

## EVALUATION IN THE PROVINCES AND TERRITORIES – A CROSS-CANADA EXAMINATION (New Brunswick)

The research objective was to understand the demand for and use of systematic evaluation in New Brunswick (NB) in 2017. The analysis was based on a triangulation of data drawn from structured interviews and observations. Key informant interviews were conducted in 2016-2017 with representatives from the Government of New Brunswick's (GNB) Executive Council Office (ECO), New Brunswick Social Policy Research Network (NBSPRN)<sup>1</sup>, Office of the Provincial Auditor General, and selected Departmental Deputy Ministers (e.g. Justice, Attorney General, and Public Safety). A systematic scan of GNB web pages was conducted for publicized evaluations, other evaluation reference documentation, and the GNB Telephone Directory for positions with "evaluation" in the job title. The questions that framed the interviews included:

- How would you assess the current use of systematic evaluation by your provincial government – High? Medium? Low?
- Where it exists, is evaluation primarily concentrated in a small number of ministries? Or, generally across most provincial ministries?
- What is the nature of the evaluation that gets carried out – formative? Summative? Both?
- What are the biggest challenges or capacity gaps for the conduct and use of evaluation in your provincial public service – (i) Demand-side challenges (for example, acceptance of evaluation as a needed tool for public sector governance)? Or, Supply-side challenges (for example, too few trained evaluators)? Or, Other (for example, no budget for evaluation)?
- What are the opportunities for advancing the use of evaluation in the provincial public sector?

### Current Situation (2017)

On an income per capita basis, Canada's only official bilingual province (less than the size of the city of Ottawa) was among the poorest. More positively, the Conference Board of Canada ranked NB favourably in 2017 with respect to low-income inequality, low crime rates, and high life satisfaction. With an aging population, declining birth rates and shrinking labour force, poverty and youth unemployment remained social concerns in 2017.<sup>2</sup>

The Canadian Evaluation Society's NB Chapter had 26 members, including 4 Credentialed Evaluators in 2017, compared to 19 members and 3 Credentialed Evaluators in 2019.<sup>3</sup> Approximately one-third

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.policyresearchnetwork.ca>

<sup>2</sup> Conference Board of Canada

[https://www.google.ca/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKewiB\\_4PWI-niAhURTd8KHcSICNQQFjAAegQIARAB&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.conferenceboard.ca%2Fpress%2Fnewsrelease%2F17-04-05%2FNew\\_Brunswick\\_Top-Ranked\\_Province\\_on\\_Conference\\_Board\\_of\\_Canada\\_s\\_Report\\_Card\\_on\\_Social\\_Performance.aspx&usg=AOvVaw1sSEzKDTJM7ND2DaXodw8b](https://www.google.ca/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKewiB_4PWI-niAhURTd8KHcSICNQQFjAAegQIARAB&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.conferenceboard.ca%2Fpress%2Fnewsrelease%2F17-04-05%2FNew_Brunswick_Top-Ranked_Province_on_Conference_Board_of_Canada_s_Report_Card_on_Social_Performance.aspx&usg=AOvVaw1sSEzKDTJM7ND2DaXodw8b)

<sup>3</sup> See CES Annual Reports for 2016/17, 2017/18 and 2018/19.

<https://www.google.ca/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=6&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKewiLkfvkmeniAhVlQ6wKHexRDZkQFjAFegQICBAB&url=https%3A%2F%2Fevaluationcanada.ca%2Fnews%2F7814&usg=AOvVaw1tOHuy2sUorJMik0sg9aD>

of CES-NB members in 2017 were either employed by the provincial or federal government (e.g. Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency - ACOA). One-third worked in the private sector, with the remainder in the social sector. The province is home to 4 universities and 3 colleges. Funding was provided to universities for 'applied evaluative research' (e.g. youth mental health conducted by University of New Brunswick (UNB) Health and Education Group<sup>4</sup>), however few academics across departments (e.g. sociology, psychology, social work) were CES members. No post-secondary degrees or certificates were offered in evaluation, however GNB supported public servants pursuing Six Sigma certificates with UNB's (College of Extended Learning - UGotClass Online Certificates and Courses: "Skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century").

In 2015, the GNB work force was approximately 45,000 employees, managing more than \$8.6 billion in government programming. The conduct and use of program evaluation in 2017 was low. Over time, GNB fiscal restraint efforts has stripped away both policy and evaluation capacity. In 2017, no central GNB evaluation policy existed. There were no evaluation plans or budget strategies. Few GNB evaluations were conducted. Meager evaluation resources were available in a limited number of GNB ministries (education, health, social development, justice and public safety). There was no evaluation oversight within the Executive Council Office (GNB-ECO). Department Deputy Ministers (DMs) decided on the need for and/or merits of program evaluation. When conducted, external consultants undertook mainly summative evaluations. Neither the studies nor management responses were ever made public. Some evaluations of shared Federal/Provincial programs were accessible, but mainly via Federal Government web page(s).

Since 2015, the ethos within GNB focused on "return on investment". The use of DMAIC methodology (**D**efine, **M**easure, **A**nalyze, **I**mprove and **C**ontrol) was advocated. Compared to evaluation, significantly more GNB resources were allocated to Audit, Balance Score Card, Lean 6 Sigma and 'Deliverology'.<sup>5</sup> Efficiency trumped effectiveness.<sup>6</sup> Since 2004, the Provincial Auditor General has underscored the importance of program evaluation as a means to improve

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[https://www.google.ca/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiLkvfkmehAhVlQ6wKHexRDZkQFjAAegQlABAB&url=https%3A%2F%2Fevaluationcanada.ca%2Fnews%2F9597&usg=AOvVaw0\\_TtkyDvTdkuExpCxz\\_K6z](https://www.google.ca/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiLkvfkmehAhVlQ6wKHexRDZkQFjAAegQlABAB&url=https%3A%2F%2Fevaluationcanada.ca%2Fnews%2F9597&usg=AOvVaw0_TtkyDvTdkuExpCxz_K6z)

<https://www.google.ca/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&ved=2ahUKEwiLkvfkmehAhVlQ6wKHexRDZkQFjABegQlAxAB&url=https%3A%2F%2Fevaluationcanada.ca%2Fnews%2F11306&usg=AOvVaw2Ikzp6C1ezX5d3wPJObBbe>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/h-s/pdf/en/MentalHealth/our-story.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> According to the NB government website: "The government is delivering improved, faster and less costly programs and services by using Lean Six Sigma's result-oriented, data-driven approach that helps identify and sustain improvements within organizations. The process improvement methodology focuses on increasing client satisfaction while eliminating waste and variation from processes. Lean Six Sigma practices have been successfully used by governments, health care authorities and major private sector organizations throughout North America.

[https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/executive\\_council/excellence/content/lean\\_six\\_sigma.html](https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/executive_council/excellence/content/lean_six_sigma.html)

<sup>6</sup> See NB Government [https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/executive\\_council/excellence.html](https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/executive_council/excellence.html) "New Brunswick's public service has undertaken a profound cultural change that has increased efficiency and accountability, improved services to the public, streamlined administration, and seen [continuous improvements](#) across the provincial government. This is leading to a more focused workplace, and more efficient and affordable services for New Brunswickers".

accountability and public results reporting. See Auditor General of New Brunswick's 2004 report on *Program Evaluation in Government Departments*.<sup>7</sup>

## Looking Ahead

The biggest challenges going forward center on the level of evaluation knowledge, attitudes and practice (KAP). Greater GNB awareness of what program evaluation entails, and its merits, is required (knowledge). Evaluation's value-added is generally not well understood. Hence, opinions (attitudes) and subsequent GNB evaluation demand and utilization in public sector governance (practice) are shaped accordingly. While increased GNB support is needed, little suggests that this trend will soon reverse, despite the continual back and forth changes between Conservative and Liberal governments since 2003. Currently, a Conservative government is in place (2018).

For fresh thinking to emerge, a change of values and priorities is required, with greater emphasis on program effectiveness, transparency, knowledge transfer and learning, CES membership, professional development (capacity building) and Credentialed Evaluation designations. There have been occasions for optimism. For example, the 2016 merged department of Justice and Public Safety (divided again in 2018) did encourage evaluation membership. The Department did embark on its first evaluation and drafted its first departmental evaluation framework in 2017. Neither, unfortunately, was ever made public. More recently, UNB's Institute for Research Data and Training (NB-IRDT) and SPOR Network in Primary Integrated Health Care Innovation (NB PIHCI) hosted an evaluation workshop on "Collaborative Evaluation Planning" (May, 21-22, 2019). A professional evaluator facilitated the workshop, but no mention was made in UNB's announcement to either Canadian Evaluation Society or the provincial Chapter (CES-NB).<sup>8</sup>

With few visible signs on the horizon, one can only speculate on what might be possible. Community strength may reside in chapter cooperation, and harmonized actions to address shared challenges. Coordinated communications among Atlantic CES Chapters to wider audiences is an option. The publication of joint op-ed pieces in local and regional newspapers is another. Atlantic CES chapters could also host combined evaluation webinars, targeting provincial government ECO officials. Partnerships with Atlantic universities could be better leveraged. Meta-evaluative research could be jointly conducted on topics of mutual interest to decision-makers. Being visible at university job fairs and advocating for 'evaluation as a vocation' is not beyond the imaginable. Information sessions could be convened with Departmental Deputy Ministers. The not-for-profit community (e.g. United Way, public policy research institutes - e.g. NBSPR; Donald J Savoie Institute<sup>9</sup>) and others are potential CES partners. Finally, the Provincial Auditor General(s) can be a significant CES friend in supporting messaging on accountability and improved results reporting.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gnb.ca/oag-bvg/2004v2/chap6e.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://blogs.unb.ca/myunbnews-s-fr/2019/05/NB-IRDT-and-the-NB-PIHCI-Network-are-pleased-to-announce-an-Evaluation-Workshop--facilitated-by-professional-evaluator--Marla-Steinberg-FR1.php>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.google.ca/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=2ahUKewiMnO-FpeniAhVDT6wKHUbmDXYQFjAAegQIBxAD&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.idjs.ca%2Fen%2F&usg=AOvVaw1KfuH7-wqoBPs-ucToED6R>