

New Models of Collaboration *A Guide for Managers*

Service Canada

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Abstract

As part of the research endeavor “New Models of Collaboration for Delivering Public Services,” selected projects were studied to analyze the cooperation model adopted, management practices used, and key success factors. Service Canada, a collaboration project involving thirteen federal departments and agencies under the direction of the Treasury Board Secretariat, was initiated in 1998, and is one of the innovative projects chosen for this study. The case study was conducted and written in 2001 by Lise Préfontaine Ph.D., Professor at the University of Quebec at Montreal in collaboration with Line Ricard Ph.D., Professor at the HEC at Montréal, Valéry Ramonjavelo, Research Assistant and Carole Maziade, Researcher.

Project Background

Historical Setting

The Government of Canada has always demonstrated a firm resolve to provide quality services for all Canadians. Yet a 1997 study on citizen satisfaction (Faye and Strickland, 1998) found a high level of dissatisfaction among Canadians with the public services provided by the federal government. The main complaint was difficulty in accessing services (44%), while 25% said they did not even know where to find the service they needed. Meanwhile many government departments were trying forms for electronic services or one-stop centres, but these fragmented and scattered attempts to modernize the delivery of public services reached few, if any, people.

Strategic Setting

At the same time, the Government of Canada announced a few of the priorities that would guide its actions in the Speech from the Throne (Government of Canada, 1999a). One of these was to ensure that all government services would be available electronically by 2004. Another priority and corollary of the first was to facilitate Internet access for all Canadians, whether living in urban or rural areas. The *Connecting Canadians*¹ program addressed this need. Lastly, a policy favouring the use of partnerships for planning and managing development projects had also been formulated by the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) in the Auditor General’s Report (Government of Canada, 1999b). Add to all this the fact that the vast majority of industrialized countries had already embarked on reinventing or at least modernizing their services, and the Canadian government had always played a leadership role on the world stage. Moreover, the country was enjoying a stable political climate and fast-growing economy. All of these factors fostered the quest for alternatives to the way in which federal public services were being delivered at the time, and the creation of a strategic development plan.

Institutional and Legal Setting

In 1998 the TBS was given a mandate to explore the options for adopting an integrated approach to the delivery of federal services in order to create a new image for the government, and to do so within two years. A working group was quickly formed and undertook a comprehensive study of

¹ See the website at <http://connect.gc.ca/en/.100-e.shtml> for more details.

the services offered with a view to proposing a strategic business plan for the Service Canada Initiative (SCI). It should be noted here that the TBS received another mandate along with the SCI, namely the Government On-Line Initiative (GOLI)², which aims to deliver public services on-line so that all citizens can interact with their government electronically. Although intrinsically connected, the two initiatives competed indirectly for resources.

The situation analysis done by the SCI team identified the basic federal government information services:

- The 1-800-O-Canada government call centre managed and run by Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC) supported by a database containing information on some 1,000 programs and services;
- The Blue Pages phonebook listings of government departments and agencies;
- The approximately 30 information kiosks set up by various departments and agencies, primarily Human Resources Development (HRDC);
- The 450 independently managed department and agency portals and websites;
- The approximately 413,000 brochures and forms published by nine departments and distributed through various channels.

The federal government was offering nearly 1,000 different programs and services at some 11,000 access points and 450 websites, and operating 170 call centres while spending a total of approximately \$1.6 billion on government information services. This was the starting-point (Service Canada Implementation Team, 1999). The challenge was all the greater because it meant integrating channels for which various departments were responsible.

The Service Canada Initiative

Mandate

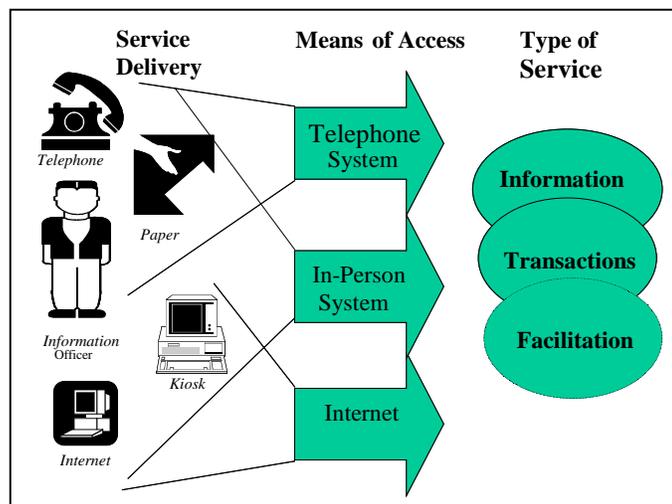
The Service Canada Initiative had a clear mandate: first, to prepare a development plan, then to implement the solutions proposed in the approved plan and, finally, to evaluate the experience. Remember that the SCI aimed to change the government's image by providing citizens with one-stop access to government services in a swift, reliable, accessible and less expensive manner, and that the project was at the experimental stage. The objective therefore was to establish and assess various innovative models for service delivery that subsequently could be extended to a region, group or all Canadians.

Five principles guided the work of the TBS working group to whom the mandate was assigned: 1) meet citizen needs and continuously improve service delivery; 2) integrate services through a one-stop centre; 3) offer a selection of other means of accessing the services; 4) support the transition to on-line service delivery; and 5) ensure the federal government's visibility and presence in every region of the country.

² See the initiative website at http://www.gol-ged.gc.ca/index_e.asp for more details.

A staff of about 20 was promptly assembled. Following the situation analysis, they designed an integrated service model (see Figure 1). The plan called for one service offered in three ways: by phone through the 1-800 O-Canada call centre; electronically through the Government of Canada website; and in person at access centres such as those already set up by HRDC, Canada Post and Canadian Heritage, for example. To facilitate access, services and programs are organized by clientele, special needs or concerns such as youth, seniors, hunting and fishing, lost wallets etc. Lastly, the focus was on integrating existing services rather than developing new ones, and this integration was to be achieved primarily through horizontal interdepartmental and interagency cooperation.

The proposal was quickly approved and the plan moved into the second phase of setting up a pilot project. This pilot project aimed at laying the groundwork for an integrated service network was allocated a \$13-million budget for fiscal 1999-2000. It was innovative in the sense that it proposed the development and integration of several delivery models instead of just one. For example, an agreement was signed with HRDC to add a government information dimension to the employment-related access centres it was already operating by means of additional personnel that would guide and assist citizens seeking information. Appendix 1 briefly describes the experiment of this nature carried out in Saguenay/Lac St-Jean. In Manitoba, six community centres were created through a partnership with the Government of Manitoba, Canadian Heritage, and a few municipalities and community organizations. Here too the formula was unique. These centres offer a range of services for Francophone communities locally in a wide range of fields such as health, culture, education, recreation, employment and local development. This project is described in Appendix 2. In New Brunswick, service centres run jointly with the province provide information for both levels of government. Another innovative model was the Café Jeunesse that opened in Montreal. Some 15 departments teamed up with HRDC to operate the Internet café, which provides access to various information services for youth in a variety of areas such as health, employment, education and sports. Guides assist the youth in their search for information. Appendix 3 briefly describes this service delivery model.



Source: Service Canada – Strategic Business Plan 1999-2000, p. 11.

Figure 1 Service Canada Delivery Model

Deliverables and Management Structure

Since the project was considered exploratory, the stages were brief and the deliverables clearly defined. Project management was the responsibility of the TBS Assistant Secretary, Service and Innovation. Those efforts were supported by the approximately 20-member SCI staff, and two committees, one for coordination and the other advisory. The Service Canada Coordination Committee was made up of representatives from 15 departments and handled strategic management, coordination, pilot project selection and evaluation, and communication. The Committee met at regular intervals, namely about four times a year. Service and Innovation also relied on the Advisory Committee on Service Improvement, a working group whose main concern was the offer of government services. This group was further backed by a forum of civil servants with a special interest in the delivery of public services. Alongside these committees were the federal councils that coordinate the regional activities of departments and agencies. They are made up of senior officials, generally Deputy Ministers or Regional Directors, representing each department active in the region. The councils, which were already in place when the SCI project got underway, focus on the regional characteristics of the areas they serve and try to orient federal policies and programs for the welfare of the community. In the case of the community centres for Manitoba's francophone communities described above, the Federal Council played a leading role in bringing some departments on board.

Achievement of the Integration Contract

The timeframe was short — scarcely two years — and there were big problems. At the outset, two major challenges were identified. Both were related to the culture prevalent within the government. First was the concept of “One size fits all”. Team members were convinced that a universal solution would be incapable of meeting the needs of all Canadians, even though they knew some countries such as Australia had successfully adopted that approach. In their view, the nature of the geographic, linguistic and cultural differences in Canada made it necessary to offer integrated yet customized service that takes into account the specific needs of all Canadians, particularly those in outlying and rural areas. The team's second challenge was convincing the various departments and agencies to work together. The idea of integrated government services was alien to the idea held by numerous departments and agencies that their services belonged to them, that they could manage them in keeping with their specific needs and that they did not have to submit to common rules. Also, some departments had developed an internal culture focused on services for citizens while others had done little along these lines.

It was not a matter of creating a new program for service delivery, but rather of exploring ways of developing existing structures into a new approach. Even with its very broad mandate, the project team was small and its resources limited; the project did not have a very high profile, particularly politically, which hampered it somewhat. While some partners wanted a precise, firm orientation, the project team defined itself more as a support group, and sought to stimulate rather than initiate projects. The pilot project took the form of a request to all. Diversity and personalized responses were encouraged. But this broad leeway given to the partners complicated matters slightly because the partners were looking for a clearly defined direction and more precise objectives. Service Canada was acting somewhat like a franchiser with its partners: it set the standards (accessibility, bilingualism, security) while making the partners responsible for service delivery. The result was a certain degree of dissociation between strategy and operations.

Despite the odd misunderstanding and inconsistency, the project quickly won the approval of numerous backers; they liked the idea of customized services and many regions across Canada viewed it as a genuine effort by Ottawa to get closer to the people and meet their specific needs. In scarcely two years, the team developed the integration concept and actively participated in establishing 122 access centres across the country. It did this by negotiating and signing 21 memoranda of understanding (MOU) with 13 federal partners. The Government of Canada website was completely reorganized and provided support for the information officers in access centres as well as people accessing it directly. Lastly, the group convinced Public Works to redesign its database for the 1-800 service and make it accessible to non-government personnel working in the access centres.

Technology

Technology played an important role in this project by providing an infrastructure for remote access at little cost to the taxpayer. Moreover, it provided very efficient support for the personnel responsible for providing information in person at the various access centres. In fact, these employees often find the information and support they need at the Canadian government's website, newly organized by subject area.

But it was not all high-tech, especially when it came to integrating the various call centres. In fact, the 1-800 basic service provides front-line information, but if someone needs specialized information, calls cannot be transferred to the appropriate department with the existing infrastructures. Although the technology is there, the costs are exorbitant. At the website, the development of electronic forms also proved problematic because it took longer than expected and because of the transactional security difficulties that arose. Telephone support for citizens accessing the government website also ran into problems even though the project provided voice support for lost visitors. Lastly, remote access from very distant regions was often completely missing or highly costly. Even where Internet access was available, not everyone could use it for lack of computer literacy. And when services are available, they are all too often piecemeal with little integration. It should be noted, however, that these problems are endemic to all efforts to develop service portals and not just to the project under discussion.

Project Partners

Treasury Board Secretariat and SCI Team

This was a small team of some 20 people at most, but they shared the same vision and commitment to developing a citizen-focused approach. Their goal can be summed up as wanting to change the government's approach to service delivery from inside-out to outside-in; in other words, adopt an approach focused on the client's needs rather than departmental or agency objectives. SCI team members were part of the Service and Innovation division, specially created within the TBS to explore ways of improving the delivery of government services

The team members were selected for their extensive public service experience and ability to manage change. The first dark cloud that loomed over this project was their high turnover rate.

As experienced, seasoned managers, they were often earmarked for other positions that some ended up accepting. The second came from the ambiguity surrounding the TBS's dual role of controller and entrepreneur, at least with this project.

Other Partners

There were numerous federal partners: Public Works and Government Services Canada, Human Resources Development Canada, Canadian Heritage, Canada Post, Industry Canada, Agriculture Canada, Citizenship and Immigration, Canada Information Office, Revenue Canada and a few others. Two played a key role in the project. The first was Public Works, which runs the 1-800 call centre, has the database on all government services, and manages the government's website. This department has very broad responsibilities in the realm of government services and its power is widely known. HRDC was the second major player because it already possessed a large network of in-person access centres and, over the years, had developed extensive experience in providing client services. Because of management problems that received wide media coverage, HRDC adopted a rather low-key role in the project and did not try to exercise any type of leadership whatsoever.

The SCI project also had other levels of government as partners, namely several provincial governments (New Brunswick, Manitoba, British Columbia and the Northwest Territories) and a few local governments. In addition, there were also community groups and a few nonprofit organizations (NPOs). The number of partners was very large, which did not fail to complicate cooperative relations.

Collaboration Process

The number of partners, fuzzy lines of authorities and experimental nature of the project were all factors that had an impact on cooperation among the partners. One project team member interviewed put the problem this way: "You have to learn to exercise leadership in a peer group." The SCI team tried to attract participants to the project, but its real power was limited to that of its role within the government and persuasion. The involvement of partners was a function of their perception of the project going well, and it only went well if they cooperated, creating a vicious circle that was hard to break out of. The collaboration process therefore was a slow and somewhat painful one.

The fact that the project came under the TBS created some discomfort among participating organizations because many of the partners viewed the Secretariat as a controlling body rather than development agency. The TBS's authoritative role became hard to overlook, and this tempered the behaviour of the partners, who dared not complain too much, make demands or take initiatives. The implementation team was keenly aware of this problem and strove for a means of governance that would give the project greater stability in the years ahead.

In addition, the personnel assigned to the project had a high turnover rate. The same thing also occurred with the partners such that relations established at a first meeting could unfortunately not be carried on at the second. This high turnover rate was partly related to public service

personnel management practices, which in turn inflated the costs associated with recruitment and training. But the uncertainty surrounding the project's future also came into play.

Cooperation among members of the Service Canada Coordination Committee also had its ups and downs. Initially, the turnover rate of Committee members and their inadequate decision making level slowed the work down somewhat, but various departments soon realized the importance of active participation in the efforts. The group gradually became more efficient and effective in managing the project even though at times the centralist mindset of some gave off the musty odour of the silo culture that had dominated public organizations in recent decades. In fact, at the outset, the departments were more concerned with the quality of services they were providing. Many departments and agencies had already developed a client-focused approach, but it was focused more on "their client" and, in fact, "the service" they provided for that client. As one interview subject put it, "Departmental officials serve two clients: the public and their Minister! And neglecting either is unforgivable."

Subsequently, the spirit on the coordinating bodies evolved. Attitudes changed as the key players tried creating more forums to foster horizontal cooperation. At one point, the partners even ended up sharing the same objectives, which represents a significant learning experience! Yet they lacked the common tools to cooperate fully. Missing, for example, were formal mechanisms for cooperation, especially agreements, as well as government recognition of cooperative efforts in terms of both resource allocation and partner accountability.

Since the accountability mechanisms had scarcely changed, cooperation created a few problems in this area. While the MOUs spelled out each partner's responsibilities, there were virtually no systems for transferring funds. In addition, the cooperative process itself, while costly, was not funded. Lastly, signing agreements with third parties became especially problematic because many community agencies refused to be accountable to the government in order to remain independent of public authorities.

Though a large distance physically separated implementation team members from the front lines, relations always remained cordial. The team closed much of the gap through visits, information exchanges, the supply of materials, management guides, as well as training and evaluation sessions. Genuine communication based on frankness, honesty and respect had to be established with each partner, and this took up a great deal of time. The same atmosphere of trust was also essential for the implementation team to function smoothly. The SCI Director played a key role in this regard. He defined himself as a coach who had to manage his own weaknesses and motivate his team, particularly by giving recognition to efforts and successes. His enthusiasm quickly spread to the team.

Managing the political dimension of SCI was more difficult. Even though the two projects were related, GOLI, which pursued the development of an electronic channel for service delivery (the website), was the main focus of attention and concern. GOLI had a high profile that gave it access to funding and drew the interest of politicians. Meanwhile the SCI project's low political profile meant fewer funds guaranteed for a very short term, a factor that tended to undermine the morale of the troops! This created a certain sense of insecurity that dampened the spirit of many and apparently also led to the departure of a few implementation team members. Make no mistake about it, however, despite the handful of problems described above, the partners and, more specifically, the personnel involved in the various regions were motivated by and

enthusiastic about the project and concept of providing integrated, personalized government services for citizens based on their needs and even the region where they lived. In particular, the cooperation in setting up the access centres was almost exemplary, creating bottom-up pressure within the government hierarchy. Field personnel were often seen clamouring for more! There were community networks in many regions, and many had taken things in hand so that the SCI simply had to furnish support and help them create coalitions with local partners as well as provide funding so that they could attain their objectives.

Performance

Project and Collaboration Performance

The SCI was a success in terms of what it accomplished in such a short time span and client satisfaction. Clients used one or another of the channels much more often and said they were rather satisfied with the services provided. A recent survey³ found a 51% satisfaction rate with federal government services in general — a 4% increase over the results of the same survey two years earlier. As for the level of service usage, the Service Canada Strategic Implementation Plan⁴ contains the following statistics:

- In 1999-2000 the Canada website had 38 million hits, which represents a 79% increase. Officials responded to 12,000 emails, 70% of which were requests for general information. Lastly, 60% of clients expressed satisfaction with the service.
- During the same period, 1-800-O-Canada calls climbed by 32%. A breakdown of this clientele reveals that Quebec accounted for the largest increase and that 49% of the calls came from rural areas (a 21% rise in these calls since 1999).
- The in-person access centres also experienced dazzling growth as 122 centres were opened in the provinces and Northwest Territories. They received 60,000 visitors, most of whom (75%) required assistance.

On a more general level, the three channels were integrated gradually with a training plan backing deployment of the access centres; the Canada website now has 35 integrated subject areas and the 1-800 call centre database has been redesigned. Some 21 MOUs were signed with 13 sponsoring departments and agencies to set up 122 access centres. In the regions, SC gave citizens an incredible opportunity to become involved in their own development by providing human, financial and information resources, yet mainly by mapping out an integration model and supporting it. Many seized the opportunity.

The project also led to substantial learning about horizontal cooperation. By raising problems such as accountability for results, the costs attached to horizontal coordination and the lack of a regulatory framework for agreements with third parties, the SCI sparked a debate that made all participants aware of the need to develop a more formal regulatory framework for partnerships between government departments and agencies. The experience shows the key players in

³ Institute of Public Administration, *Citizens First 2000*, Toronto, 2001.

⁴ Government of Canada, *Strategic Plan for Service Canada Implementation 2001-02 to 2003-04*, November 2000.

delivering government services attempting cooperation and becoming convinced of its value. The only missing ingredient was a tangible means to go all-out.

The evaluation report was tabled on October 18, 2001, followed by a Cabinet brief in the fall for guidance on the future of the Initiative.

Project Benefits

The development phase was a tremendous learning experience for the team as mentioned in its strategic business plan⁵. It developed invaluable knowledge in terms of:

- The requirements for setting up an integrated multichannel network;
- The real need for one-stop service centres across Canada;
- The necessity of a citizen-focused approach;
- The need for close ties to GOL, the other initiative underway at the TBS;
- The importance of establishing a horizontal coordination mechanism to integrate policy, operations, and communication functions.

The team therefore embarked on a consolidation phase in the development of Service Canada, an innovative approach because it aims to create an integrated one-stop network with multiple channels for accessing government services, takes into consideration the fundamental differences among Canadians and provides customized solutions for each and every one.

⁵ Development Phase Report 1999/2000.

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Appendix 1 – SC Access Centre at Alma in Saguenay-Lac St-Jean

In Quebec, seven Service Canada centres were created in association with Human Resources Development Canada: Gaspé, St-Hyacinthe, Repentigny, Mont-Laurier, Alma, Drummondville and Café Jeunesse. While these centres all offer a set of common services, the list nonetheless varies with the size of the centre and region concerned. Examples of specific initiatives undertaken at these centres include:

- The assignment of personnel to the road to meet with organizations, employers and various groups (a Mont-Laurier initiative);
- A postcard sent to all homes to promote the centre in Drummondville;
- The involvement of 13 departments in setting up Café Jeunesse;
- Group facilitation and training sessions carried out in association with the Human Resources Information Centre;
- Production of a promotional video and information capsules for community television by the Alma bureau.

With all the projects carried out in Quebec, officials emphasized that the harsh political climate of federal-provincial relations had some impact on acceptance of the SCI project. The two governments regularly wrangle over jurisdiction and, in some parts of Quebec and with some groups of people, the federal government is not always welcome! The in-person access centres also encountered problems experienced in other regions across Canada. For example, the problems with Public Works and Government Services database access and security arose because some community groups provided part of the services and needed access to information traditionally available only to federal civil servants. The limited computer literacy of many people, more so in rural than urban areas, also meant providing more support; navigating the Canada website was not also considered easy. Lastly, the atmosphere of questioning HRDC program management and insecurity surrounding SCI short-term renewals apparently made many employees fearful of losing their jobs.

The Canada Human Resources Centre (CHRC) at Alma in the Saguenay-Lac St-Jean region is under the jurisdiction of the Jonquière regional office. The director of the office was the one who took charge of the SC project. The project was very well received because it meshed with the turnaround underway at the Department, which was abandoning some employment-related activities and redefining its mission in terms of informing, supporting and assisting citizens in their efforts to improve community development. The approach favoured by HRDC is one of relational rather than transactional type service, as administrative tasks can now be done more quickly with computers. Service Canada provided an opportunity to add another information tool to the existing one. The CHRC in Alma already had a number of projects underway with the HRICs (Human Resources Information Centres to help job-seekers), CACs (Community Access Centers) and Ambassadeur (a regional development project; see separate case study), and all of these projects were complementary.

After consultation with employees, a team was formed from among the volunteers and a coordinator took the helm. SC was set up in a local semi-rural community, Alma. The six assistance officers there received training in SC and two were assigned directly to the new

service. All expressed tremendous interest in this new orientation to their work — becoming information brokers and providing guidance for citizens who needed it.

A person who approaches the CHRC about an employment-related problem is given a brief information session on federal programs and services. The officials also meet with various groups upon request, or after proposing meetings they consider worthwhile. Lastly, they provide additional services such as CV preparation, training in job-hunting or how to use a computer or fax machine. The employees interviewed appreciated the job enrichment that came with the introduction of SC. “We’re doing marketing,” said one of them very proudly. The contacts and relations they develop with community groups will enable them to expand the clientele they reach. The coordinator even prepared a guide of proper addresses organized by needs that has proven very useful for everyone, both officials and citizens.

In terms of cooperation, project participants underscored the large number of partners: the TBS, HRDC with its national arm and regional branches, Economic Development Canada, Industry Canada and a few other departments, not to mention community groups. This did not make the job any easier. Project evaluation was also a problem because, after not receiving any clear instructions from SCI, they first tried to develop their own evaluation tools only to find themselves later required to use a national questionnaire. Regional consultation was still minimal. SCI publicity also sparked some disagreement because they would very much have liked to see the service receive more.

As a result of all the delays, the service had only been in operation a few months when this research was done. Despite this short timespan, HRDC personnel involved with the project are unanimous in considering the experience an outright success that meets local needs. How do they see the future of SC? First, they would like to be able to propagate the Alma experience at the five other CHRCs in the region. And even though it was a “strict agreement with local flavouring”, they all appreciated the opportunity provided by SC to develop customized service for their fellow citizens.

Appendix 2 – Community Centres for Francophone Communities in Manitoba

This project fits into the broad movement of Francophone communities taking control of municipal, school, economic and social management. These communities are facing a number of problems such as the exodus of the young, a shortage of jobs, lack of training, and often distance from urban centres and therefore resources capable of helping them.

Provincial Bill 41 on French-language services, inspired by the Chartier Report, aims to shatter the isolation of Francophone groups by providing them with services in French within the community, and by creating special units to provide these services because the report clearly signals the imbalance of bilingual positions added at service centres in English-speaking communities. These conclusions were also largely supported by the Delotte and Touche report commissioned by the Economic Development Council of the municipalities, which points to the need to develop the economic thinking and business skills of community members. The Fontaine report submitted to the federal government reaches a similar conclusion on the necessity of customized services for these minority groups.

The SCI therefore fit perfectly into Manitoba where several groups backed by the provincial government were looking for means to carry out their project, namely provide government services where people lived with respect for their culture and language, and do all this proactively. Given the shortage of funds, the arrival of a new player in the form of the federal government was welcome. The players were now in place: first, the Manitoba government serving as project leader, then the federal government represented by the Federal Council, whose most active representative turned out to be Canadian Heritage, the municipalities involved including the City of Winnipeg and, lastly, the established community groups. The hiring of a project manager to implement the plan for the creation of community centres by Service Canada was the catalyst that got the initiative off the ground.

The concept of access centres was quickly developed — a sort of shopping mall for federal, provincial, municipal government and community services. There would be six of them serving the main Francophone centres in the province, including St-Boniface (now Winnipeg) and Notre-Dame de Lourdes. All the partners in a centre formed an alliance: they shared the same premises, some pooled reception services and costs in proportion to the space occupied. The objective, however, was not simply cost-sharing, but rather to build a critical mass of services to revitalize the community. For this, the policy adopted in dealing with citizens was to “go the extra mile”, i.e., provide more information than was requested.

The cooperative process then ran into a few problems. At the federal level, while the Federal Council clearly had good intentions, decisionmaking at the operational level greatly dampened everyone’s enthusiasm. Differences between federal and provincial standards concerning access to the centres and building occupancy were hard to reconcile. Finally, a harmonization committee was formed to develop a structure for the centres as well as operating plans and policies. Meanwhile a coordinating committee focused on the building-related problems. Lastly, a board of directors was formed to manage the six planned centres with a management committee made up of representatives of the tenant organizations responsible for running each

centre. The latter met regularly and held training and brainstorming sessions to map out common spheres of action.

As regards Service Canada, participants said they received good support but complained about the constant turnover in personnel that made cooperation, if not more difficult, at least longer to establish. Service Canada provided the centres with all kinds of information, but the team still lacked coordination mechanisms to learn the needs and expectations of the local management teams. Moreover, the SC implementation team had problems monitoring the projects which, once launched, soon reached cruising speed. This wait for policies that would enable them to proceed undoubtedly tried the patience of the Manitoban participants.

Community centre officials were all given the same training and formed ties as evidenced by frequent telephone conversations; they helped each other gain a better understanding of government services and meet special demands. Since the centres were in the start-up phase, they used downtime to learn more through the Government of Canada website. The information officers saw their role as proactive: they offered citizens help and promoted the service among community organizations. They also wrote a monthly column for the local newspaper, answered the phone and met with clients. If, for example, a student group announced a visit, they provided the group with information about education, scholarships and bursaries, summer jobs, drugs or anything else of interest to youth.

Everyone agrees on pointing to the experimental nature of the project, yet they all say they are enthralled by the concept. The people who so far have taken advantage of their services were first surprised to find someone from the government offering them help and delighted with it. Citizens went there to pay their taxes or a fine, or even to change their library book. They see the computer, the official, the posters and they come closer. That's the starting-point...

Among the main problems encountered to date, the persons interviewed cited:

- The scant publicity given to the Service Canada concept;
- The project's very short-term planning, which depends on renewals of SC's mandate;
- The difficulty developing a common program for all the partners;
- The absence of a financing structure;
- The very identity of the community centres and, more specifically, the SC officials.

At the time when this study was done, two centres were already in operation and preparations were actively underway to open the others. Several federal departments that initially displayed no interest are now backtracking and asking for information about the project. The experiment looks promising. In other centres where a computer is installed with no support, nobody uses it. The concept of a community service centre is innovative: "We're convinced that a collaborative approach is necessary and, in Manitoba, we have a cooperative culture!" says the project manager.

Appendix 3 – Café jeunesse de Montréal

Can we do more for young people? This question asked by the executive director of youth employment centres in the Montreal area led, two years later, to the opening of Café Jeunesse de Montréal. Following a youth survey, two employees came up with the idea of a centre where all youth services would be represented. The project was first submitted to Human Resources Development Canada, which agreed to sponsor it.

The Café jeunesse project was next presented to an interdepartmental panel representing 13 federal departments, organizations and agencies. The objective then became to reach an agreement on the creation of a one-stop centre for youth services. At the same time, the Service Canada Initiative was looking for experiments in delivering public services and guaranteeing a financial base.

Café jeunesse de Montréal, which opened in April 2000, gives young people between the ages of 18 and 35 unlimited free Internet access for occupational or useful purposes such as job-hunting, education, health and other information. The site chosen in the Quartier Latin, surrounded by the CEGEP de Vieux Montréal and UQAM, the NFB and Cinémathèque québécoise, is perfect. The Café receives an average of 40 visitors a day, and has peak periods when the number climbs as high as 150 youths. The objective is to meet the needs of the clientele and promote federal government services “without waving the flag!”, as the director puts it. Occasionally, the premises are also loaned for departmental recruiting campaigns. A young person who visits the Café shows their ID, after which a computer is unlocked for them. A guide is on hand to answer questions and help the youth if necessary, but the young are independent and many prefer to do their own searching without help. If the guide does not have the answer or if the resources capable of helping the youth are not part of the federal government, the young person is steered towards the appropriate services.

The Café has five employees, including two part-timers who serve as counsellors for the youth who drop in. A few people also work on special projects. They are all HRDC personnel. A plan for converting a student job into a regular one was even established with the Public Service Commission so that a student employee could join the public service upon graduation.

As with many projects, even though the departments agree to cooperate, the very nature of that cooperation depends on the representative chosen to serve on the working committees. Some, more open, energetically plunged into the project while others put on the brakes by constantly citing rules and procedures. In general, the meetings were very lively, especially when preparing documentation and information. Subcommittees were formed and the preparations for opening the Café were completed. The interdepartmental panel is not at a stage where it has to review its role and the project management mechanisms to provide it with longer-term funding. Some favour the creation of a board of directors with about five members backed by an interdepartmental panel made up of resource-persons from the various departments and agencies.

The Café regularly conducts surveys to assess user satisfaction. It stands at about 90%, which is much higher than the rates report for other government services. In many cases, respondents who

notice the named “Service Canada” on the evaluation form are surprised to learn they are dealing with a federal agency.

With its mission redefined, the Café now serves as a one-stop youth centre for information intended for youth. It is also a meeting place for departments that want to reach out to young people. Lastly, the Café serves as an employment centre for summer jobs. An orientation based on environmentalist values has also been adopted, and the arts are promoted there by incorporating exhibitions by young Montreal artists.

Even though its employees are assured of a permanent job, the future of the Café is tied to HRDC which provides coordination and much of the funding. The youth website is not yet integrated with other government services and its interface is not uniform like that of other government information sites. Direct contact with Service Canada is now being pursued.