



Accountability Report 2019–20

Communications Nova Scotia



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Accountability Statement

The Accountability Report of Communications Nova Scotia for the year ended March 31, 2020 is prepared pursuant to the Finance Act and government policies and guidelines. These authorities require the reporting of outcomes against Communications Nova Scotia's business plan for the fiscal year just ended. The reporting of Communications Nova Scotia outcomes necessarily includes estimates, judgments, and opinions by Communications Nova Scotia management.

We acknowledge that this Accountability Report is the responsibility of Communications Nova Scotia management. The report is, to the extent possible, a complete and accurate representation of outcomes relative to the goals and priorities set out in the Communications Nova Scotia 2019-20 Business Plan.

Hon. Patricia Arab
Minister, Communications Nova Scotia

Donna MacDonald
Associate Deputy Minister, Communications Nova Scotia

Message from Minister

Communications Nova Scotia (CNS) takes pride in serving Nova Scotians every day.

From our marketers, web specialists, graphic designers, photographers and videographers to our communications planners, translators, editors, and project managers, we are passionate about helping Nova Scotians understand what government is doing and why.

Nova Scotians rely on us for information about their health, safety, education, economic well-being, and more, and we take that work seriously. We also recognize that we are one element in a larger system, where collaboration and coordination is key. CNS staff spend as much time helping other departments, units and agencies as delivering on our own initiatives. Supporting others inspires and uplifts us.

Looking back, 2019-20 was a year of significant progress and change. Government advanced major priorities like the introduction of pre-primary education and the strengthening and redevelopment of our health care system. We also responded to major challenges like the COVID-19 global pandemic, Hurricane Dorian and challenges within the forestry sector. We, at CNS, are proud to have contributed to those efforts in small and big ways.

As we look to the future, however uncertain it may seem, I know our team will stay focused on delivering for Nova Scotians. We will continue to involve, consult, inform, engage, and empower Nova Scotians on the things that matter to them. We will share the best information we have, when we have it. We will support our decision-makers and colleagues, as best we can, under any circumstances. We will create stronger pathways to information. We will keep improving our website, leveraging digital media, and championing accessibility.

There's always more to do.

Be well and stay safe.

Original signed by

Hon. Patricia Arab
Minister, Communications Nova Scotia

Financial Results

	2019-2020 Estimate	2019-2020 Actuals	2019-2020 Variance
Program & Service Area	<i>(\$thousands)</i>		
Departmental Expenses:			
Office of the Associate Deputy Minister	746	594	(152)
Client Services	907	861	(46)
Communications Planning	1,579	1,436	(143)
Communications Services	693	730	37
Marketing	3,846	3,342	(504)
Total: Departmental Expenses	7,771	6,963	(808)
Additional Information:			
Ordinary Revenue	0	0	0
Fees and Other Charges	0	0	0
Ordinary Recoveries	51	219	168
Total: Revenue, Fees and Recoveries	51	219	168
TCA Purchase Requirements	0	0	0
Provincial Funded Staff (FTEs)	97.0	101.1	4.1
Departmental Expenses Variance Explanation: Variance due to operating savings as a result of a lower than anticipated project volume.			
Revenue, Fees and Recoveries Variance Explanation: Variance due to increased recoveries for higher than anticipated project volume for Agencies & Commissions			
TCA Purchase Requirements Variance Explanation: N/A			
Provincial Funded Staff (FTEs) Variance Explanation: Variance due to term positions required by departments.			

Measuring our Performance

Communications Nova Scotia (CNS) is government's full-service communications agency. We help Nova Scotians understand what government is doing and why. We also market provincial programs and services, and create pathways to information for citizens, communities and businesses.

Goals:

- Use strategic communications to give Nova Scotians the information they want and need.
- All communications and marketing activities are guided by the principles of accessibility, timeliness, accuracy, effectiveness, non-partisanship and fiscal responsibility.
- Strive for continuous improvement, be flexible and maximize resources. New ways of communicating are identified, tested, implemented, and evaluated.

The following priority actions guided the agency's work in 2019-20:

- Priority Action 1 - Strategic Communications and Marketing
- Priority Action 2 - Evidence-based Strategy
- Priority Action 3 - Using Digital Platforms to Engage and Inform Citizens
- Priority Action 4 - A User-centric Government Website
- Priority Action 5 - Maximizing Resources and Coordination
- Priority Action 6 - Accessibility

Priority Action 1 – Strategic Communications and Marketing

Government priorities benefit from strategic communications and marketing. At the corporate and/or department levels, communications activities are planned, implemented, and evaluated for effectiveness.

2019-20 highlights:

COVID-19 Response (Jan. 2020 – March 31, 2020)

The COVID-19 pandemic spread quickly across the globe, reaching Nova Scotia in March 2020.

As government responded to the pandemic with a series of public health measures, including closing schools, gathering places, and some sectors of the economy, CNS played a critical role in getting information to Nova Scotians, the media, and our partners. A dedicated website was developed in early 2020; the Premier and Chief Medical Officer of Health started holding regular media briefings by livestream; and government began to share public health information online and through paid advertising.

During the first few months of the pandemic, government communications focused on sharing the best public health advice available. Nova Scotians were encouraged to practise good hand hygiene, limit physical contact with others (via social distancing and staying home as much as possible), self-isolate after travel, and call 811 to get tested for COVID-19 if feeling unwell. Emphasis was placed on citizens protecting themselves and others from COVID-19 by adopting new habits.

Action

- All CNS units started preparing for the arrival of COVID-19 in Nova Scotia, making plans and implementing them (January-March).
- A dedicated team of communicators was formed to work exclusively on Nova Scotia's response to COVID-19 (January-March). The team was cross-functional by design and included communicators with expertise in media relations, issues management, project management, marketing, web and social media, translation, photography and video services, stakeholder engagement, and other areas.
- Teams embedded in departments reached out to clients, partners, communities, and businesses. They also started developing and sharing materials like fact sheets and posters for use by stakeholder groups (January-March). For example, the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing sent public health posters to every municipal unit in Nova Scotia; the Department

of Environment tailored information for specific sectors such as hotels and food establishments; as well as for fishing vessels docking in Nova Scotia harbours.

- A website focused on COVID-19 was launched on January 30, 2020. The site quickly became a trusted source of information for Nova Scotians and continued to grow and change, as needed.
- Proactive social media posts directed Nova Scotians to the website for the most up-to-date information (February-March 2020).
- Government's social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn) shared public health information (i.e. new protocols, rules, and guidelines) and the latest news with Nova Scotians. CNS's social media team also engaged directly with Nova Scotians that reached out via social media, answering thousands of questions, and providing information in real-time.
- A province-wide advertising campaign was launched via radio, print, online and paid social media (March 2020), to communicate public health and safety messages. Ads directed Nova Scotians to the website for additional information. As circumstances changed and new restrictions were announced, the campaign was updated to reflect the latest information.
- The Premier and Chief Medical Officer of Health started holding regular media briefings (usually daily), serving as our designated spokespeople and quickly becoming the official sources of information about cases, rules and regulations and preventative measures (March 13-31, 2020). All briefings were livestreamed via Facebook, YouTube, and the government website. When gathering limits prevented in-person attendance for the media, a dial-in teleconference line was established for the media to listen-in and ask questions.
- Frequently-asked-question documents, public health posters and other supporting materials (i.e. posters advertising travel restrictions for the airport, visitor restriction signs for Long-term Care facilities, and fact sheets on proper handwashing and the State of Emergency) were developed, shared/posted and updated as needed (January-March 2020).
- A centralized, COVID-19 email account was created to share public health information, including the number of cases, with stakeholders (1-2 times a day). Many departments also increased their outreach activities. For example, the Department of Business started a daily newsletter focused on supports for businesses.
- A media relations phone line and email address was established and staffed with two dedicated-resources.

Results

Nova Scotians were well-informed about our response to COVID-19, new public health protocols, and the supports available to citizens, communities, and businesses.

The dedicated website (novascotia.ca/coronavirus) quickly became a trusted source of information for Nova Scotians.

Web traffic up to and including March 31, 2020 (Google Analytics):

- Pageviews: 1,788,397
- Top 3 Channels:
 - Organic: 979,259 (49%)
 - Direct: 445,464 (22%)
 - Social Media: 270,047 (14%)

Thousands of media requests were answered in the early months of COVID-19, with as many as 40 calls received, triaged, and answered each day. Inquiries from reporters were actioned as quickly as possible.

Thousands of inquiries from citizens, communities, businesses, stakeholders, and partners were answered via phone, email and social media. Those efforts were coordinated as much as possible to avoid duplication and provide the best information available.

Social media traffic and engagement related to COVID-19 hit a new high, with our social media team online seven days a week and often answering thousands of posts/comments per day.

Social media stats (NSGOV and DHW Facebook and Twitter and NSGOV Instagram, up to and including March 31, 2020 via Sprout Social)

- Impressions: 25,296,605
- Engagements: 2,449,747
- Link Clicks: 182,899
- Messages Received and Triaged: 69,680

The media briefing livestreams consistently generated large audiences, providing accurate and timely information to the media and tens of thousands of Nova Scotians at the same time. Special attention was paid to accessibility and every livestream included ASL and CART Services.

Livestreams:

- 16 briefings were held by livestream, with ASL and CART Services (March 13-31).
- Top livestream: State of Emergency announcement on March 16
 - Impressions: 524.1K
 - Video Views: 262.5k
 - Engagements: 186.5k

Almost 50,000 words were translated from English to French related to COVID-19, ensuring essential information was shared with French-speaking Nova Scotians (January-March).

Recruitment of Early Childhood Educators

Nova Scotia needs more Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) to continue expanding pre-primary education and create additional childcare spaces. An integrated marketing campaign was developed to raise awareness about early childhood education as a career path and sector of growth, in coordination with other recruitment activities. The campaign went to market in 2018-19, then was refined and re-run in 2019-20.

Action

An integrated marketing campaign was planned and executed (2018) and then refined and re-run (2019-20). Print, radio and digital ads directed interested individuals to government's Early Years branch website.

Strategic ad buys were made in the province and outside of Nova Scotia to complement other recruitment activities, including attending events and tradeshows.

The campaign included French- and English-language ads.

Results

The 2019-20 campaign reached and engaged thousands of people. The digital ads generated 585,000 impressions and 800+ engagements.

Priority Action 2 - Evidenced-based Strategy

Evidence drives decision-making. As government's full-service communications agency, CNS helps other departments gather the data and insights needed for policy

development. CNS also uses research to test communications efforts and evaluate their effectiveness.

2019-20 highlights:

Human Organ and Tissue Donation

Human organ and tissue donation saves lives and gives hope to those waiting for life-saving, medical transplants. Nova Scotia became the first jurisdiction in North America to make organ and tissue donation an opt-out instead of opt-in system, with the introduction of the Human Organ and Tissue Donation Act on April 2, 2019, which passed and has since been proclaimed. Public opinion research played a key role in shaping that legislation and the way the policy change was communicated.

Action

Two phases of research were commissioned to better understand public attitudes about organ and tissue donation.

A telephone survey (January-February 2020) was conducted with a representative sample of the Nova Scotia population (n =1000) to test openness to the change.

Research was also conducted by online survey (n=400) to test the preferred language on health cards under the new system.

Results

- An overwhelming majority of Nova Scotians (95%) support organ and tissue donation (“strongly support” or “support”).
- When asked to reflect on the possibility of moving to presumed consent, 8 in 10 Nova Scotians appear to be comfortable with the change (85%) and only the occasional respondent says they plan to opt-out of donation (6%) or don’t know yet (9%).
- Respondents interested in donation commonly identify knowing/understanding the benefit to the donor as the most influential factor on their decision-making (49%). That insight inspired the development of a creative campaign emphasizing the “one donor can impact the lives of 80 or more people” fact.

“Speak to Business” Research

Businesses, particularly small businesses, drive our economy and government is always looking for new and better ways to communicate with them.

Action

CNS commissioned a research study in 2019-20 on speaking to businesses and marketing programs to businesses, in cooperation with other government departments.

An online survey (Summer/Fall 2019) and a series of in-person focus groups (Winter 2020) were conducted to better understand the needs, habits, perceptions, and preferences of employers. Creative materials for the Graduate to Opportunity program and the Office of Immigration were also tested.

Results

- More than 800 employers (mostly small and medium-sized businesses) completed the survey, offering useful feedback on a wide range of government initiatives and the way they are promoted.
- Seven in ten employers are confident in their own organization's ability to grow in the next five years.
- Survey respondents commonly identify the web, email, info sessions/events and Facebook as the best way for government to speak to and market programs to businesses.
- Business representatives respond most favourably to language/materials that are clear, to-the-point, specific, and relatable.
- Trust in community partners (i.e. local chambers of commerce) as reliable sources of information on provincial programs is high, and that feeling is particularly acute outside of Halifax Regional Municipality.
- Creative materials for the Graduate to Opportunity program were updated based on the insights gathered from the survey and focus groups. Positioning of the program and the language used in some digital ads were adjusted to emphasize "saving money" and "strengthening your business" by hiring a recent graduate (March 2020).

Priority Action 3 – Using Social Media to Inform and Engage Citizens

Social media works. Government continues to explore new ways of reaching and engaging Nova Scotians online – meeting them where they are, with the information they need. CNS is also using social media to not only promote government programs and services, but also tell more compelling stories about who we are, with special attention to our health, safety, education, and economic well-being.

Social Media Best Practices

CNS continues to champion best practices for using social media, sharing new approaches and tools with others and building capacity across government.

Action

CNS developed an in-house training program on social media best practices, including how to listen, engage and analyze responses, and develop more engaging content. Training included monthly cross-agency workshops and one-on-one coaching.

Staff were added to CNS's social media team (on a temporary, project-by-project basis) to help inform and engage the public on social media during peak periods and enable more storytelling.

Results

- Government reached people through its social channels 53.5 million times in 2019-20.
- Facebook: 77,502 page likes (62.26% growth)
- Twitter: 118,590 followers (93.9% growth)
- Instagram: 6,540 followers (124.28% growth)
- YouTube: 712,100 video views (306.85% growth)

Strategic Channel Selection

CNS studies emerging digital trends and is always looking for ways to apply them to our communications and marketing efforts. Our social media team also acts as in-house experts, helping other communicators and program staff select the best social media channels to share information and promote programs, with special attention to reaching key segments.

Action

CNS continues to use data and analytics to improve government's social media presence and take more innovative approaches, including using new channels to reach specific audiences.

In 2019-20, CNS started exploring and testing audio streaming as a new channel for government communications. Time spent streaming audio online reached an all-time high in 2019-20, with almost seven in ten Nova Scotians (68%) indicating

that they had listened to audio online (Fall 2019), making the channel a great opportunity for government to reach Nova Scotians.

CNS planned, produced and released a podcast for the Office of Workplace Mental Health, which launched on Spotify and Apple and RSS feeds (January 2020).

CNS also used audio updates to keep the public informed about COVID-19. Short audio clips from the Premier and Chief Medical Officer of Health's media briefings were re-posted and sent to stakeholders by email.

Results

Exploring audio makes sense for government and the podcast project was an important first step and learning experience.

13 audio updates on COVID-19 were shared via YouTube and distributed to streaming channels including Spotify and Apple (March 2020), generating 17,463 plays on YouTube and 6,996 plays on streaming channels.

CNS plans to keep exploring audio as a new communications channel.

Priority Action 4 – A User-centric Government Website

Easy access to information is more important than ever. Under CNS's leadership, government continues to transition to a more user-centric website, making provincial programs and services more accessible to Nova Scotians.

[Beta.novascotia.ca](https://beta.novascotia.ca)

Work continues on transforming government's online presence (with 150+ domains, 1.9 million web pages, 75,000 PDFs and 70,000 images) into a cohesive experience that better meets users' needs. The updated and improved novascotia.ca focuses on: explaining what government is doing and why, providing easier access to programs and services and delivering other useful information to citizens, communities and businesses.

Action

[Beta.novascotia.ca](https://beta.novascotia.ca) was populated with more content throughout 2019-20. Every month, content was edited and moved to the new site, with thousands of old pages being archived along the way.

Learn more about the scope, progress and status of government's web strategy at beta.novascotia.ca/web-strategy-overview.

Results

- 396 content teams have been mobilized across government to transform our web presence (as of March 31, 2020).
- 2,162 web pages have been published and 554 pieces of content have been translated.
- Web analytics demonstrate that the updated site is improving access to government's programs and services and providing easier pathways to the information that citizens, communities and businesses are looking for. For example, there was a 40% increase in website visits, the updated website places higher in search engine results, an increase in per user visits and a 93% increase in mobile and tablet users, in 2019-20 compared to 2018-19.

Priority Action 5 – Maximizing Resources and Coordination

The more flexible, the better. CNS continues to shift people and resources to address changing circumstances, including new priorities and emergency events. Crisis communications work is quick, coordinated, and efficient.

2019-20 highlights:

Hurricane Dorian

Hurricane Dorian made landfall in Nova Scotia on September 7, 2019. The powerful category-two storm toppled trees, damaged buildings, and left up to 80% of the province without power. Staff from CNS played a key role in the provincial response, standing side-by-side with the Emergency Management Office (EMO). This required CNS staff to be on-site at the Provincial Coordination Centre (PCC) throughout and immediately following the storm, coordinating efforts with the Incident Commander and other partners, managing issues, and keeping the public well-informed. In the aftermath of Dorian, CNS staff also played a key role in managing communications related to the removal of a fallen crane brought down by the storm.

Action

All units within CNS provided strategic communications advice and support before, during, and immediately following the hurricane. This included communications planning and issues management, media relations, translation, marketing including digital and web staff, with a common goal of helping Nova Scotians stay safe.

In the days before Hurricane Dorian made landfall, CNS developed a resourcing plan to ensure staff were ready to support a multi-day event depending on the

impacts of the storm on the province. Connections with key partners like Nova Scotia Power, Halifax Regional Municipality, and the Canadian Red Cross were also made to ensure communications activities were coordinated, including developing a centralized media briefing process. Centralizing media briefings at the EMO office in Dartmouth was efficient for journalists, partners, and stakeholders as well as provincial staff. CNS also made briefings accessible to the public with ASL and CART services and livestreaming (Facebook Live); and the social media team responded to thousands of inquiries in real-time.

Results

Government kept Nova Scotians well-informed during and immediately following the storm.

Four updates were livestreamed from the PCC.

CNS staff responded to hundreds of media requests on Hurricane Dorian and the removal of the fallen crane.

Our response to Hurricane Dorian was assessed by National Public Relations and commended as following best practice. In an article on crisis management (published on February 25, 2020), the firm concluded that “the inter-agency cooperation and emergency response by all levels of government and the industry was very well done in Nova Scotia.” It went on to further state that: “[Our] timely, coordinated and transparent approach went a long way to build confidence and trust.”

Transition of Forestry Sector

When it became clear that a major pulp mill in the province would be closing, government acted quickly to help the forestry sector start transitioning. A Forestry Sector Transition Team was appointed in January 2020, with CNS leaders at the table. CNS supported the team in keeping forestry workers, businesses, and the general public updated.

Action

CNS shifted resources to support the forestry sector transition initiative, assigning a senior communicator to work on the file full-time in early 2020.

Throughout the winter of 2020, CNS provided strategic communications advice and support to the Transition Team, the Department of Lands and Forestry and other government departments. CNS supported more than 10 government announcements, worth a combined \$75 million in new and adjusted program spending, and answered media, social media and information requests.

A stand-alone website, focused on support for the forestry sector, was created in January 2020 and continues to be updated regularly as new programs and services are announced.

A 1-800-number was launched (December 2019) and a series of in-person information sessions were held with forestry workers, businesses, and other community members (February-March 2020), with CNS playing a supporting role in those efforts.

Results

Forestry workers and businesses had many paths to information about the supports available to them.

About 600 calls were received and answered through the 1-800 number.

Priority Action 6 – Accessibility

Accessibility matters. Nova Scotia is committed to being fully accessible by 2030. Raising awareness about the value and importance of accessibility is a key element of reaching that goal.

Actions

CNS continues to champion, promote, and improve accessibility – playing a leadership role in educating others and advancing our accessibility goals (outlined in the Accessibility Act and “Access by Design 2030” strategy).

A Working Group on Accessibility has been established at CNS with the goal of increasing awareness about accessibility (in government and beyond), tackling specific projects and building capacity for change.

A review of the provincial brand and current design standards is underway with a special lens on accessibility and removing barriers.

Government use of ASL and CART services significantly increased in 2019-20.

Government social media graphics and practices changed in 2019-20. More text captions were added to photos posted online. The amount of text on social media posts was reduced. More light versus dark backgrounds were used online.

CNS also partnered with the Accessibility Directorate and Rick Hansen Foundation in 2019-20 on a comprehensive public education campaign (called “Everyone Everywhere”), which included television, billboards, and digital ads. The performance of that campaign was also tested via public opinion research (February-March 2020).

Results

Progress was made in making government communications more accessible in 2019-20, with more work in process and planned.

All of the Premier and Chief Medical Officer of Health's media briefings on COVID-19 included ASL and CART services and were livestreamed.

Government and its partners are tracking public attitudes about accessibility. Recent survey data (n=400) indicates that:

- One in six Nova Scotians experience barriers due to a disability (16%), and nearly one-half of Nova Scotians know someone else who experiences barriers due to a disability (45%).
- Respondents commonly identify “more funding/resources” and “making places accessible” as the primary actions government should take.
- One in ten Nova Scotians (13%) recalls the “Everyone Everywhere” campaign.

Appendix A - Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act

Annual Report under Section 18 of the Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act

The Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act was proclaimed into law on December 20, 2011. The Act provides for government employees to be able to come forward if they reasonably believe that a wrongdoing has been committed or is about to be committed and they are acting in good faith.

The Act also protects employees who do disclose from reprisals, by enabling them to lay a complaint of reprisal with the Labor Board.

A Wrongdoing for the purposes of the Act is:

- a) a contravention of provincial or federal laws or regulations
- b) a misuse or gross mismanagement of public funds or assets
- c) an act or omission that creates an imminent risk of a substantial and specific danger to the life, health or safety of persons or the environment, or
- d) directing or counselling someone to commit a wrongdoing

The following is a summary of disclosures received by Communications Nova Scotia:

Information Required under Section 18 of the Act	Fiscal Year 2019-20
The number of disclosures received	0
The number of findings of wrongdoing	0
Details of each wrongdoing	0
Recommendations and actions taken on each wrongdoing	0