



Accountability Report 2020–21

Communications Nova Scotia



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Accountability Report 2020–2021

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Accountability Statement

The Accountability Report of Communications Nova Scotia (CNS) for the year ended March 31, 2021, is prepared pursuant to the Finance Act and government policies and guidelines. These authorities require the reporting of outcomes against the Communications Nova Scotia Business Plan for the fiscal year just ended. The reporting of outcomes necessarily includes estimates, judgments and opinions by CNS management.

We acknowledge that this Accountability Report is the responsibility of CNS 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 2020-2021 Business Plan.

Original signed by

Brian Comer
Minister, Communications Nova Scotia

Original signed by,
Donna MacDonald
Associate Deputy Minister, Communications Nova Scotia

Message from Minister

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

CNS staff do important work behind the scenes, and this year, over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, Nova Scotians have become more aware of that good work than ever.

Nova Scotians rely on government programs and services to support their health, education and economic well-being. Every CNS employee understands that it's their job to help get important information to Nova Scotians about how to access and use these programs and services.

CNS will continue to evolve, reflect and evaluate how to best serve Nova Scotians. We will keep improving our website, strategically using digital media, and championing accessibility and inclusion.

Original signed by

Hon. Brian Comer
Minister, Communications Nova Scotia

Financial Results

| | 2020-2021 Estimate | 2020-2021 Actuals | 2020-2021 Variance |
|--|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Program & Service Area | <i>(\$thousands)</i> | | |
| Departmental Expenses: | | | |
| Office of the Associate Deputy Minister | 727 | 725 | (2) |
| Client Services | 939 | 784 | (155) |
| Communications Planning | 1,577 | 1,712 | 135 |
| Communications Services | 702 | 701 | (1) |
| Marketing | 3,872 | 3,158 | (714) |
| Total: Departmental Expenses | 7,817 | 7,080 | (737) |
| | | | |
| Additional Information: | | | |
| Ordinary Revenue | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Fees and Other Charges | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Ordinary Recoveries | 51 | 4 | (47) |
| Total: Revenue, Fees and Recoveries | 51 | 4 | (47) |
| TCA Purchase Requirements | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Provincial Funded Staff (FTEs) | 97.0 | 101.0 | 4.0 |
| <u>Departmental Expenses Variance Explanation:</u> | | | |
| Variance due to operating savings as a result of increased recoverable projects from other departments related to COVID-19 | | | |
| <u>Revenue, Fees and Recoveries Variance Explanation:</u> | | | |
| Variance due to lower than anticipated recoverable projects from agencies and commissions | | | |
| <u>TCA Purchase Requirements Variance Explanation:</u> | | | |
| N/A | | | |
| <u>Provincial Funded Staff (FTEs) Variance Explanation:</u> | | | |
| Variance due to required additional staff | | | |

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.
- Use the principles of accessibility, timeliness, accuracy, effectiveness, non-partisanship and fiscal responsibility to guide all communications and marketing activities.
- Strive for continuous improvement, be flexible and maximize resources and evaluate results.

The following **priority actions** guided the agency's work in 2020-21:

- Developing, implementing and evaluating communications and marketing plans aligned with government priorities.
- Using evidence-based planning.
- Using the most effective and appropriate digital and traditional media platforms to engage and inform citizens.
- Continuing to implement a government website organized in ways that make sense to the public.
- Maximizing staff expertise to design integrated, client-centered communications and marketing approaches.
- Implementing actions related to accessible government communications and awareness outlined in government's multi-year accessibility plan.

Impact of COVID-19:

Government's response to COVID-19 has been the most significant and sustained communications effort in CNS history. In 2020-21, our team worked hard to ensure Nova Scotians received the information they needed, when they needed it, and in the ways they needed it. Responding to the pandemic was our top priority in 2020-21, with all team members playing a direct or indirect role in delivering critical health and safety information to Nova Scotians.

Accordingly, this year's accountability report mostly features our work on COVID-19 and references a few other projects completed in 2020-2021.

Priority Action 1: Strategic Communications and Marketing

Developing, implementing and evaluating priority communications and marketing plans aligned with government priorities.

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

2020-21 highlights:

Pandemic Response (April 2020 – March 31, 2021)

The COVID-19 pandemic reached Nova Scotia in March 2020, disrupting lives and creating a great deal of uncertainty. As government responded to the pandemic with a series of public health measures, CNS embraced its role in delivering vital health and safety information to Nova Scotians, the media and our partners.

In the early days of COVID-19, government communications focused on sharing the best public health advice and clearly communicating restrictions. Emphasis was placed on Nova Scotians protecting themselves and others from COVID-19. We also reported the number of active and recovered cases, shared public exposure notices and helped Nova Scotians determine whether they should get tested for COVID-19 through dynamic web tools like the “811 checker.” All of those strategies survived the “first wave” and continue to define our provincial response.

Considerable attention was paid to explaining our provincial immunization strategy and promoting the roll-out of the vaccine (winter 2021). We did some of our best work by consulting vaccine hesitancy experts and testing vaccine intentions before launching a marketing campaign and opening the first public clinics. Early and ongoing stakeholder relations (in close coordination with Public Health) also helped us reach Nova Scotians in communities and demographics that needed more encouragement.

By providing clear, consistent and coordinated communications day-in and day-out, we are proud to have helped Nova Scotia become one of the safest places to live and work.

Actions

CNS took a strong and coordinated approach to sharing information about COVID-19 and keeping the public well-informed.

- A dedicated communications team was formed in March 2020 and started working lock-step with Public Health. Half of our agency also moved to 7 days of operation early in the pandemic, while the other half assumed additional responsibilities, ensuring other (critical) communications continued.
- A new web presence was built right away (novascotia.ca/coronavirus) and improved overtime. The site quickly became a trusted source of information for Nova Scotians and continued to grow and change, as needed.
- The Premier and Chief Medical Officer of Health lead our provincial response from the beginning, speaking directly to the public at “COVID briefings” and serving as our main spokespeople throughout the year. That strategy focused public attention on the most important news of the day and built trust.
- Special attention was paid to making the “COVID briefings” as accessible as possible, with captioning and ASL services as well as plain-language scripting, strong visuals and live social media moderating.
- Vital health and safety information was shared in the ways Nova Scotians wanted, needed and expected, with a focus on removing/reducing barriers. A province-wide advertising campaign was launched for radio, print, online and paid social media (March 2020), to communicate public health and safety messages. Ads directed Nova Scotians to the coronavirus site for additional information. As circumstances changed, the campaign was “refreshed” and placed back in-market.
- Public opinion research and early/ongoing stakeholder relations helped us understand what Nova Scotians were thinking, feeling and doing related to COVID-19 and reach as many people as possible.
- In all our communications and marketing, we balanced the need to reach all Nova Scotians with the need to reach Nova Scotians in particular segments. Special attention was paid to delivering clear information to members of marginalized groups, newcomers, partners and stakeholders, reducing/eliminating confusion and challenging misinformation about public health measures like masking, testing and vaccination. Plain language editing was also arranged and the public health guidelines were translated into many languages, including Mi'kmaw, Arabic, simplified Chinese, Oromo, Somali and Tigrinya, as well as French, significantly increasing our reach.

- Our social team was always online. Public inquiries were answered on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram all day, every day, during the “first wave” (winter and spring 2020), the first opening of the “Atlantic Bubble” (summer 2020) and first reopening period (summer 2020). That almost-constant presence made Nova Scotians feel like their questions mattered and that government cared.
- Our professional photo and video work added visual power to our messages, highlighted positive actions and told the story of the pandemic in Nova Scotia – building more confidence and pride.

Results

Note: Most of the results detailed below are from March 15, 2020 to March 15, 2021 (i.e. the date when the first probable case of COVID-19 in Nova Scotia was announced to the one year anniversary of our provincial response) and some of the results below are from March 15, 2020 to March 31, 2020 (i.e. the date of the first probable case to the end of the fiscal year), as indicated by asterisks ().*

In the first year of the pandemic, we:

- Reached Nova Scotians over-and-over again, with eight-in-ten Nova Scotians saying that they were following COVID-19 closely in November 2020 and February 2021 and commonly identifying our coronavirus site as their preferred pathway to reliable information (public opinion research)
- Issued 486 news releases on COVID-19 (in English and French)
- Answered 4,000+ media calls
- Held 105 “COVID-19” briefings (150 by mid-July 2021)
- Wrote 105 sets of remarks for Dr. Strang and supporting information for the Premier
- Created and published 3,700 web updates (in English and French)*
- Edited and published 80,000 words on the web - the equivalent of a 300 page novel
- Architected, designed and published 10 dynamic web platforms (e.g. to communicate case data, exposures, resources, business fees, address look-up tool and vaccine-related information)
- Earned more than 36 million pageviews on the web*
- Made 9,940 posts about COVID-19 and related guidance on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter
- Answered 45,287 questions from Nova Scotian through direct message and countless more via social post comments
- Earned 224 million impressions of social media posts and 19.3 million video views on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter

- Ran 14 large multi-media campaigns updating, informing and encouraging Nova Scotians using all mediums (print, online, social, out of home, television and radio) in all regions of the province, in French and English, with countless 'one-off' ads on social media, print and radio based on new information and announcements
- Translated approximately 400,000 words into French
- Produced 96 videos, 40 podcasts and dozens of radio ads
- Completed hundreds of individual photo shoots, generating tens of thousands of images
- Designed a research program on COVID-19 and tested vaccine intentions through telephone research
- Delivered 1,435 stakeholder updates (stakeholders first received updates twice a day, then seven days a week)
- Provided constant communications, marketing, web and photo/video support for the full year, including working 52 weekends.

The strength of our response to COVID-19 has been recognized by Nova Scotians. Since we started measuring public opinion on COVID-19 in the fall of 2020, government and public health have consistently earned approval ratings of 9-in-10 or more, with communications playing an influencing role.

Our public opinion work, and other internal statistics (like COVID-19 case numbers, 811 call volumes, symptomatic and asymptomatic testing rates and vaccine bookings), also demonstrate the tremendous reach we achieved in the first year of the pandemic and the success we've had in popularizing positive COVID-19 behaviours like masking, staying home during outbreaks and periods of lockdown, limiting one's social circle and getting vaccinated. Awareness of, and compliance with, public health measures, has consistently tested in the 90% range (public opinion research). Eight-in-ten Nova Scotians were/are able to identify Dr. Strang as our Chief Medical Officer of Health (by name); and large numbers have watched our "COVID briefings" and check the coronavirus site regularly.

Human Organ and Tissue Donation

While we were coping with COVID-19, the law for organ and tissue donation changed in Nova Scotia. Under the new law, those who do not opt-out of organ and tissue donation are presumed to have consented to donation – a legal concept known as "deemed consent."

Nova Scotia was the first jurisdiction in North America to make such a change. Communications and marketing support was needed to share the news, promote organ and tissue donation and encourage more people to register a decision.

Actions

A new marketing campaign was developed with the help of a creative agency, which ran on multimedia from July 6, 2020 to January 24, 2021. The campaign tagline was: "A change that could change lives," to emphasize the positive impacts of organ and tissue donation.

The goal of the campaign was to advise Nova Scotians of the change, make sure they knew their rights, and encourage more people to register a donation decision through their health card.

The marketing strategy included broad outreach via television, radio, social media, search engine marketing (i.e. Google Ads) and print as well as stakeholder relations.

Results

The campaign earned good reach and positive response across all segments.

The specific results were as follows:

- Social:
3,047,085 impressions
32,577 engagements
1.07% engagement rate
- Online:
3,257,539 impressions
7,442 total clicks
0.23% engagement rate
- Search Engine Marketing:
5,649 impressions
749 clicks
- Google Analytics:
65,219 pageviews
33,288 users
21,533 new users

Public opinion research also measured high awareness of, and support for, the new donation model after the campaign had been in market for a few months (telephone surveying conducted in November 2020). When asked specifically about the shift to “deemed consent,” four-in-five Nova Scotians said they were *aware* of the change and an overwhelming majority said they *approved* of the change (88%). A large number also reported *registering* a donation decision (70%) and *discussing their wishes* with a family member or someone close to them (71%).

Priority Action 2: Evidence-based Planning

Using evidence-based planning for communications and marketing activities.

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.

2020-21 highlights:

Vaccine Roll-Out (Vaccine Intentions Research, Public Awareness Campaign and Community Engagement)

When it became clear that COVID-19 would be with us for some time, CNS started exploring other methods of engaging the public and collecting feedback. Public opinion research emerged as a good way to take the ‘provincial pulse’ and study individual attitudes and behaviour during COVID-19. A research program was quickly developed (in-house) and a research partner was secured (external support). From the outset, the goal of the program was to better understand what Nova Scotians were thinking, feeling and doing related to COVID-19. There was also broad recognition that government would use the data to aid in planning; and the results would be compared against other pieces of evidence, to give a complete picture.

When the first COVID-19 vaccines received approval from Health Canada, the emphasis of the program shifted more towards measuring vaccine intentions. A longer set of questions was designed to identify *likely* behaviour (i.e. whether one planned to get vaccinated for COVID-19 or not) and test personal motivations.

Knowing who was and was not planning to get vaccinated improved our strategy. It gave us intelligence we needed to estimate vaccine uptake, target our messages and identify and reduce barriers.

Actions

A research program was designed to better understand what Nova Scotians were thinking, feeling and doing related to COVID-19 and track patterns/changes over time.

Telephone surveying began in November 2020, with a representative sample of the Nova Scotia population (n=400), and additional research was conducted in the winter and spring quarters.

Important datapoints were collected like overall health and wellbeing, concern about COVID-19, awareness of, and compliance with, public health advice, pathways to information and vaccine intentions.

The results were shared with Public Health as well as key partners like the Nova Scotia Health Authority and the IWK.

Testing vaccine intentions became a key focus when the first COVID-19 vaccines received health approval and the provincial immunization strategy began to take shape.

The research provided quick intelligence about the pandemic here in Nova Scotia, including identifying what Nova Scotians were *likely* to do (or not do) when a COVID-19 vaccine was available to them and why.

A common demographic profile (or composite) for vaccine hesitancy in Nova Scotia was built using the data and insights collected through surveying and updated regularly.

Results

- Seven-in-ten Nova Scotians said they planned to get vaccinated for COVID-19 in February 2021 (public opinion research).
- Eight-in-ten Nova Scotians (who were not already vaccinated for COVID-19) said they planned to get vaccinated in April/May 2021.

- The research also validated the need to engage harder to reach communities and specific age groups in the vaccine roll-out through targeted outreach and messaging. Further actions undertaken by Public Health, CNS and our partners included:
 - Vaccine clinics in First Nations communities organized and run by First Nations health clinics, with a First Nations branded logo, posters, videos with community members, and resources in Mi'kmaw;
 - Vaccine clinics in African Nova Scotian communities organized in partnership by community leaders, with an Afrocentric design elements, including a logo, posters, TV ads, and videos featuring community members;
 - Vaccine clinics for the Muslim community in partnership with the Ummah Mosque, as well as a video, Arabic radio ads, and translated materials;
 - Vaccine clinics for newcomers in partnership with stakeholders; with vaccine information in multiple languages in written and audio formats; and communication and promotion of availability of interpretation services on the booking line and at vaccine clinic;
 - Marketing efforts targeting groups identified as vaccine hesitant including youth and young adults, consisting of TV and social media campaigns, videos with experts answering common questions, and partnerships with influencers, as well as information and resources for parents, youth and families distributed through the school system.

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

Using the most effective and appropriate digital and traditional media platforms to engage and inform 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.

2020-21 highlights:

“The Sooner We Do” Social Media Campaign

When the “second wave” of COVID-19 reached Nova Scotia in the Fall of 2020 and new public health restrictions were announced, it was imperative that Nova Scotians of all backgrounds modified their behaviour.

To reach younger Nova Scotians (typically a more challenging audience for government to reach), a new social media campaign called “The Sooner We Do, The Sooner We’re Through” series was developed with the help of external partners. The series promoted “good public” health practices in a fun, empathetic, engaging, and upbeat way. It also featured local actors and musicians and was produced by well-known TV actor-director Jonathan Torrens and his creative partner.

Actions

Five PSA videos were produced in partnership with a creative agency. The videos starred, were shot and edited by a real-life couple living in Nova Scotia.

The videos humorously depicted life in lockdown while encouraging and thanking Nova Scotians for keeping each other healthy. One video clip showed the couple watching Netflix in two different locations, thinking they were watching the same thing, but watching different shows. Joel Plaskett’s song “Can I go nowhere with you” was also featured in the videos, adding more local colour, and viewers were directed to our coronavirus site (novascotia.ca/coronavirus) for additional advice and support.

The campaign was released in stages over a four-week period, and the videos were shared by other vendor/influencer social media accounts with significant Nova Scotian followings as well as through government accounts.

Results

The campaign was a hit, especially among younger Nova Scotians, achieving higher than typical reach and engagement in the 18-45 age demographic.

Feedback on the tone of the messaging was also positive, with many Nova Scotians adding comments and sharing the videos on their own accounts.

- Views on Government channels:
 - Facebook: 128,166
 - Twitter: 74,397
 - YouTube: 121,963

Expansion of Platforms

CNS continues to explore new ways of reaching and engaging Nova Scotians online – meeting them where they are, with the information they need. Our social media presence grew substantially during the first year of the pandemic, as we embraced two-way communication online unlike ever before.

Actions

The COVID-19 pandemic demanded a tremendous amount of innovation and creative approaches, and CNS met the challenge by dedicating resources and staff to the social media team to produce creative content, deliver it in new ways, and monitor and respond to an influx of public inquiries.

- **Live briefings:** Prior to the pandemic, NSGov would livestream sparingly on Facebook, for occasions such as hurricane briefings or major announcements. Throughout this fiscal year however, especially during points of peak COVID-19 cases, Facebook Lives occurred on an almost daily basis. This method of communication was resource-heavy but proved to be extremely effective in reaching Nova Scotians with important pandemic information. Facebook Lives reached hundreds of thousands of Nova Scotians and resulted in thousands of comments and questions per broadcast.
- **Sprout Social:** The influx of thousands of daily inquiries presented a challenge for the small social media monitoring team. CNS fully implemented the use of Sprout Social, a platform which combined the inboxes of multiple social media channels into one streamlined inbox. It also allowed for easy onboarding of other CNS staff who were brought in to help triage and answer the questions.
- **New Tactics to Reach more Nova Scotians:** The CNS marketing team reached out to a number of local social media influencers to amplify public health messaging and reach key demographics. This involved a variety of tactics and messaging tailored to the influencer and their audience. After seeing the rise of the social media platform TikTok, particularly among younger Nova Scotians, CNS created an account and began creating material tailored to the platform.

CNS used creative and humorous messaging, design and video content to help capture the attention of Nova Scotians who may have tuned out COVID-related social posts. By leveraging popular cultural references and using a tone of humour and empathy, this content was shared widely by Nova Scotians and helped deliver important public health messaging in a positive way.

Results

The following metrics demonstrate our success moving to new platforms and growing our followings and engagement on existing platforms. The percentage increases indicated are a comparison to the previous year (2019-20). The data combines all COVID-related accounts (NSGov Facebook, Twitter, Instagram; DHW Facebook and Twitter).

- 103,160 (+129%) net follower gain
- 217,824,019 (+370%) impressions
- 17,383,936 (+499%) engagements*
- 1,785,627 (622%) link clicks*
- 516,730 (582%) messages received and triaged*

*These metrics demonstrate the level of engagement and highlight the degree to which Nova Scotians came directly to government social media channels to stay up-to-date.

Priority Action 4 – An Updated Government Website

Continuing to implement a government website organized in ways that make sense to the public.

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

2020-21 highlights:

Coronavirus Site

Nova Scotians visited government's website in record numbers in 2020-2021, finding the information they needed, especially on COVID-19, in the ways they needed it.

A strong web presence was identified early in the pandemic as an important way to reach Nova Scotians and communicate vital health and safety information.

Our coronavirus site created a seamless, one-stop shop for Nova Scotians, making it the place to go for information about the pandemic.

Actions

A dedicated coronavirus site was quickly stood-up (February 2020), before the first cases of COVID-19 were detected in Nova Scotia, and further developed overtime

The coronavirus site, like all our beta-level sites and pages, was designed to meet the needs and expectations of an increasingly digital and mobile audience, while also being accessible to those with less access to technology (slow connections, community access, mobile-only household, shared data plans), disabilities and other special requirements.

Special attention was paid to things like matching new concepts and terminology with words people were using in online search engines.

With short notice a dashboard was created that graphed daily statistics of COVID-19 data and shared via the coronavirus site, bringing our reporting in line with what was happening in other provinces and around the world. The dashboard included such measures as daily case counts, negative tests, demographic information, and cases by region.

As our provincial response continued, new pages/sections were also added on reopening (summer of 2020). The reopening “microsite” was designed to provide guidance and instructions to those responsible for keeping employees and customers safe when shopping.

The roll-out of our COVID-19 immunization strategy (winter 2021) involved linking together many different types of content, from the vaccine plan, to information about the different vaccines, and connecting people to when and how they could get the vaccine.

The coronavirus website was updated almost daily (including weekends) and sometimes several times a day to respond to the evolving restrictions, stay relevant and answer the questions we received from Nova Scotians.

Results

Record numbers visited novascotia.ca and our coronavirus site in 2020-2021, finding the information they needed in they ways they needed it.

- Almost 4.9 million users visited our coronavirus site, with over than 36 million page views in 2020-2021 (annual stat from Google Analytics).
- Our coronavirus site became a trusted source of information on COVID-19, consistently being identified by Nova Scotians as their preferred pathway to reliable information (Public Opinion Research on COVID-19 – Fall of 2020 and Winter and Spring 2021), with traditional media also playing an important role.
- Our web content was timely and up-to-date, with our team creating and publishing over 3,700 web updates in English and French over the course of the year.

- Our web content was dynamic and solution-oriented, with approximately 10 new dynamic platforms developed in-house and supported (e.g. COVID-19 case data, exposures, resources, business fees, regional restrictions, reopening plans, vaccine).
- Our coronavirus site did particularly well on mobile, with more than 60% of users accessing with mobile and tablet; and more than half of our traffic was generated by search engines (organic search), a common searching method used by Nova Scotians.
- The coronavirus website satisfies 90% of the 50 criteria of an international standard that CNS tests against, meaning the large majority of people would be able to find, understand and use the pages.
- In April 2021 a prominent accessibility expert published a review of the accessibility of all Canadian COVID-19 vaccine landing pages. He found that Nova Scotia's page had zero accessibility errors and had the best score overall nationally. <https://uxdesign.cc/canadian-covid-vaccination-landing-pages-how-accessible-are-they-to-people-with-disabilities-ee8888cf0763>

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

While we were responding to COVID-19, work continued on the Beta web project and transforming government's online presence (with 150+ domains, 1.9 million web pages, 75,000 PDFs and 70,000 images) 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.

Actions

Beta.novascotia.ca was populated with more content throughout 2020-21, as we balanced that work with building and improving the coronavirus site and other dynamic web platforms. 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

- A total of 16 government departments have now been migrated to beta.novascotia.ca.
- A total of 2,236 web pages have been published and 596 pieces of content have been translated.

- The mobile friendliness of the new website has been of great importance as mobile and tablet users have increased more than 42% from 356,000 in 2019-2020 to 508,000 2020-21.
- 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, before the Registry of Joint Stocks Companies (RJSC) moved to beta, over 60% of visitors landed on their content in error, as they immediately left for the Land Registry and did not return. After moving to the beta website, this measure became insignificantly small.

Priority Action 5 – Maximizing Resources and Coordination

Maximizing staff expertise to design integrated, client-centered communications and marketing approaches.

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.

2020-21 highlights:

Pandemic Staffing

CNS's staffing model has always been based on multi-disciplinary teams working together towards a common goal. Responding to the pandemic, however, required our agency to stretch, resulting in greater integration of services.

Collaboration and creativity was encouraged at every level of CNS, with staff showing up for each other and Nova Scotians day-in-day-out.

Actions

A dedicated team of communicators worked exclusively on Nova Scotia's response to COVID-19 in 2020-21. The team was cross-functional by design and included communicators with expertise in media relations, project management, marketing, web and digital, translation, photography and video services, stakeholder engagement and other areas. Keeping Nova Scotians safe was their common purpose and unifying goal.

Results

Responding to COVID-19 has been the largest and most sustained communications effort in our history.

- In the weeks after the first cases of COVID-19 were announced, CNS developed a resourcing plan to ensure staff were ready to respond to the pandemic and move to a seven-day per week operation.

- Connections with key partners, like the Nova Scotia Health Authority and IWK, were made and strengthened over time to ensure communications activities were consistent and coordinated.
- As the pandemic wore on, CNS staff were also organized into shifts to maintain critical functions like managing media relations and conducting social media monitoring.

Priority Action 6 – Accessibility

Implementing actions related to accessible government communications and awareness outlined in government’s multi-year accessibility plan.

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.

2020-21 highlights:

Pandemic Response Efforts

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).

Actions

CNS continues to champion accessibility and lead by example. Sign language interpretation and CART services have been provided for all 150 live-streamed “COVID briefings,” enabling government to better reach, engage and empower more Nova Scotians. CNS has also ensured the coronavirus website is accessible by design, increasing access to vital health and safety information for more Nova Scotians.

During the pandemic, our teams have also improved our social media practices, including adding more photo captions, using high contrast images and camel case in hashtags (capitalization of the first letter of each word - #NovaScotiaStrong) and reducing the amount of text online.

CNS is also leading the transition to a more user-friendly government of Nova Scotia website, with international accessibility standards built into the development of beta.novascotia.ca. This work has included: descriptive titles for search and screen readers, improved navigation, better readability and responsiveness to many devices, one clear task per page, contrast for better readability, and PDF details help identify the downloadable content. We are working towards providing an equivalent user experience for everyone.

Results

- A recent review of the top 1,000,000 homepages rated novascotia.ca in the top 10% in terms of web accessibility. This analysis was conducted by WebAim (<https://webaim.org/>).
- The COVID-19 and vaccine websites have been visited by almost 4.9 million users with more than 36 million page views.
- A prominent accessibility expert published a review of the accessibility of all Canadian COVID-19 vaccine landing pages in April 2021. He found that Nova Scotia's page had zero accessibility errors and had the best score overall nationally. <https://uxdesign.cc/canadian-covid-vaccination-landing-pages-how-accessible-are-they-to-people-with-disabilities-ee8888cf0763>
- The coronavirus website satisfies 90% of the 50 criteria of the international standard that CNS tests against, meaning the large majority of people would be able to find, understand and use the pages.
- An initial review of Government's Brand guidelines has been completed from a print production perspective. An internal working group is reviewing the guidelines from a holistic design approach, including web design, video animation, social media design, etc.

Inclusive Communications Initiative

At CNS, accessibility and inclusivity intersect, sharing common themes and principles. CNS has worked, and will continue to work, diligently to ensure Nova Scotians receive information in ways that are most accessible to them.

Actions

In 2020-21, CNS worked hard to ensure Nova Scotians received information in ways that are most accessible to them. This includes placing ads in traditional media like print, radio and TV, which are still the primary sources of information for many Nova Scotians. And it includes reaching people in the languages they understand best.

The CNS team of certified French translators translated approximately 450,000 words during the pandemic, which included web content, social posts, fact sheets, as well as the slides that appeared before each COVID-19 live-streamed briefing.

CNS arranged translation of public health guidelines into languages including Mi'kmaw, Arabic, simplified Chinese, Oromo, Somali and Tigrinya. CNS consulted, and worked closely, with ISANS to identify the specific languages and translators. Before being translated and shared, CNS's in-house plain language editor reviewed and revised the information to ensure it was clear for the broadest possible audience.

CNS graphic designers incorporated principles of Afrocentric design into many of the COVID-19 print and online materials, so that more Nova Scotians see themselves reflected in important health information.

On the vaccine front, CNS partnered with community groups to identify key spokespeople to help overcome barriers between community and government and encourage people from historically marginalized communities to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

Results

- All of the Premier and Chief Medical Officer of Health's live-streamed media briefings on COVID-19 included ASL and CART services (*approximately 150 separate briefings between March 2020 and July 2021*).
- In November 2020, the CNS Translation team was recognized by the Association des Juristes d'Expression Francaise de Nouvelle-Ecosse, an association of French-speaking jurists in Nova Scotia, with the association's annual award for their excellent work in translating the COVID-19 website. The team also received praise from various francophone organizations such as the Réseau Santé and the Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse (FANE) for ensuring that COVID-19 information is readily available to all Nova Scotians in both English and French.
- CNS staff were part of a COVID-19 working group, co-led by the Association of Black Social Workers and the Health Association of African Canadians, that developed COVID-19 communications products using Afrocentric design elements. The effectiveness of the products was recognized by other jurisdictions, with Ontario requesting to use the designs produced by CNS in their communications.
- CNS partnered with external groups and experts, such as ISANS, the Association of Black Social Workers, the Health Association of African Canadians, the Mi'kmaq Health and Wellness Authority, the Mi'kmaq Friendship Centre, and Muslim community leaders, to ensure more Nova Scotians received information about COVID-19 and vaccines in ways that were most accessible to them.

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 |