information sharing to protect the unauthorized collection, use, or disclosure of information

Discussion Questions

1. What does an Open Government mean to you?
2. How can government better include residents and outside organizations in decision making?
3. How do you access information about the government? Online? Media? Libraries? Other methods?
4. Do you feel that government values public input? In what ways can government improve this?
5. Are there any particular areas where you would like to see more open information available? (e.g., culture, finances, procurement, science, geospatial, etc)
6. Is the information you need easily accessible? What would make it easier for you to access or use?

If you have additional comments or ideas about please contact us at engagement@gov.nt.ca.