

Transformation of Employment Services in Nova Scotia - Nova Scotia Works

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Organisation: Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Advanced Education

Country: Canada

Level of government: Regional/State government

Sector: Economic affairs, Education

Type: Methods, Organisational Design, Partnerships, Public Service

Launched in: 2015

Overall development time: 2 year(s)

Link to the innovation's website

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Description

Labour and Advanced Education undertook a transformation effort to refocus their third-party employment services delivery system, using a collaborative approach with over 50 service delivery organizations. The result was the implementation of a transformed system that is efficient, effective and that meets the needs of Nova Scotians; that focuses on having the right skills to provide services to all Nova Scotians through a 'one-door approach'; that embodies principles of diversity and inclusion in their approach with clients and in their administration and governance; with a common brand that will be promoted and that will be recognized by Nova Scotians.

Status quo had an, ineffective delivery of services, in terms of its cost, design and results for end users. There wasn't equitable services for all Nova Scotians in the former/status-quo system; quality was by times lacking, and too many resources were being invested in the administration of the system.

The success of this initiative rested on the development and implementation processes undertaken, and, as such, it is a change model that could be used by many jurisdictions. As a recent local example of this, the province of Nova Scotia's Department of Health is about to undertake a similar change initiative and they are consulting with the Department of Labour and Advanced Education Transformation Project Team for best practices and approaches to use. The province of Prince Edward Island is moving into a design phase of their own employment services system and has been leaning on NS for lessons learned and best practices.

Why the innovation was developed

- Nova Scotia's employment support services, delivered by third-party service providers to communities in the province, had evolved organically over 15 + years. However, there were issues and opportunities in the system that needed to be addressed strategically.
 - Burgeoning administrative costs (53% of funding was for administrative costs)
 - Access was not equitable for people who needed specialized services
 - There were inconsistent services in the system and staff qualifications were not defined
 - Important components to the labour market equation, students and employers were not served specifically by the system.
 - A lack of awareness about the services available - 90% of job seekers that were polled had never heard of the employment supports available.
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Objectives

Develop staff capacity, Improve access, Improve effectiveness, Improve efficiency, Improve service quality, Improve social equity, Improve user satisfaction, Support economic growth

Main beneficiaries

Businesses, Ethnic or racial minorities, High-risk populations, Low-income groups, People with disabilities, Students, Young people

Results

Efficiency

- The implementation of re-designed client assessments that service providers use to assess client need and determine next steps with the client provided by Career Practitioner as front-line service versus waiting to see a Career Practitioner and then using the assessment has resulted in operational efficiencies for service providers. The objective with the enhancement of the assessments was better results for clients and their success, yet we have learned the changes have also led to efficiencies.
 - Administrative costs of the system were 53% of the total program budget and has been reduced to 30% through the restructuring that occurred by the service provider community..
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Effectiveness

- Expanded services to the business community through Employer Engagement Specialist roles in the system. Creating services for employers so they regard the NS Works centres to be a service for them creates a strong connection between job seekers and employers.
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Service quality

Accessibility:

- A virtual service delivery system is part of the transformation effort and various services are and will be expanded to be delivered through a number of virtual mediums, meaning you do not have to walk into a NS Works Employment Services Centre to access resources or support. This is particular important in the strategy to assist youth and their parents.
- One-door services - the previous system had organizations that were specialized (i.e. for mental health, persons with disabilities, African NS's, etc.) and it was often a challenge for a client to know who they should go to for support for employment, especially if perhaps their circumstances of challenges 'fit' in several categories. The new system is one-door for everyone - specialization is behind the scenes and clients go through one door to get the help they need from qualified practitioners. Inclusion and diversity is promoted and embraced.

Responsiveness:

- Employers are being contacted proactively by NS Works staff to find out what their employment/employee needs are and to assist them to find workers - through their existing clients or by assisting them with recruitment efforts. Employers are pleasantly surprised that this service is offered to them.

Reliability:

- Career Practitioner Certification - all Career Practitioners in the system need to have certification to be employed in the role and Career Counsellors must have proper designation to fill this position as well. The former system did not require this. The end result was an unreliable quality of service and a client could encounter inconsistent assistance in centre to centre.
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User satisfaction

- Youth were previously not part of the service delivery model and were, at times, even turned away at the doors of service providers in the previous model and this new system recognizes that we need to support career and employment development through the life of Nova Scotians. Youth are now receiving services with an expanded suite of offerings anticipated in the near future in partnership and collaboration with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Education.
- Career Practitioners have shared with us that they are more confident in the work they are doing and this is translating into greater client satisfaction.

Development

Design

The idea for the innovation rose from a combination of stakeholders and came from both those in the public service as well as from service provider partners who could also see the challenges and opportunities that the system had before itself. A great deal of the innovation itself (i.e. best practices, approaches taken, service delivery model ideas) came as result of the consultations that the department undertook with service providers, end users and public servants. The initiative was led by government and a dedicated transformation team in the Skills and Learning branch. Design time: 1 year(s)

Testing

- Testing of the service delivery model is occurring through implementation and the department and service delivery partners are committed to evolving elements of the model as it is implemented.
- We have built in intensive and continuous check-in and consultation throughout implementation and various stakeholder will continue to have input.

Testing time: 1 year(s)

Implementation

Tools used:

- A Diversity and Inclusion Framework was created to guide all those involved
- Universal Design Guides and approaches were developed Client Assessment Tools were defined and redeveloped and implemented across the system
- Having Career Practitioner Training & Certification was key to the service quality aspects of the model and was a 3 year process leading up to the implementation to the innovated service delivery model
- On-line learning through Skills Online was leveraged by partners An online portal was created to inform and engage the service provider community
- The Centre for Employment Innovation and Excellence (CEIE) was created to support the service provider system with career development expertise and to support on-going innovation. This was established via a third party/university
- New budget management approaches and tools were developed and implemented internally and externally

Resources used:

- A dedicated project team was created and supported by senior leadership in the department; a public servant Executive Lead managed the project; project management and business analysts were acquired through consultancy engagements from the private sector; public servants were brought together from a cross-section of divisions in the department to create a blend of skill sets in labour market, communications, facilitation, business development, career development, and management; subject-matter expertise was acquired from third-party service providers and dedicated to the project.
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Challenges and solutions

- Stakeholder resistance: used consultation, collaborative approach throughout the change, involved stakeholder in making decisions, applied proactive and intentional change management process and anticipated resistance and got out ahead of the issue
 - Internal staff resistance: changes to the delivery model meant changes to the way the public service would do its work, worked with the operations team to develop change management approaches
 - A stakeholder engagement & communication plan was developed and used through the project to inform a plethora of groups
 - Senior Officials Committee was actively involved - had a cross-government view
 - Resourcing the project was a challenge, couldn't add staff so pulled expertise from within
 - A solid business case for change - easy to justify decisions or work through change management challenges - stakeholders supported the model because of how it dealt with challenges and opportunities and it had been framed positively.
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Partnerships

Multiple partners

Academics and Research Bodies, Civil Society, Other Public Sector, Private sector

Partnered across the provincial government with other departments (such as Dept of Community Services, and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, various policy divisions related to specialized populations (persons with disabilities, aboriginal affairs, African Nova

Scotian affairs) and the 50 service providers across the province who were part of the previous service delivery model; the Nova Scotia Career Development Association (NSCDA).

Nova Scotia has always regarded the service providers in the system as 'partners' as opposed to a contractual relationship - their input and ideas have been key to service delivery excellence and the success of the model; the NSCDA has partnered with the department for several years to develop Career Practitioner Certification; cross-departmental partnering enabled the connection of various departmental strategies - reduced overlap, ensured strategies were in-sync with plans and objectives. Policy divisions provided context and expertise about key issues that needed to be considered as the model was being developed so as to serve specialized populations in ways that met their needs.

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

- Collaboration is key: involve the community.
 - A strong business case for change and transformation needs to be in place that includes the input, advice and guidance of all stakeholders.
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Conditions for success

- Senior leadership in the government department is required. In our case they were accessible and involved and supported the process from beginning to end; an appropriate project team with a dedicated project sponsor, leadership and the required expertise that can support and develop the project is instrumental in its success.
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Other information

We have heard from our service provider partners themselves, who have had to manage innumerable challenges and change throughout the process, that they have watched and researched employment services systems in other jurisdictions and feel that what has been developed in Nova Scotia is a best practice that they are proud to have been part of.

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