

# Pride in the Public Service

A strategy to build pride and  
employee engagement in the  
Nova Scotia Public Service.

2015-2018

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# Executive Summary

In 2011, the executive leadership of the Government of Nova Scotia became concerned about a sharp decline in employee engagement in the civil service.

The annual “How’s Work Going?” survey, which measures employee engagement, indicated it had dropped from a corporate high of 74 per cent in 2009 to 62 per cent in 2011. It dropped further to 60 per cent in 2013.

Feedback from employees pointed to their having a lack of confidence in a number of areas, including

- care and respect for employee well-being
- job supports so they can do their job well
- communications, both from leadership and across work units
- opportunities for career growth

It also indicated that employees had low confidence in leadership practices.

Employee engagement is critical to government’s success. Research shows that increased employee engagement in the public sector affects employees’ and citizens’ levels of satisfaction, trust, and confidence in government.

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*The Nova Scotia civil service consists of more than 10,000 employees serving citizens across all its departments and agencies.*

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As a result of these findings, all departments were challenged to make meaningful changes that would positively influence engagement. Deputy Ministers were asked to lead the charge, recognizing that everyone has a role to play in creating an engaged workforce, from the leaders and managers to the employees themselves.

This strategy considers some of the systemic barriers to engagement across government and provides tools and measures to mitigate them. These are not off-the-shelf, one-size-fits-all solutions; they are designed to be tailored from employee to employee, unit to unit, and department to department, depending on needs and desired outcomes.

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*The Government of Nova Scotia defines employee engagement as the level of connection and involvement employees feel to their jobs and their organization.*

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Government leadership is committed to developing a work environment and culture that fosters a productive, satisfied, and committed workforce. How employees feel about their work environment and culture is important because it is directly related to individual well-being and organizational effectiveness. An engaged public service will allow us to better deliver high-quality programs and services to Nova Scotians.

All of government must work together to create those conditions.

# Introduction

## Building Pride in the Public Service

In February 2014, the oneNS Commission report, *Now or Never: An Urgent Call for Action for Nova Scotia* was released. This report clearly stated that we in Nova Scotia have to change the way we do business in order for our province to prosper.

As the Government of Nova Scotia—and the largest employer in the province—we have a responsibility to set an example of ways to take on that challenge. We need to find ways to work smarter while providing a high level of service to citizens.

Key to that success is an engaged workforce.

Research tells us that engaged employees

- are proud of the work they do
- see themselves as part of their organization's success
- find satisfaction with their work
- are inspired to do their best
- are committed to the organization's goals
- intend to remain with the organization

Most importantly, they deliver service excellence, which is critical for our province, its people, and its businesses.

The *Pride in the Public Service Strategy* is designed to help build a strong, engaged public service that can successfully navigate our province's present and future changes.

We value the work public servants do each and every day and are committed to providing the supports they need to do their best work and to feel good about choosing a public service career.

## How the Employee Engagement Strategy Was Developed

In 2013, the Public Service Commission conducted the most recent "How's Work Going?" employee engagement survey. The department also gathered feedback through the Premier's Suggestion Box, employee networks (African Canadian Women in the Public Service, GoverNEXT, LGBTI), the Diversity Roundtable (a group representing various departments and agencies that focuses on diversity and inclusion), the Community of Action (a group representing various departments and agencies that focuses on departmental employee engagement), and a Manager Summit held in 2013.

These results provided leaders, managers, and employees with information about employees' perceptions related to their job satisfaction, commitment to the organization, leadership, communications, and other aspects of their lives.

These opinions are important because they help identify issues related to employee well-being and the organization's effectiveness.

The results gathered indicated that employees felt there were several areas that need attention or enhancement. We appreciate their input and are using it to change the way we work.

The Public Service Commission has developed a three-year strategy that will support the development of a work environment and culture that will motivate our employees to do their best work, and contribute to the achievement of optimum client service. Change can be difficult, but with the support of employees, managers, and leaders it will result in a better public service for all.

## The Four Pillars

There were distinct themes in the feedback that led to the creation of the strategy's four pillars:

Pillar 1 • Better Internal Communication

Pillar 2 • Better Opportunities

Pillar 3 • Better Well-being

Pillar 4 • Better Job Support

This document outlines the specific objectives and actions the strategy calls for under each pillar. The strategy also identifies how we will track our progress. Measurement will be linked to an accountability framework that sets clear statements summarizing the expectations, accountabilities, and responsibilities for all levels of our organization.

## Pillar 1 | Better Internal Communication



### Why Internal Communication is Important

Effective communication improves workflow and productivity in an organization. Clear, open communication builds trust among levels of employees, which increases collaboration. It also reduces confusion and ambiguity, which can create a negative, tense, less-productive workplace. An atmosphere that encourages open communication also inspires innovation; employees are more likely to offer up new ideas when they feel they are safe and respected.

### What Employees Told Us

Employees' responses to the 2013 "How's Work Going?" survey strongly indicated that more attention needs to be directed to strengthening the flow of internal communication within government. Only 40 per cent of employees across government felt that essential information flows effectively from senior leadership to staff, and only 36 per cent felt information flows effectively between work units.

Employees want to be kept in the loop about what is happening in government—especially if decisions or changes affect them. They want to be well informed so they can communicate knowledgeably with their colleagues, the public, and the communities in which they work.

They want to know what is happening in their own departments, as well as others, and want opportunities to talk across the organization to see what other public servants are doing personally and professionally.

A further analysis of the data also revealed several systemic and/or structural barriers to creating better communication for employees, such as

- inefficient and inadequate communication protocols that are focused primarily on external communication
- a culture that does not adequately assess the risk of not communicating to employees
- communication practices and strategies that do not consider employees' different cultures, backgrounds, and preferences

The actions within this strategy look to remove these limitations and restrictions by supporting and introducing more inclusive and innovative practices.

### What Research Says

Research shows that other organizations that have shifted from the traditional top-down process to one that is more dynamic and sophisticated have seen strong positive employee engagement as a result. The combination of committed leadership and open, transparent communication has increased employee effectiveness and job satisfaction.

The key elements of better internal communication are engagement, explanation, and expectation clarity.

# Goal 1

Government communications are timely, coordinated, flow effectively, and connect employees at all levels to the information they need to do their job well.

Objectives	Strategic Actions
1.1 Improve access to corporate information for all public service employees.	<p>Build an inventory of the communication programs and supports that exist and make it available to employees.</p> <p>Create a one-stop information source for human resource information for all employees.</p> <p>Identify ways to incorporate new technologies into communication practices to enhance information sharing and collaboration. Some examples include enhancing the iConnect website and expanding WIFI coverage and access.</p> <p>Customize employee survey results for different groups, share as appropriate, and respond to specific areas of concern.</p>
1.2 Enhance internal and cross-departmental communication.	<p>Work with partners to create new—or leverage existing—platforms and networks to improve information sharing and dialogue.</p> <p>Enable and promote the use of multiple communication channels, such as Yammer.</p> <p>Work with partners to ensure consistency and ease of use for all government intranet sites.</p>
1.3 Support regular two-way communication between leadership and employees.	<p>Identify and implement communication techniques that better connect employees with leaders.</p> <p>Enhance the visibility and accessibility of leaders to employees through iConnect and other vehicles and opportunities.</p>
1.4 Build communication competency.	<p>Enhance communication training, tools, and support for employees, managers, and leaders.</p>

Objectives	Strategic Actions
<p>1.5 Make it easy to access communications in various languages, formats, and styles.</p>	<p>Develop a list of public servants who can speak different languages so they can help employees provide service to clients in the language of their choice.</p> <p>Incorporate a variety of technologies and approaches so employees can communicate in a style that matches their needs and preferences.</p>
<p>1.6 Share communication best practices and other experiences across departments.</p>	<p>Develop and implement a platform to share and recognize communication best practices.</p> <p>Create and support a suite of practices to enable sharing of success stories and common challenges.</p>
<p>1.7 Ensure senior leadership and management across government are accountable for regularly communicating with employees.</p>	<p>Promote target levels for Effective Interactive Communication competency.</p> <p>Implement practices to review and hold leaders/ management accountable on the effectiveness of their communication protocols and communication.</p>

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*iConnect connects employees to their work and each other. It provides updates on government priorities directly from senior leaders and information about what other employees are doing in their daily jobs or as volunteers. It is also a source of information for supports and programs available to employees. This website can be accessed only by government employees.*

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## Pillar 2 | Better Opportunities



### Why Career Development and Opportunities are Important

Providing employees with career development and opportunities is critical for organizations. It helps them retain existing talent and boost productivity. It is also essential for succession planning and knowledge transfer as it allows employees to plan and prepare for moves into new positions as they become available. Being known as an organization that provides career development and opportunities also builds an excellent reputation, which allows an organization to attract, hire, and retain the best talent.

### What Employees Told Us

Responses to the 2013 “How’s Work Going?” survey indicate that employees do not believe they have opportunities. Only 35 per cent of employees felt they have opportunities for career growth within government.

Employees want more opportunities to broaden their career options. They want to know about secondment opportunities and short-term projects, as well as training that will provide opportunities for learning and growth and the chance to network. The ability to tap into the experience of mentors is also important.

Employees also spoke of systemic and attitudinal barriers within government’s recruitment and selection practices that have had an adverse impact on their opportunity to advance in government, such as

- a selection process that is mostly focused on the candidate’s interview performance and not overall work performance
- selection practices that exclude certain work and volunteer experiences
- hiring practices that do not consider employees’ cultural and diverse differences

The actions noted under the better opportunities pillar are intended to identify and remove the institutional barriers that are limiting employees’ training and advancement opportunities.

### What Research Says

Research shows there is a strong connection between providing employees with training and advancement opportunities and increasing employee engagement. Comparable organizations that have provided opportunities for both professional and personal growth have seen strong increases in employee satisfaction. Millennials—an important group for government to attract to the workforce—value professional growth opportunities more than traditional benefits.

The key for employers is to view employee development as an investment, not a cost.

## Goal 2 We demonstrate a shared commitment with our employees to assist them to develop and grow so they can reach their full potential.

Objectives	Strategic Actions
<p>2.1 Provide employees with effective training and development opportunities.</p>	<p>Develop programs to meet employees' and the organization's career/succession requirements. Examples include mentoring, cross-training, job shadowing, and development programs.</p> <p>Increase the use of technology and other innovative approaches to make it easier for employees to access development programs and opportunities. Examples include networks, free online courses, volunteering, and best practice sites.</p> <p>Promote education leaves, interdepartmental committees, change labs, volunteerism, temporary assignments or secondments for employee career and self-development.</p>
<p>2.2 Connect employees with the information and support they need for their career development.</p>	<p>Promote awareness of the options available for guided and self-guided career development support. Examples include the Career Development Specialist and online tools.</p> <p>Provide information about potential career paths available to employees and the necessary qualifications.</p> <p>Improve employees' awareness of the current development opportunities that are available.</p> <p>Explore ways to increase regional employees' awareness of the current opportunities available outside of the downtown core.</p>
<p>2.3 Unify the needs of the organization with the goals of its employees.</p>	<p>Develop a succession and knowledge retention program to improve employee growth and ensure continuity of service.</p> <p>Consider creating an online skills inventory that would routinely capture information on the skills, capabilities, and qualifications of employees.</p>

Objectives	Strategic Actions
<p>2.4 Improve the selection and hiring policies, processes, and practices to meet the diverse needs of the organization and its employees.</p>	<p>Streamline the recruitment and selection process to increase responsiveness, flexibility, timeliness, and efficiencies.</p> <p>Ensure the recruitment and selection processes/practices are fair and accessible to all; implement the recruitment and selection objectives of the Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.</p> <p>Improve the recruitment and selection process to encourage the recruitment of youth.</p> <p>Provide support to potential employees and current public servants so they know what to expect in a recruitment process.</p> <p>Work with management to use a transparent, fair process to select employees for long-term acting positions.</p> <p>Ensure employees promoted into management positions receive the appropriate management orientation training.</p>
<p>2.5 Focus on effective performance management practices that provide feedback on employees' work performance and encourage career-planning discussions.</p>	<p>Ensure managers focus on effective performance management practices and dedicate time to providing ongoing feedback on employees' work performances and supporting employees' career goals.</p> <p>Provide a performance management portal to help manage the performance management process.</p> <p>Support career-planning discussions by linking them to an online skills inventory database, as well as career path and development information.</p>
<p>2.6 Ensure all leaders and management in the organization have competencies that are known to enhance employee engagement.</p>	<p>Examine the competencies used to hire, develop, and promote employees to ensure they align with the known engagement behaviours.</p>

*iNSpire is a formal, cross-departmental mentorship program designed to connect experienced public servants across the organization with others who want to grow and develop their careers.*

## Pillar 3 | Better Well-being



### Why Employee Well-being is Important

Organizations that support their employees' physical, emotional, and mental well-being both personally and professionally see a return on the bottom line through increased productivity and reduced health-care costs and absenteeism. However, there are many more reasons to do it. Fostering a caring workplace that recognizes employees' needs, values, contributions, and unique attributes is essential to finding, keeping, and motivating talent. One of the fundamental attributes of an engaged employee is one who feels they can be themselves mentally, physically, and emotionally in the workplace, all of which contribute to well-being.

### What Employees Told Us

There are now four generations in the workplace and the expectations of each generation are different. Employees told us they value life-work balance, their relationships with their supervisors and co-workers, and having control over their work. They also want a workplace where diversity—including second languages—is valued, where they can express opinions and ideas, and where their psychological well-being and spirituality is respected. Meaningful, performance-based recognition is also important. Informal, ongoing, day-to-day forms of recognition are more likely to make employees feel valued.

The 2013 "How's Work Going?" survey results indicate several areas in the workplace culture that are in most need of attention to improve employees' work experiences and well-being. For example, in

the 2013 survey, only 36 per cent of employees felt their departments do a good job of formally recognizing employees, only 54 per cent felt they have opportunities to provide input into decisions that affect their work, and only 56 per cent felt work-related stress is manageable.

Our analysis also revealed several systemic and structural barriers to creating better well-being for employees, such as

- lack of a comprehensive approach to looking at employee absenteeism and well-being
- slow transition from a punitive to a recovery-oriented absenteeism approach
- culture of avoiding certain health topics (e.g. mental health)

The strategic actions noted in this strategy are designed to foster a healthy workplace. Employees who feel energized and positive when they leave work are better able to contribute to their families and their communities—and themselves.

### What Research Says

Research shows that comparable organizations that have focused on building healthy, safe, supportive, and respectful workplaces have seen strong positive employee engagement as a result. These changes have included creating more flexible workplaces that allow for greater life-work balance and control— aspects that are highly valued, particularly by youth.

The key is to provide a safe and respectful work environment that builds employees' sense of empowerment.

# Goal 3

Our work environment supports the physical, psychological, and social well-being of employees by providing a caring, respectful, healthy, and safe workplace, and by valuing and recognizing employee contributions and differences. This enables our employees to work to their full potential and respond most effectively to the needs of the public.

Objectives	Strategic Actions
3.1 Support employees to increase job satisfaction, productivity, and balance in the workplace.	<p>Increase awareness of the benefits to employees and the organization of flexible work arrangements.</p> <p>Develop guidelines for flexible work arrangements and provide measures and frameworks for their effectiveness.</p>
3.2 Enhance employees' health, safety, and well-being in the workplace.	<p>Implement the National CSA standards for psychological health and safety, which focus on prevention of harm, promotion of health, and resolution of incidents and concerns.</p> <p>Build on existing wellness programs and incentives.</p> <p>Develop and implement guidelines (such as Blackberry Etiquette) that enable employees to manage a better life-work balance.</p> <p>Explore ways to support alternative forms of commuting that align with employees' lifestyles and needs. These could include bike racks, changing facilities and showers, discounts or payroll deduction for public transit, and the promotion of carpool sites.</p>

Objectives	Strategic Actions
<p>3.3 Continue to provide opportunities to strengthen relationships among employees, managers, and leaders in a positive work environment.</p>	<p>Establish and implement initiatives that promote relationship connections among employees, managers, and leaders with intention.</p> <p>Implement alternate respectful dispute resolution techniques such as restorative practices and restorative conferencing.</p> <p>Build capacity for restorative practices techniques.</p> <p>Increase facilitation and training sessions on dealing with difficult issues such as disrespectful behaviour and navigating difficult discussions.</p> <p>Provide support to managers and supervisors so they can address situations and ensure a positive and respectful work environment.</p>
<p>3.4 Recognize employee value to the organization.</p>	<p>Strengthen and promote a shared recognition tool kit that includes ways to both informally and formally recognize employees' contributions.</p>
<p>3.5 Create an environment that demonstrates our commitment to being an open, diverse, and inclusive organization.</p>	<p>Support collaborative implementation of the Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.</p> <p>Support collaborative implementation of the Youth Strategy.</p> <p>Implement Positive Spaces Initiative and Guidelines to support transgender and gender-nonconforming employees.</p>

*Workplace flexibility helps employees better meet the challenges of balancing life and work. Options may include flexible start times, telework, job sharing, and modified work weeks.*

## Pillar 4 | Better Job Supports



### Why Job Supports are Important

Providing workers with the right training, the right equipment and tools, good working conditions, and strong leadership and support all help ensure productivity. It can also increase employee morale because it sends the message to the organization's workforce that their daily contribution is understood and valued.

### What Employees Told Us

The 2013 "How's Work Going?" survey results on job supports were strong, but this is still an area that government should continue to improve to further enhance job satisfaction. Employees told us that having the tools and supports to do their job well strengthens their job satisfaction. When the right support or resources are lacking, employees can become frustrated—and that leads to work-related stress and a decrease in satisfaction.

Employees also told us they have encountered systemic and institutional barriers to their ability to access the job supports they need. This engagement strategy is designed to tackle these corporate administrative structures, such as the job classification system and issue resolution procedures, that, at times, have contributed to a disengaging work environment.

### What Research Says

Research shows that many organizations have had to reduce the size of their workforce, leaving the remaining employees to do more with less. In 2011, the Conference Board of Canada reported that 74 per cent of Canadians believed that employees are overworked. Research also shows that work overload contributes to higher stress, poorer health, burnout, turnover, increased medical costs, and a reduction in innovation.

At the same time, organizations that respond to employees' needs by providing training and tools to help them manage their time, schedules, and responsibilities—as well as providing a range of benefits that promote employee health and wellness—have seen an increase in engagement.



## Goal 4 Employees have access to the job supports and tools they need to empower them to do their job well and to provide quality service.

Objectives	Strategic Actions
<p>4.1 Make it easy for employees to access the technologies, tools, and information they need to do their jobs well.</p>	<p>Provide a guide of services available to employees and management.</p> <p>Develop a one-stop human resource tool where all employees and managers can find answers to human resource questions.</p> <p>Enhance employees' and management's access to HR specialists to help address unique and complex issues.</p> <p>Develop and promote a tool kit for managers.</p> <p>Review the workspace guidelines to ensure they meet our employees' current needs.</p> <p>Promote employees' ability to purchase home computers.</p>
<p>4.2 Ensure all new employees welcomed to the public service receive a comprehensive orientation that helps them understand their department, their job, and our workplace culture, which is committed to diversity and inclusion.</p>	<p>Build on corporate orientation programming for all new employees and develop tools that can be used by departments to enhance their orientation of new employees.</p>
<p>4.3 Support employees' understanding of government's commitment to diversity and inclusion.</p>	<p>Support collaborative implementation of the Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.</p> <p>Promote the new Diversity and Intercultural Proficiency competency.</p>
<p>4.4 Support the fair and timely resolution of employee issues.</p>	<p>Establish and implement tools to help employees and managers engage in a more proactive approach to resolving tension before it becomes a workplace conflict.</p>



Objectives	Strategic Actions
<p>4.5 Improve and streamline our classification and job evaluation practices.</p>	<p>Review and streamline the classification and job evaluation process and practices.</p> <p>Increase support for writing position descriptions.</p> <p>Streamline the classification processes to increase timeliness.</p> <p>Continual review of classification practices to ensure internal equity, transparency, and fairness.</p> <p>Better communicate the rationale behind classification results.</p> <p>Provide a fair mechanism to appeal results in a timely manner.</p> <p>Review and analyse classification practices to align with with diversity and inclusion objectives.</p>

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*Corporate orientation helps new employees better understand the organization—how it works, what it can offer them, and how they can contribute to the success of serving the public of Nova Scotia.*

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# Measures of Success

The success of *Pride in the Public Service: A Strategy to Build Pride and Employee Engagement in the Nova Scotia Public Service* is critical to our organization's ability to meet its goals in this new and challenging economic environment.

The Public Service Commission will be tracking the objectives and actions set out in this three-year strategy to ensure we are making timely progress and are on course.

Below are specific indicators we will track and/or measure:

- Usage and effectiveness of programs and tools that support employee engagement.
- Implementation of National CSA standards for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace.
- Implementation of Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and Youth Strategy.
- Regular use of multi-communication channels for all communication strategies, employee networks, and communities of practice.
- Competencies aligned to known engagement behaviours.
- Demonstration of enhanced communication competencies.

- Demonstration of enhanced classification support.
- Revised recruitment and selection processes that are lean and responsive.
- Streamlined and timely classification and job evaluation processes and practices.
- Effective performance management practices.
- Increased participation in and satisfaction of orientation practices by eligible employees.
- Increased feeling of mutual respect, trust, and inclusivity.
- Increased satisfaction with
  - effective flow of communication in all directions
  - organizational support for learning and development
  - provision of tools, equipment, and information needed by employees to do their jobs well
  - job satisfaction and work culture

The key measure of success will be an elevated and sustainable level of employee engagement in a work environment in which employees feel their voices are heard and their unique experiences are valued. This will be reflected in the "How's Work Going?" survey.

# Looking Forward

Building a more engaged public service requires collaboration across our entire organization. This three-year strategy puts in place actions government leaders will be taking in partnership with employees, whose work and commitment we value every day.

Government leaders already have accountability for engagement in many areas. Departments are required to develop annual departmental engagement plans and progress reports, individuals have performance targets, and we have leadership competencies that help to define our accountability in areas such as diversity and intercultural proficiency, and effective interactive communication.

Other stakeholders are also critical to success. Government leaders will be encouraged to collaborate with unions, employee networks, and communities of practice to share ideas and initiatives that could contribute to employee engagement. In addition, we expect employees to participate in the engagement proposition.

The public service describes many different types of jobs and people in different roles, but we all have one goal: to make the Government of Nova Scotia the best public service organization in Canada.