

Citizen Focused Service Delivery in the Agricultural Sector



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Organisation: Service and Program Excellence Directorate, Agriculture and Agri-food Canada

Country: Canada

Level of government: Central government

Sector: Economic affairs

Type: Digital, Organisational Design, Public Service

Launched in: 2012

Overall development time: 2 year(s)

Link to the innovation's website

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Description

Citizen-focused Service and Programme Delivery: transforming the way Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) delivers services and programmes to the agriculture sector. Modernisation and red tape reduction in the administration of grants and contributions was the impetus for innovative thinking at AAFC. The focus of this initiative was on streamlining and simplifying programming, improving access to programme information and services, and providing timely delivery for clients transacting with the Department. Its results have improved AAFC's service delivery, created a more common and consistent recipient experience and lowered costs.

The initiative has included harmonising programmes; consolidating delivery; developing common departmental business processes and forms; and consolidating information points by creating a single website. It also includes the launch of a user-friendly web-based discovery tool, AgPal where users can find the programmes and services they need with a touch of a button.

Why the innovation was developed

- Departmental focus on service excellence.
 - As a response to observed inconsistencies.
 - As a response to feedback from clients and public surveys.
 - As a response to Government of Canada's Blue Ribbon Panel on Grants and Contributions Reform.
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Objectives

Develop staff capacity, Improve access, Improve efficiency, Improve service quality, Improve user satisfaction

- Consolidate non-business risk management programme offerings from 5 branches to a single, newly created Programmes Branch.
 - Harmonise programmes from 28 to 3.
 - Develop and implement common business processes, standard forms, templates and tools.
 - Reduce and simplify options and channels for communication with clients.
 - Partner with other providers of agricultural programmes and services in a shared online information portal.
 - Identify internal efficiencies and cost savings in programme delivery and administration.
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Main beneficiaries

Businesses, Government bodies, Government staff

- 250 programme recipients, including both individuals and organisations.
- 1000 transactions of various types between AAFC and representatives of the agriculture and agri-food industry in Canada.
- 20 000 visitors to the new AgPal website .

Results

Efficiency

- The reduction of programme spending approval requests to the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) from 28 to 3 has greatly reduced monitoring and reporting requirements.
 - There are fewer and more standard forms and processes throughout the project/programme lifecycle.
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Effectiveness

- Comments have been received on the improved effectiveness of accessing programme information through the AgPal portal versus the previous method of searching and reading through independent web pages for each federal and provincial programme looking for the one that fits a potential applicant's needs.
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Service quality

Accessibility:

- All content provided on AgPal meets rigorous standards for accessibility that may not have consistently existed across the many separate web pages of information previously providing such content.

Responsiveness:

- Anecdotally, reducing the number of 1-800 telephone lines for programme inquiries and creating a national call centre has improved the effectiveness in responding to potential applicant questions. Call centre operators are provided information to enable them to respond to most basic programme questions, resulting in answers from a first contact in many cases.

Other:

- Anecdotally, with the adoption of many standard forms and processes in the reduced number of programmes, applicants and recipients have a much more consistent experience dealing with AAFC regardless of the programme they are applying to. With this consistent experience come more consistent expectations, which are also more easily responded to by AAFC.
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User satisfaction

- Anecdotal evidence of increasing hits on the AgPal information portal indicate user adoption.

Development

Design

Planning staff were challenged to reduce the complexity of programmes across AAFC as part of the development of the 5-year programme policy framework to be implemented on 1 April 2013.

Service staff had also conducted client surveys, where results indicated clients wanted simplified information guiding them to potential programmes without needing to know if the programme was provincial or federal.

Programme management was challenged with looking for ways to streamline and standardise internal operations to increase efficiency in programme administration and create a more consistent client experience.

Design time: 6 month(s)

Testing

- Usability testing was conducted at different points in the development and launch of the different elements of this innovation. For example, as various standard input forms were developed, recipient focus groups were asked to review them and provide feedback. Usability testing continued for each client-focused element of the initiative.
- Provinces were brought onto AgPal individually so that the integration of their content and client experience accessing it could be tested alongside AAFC's. Surveys of users were conducted and beta testing of the AgPal web platform was completed as content was added.

Testing time: 6 month(s)

Implementation

Tools used:

- Interdepartmental partnership driven by client needs.
- Extending traditional partnerships with provinces and territories.
- Development of horizontal partnerships.

Implementation time: 1 year(s)

Partnerships

Other government departments and Canadian provinces: Newfoundland and Labrador; Nova Scotia; Ontario; Saskatchewan; British Columbia

Other Public Sector

AgPal was an impetus for the extension of a new type of interdepartmental partnership driven by client needs.

Likewise, existing traditional partnerships with provinces and territories expanded in a way designed to seamlessly meet client needs rather than by the jurisdiction of programme offerings.

Previously, programme policy development has been more siloed in its approach. With a goal to simplify both authorities and offerings, programme management and enabling teams worked together in new and horizontal ways.

The work to rationalise 1-800 phone lines and client support required the development of horizontal partnerships as well from structures that had previously been siloed by programme offerings.

Agreement on standard processes, authorities, forms and templates required active collaboration from all parties involved including AAFC programmes but also the horizontal enabling teams involved in many of the programme processes.

Without the collaboration of the Provinces, and other government departments and agencies that also have responsibilities for the delivery and administration of agricultural programmes and services, the one-stop information portal for Canadians, AgPal, would not have been possible.

Farm Credit Canada; Greener Pastures Ranching Ltd.

Other

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

- Public sector partnerships between different entities take time to develop and ongoing time to maintain and sustain.
 - Developing consensus on new standards requires in-depth understanding of programme context and existing processes.
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Conditions for success

- Supporting infrastructure for 1-800 line consolidation and information portal.
 - Alignment with Government of Canada policy.
 - Shared vision among leaders.
 - Consensus and leadership across programmes.
 - Determined change agents.
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Other information

AgPal, the one-stop information portal: www.agpal.ca