

Report of the
**Red Tape
Reduction
Committee**

Part II: Submissions from the Public Sector

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A. Executive Summary

On March 2, 2000, the Premier invited all government employees to submit suggestions for reducing red tape. This report endeavors to provide a summary of responses from more than 100 civil servants. Submissions range from in-depth proposals for simplifying licensing procedures to improvements in the adoption process.

The three main areas of focus are:

- *Single-entry point for development applications:* Clients in the construction and food service industry, for example, are required to visit a number of government offices to obtain a variety of permits, often providing the same information over and over again, and completing the same forms year after year. Several proposals outline strategies for streamlining and simplifying the approval process through an information management system. Service New Brunswick's one-stop shopping model is cited as an effective tool for coordinating the delivery of multi-department services seamlessly.
- *Culture change:* Many recommendations stressed the need to view government services through the customer's eyes – to design and implement services with customers in mind. Respondents suggested putting more services, application forms and information online, citing Service New Brunswick's portal site as a good example of customer-focused service delivery.
- *Decision-making:* Respondents repeatedly emphasized a desire for front line employees to have more input to programs. As the people responsible for delivering services, they requested more discussion take place among employees at all levels before programs are implemented.

These recommendations do not necessarily represent the views of any department, agency, Crown Corporation or the civil service in general. They are simply suggestions from dedicated staff, many of whom have years of experience working with the programs and services discussed in this report. There has been no attempt to prioritize these recommendations, to explore costing or to assess their feasibility. Suggestions were submitted in confidence; the respondents' names and their original submissions shall be kept confidential.

B. Introduction

The Government of New Brunswick's *New Vision • New Brunswick* election platform document identified a number of initiatives to create new job opportunities. One of the 200 Days of Change action items was "reducing red tape and other job creation barriers through a six-month Red Tape Reduction Review".

On November 5, 1999, Premier Bernard Lord announced the membership of the Red Tape Reduction Committee, comprised of representatives from interested organizations, the business community, and government officials.

In June 2000, the Committee produced their report, which contains 37 recommendations focused primarily on reducing red tape in the manufacturing, construction and small business sectors.

The Premier also issued an invitation to government employees to submit ideas for reducing barriers to better service. This report is a record of the input provided primarily by front line employees. The recommendations cross all sectors and focus on the specifics of what works, what doesn't and why.

These suggestions have been made, in confidence and good will, with a view to building a more effective, efficient and responsive government.

C. Streamlining Government

The majority of recommendations focused on ways to eliminate duplication, reduce paperwork, and co-ordinate functions between departments to improve customer service. Employees suggested streamlining processes so that services would be delivered seamlessly, irrespective of how many departments were involved.

Review Regulations and Legislation

The issue of reviewing regulations to ensure they are relevant and necessary was identified several times. It was felt that fewer rules mean less red tape, and relevant rules mean easier compliance. Suggestions ranged from attaching a 'sunset clause' to each regulation ensuring automatic review, to developing a service culture where policies and regulations are developed from the consumer's perspective.

Recommendations:

1. Review the Cooperatives Association Act with a view to eliminating certain filing requirements, approvals, and assessments and the merit of moving the co-operative register to Corporate Affairs, Service New Brunswick.
2. Reduce paperwork regarding the Industrial Relations Act.
3. Revise the Community Planning Act to make it relevant and transparent.
4. Conduct a review of the environmental legislation with the aim of consolidating the authority of the Minister within one piece of legislation.
5. Remove a serious barrier to small business by simplifying the taxation system. Institute a flat tax that incorporates the HST, income tax, unemployment insurance and all other charges by both federal and provincial governments.

Restructure Departments/Programs

Recommendations:

1. To reduce costs, consider privatizing the provincial veterinary service and including a small subsidy to ensure service continues in remote areas of the province.

2. Enhance the functioning of the Department of Environment by dividing the programs into an Industrial Technology Division and Environmental Conservation Division.
3. Review forms, Retirement Savings Arrangements and Simplified Defined Benefit Pension Plans to streamline the operations of the Pensions Branch.

Streamline Approvals, Audits, Inspections, Assessments

Suggestions were made to speed up the approval process and minimize the impact of inspections and audits on clients: In some cases, up to five government departments visit a single client regarding licensing. Recommendations focused primarily on development applications.

Recommendations:

1. Streamline the approval process for amendments to the Municipal Heritage Preservation Act.
2. Review the Department of Environment approach to managing contaminated sites with the aim of creating an audit function to replace the current system where every submission is assessed individually.
3. Streamline approvals and assessments in the Department of Environment to improve their effectiveness and allow staff to focus more on environmental protection and sustainable development rather than on writing approvals.
4. Create an Environmental Health Unit in the Department of Environment to clarify responsibility for environmental health issues and facilitate environmental impact assessments.
5. Share information on new construction among people in all departments who require that information – property assessors, planning officers, health inspectors.
6. To reduce the number of eligibility assessments, create a provincial telephone service where the public can access valid information about the Standard Family Contribution under Long Term Care.
7. Standardize Department of Health inspections and evaluations province-wide and have all departments involved follow the same criteria to create an even playing field for all companies.

8. Co-ordinate inspections of facilities that require the input of more than one department, or designate one person in one department as the prime contact through which all information funnels.

Simplify Licensing

The #1 Recommendation in the June 200 Report of the Red Tape Reduction Committee was to have the government move to a single business registration system for all government departments. This would mean that all permits and licenses would be available through one door. Responses in this report also reflect the need for a single entry point system for development and building approvals. It was noted that currently there are no less than eight departments with authority to grant 26 different permits or approvals related to the use of land, buildings and structures. This does not include permits and approvals associated with the food service industry, petroleum storage, or plumbing and electrical permits. Detailed proposals were submitted describing a single entry point for licensing in land-related issues and for simplifying licensing for Foods Service Establishments.

Recommendations:

1. Consider adopting a single entry point system for license and permits for development and building approvals.
2. Simplify licensing in all industries and sectors. One respondent submitted a detailed outline for improving the Food Service Establishment licensing process.
3. Differentiate between the requirements for individuals building their own home and requirements for the construction industry with a view to reducing the number of permits, licenses and inspections accordingly.
4. Reduce the time required to obtain a Watercourse Alteration permit by providing the permitting service on a regional, rather than a central, basis.

Integrate IT

Several respondents felt that making better use of the Internet and other communications technologies could help eliminate red tape within departments and facilitate the sharing of information among departments. An information management system, based on the Service New Brunswick model would put the

onus on government, rather than on clients, to supply information for licensing, permitting, business registration, taxation and other functions, to the various departments requiring that information.

Respondents also outlined the reduced cost and efficiencies in developing e-government, i.e. making more forms, information and transactions available online. Having government and industry work from electronically formatted documents would simplify licensing and approvals. These recommendations reflect the findings of the private sector report. Recommendation #8, in the Red Tape Reduction Committee report of June 2000 states that the government should strive to make tendering, permits and application forms available online with the goal of improving service in all government departments.

Recommendations:

1. Create a centralized information management system based on the Service New Brunswick model to serve all areas of government. Consider contracting out technicians, programmers and web designers from the IT centre to various departments according to an agreed upon budget.
2. Put all government forms for regulations, tendering, permitting processes and other forms and information online. Have all related guides and information downloadable. Consider developing on-line forms for direct input by customers.
3. Provide up-to-date, flexible technology and establish a budget for each department's training needs.
4. Post email addresses in the government pages of telephone directories.
5. Streamline business start-up and assistance programs by enabling entrepreneurs to apply online. Make assistance information searchable by type of business so entrepreneurs can identify the programs for which they are eligible.
6. Provide instant information to customers by putting all departments' annual reports on the web.

Simplify Financial/Budgetary Procedures

According to Recommendation # 19 of the June 2000 Red Tape Reduction Committee Report, the timing of the introduction of the Capital Budget should

facilitate the start of construction work early in the season. Several employee submissions concur with that view.

Suggestions were offered in the area of job creation by reviewing existing funding programs. Employees also identified serious delays in payments due to the number of signatures required on checks.

Recommendations:

1. Consider changing the timing of the introduction of the Capital Budget by the Minister of Finance to facilitate tendering and planning.
2. Streamline and integrate the budget process to provide a clearer, more definite process improving the government's responsiveness, effectiveness, and its planning, operations and decision making.
3. Have all funding and projects administered directly out of the Department - avoid transfer of funds from several departments for one project.
4. Keep the eligibility criteria and funding formulas simple and transparent.
5. Avoid leveraging funds as a requirement, where possible.
6. Ensure funding decisions are made well before April 1st.
7. Simplify and provide better instruction for using the BIDS System.
8. Issue standards and protocols for electronic signatures to facilitate approval of budget and financial documents and fund transfers to speed up approval processes.
9. Consider delivering benefits electronically, i.e. direct deposit of checks for clients of the Department of Health and Income Assistance, for example.
10. Revert to centralized system for payroll, payments and purchasing. Consider giving more purchasing authority to managers, and the flexibility to "buy New Brunswick first".
11. Remove double taxation on vacation property as it reduces investment and vacation expenditures in the province.

Improve Customer Service

Recommendation #2 in the June 2000 Report of the Red Tape Reduction Committee suggested that the government enhance the level of services available to business through Service New Brunswick. Employee submissions indicate that process should be extended to all customers, and that customer service should be a top priority in government. Many recommendations focused on providing more services online. These have been included in the preceding section under *Integrating IT*. Many of the following suggestions came from Service New Brunswick front-line workers.

Recommendations:

1. Improve service to users of 800 numbers by giving customers options for further assistance and the opportunity to leave a message.
2. Schedule property tax payments for the summer, or at intervals throughout the year to reduce the financial strain on customers in April after paying high heat bills, income tax, etc.
3. Improve customer service by including the possible Property Tax Allowance shown on the property bill at the time of printing, along with an insert explaining the criteria and process for receiving the PTA.
4. Reduce property tax bills to one mailing per household for multi-property owners.
5. Provide customers with the option of paying their motor vehicle registration renewal fee proportionally for part of a year. Recommendation #7 in the RTRC June 2000 report makes this suggestion for vehicles in the construction industry.
6. Remove the restriction to renew for more than 1 year and allow a slight discount for paying for multiple years.
7. Consider a lifetime registration for utility trailers.
8. Consider reducing the frequency of safety inspections on trailers and cars less than three years old.
9. Allow a discount for registering multiple motor vehicles per household.

10. Consider having all vehicle registrations registered to the same individual at one date (birthday).
11. Reduce motor vehicle inspections to once every four years unless the vehicle has been in an accident.
12. Eliminate car license plate stickers - it's costly and time consuming. Enforcement agencies now have access to registration information from their cruisers or offices.
13. License tractor-trailers through Service New Brunswick centres, at least those in Edmundston, Woodstock, Saint John and Moncton, rather than a central office in Fredericton.
14. Reduce costs and paper work while improving service by replacing hunting licenses with a sticker on the back of the customer's credit card.
15. Streamline the process for refunding applications for Motor Vehicle/ATV fees by issuing refunds at Service New Brunswick Centres.
16. Establish a Provincial Trustee Office to prevent financial abuse and unnecessary costs to nursing homes and families.
17. Review adoption legislation to reduce barriers encountered by adoptive parents.

D. Empowering Employees

Based on the number of submissions on this topic, employees also struggle with red tape: Complicated and time-consuming hiring policies, glass ceilings, and a cumbersome system for reimbursing expense claims.

Frustration seems to be focused on two issues in particular: the perceived reluctance on the part of management to allow front line staff to make decisions, and the restriction of a one-year work term for casual employees.

Delegate decision-making

Respondents cited “departmental unwillingness to let employees make decisions at all levels” as a factor contributing to red tape. Some examples related to the number of signatures required for sign-off on financial matters; having management review, and sometimes, overturn decisions regarding hiring and environmental assessment; front line employees having to adhere to unproductive regulations instead of having the flexibility to solve a problem for a client.

Recommendation:

1. Delegate authority and responsibility to middle management and those working on the front lines; let them use their creativity and experience to solve problems.
2. Increase the number of clerical staff and reduce the number of management positions. One respondent recommended replacing senior management with an Advisory Committee, consisting of members appointed from all branches of government to serve 6-month terms on a number of committees.

Involve front-line staff in development of policies & procedures

As evidenced by the many detailed submissions received from employees in the preparation of this report, front-line staff has a thorough knowledge of the needs of their clientele. These employees felt that, since they will be called upon to implement new and revised policies and procedures, involving them directly in the development of new policies serves the dual purpose of improving staff morale and better responding to customers’ needs. It was also suggested that this would remedy the problem of incomplete information being relayed to front line staff, as well as reducing the possibility of misinterpretation.

Recommendation:

1. Review policies, procedures, directives at both staff and management levels and request input at all levels before implementation.

Review the policy governing casual workers

More submissions were received regarding casual workers than on any other single topic. Employees who responded, both permanent and casual, felt strongly that the current policy

- decreases productivity through the loss of qualified, experienced staff and the time required to train new employees
- wastes government resources that were used to train these people
- adversely affects clients, particularly in the areas of public health, human resource development and social services. The following comment illustrates this point: "...the position we vacate, the cases which we have come to know inside and out, and the clients whom we have built a trusting relationship with, are all still here. Why hire someone new, someone with no experience, to fill this void when there is a skilled, knowledgeable case manager already in that position?"

Recommendations:

1. Have new employees begin as casuals, using that 6-month term as a training/probation period for future full-time employment.
2. Consider creating permanent positions whose incumbents would work six months each year, instead of hiring six-month project employees.
3. Investigate the policies in place for civil servants in BC and PEI.

Review personnel policies

Respondents noted that the provincial government loses candidates because the hiring process is too slow. Employees also expressed frustration at hitting 'glass ceilings' and the lack of incentives and opportunities for employees wanting to 'move up'. Many submissions lamented the month-long delay for travel claim reimbursements.

Recommendations:

Recommendations to Government

1. Review personnel policies regarding hiring and promotion; consider adding performance incentives and adopting a hiring-from-within policy where possible.
2. Simplify expense claim forms and have them available on line. Develop protocol for electronic signatures to speed up the process.

E. Conclusion

Front-line civil servants of the Province of New Brunswick have made a significant contribution to the work of Red Tape Reduction Committee in its efforts to review all regulations, permit requirements, fees, policies and practices affecting job creation and business growth. Their responses explain some of the barriers to better service that may not be obvious to Committee members in the private sector, or even upper level civil servants. Most importantly, employees have offered suggestions for eliminating these barriers and moving forward.

Reducing the red tape inherent in any government is a huge undertaking that requires the good will of all civil servants. If the responses are any indication, this spirit exists among Government of New Brunswick employees. Respondents thanked the government for consulting them and for giving them an opportunity to participate; many expressed their willingness to provide more detail or pursue recommendations further.

As departments are implementing the 37 recommendations from the private sector report, relevant suggestions from this report will be brought to their attention to help facilitate the red tape reduction process.