



# **EVALUATION**

**CANADA BUSINESS SERVICE  
CENTRES in western Canada**

**July 2002**



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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

<b>AB</b>	Alberta
<b>BC</b>	British Columbia
<b>BIS</b>	Business Information System
<b>BSA</b>	Business Start-up Assistant
<b>CBSC</b>	Canada Business Service Centre
<b>CCG</b>	Centre for Collaborative Government
<b>CFIB</b>	Canadian Federation of Independent Business
<b>CMT</b>	Common Measurement Tools
<b>CRM</b>	Customer Relationship Management
<b>EFF</b>	Effectiveness
<b>FTE</b>	Full Time Equivalent
<b>GOL</b>	Government On-line
<b>MB</b>	Manitoba
<b>ODLIS</b>	Online Dictionary of Library and Information Science
<b>REACH</b>	Regional Economic Access and Community Help
<b>SB</b>	Small Business
<b>SBINA</b>	Small Business Information Needs Assessment (Survey)
<b>SK</b>	Saskatchewan
<b>SME</b>	Small and medium-sized enterprise
<b>TQM</b>	Total quality management
<b>WDAE</b>	Western Economic Diversification Canada, Audit & Evaluation Branch

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## 1.0 EVALUATION PURPOSE

Western Economic Diversification Canada, Audit and Evaluation Branch (WDAE), retained the Macleod Institute to carry out an evaluation of the Canada Business Service Centres (CBSCs) in the four western provinces. WDAE defined the purpose of the evaluation by saying it will “provide senior management with an independent examination and assessment of the CBSCs, advising on their relevance, success and effectiveness.” (Terms of Reference, Appendix A)

## 2.0 METHODOLOGY

The Macleod Institute applied a methodology that is consistent with the *National Evaluation Framework*. Eight research questions were framed to focus the evaluation on three issues:

1. **Relevance:**
  - Are client needs being met?
  - Are Partner needs being met?
  - Is the mandate relevant?
  
2. **Success:**
  - Have CBSCs produced their intended outputs?
  - Have CBSCs achieved their intended outcomes?
  - Were there unintended impacts?
  
3. **Effectiveness / Alternatives:**
  - Is there a more cost-effective way to deliver the program?
  - Are there alternative ways to design and deliver the program?

Multiple lines of evidence were used to address each evaluation question. A summary of the indicators for each question and the source of data for each indicator is presented on the next page (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Evaluation Questions, Indicators and Sources of Data**

EVALUATION QUESTIONS	INDICATORS	DATA SOURCE
<b>RELEVANCE</b>		
Are client needs being met?	Information ~ Satisfaction Importance Usefulness	Client Survey Potential Client Survey Staff Survey
Are Partner needs being met?	Alternate sources Accuracy of referrals Service to Partners	Client Survey Potential Client Survey Interviews
Is the mandate relevant?	Mission Overall Outcomes	Client Survey Potential Client Survey Interviews Document Review
<b>SUCCESS</b>		
Have CBSCs produced their intended outputs?	Information and Referrals Partnerships	Client Survey Staff Survey Document Review
Have CBSCs achieved their intended outcomes?	Mission Overall Outcomes	Client Survey Staff Survey Interviews Document Review
Were there unintended impacts?	Identified Impacts	Client Survey Staff Survey Interviews
<b>EFF/ALTERNATIVES</b>		
Is there a more cost-effective way to deliver the program?	Willingness to Pay Cost and Benefits	Client Survey Potential Client Survey Staff Survey Interviews
Alternative ways to design and deliver the program?	Delivery of Services Design/Delivery Options	Client Survey Potential Client Survey Staff Survey Interviews Document Review

Five lines of evidence were used to evaluate the CBSCs: a Client Survey, a Potential Client Survey, a Staff Survey, interviews with senior officials and a review of pertinent documents.

### **Client Survey**

Data with respect to CBSC clients were collected using a web-based survey instrument (survey questions are listed in Appendix B). A client was defined as any individual who had contacted a Centre with a request for business information. Prospective respondents were randomly selected from lists provided by each of the CBSCs in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Sampling techniques are summarized in Appendix C. E-mails were sent to prospective respondents with an invitation to respond directly on-line. If no response was received within ten days, the original e-mails were followed up by both e-mail and telephone reminders. Additional prospective respondents were invited to participate by telephone. Both on-line and telephone responses to the survey instrument were entered in the Client Survey Data Base. Statistics regarding the Client Survey are summarized in Table 1. Survey results are summarized (without attribution) in Appendix D.

**Table 1: Client Survey Statistics**

	<b>BC</b>	<b>AB</b>	<b>SK</b>	<b>MB</b>	<b>Totals</b>
<b>Initial Sample Size</b> <sup>1</sup>	222	350	139	160	871
<b>Responses (#)</b>	66	69	63	78	282 <sup>2</sup>
<b>Response Rate (%)</b>	29.7	19.7	35.3	48.6	32.3
<b>Precision</b> @ 90% confidence level	+/- 10.1%	+/- 10%	+/- 10.4%	+/- 9.4%	+/- 4.9%

Notes:

1. Sampling frames differed between CBSCs. The results are weighted towards walk-in and telephone clients because of the way sample populations were gathered. In BC, they are also heavily biased in favour of recent clients. Details are provided in Appendix C.

2. In fact, 300 responses were received, but the province of origin could not be established for 18. The total stratified by province is therefore 282.

### Potential Client Survey

Data with respect to potential clients were collected using a web-based survey instrument (survey questions are listed in Appendix B). A potential client was defined as any individual in the small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) business sector who had never used a CBSC to obtain business information. Prospective respondents were randomly selected from lists of SMEs for each province. The lists were obtained from a market research corporation. Sampling techniques are summarized in Appendix C. E-mails were sent to prospective respondents with an invitation to respond directly on-line. If no response was received within ten days, the original e-mails were followed up by both e-mail and telephone reminders. Additional prospective respondents were invited to participate by telephone. Both on-line and telephone responses to the survey instrument were entered in the Potential Client Survey Data Base. Statistics regarding the Potential Client Survey are summarized in Table 2. Survey results are summarized (without attribution) in Appendix D.

**Table 2: Potential Client Survey Statistics**

	<b>BC</b>	<b>AB</b>	<b>SK</b>	<b>MB</b>	<b>Totals</b>
<b>Initial Sample Size</b>	500	500	500	500	2,000
<b>Responses (#)</b>	21	31	46	36	134
<b>Response Rate (%)</b>	4.2	6.2	9.2	7.2	6.7
<b>Precision</b> @ 90% confidence level	+/- 17.9%	+/- 14.8%	+/- 12.1%	+/- 13.7%	+/- 7.1%

### Staff Survey

Front- and second-line CBSC staff were polled using a web-based survey instrument (survey questions are listed in Appendix B). E-mail addresses were obtained from CBSC staff directories. E-mails were sent to prospective respondents with an invitation to respond directly on-line. If no response was received within ten days, the original e-mails were followed up by e-mail reminders. On-line responses to the survey instrument were entered in the Staff Survey Data Base. Statistics regarding the Staff Survey are summarized on the next in Table 3. Survey results are summarized (without attribution) in Appendix D.



**Table 3: Staff Survey Statistics**

	<b>BC</b>	<b>AB</b>	<b>SK</b>	<b>MB</b>	<b>Totals</b>
<b>Initial Census Size</b>	14	18	10	17	59
<b>Responses (#)</b>	8	14	7	17	46
<b>Response Rate (%)</b>	57.1	77.8	70.0	100.0	78.0

### **Senior Officials Interviews**

The Institute conducted personal interviews with 37 senior officials of the Managing and Operating Partners and National Secretariat, selected in consultation with WDAE. When respondents were not available for face-to-face interviews, they were interviewed by telephone. An interview guide was developed to help ensure sufficient commonality of information collected for analysis, while also allowing greater flexibility than a survey questionnaire does for exploring areas of particular interest to the evaluation. A list of interviewees and a copy of the interview guide are provided in Appendix E.

### **Document Review**

A number of documents were reviewed, including Partnership Agreements, annual reports and operating plans, usage statistics by mode of access, previously completed evaluation reports and statistical reports provided by the four CBSCs. A list of documents is provided in Appendix F.

### 3.0 CONTEXT

The Canada Business Service Centres are a network of 13 hubs, one in every province and territory, resulting from co-operative arrangements among 28 federal business departments, provincial governments and, in some cases, private sector organizations. The mandate of the Centres is set out in the *CBSC Annual Report 2000 – 01* (page 3) as follows:

[T]o serve as the primary source of timely and accurate business-related information and referrals on federal programs, services and regulations, without charge, in all regions of the country.

#### 3.1 Canada Business Service Centres

Figure 2 provides an overview of CBSCs in the four western provinces.

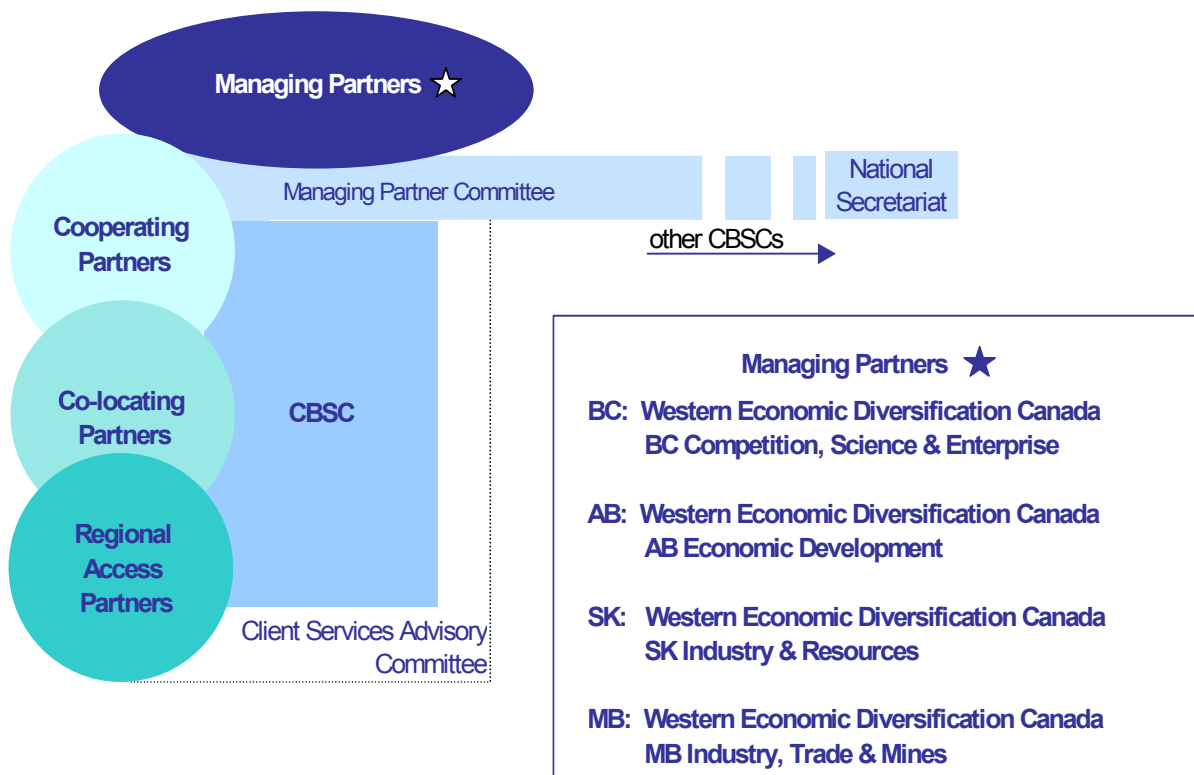
Figure 2: An Overview of CBSCs in the Four Western Provinces

Hub name	<b>BUSINESS SERVICES</b>	<b>THE BUSINESS LINK</b>	<b>BUSINESS INFOSOURCE</b>	<b>BUSINESS SERVICE CTR.</b>
Hub location	Vancouver	Edmonton	Saskatoon	Winnipeg
Satellite office	Victoria	Calgary	Regina	
Regional Access Centres	<b>63</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>23</b>
	<b>BC</b>	<b>AB</b>	<b>SK</b>	<b>MB</b>

Regional access centres are locations provided by organizations which have formally agreed to collaborate with a CBSC to make business information available at sites other than the hub or satellite office.

Each of the CBSCs operates under one or more agreements signed by Managing Partners (organizations responsible for funding and facilitating the joint delivery of business information services). Managing Partners across Canada facilitate the CBSC network through a Managing Partner Committee. The National Secretariat, located in Ottawa, supports CBSCs by developing and coordinating the federal Business Information System (BIS) database, information dissemination, advocacy, problem solving, secretariat and technical support.

**Figure 3: Generic CBSC Organization Structure**



In addition, a CBSC works closely with other Partners. Cooperating Partners are organizations which provide information to be distributed by the CBSC. Co-locating Partners are organizations that operate on-site with the CBSC, and typically share some part of the operating and resource costs. Regional Access Partners provide regional access points, as mentioned earlier. Aboriginal Business Partners and Sponsors (not shown in Figure 3) also link up with the Centres to provide business information services of interest to their specific client groups.

CBSCs in the four western provinces are staffed by federal, provincial and municipal employees co-located at, seconded to or hired directly by the Centre. Budgets are primarily financed by the Managing Partners, although Alberta augments its funding by generating revenues from a number of other sources. Table 4 summarizes staff and budgetary information by province.

**Table 4: CBSC Staff and Budgetary Information (2001 – 02)**

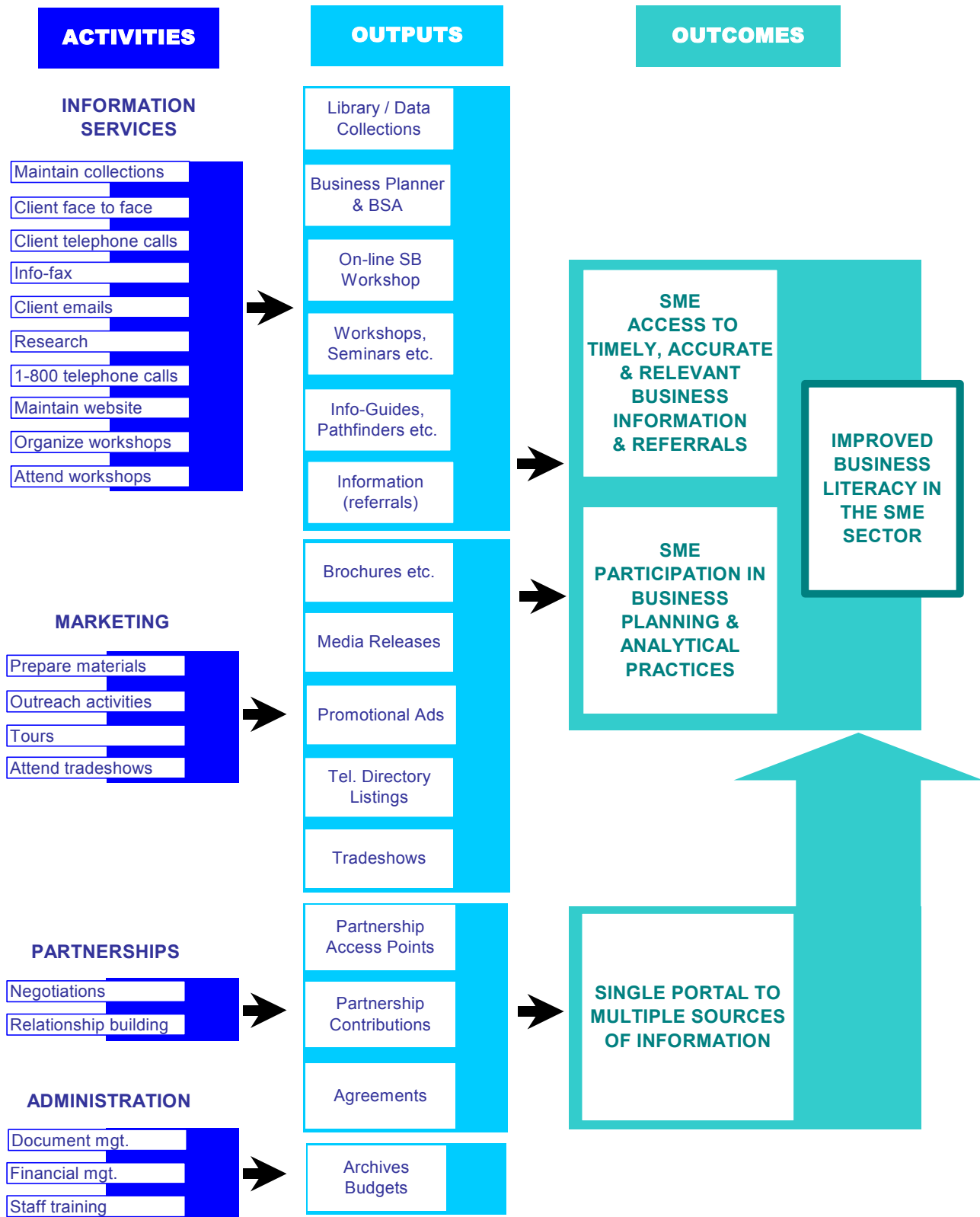
	<b>BC</b>	<b>AB</b>	<b>SK</b>	<b>MB</b>	<b>Totals</b>
<b>Staff – total FTEs</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>21.2</b>	<b>9.9</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>65.1</b>
<b>Managerial</b>	4	1	1	1	7
<b>Second line</b>	0	12.3	2	9	23.3
<b>Front line</b>	9	7.9	4	6	26.9
<b>Other</b>	5	0	2.9	0	7.9
<b>Funding – total \$</b>	<b>1,594,330<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>1,638,276<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>742,810<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>1,168,000<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>5,143,416<sup>1</sup></b>
<b>% Federal gov't</b>	50.0	39.9	62.4	70.0	53.0
<b>% Provincial gov't</b>	50.0	39.7	37.6	30.0	40.2
<b>% Sublease Income</b>		2.9			0.9
<b>% Revenues</b>		10.1			3.2
<b>% Other Cost Recovery</b>		7.5			2.4

Note:

1. Represents the "Budgeted Use of Funds"

The CBSCs provide a number of client services including business information, referrals to appropriate sources or contacts to obtain business information, research services and access to reference materials. Optional services include assistance with self-directed research, enhanced research services, training sessions and seminars. Services are delivered in person, by telephone, fax or e-mail and over the Internet. The CBSCs serve Cooperating Partners by screening and referring their clients, disseminating information and tracking statistics on usage. In addition, Regional Access Partners receive staff briefings, Internet/intranet and restricted access to the CBSC website, and preferred access to enhanced research services. A CBSC program logic diagram is presented on the next page (Figure 4).

Figure 4: CBSC Program Logic Diagram

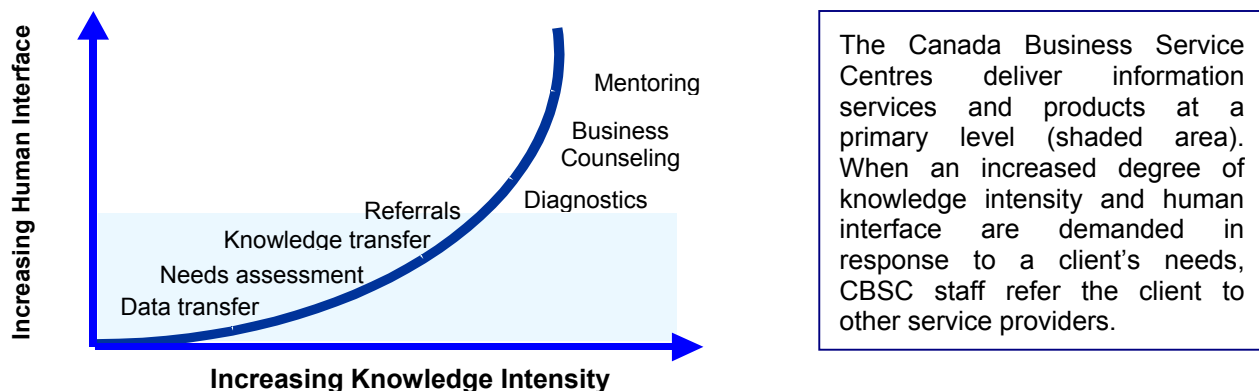


The CBSC hubs, satellite offices and regional access points are hives of activity. Preliminary figures for the past year indicate that the western network dealt with over 118,000 walk-in and 87,000 telephone clients in person, and logged a further 30,000 automated telephone calls. The Program Logic Diagram (Figure 4) fails to capture a sense of these transactions – the frenetic pace of work and the formidable number of information products being handled daily are not readily apparent from the simple schematics. Nevertheless, the diagram serves to highlight relationships between activities, products (outputs) and intended results (outcomes). Four categories of activity are addressed in Figure 4: Information Services, Marketing, Partnerships and Administration.

### Information Services

CBSCs undertake a range of **activities** related to the provision of business information. A substantial amount of effort is devoted to maintaining, renewing and updating library and electronic data collections. However, the Centres are primarily engaged in responding to clients whose information needs run the gamut from a single request for a ready-made product to a complex (often unfocused) inquiry for customized solutions. Staff fulfill these needs in a variety of ways (Figure 5). Many interactions consist of relatively simple transactions – facts are recited, brochures and booklets are handed over, or data sources are identified. Other interactions require more analysis which frequently leads to officer-assisted research activities. When clients seek knowledge (as opposed to mere data), increased levels of interaction are provided either electronically (the Business Planner is an example) or in person (as in a workshop setting). Ultimately, clients are referred to other service providers.

**Figure 5: The Information Services Curve** (adapted from the Manitoba CBSC)



The **outputs** produced by Information Services are every bit as varied as the activities. Six representative outputs are included in Figure 4 (library / data collections, the interactive Business Planner, Business Start-up Assistant (BSA) and on-line small business workshop tools, in-person workshops and seminars, Info-Guides and Pathfinders, and referrals). The Business Information System (BIS) is one of the data collections most used by CBSC clients. Industry Canada maintains the national BIS, although some western CBSCs perform that task for provincial BIS collections (Saskatchewan and Manitoba are examples). Two **outcomes** flow from the information services and products provided by the Centres: SME (small and medium-sized enterprise) access to timely, accurate and relevant business information and referrals; and SME participation in business planning and analytical practices.

### **Marketing**

The CBSCs do not engage aggressively in marketing **activities**, although the Manitoba Centre occasionally sponsors advertising campaigns comprised of a series of 30-second commercials. Apart from preparing materials for advertising purposes, CBSC staff participate in various outreach activities, conduct tours and attend tradeshows. **Outputs** include media releases, promotional ads, telephone directory lists and tradeshows. Marketing supports Information Services, and leads to the two **outcomes** mentioned above.

### **Partnerships**

Partnerships are a key design feature of the CBSC network. **Activities** include negotiations and relationship building. Negotiations result in regional access points and financial and in-kind contributions which are typically documented in formal agreements between the Partners, all of which are **outputs**. Relationship building is a term used to describe all activities that lead to such collaborative arrangements between Partners. The **outcome** is a single portal to multiple sources of information, which supports and enhances access to business information, referrals and participation in business planning and analytical practices.

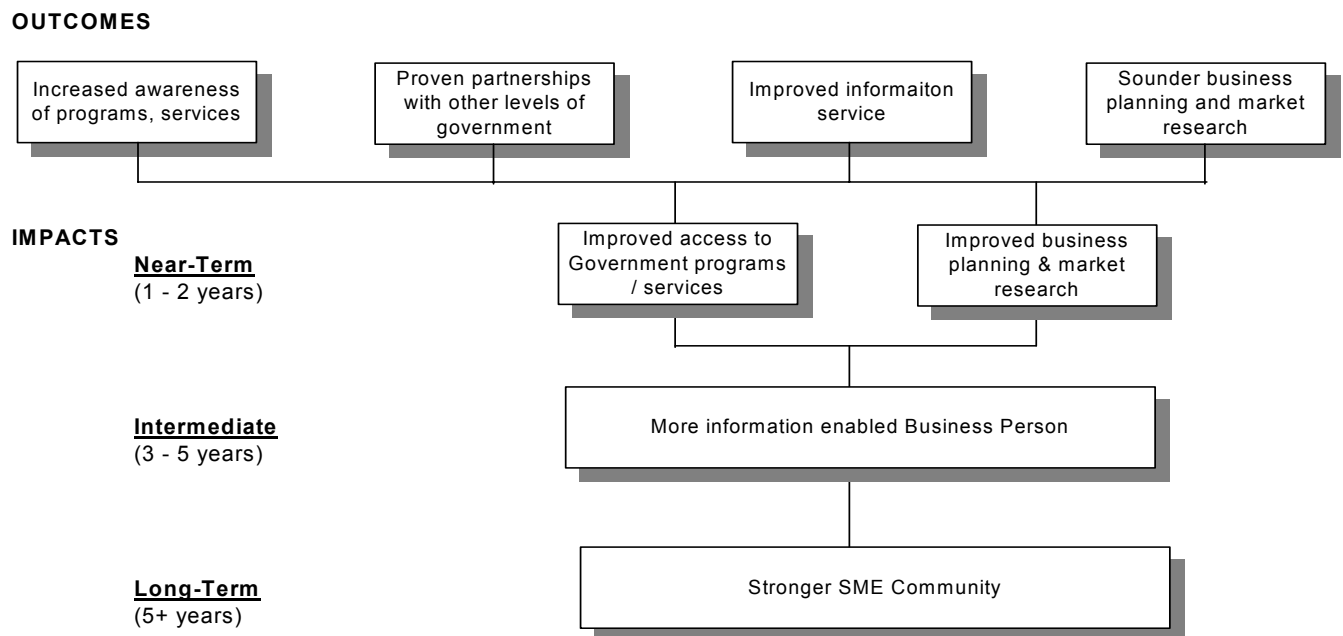
### **Administration**

Document and financial management, together with staff training exercises, comprise the main administrative **activities** undertaken in support of all CBSC endeavours. Archives and budgets are two primary **outputs**.

### Intermediate and Final Outcomes

Outcomes are “external consequences attributed to an organization, policy, program or initiative that is considered significant in relation to its commitments” (Treasury Board Secretariat, *Guide for the Development of Results-based Management and Accountability Frameworks*, page 34). They may be immediate, intermediate or final. The National Evaluation Framework has stipulated a four-tier description of CBSC outcomes, using the word ‘impacts’ as a synonym for outcomes (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: National Evaluation Framework Logic Model: Outcomes and Impacts**



The Institute has consolidated the first two rows in Figure 6 (Outcomes and Near-Term Impacts) into the three outcomes discussed earlier (SME access to timely, accurate and relevant business information & referrals; SME participation in business planning & analytical practices; and Single portal to multiple sources of information), all as shown on Figure 4. These outcomes are all within a CBSC’s direct control.

The intermediate outcome for CBSCs is improved business literacy in the SME sector (another way of saying a “more information enabled business person”), and is influenced by CBSC involvement in the marketplace. The Institute has not included the Framework’s final impact (a stronger SME community) because this outcome is beyond the scope of the current evaluation.

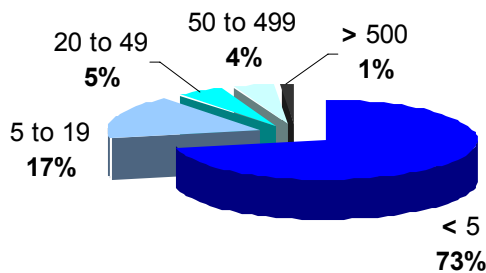


### 3.2 SME Business Sector

A small business is generally defined by having fewer than 50 employees (or, in the manufacturing sector, 100 employees). Medium-sized enterprises are similarly defined by number of staff (between 50 and 499). Together these firms make up the SME (small and medium-sized enterprise) business sector. Approximately 359,938 SMEs were operating in the four western provinces during 1998. According to StatsCan's report, *1983 - 1998 Employment Dynamics (2001)*, they constitute 99% of the total number of businesses in western Canada (Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Proportion of SMEs in Western Provinces (1998)**

*StatsCan, 1983 - 1998 Employment Dynamics (2001)*



73% of all businesses have fewer than 5 employees.

Small enterprises (1 – 49 employees) comprised fully 95% of the total number of operating businesses.

Together, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) make up 99% of the total.

In 1998, SMEs were credited with creating between 60% (Alberta) and 100% (Saskatchewan) of all new jobs. Total employment share appears to be growing (Table 5).

**Table 5: SME Share of Total Employment in Western Provinces (1991 and 1998)**

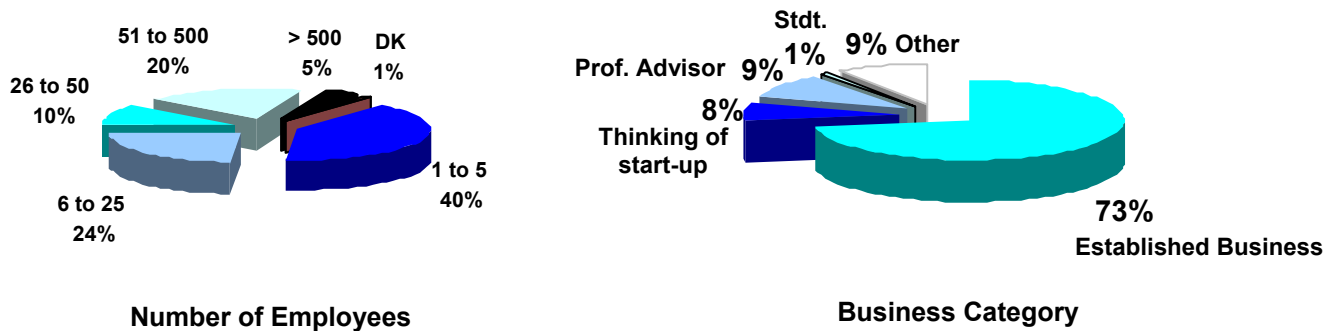
	BC	AB	SK	MB	Canada
1991 SME employment (%)	57.2	56.0	59.0	51.0	55.8
1998 SME employment (%)	58.8	59.0	60.0	54.0	58.0

Source: StatsCan, 1983 - 1998 Employment Dynamics (2001)

The Institute surveyed the SME business sector in the four western provinces for the purpose of assessing issues of relevance and alternatives. Responses from firms which had never used CBSC services or products provide an insight into the market for business information, and suggest additional options for program design and delivery. The profile of these potential clients indicates that the majority are small businesses (Figure 8). Most of the survey respondents were currently active with an established business.

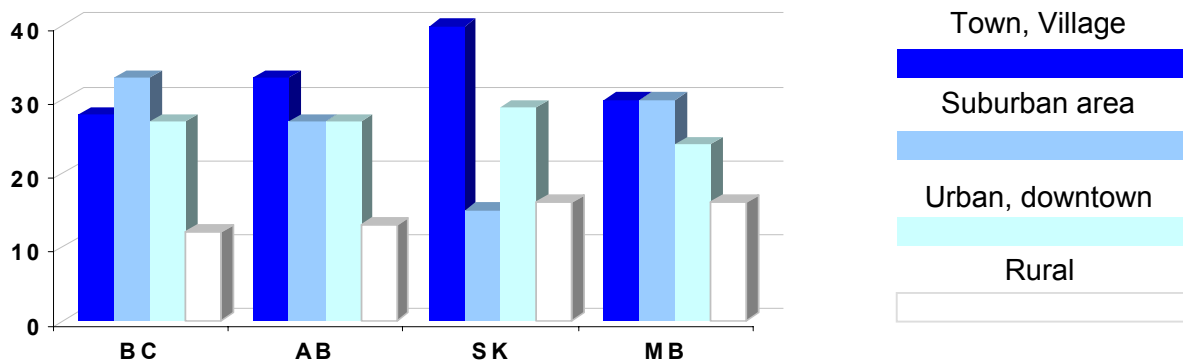
**Figure 8: Profile of Respondents – Potential Client Survey**

*Potential Client Survey, questions 48 and 52*



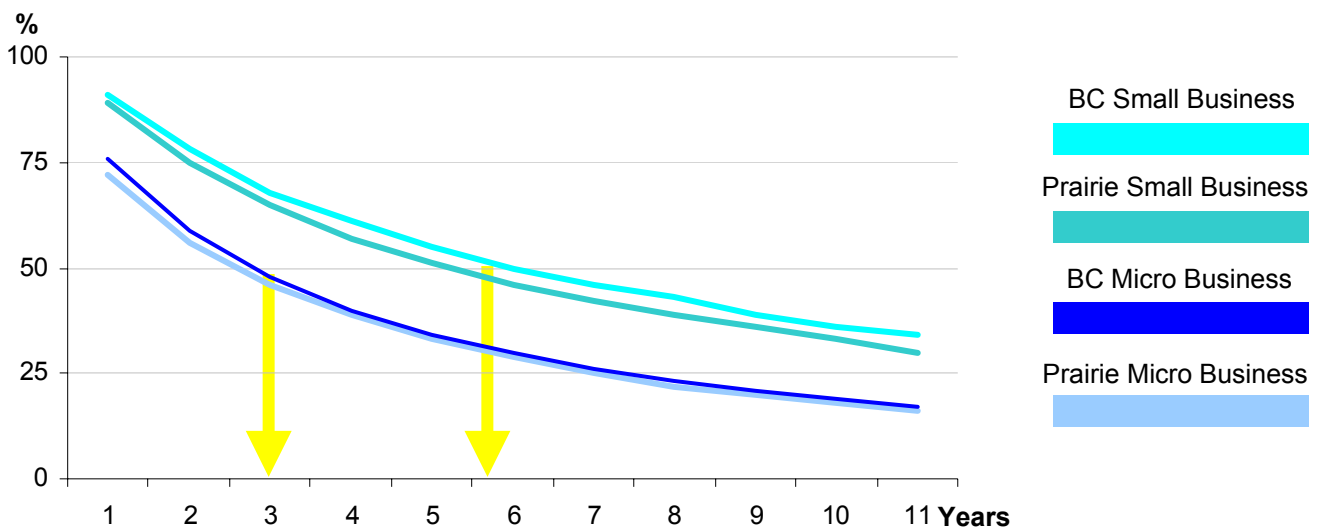
SMEs responding from across Canada to a poll of its members taken by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) reported that the majority (52%) started from scratch, and that less than 20% were inherited family businesses (CFIB 2001). They tended to locate in small towns, suburban areas and cities, although a significant number are situated in rural areas (Figure 9).

**Figure 9: Location of SMEs in Western Provinces (CFIB 2001)**



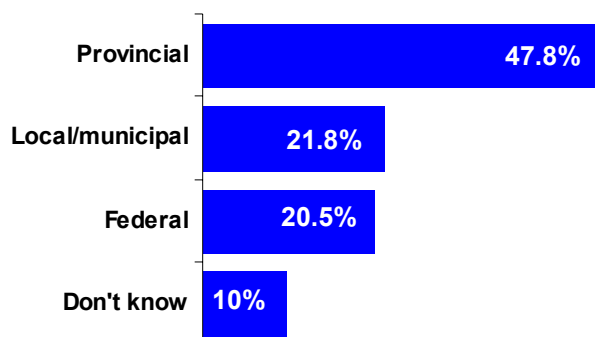
SME survival rates in the prairie and BC regions have been estimated by StatsCan for both 'micro' and small businesses (Figure 10). The data are based on firms that entered the market over the 1984-1995 period; the longest-observable age was therefore 11 years. Approximately 50% of the micro businesses (fewer than five employees) were still operating after three years. Small businesses (five to 99 employees) survive about twice as long, and BC firms appear to have a slight advantage.

**Figure 10: Survival Rates of Micro and Small Businesses (StatsCan 2000)**



When the CFIB asked its members which level of government has the most impact on the day-to-day operation and success of businesses, most western Canadians identified their provincial governments (Figure 11). Alberta, however, ranked federal, provincial and local governments roughly equal in impact.

**Figure 11: Level of Government with the Most Impact on Business Operations (CFIB 2001)**

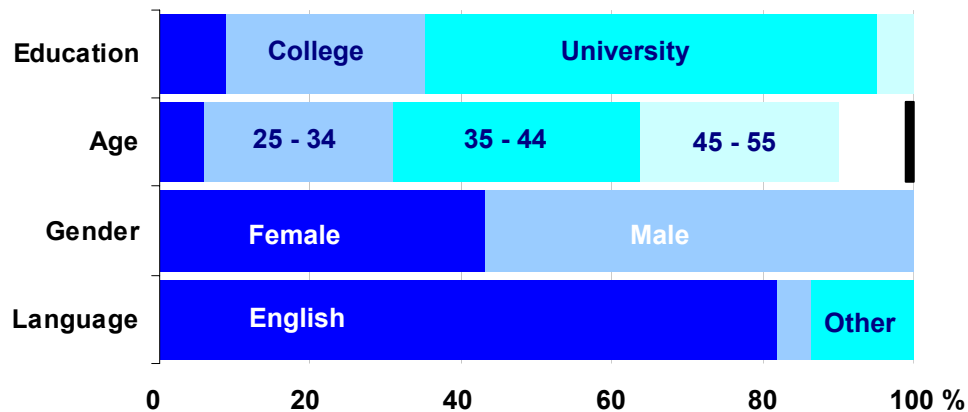


### 3.3 CBSC Clients

The Institute surveyed a sample of CBSC clients in each of the four western provinces (see Table 1, page 3, for statistics). Clients are defined as individuals who have used CBSC services and products. Overall, most of the clients are well educated, and between the ages of 25 and 55 (Figure 12). English is overwhelmingly their language of choice. More men responded than did women.

**Figure 12: Profile of Respondents – Client Survey**

*Client Survey, questions 55 to 58*

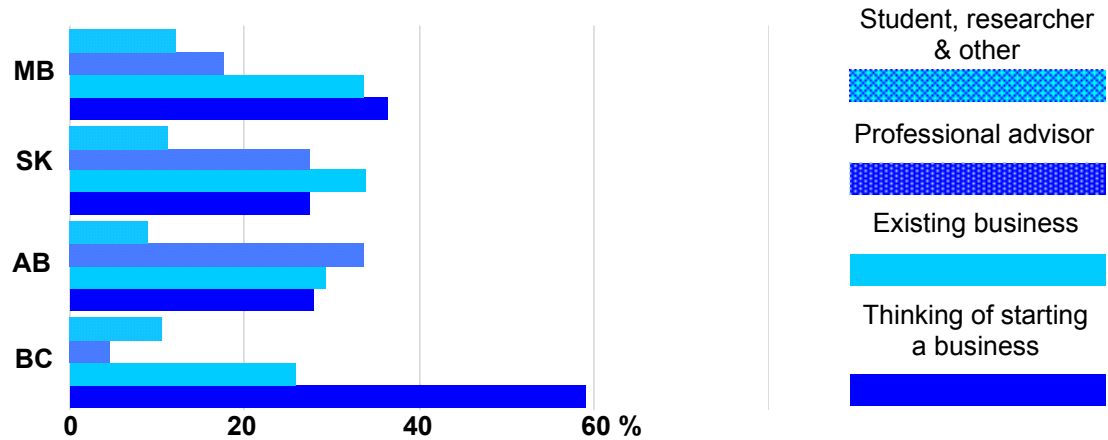


Clients were asked which category best described their situation when they last contacted a Centre. Results were fairly consistent across the prairie provinces, but BC revealed significant differences (Figure 13, next page).

Almost 60% of the BC respondents classified themselves as “thinking of starting a business”; 25% said they were “an owner or employee of an existing business”; and only 4.5% identified themselves as professional advisors. (The categories were prescribed in the National Evaluation Framework.) These results are likely an artifact of the sampling population provided by the BC Centre, which was biased towards recent walk-in clients.

**Figure 13: Category of Client Responding to Survey, by Province**

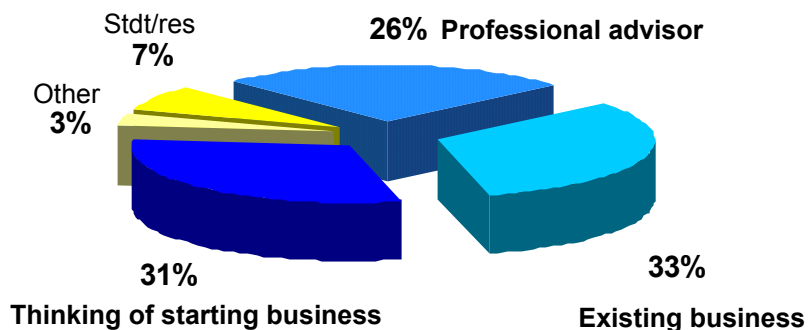
*Client Survey, question 47*



Without BC, the overall distribution of client categories shows a roughly equal proportion of start-up, existing businesses and professional advisors (Figure 14). The clients who were thinking of starting a business comprised only 31% of the total.

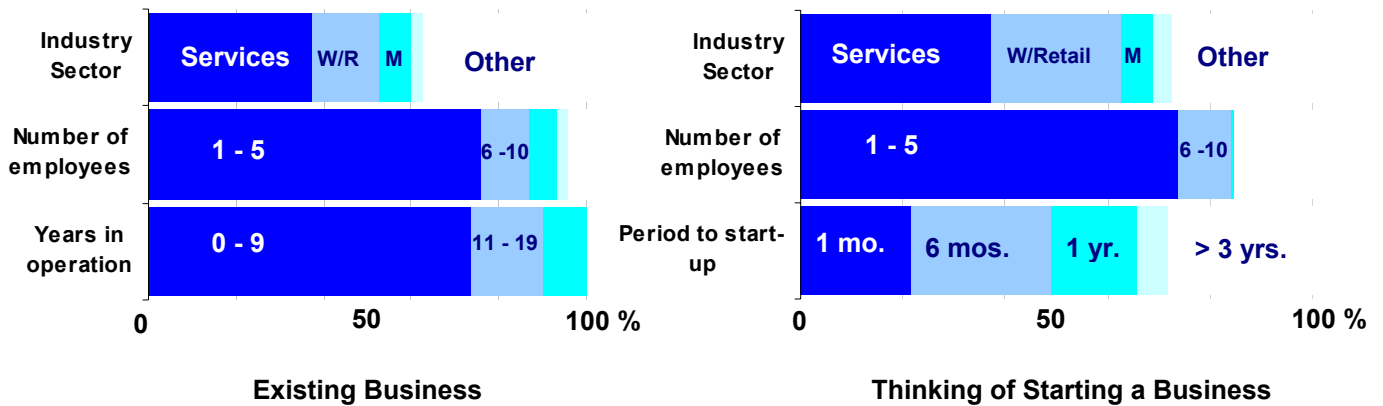
**Figure 14: Category of Client Responding to Survey (other than BC)**

*Client Survey, question 47*



**Figure 15: Industry Sector, Employees and Years in Operation / Period to Start-up**

*Client Survey, questions 49 to 54*



Most clients fell within the 'micro' business category (fewer than five employees), and almost all within the small business category (Figure 15). The majority of existing businesses had been operating for less than ten years; of these the breakdown into three-year segments is shown in Table 6. People thinking of starting up a business mostly indicated that they intended to do so within the next six months to a year.

**Table 6: Years in Business by Province**

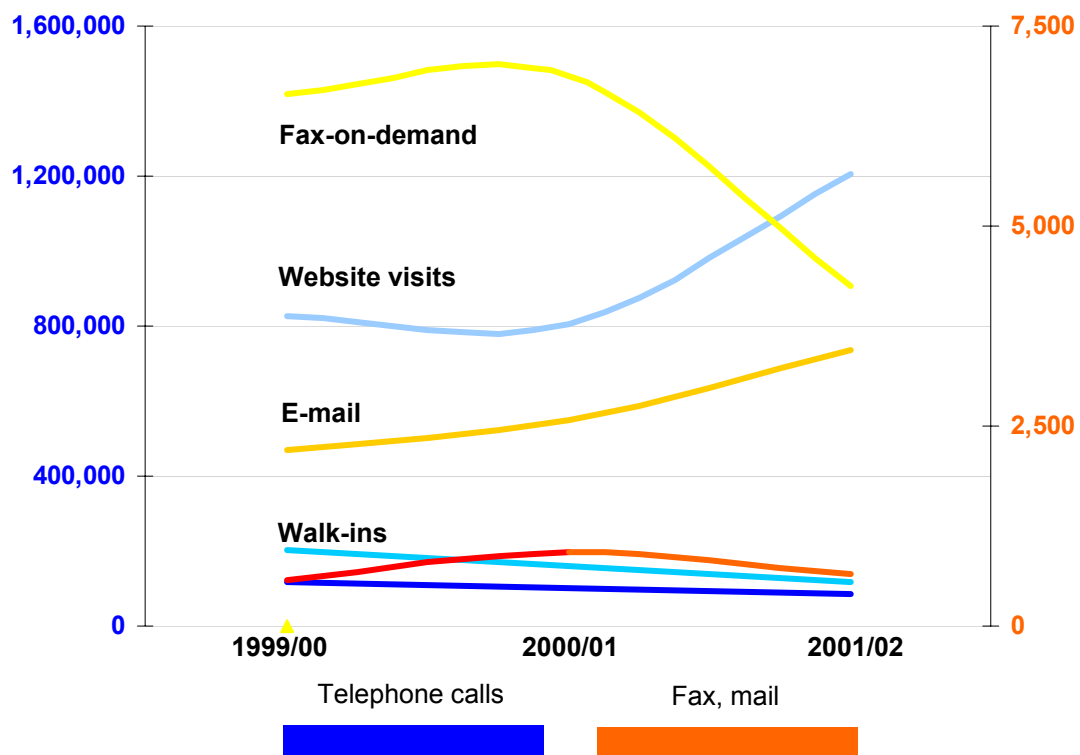
	BC	AB	SK	MB	Totals
1 to 3 years (%)	65	38	58	46	52.3
4 to 6 years (%)	17	29	4	21	17.4
7 to 10 years (%)	1	13	7	14	10.1

Source: Client Survey, question 50

Almost 90% of the clients reported they had used the services of a CBSC between one and nineteen times in the last twelve months.

The way in which clients are accessing business information is changing. Figure 16 uses two scales to illustrate the changes; lines in yellow/orange tones correspond to the right hand scale, and lines in blue tones correspond to the left hand scale. As can be seen in the Figure, fewer people are using fax-on-demand, and more are visiting the website and contacting CBSCs by e-mail. Walk-ins are still a significant mode of access (although underemphasized in Figure 16 because they are plotted against the left-hand axis), but they are trending downwards – from 200,000 in 1999/00 to 118,000 in 2001/02. Telephone calls, fax and mail are holding steady. Automated telephone use has not been included in Figure 16; however, calls have fallen off by about 30% over the past three years (from 44,500 to 30,400). Overall, total officer-assisted interactions have decreased in number while the total self-serve interactions have increased. This trend is consistent across all four provinces except BC, which has experienced a slight downturn in the number of website visits since 1999/00.

**Figure 16: Client Contacts by Mode of Access (1999/00 – 2001/02)**



*Note: automated telephone use has not been included in Figure 16 (its scale does not match either the left- or the right-hand axis). Its use has declined by about 30% over the past three years.*

## 4.0 EVALUATION FINDINGS

### 4.1 Client Needs

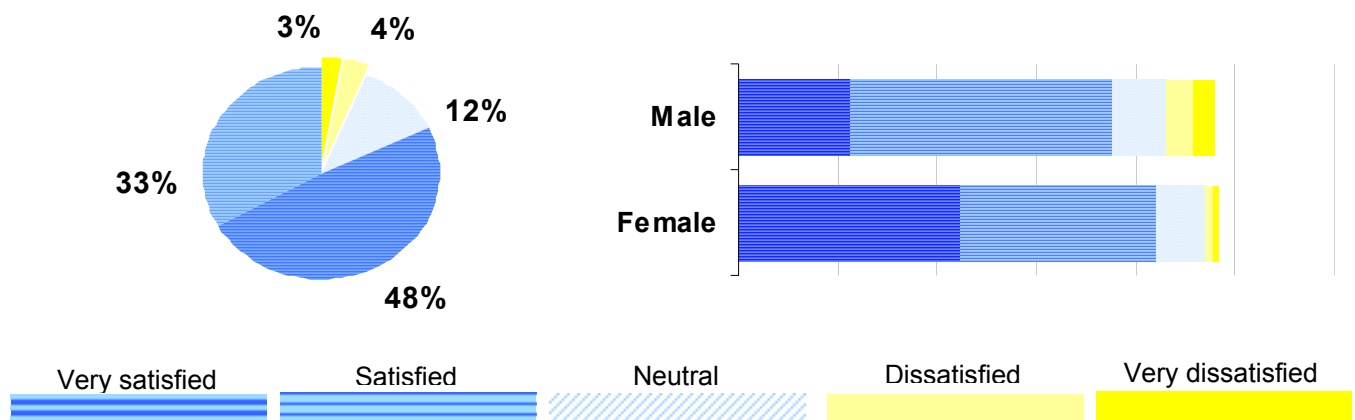
<b>EVALUATION ISSUE</b>	<b>RELEVANCE</b>
<b>EVALUATION QUESTION</b>	<b>Are client needs being met?</b>

Responsiveness to client needs was gauged by assessing levels of satisfaction, importance and usefulness attributed to CBSC services and products.

Clients responding to the survey gave the CBSCs a resounding vote of confidence when asked if they were generally satisfied with the information they received in the last twelve months. In total, 81.9% were very satisfied or satisfied (Figure 17). Women tended to be more satisfied overall than men. The Staff Survey corroborated these findings, although staff tended to be somewhat more optimistic – 93% said they felt clients were satisfied with the products they delivered.

**Figure 17: Clients' General Satisfaction**

*Client Survey, questions 24 and 58*

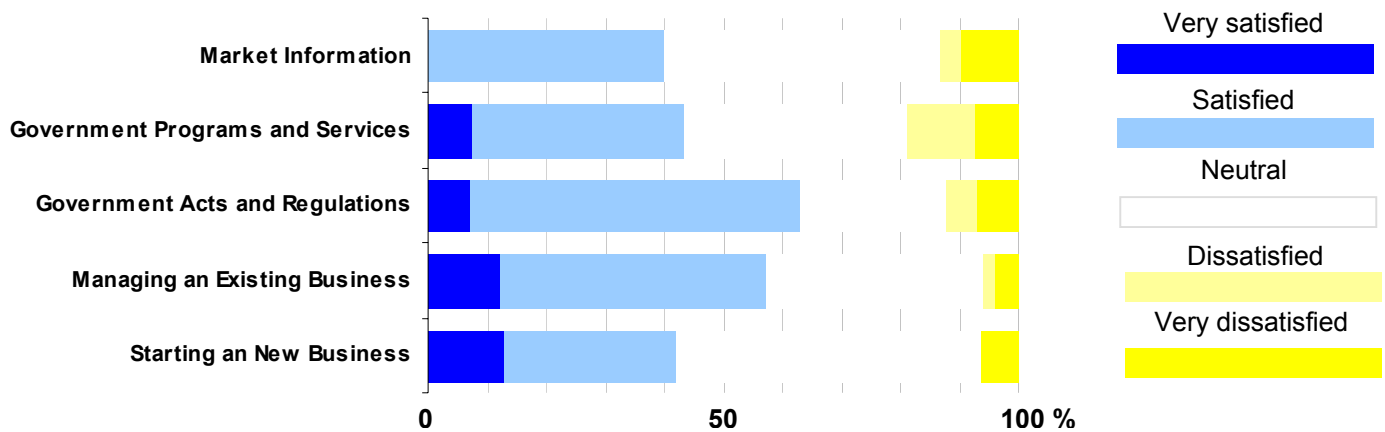




By way of contrast, when potential clients were asked about satisfaction, they tended to express a lower level of contentment with their information sources than clients had reported for CBSC services and products. At best, only 12.5% of potential clients registered a 'very satisfied' rating for information services (Figure 18). CBSC clients, on the other hand, were much more likely to express themselves as being very satisfied (48%, Figure 17).

**Figure 18: Potential Client Satisfaction with Information Sources**

*Potential Client Survey, questions 7, 13, 19, 25 and 31*

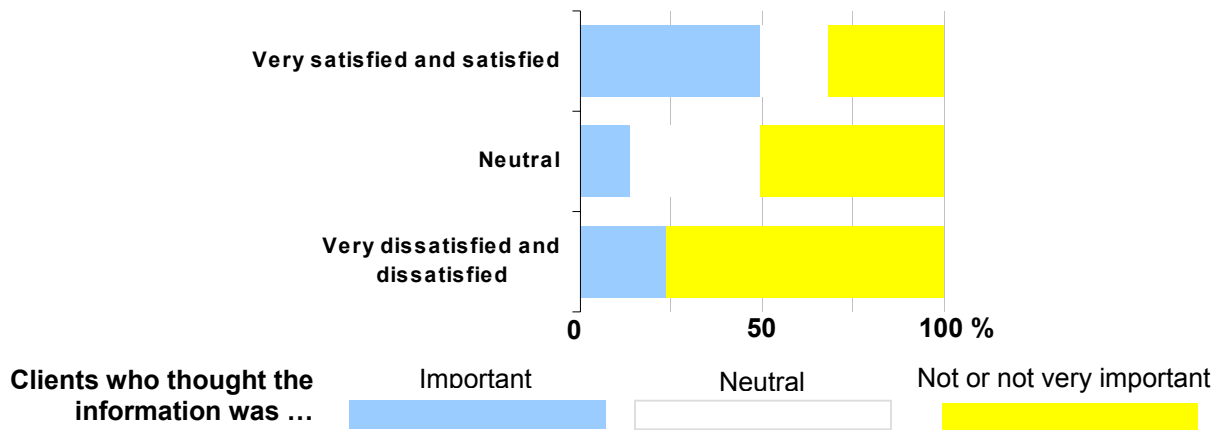


Clients also rated services and products high on the importance scale. About 83% said they received business information that was very important or important in the creation and operation of their business. Only 6.2% felt it was not very or not at all important.

Reported levels of satisfaction and importance do not, in themselves, tell the whole story. The Institute therefore examined client responses more closely to determine how satisfied clients were in connection with 'important' information. Figure 19 (next page) correlates satisfaction ratings with the degree of importance assigned by clients. Satisfaction levels are highest amongst clients who felt they received important information. Dissatisfaction levels are highest in connection with information considered to be of low or no importance.

**Figure 19: Client Satisfaction Ratings Correlated with Importance of Information**

*Client Survey, questions 24 and 29*



To assess the usefulness of information from a client’s point of view, the Institute asked both what the information had been used for, and how useful the client judged the information to be. Putting responses to the two questions into one chart provides a rudimentary gap analysis of whether clients’ needs are being met (Figure 20).

**Figure 20: Client Information Used and Useful**

*Client Survey, questions 28 and 34*

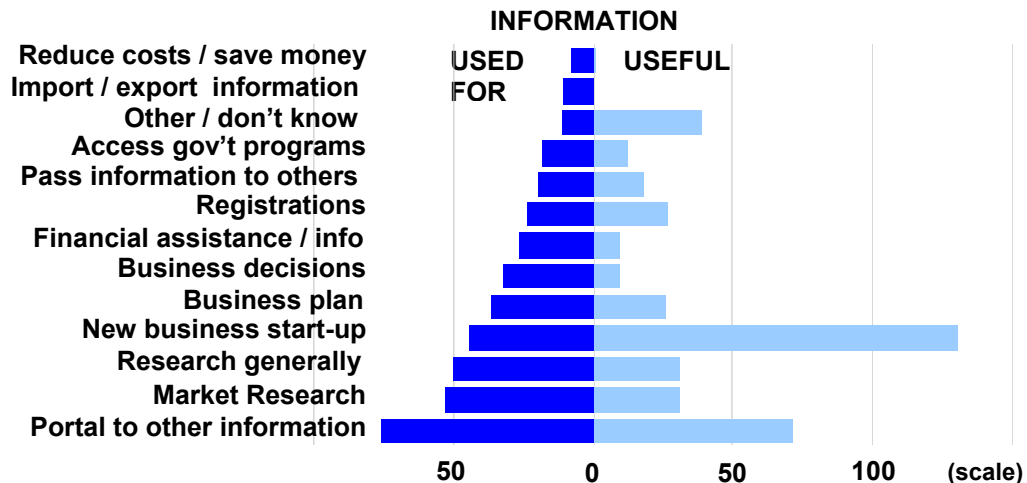


Figure 20 presents graphic proof that client needs are being met – at least for start-up clients. The emphasis that CBSCs have placed on providing services and products to clients who want to start their own business is clearly paying dividends. The Business Start-up Assistant is a good example. It provides accurate information, responds directly to client needs and is available on-line, which is fast becoming the preferred mode of access for SMEs.

The situation is not so clear with respect to clients who are already in business or are professional advisors, partly because the National Evaluation Framework Common Questions asked survey respondents to “select all that apply” from a list which gave several operational categories, but only one start-up category. When Figure 20 is simplified by aggregating all the categories pertaining to business operations, the picture changes (Figure 21).

**Figure 21: Client Information Used and Useful (Figure 20 Simplified)**

*Client Survey, questions 28 and 34*

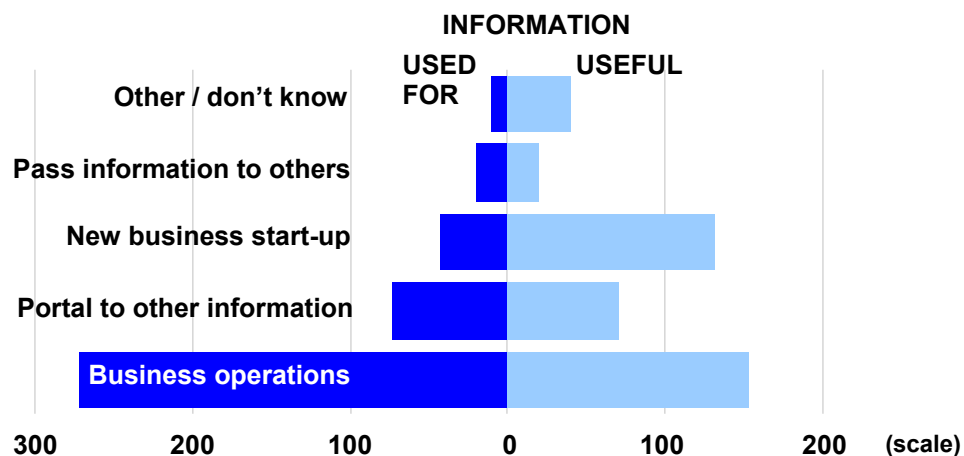


Figure 21 emphasizes the fact that more clients used information for business operations than for any other single purpose. They also reported that this category of information was most useful. Relatively speaking, however, when “used for” and “useful” attributions are compared, survey respondents were more impressed with start-up information than they were with operational information.

The Institute tested this finding by looking at two other factors: first, the proportion of clients in a business start-up situation, compared to those already in business; and second, the kinds of information both clients and potential clients said they were seeking in the past twelve months.

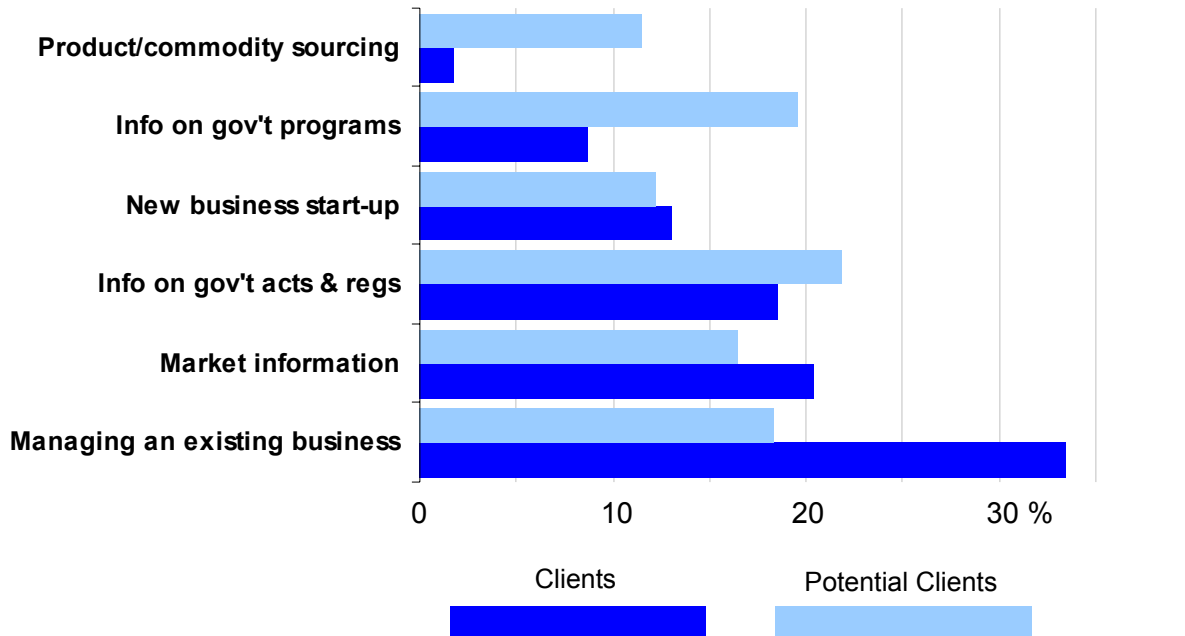
With respect to the first factor, only 31% of CBSC clients in the three prairie provinces were thinking of going into business (Figure 14, which excluded BC data for the reason given earlier). This proportion represents a change from the last CBSC evaluation, in which 44% of respondents were identified as “thinking of starting a business” (FW 1998, Table 3.1). However, it also reflects a change being experienced by the three CBSCs. Statistics gathered by the Manitoba CBSC, for instance, show a 100% increase in the number of existing businesses using its services over the past year, confirming a four year trend in the growth of such clients. Saskatchewan has also seen an increase, from 13% existing to 25% new and established businesses between 1998/99 and 2001/02. And Alberta commented last year that the “trend of people wanting to start their own businesses may be declining somewhat, however there is a steady demand from small businesses wishing to expand their operations and take their businesses to the next level” (*Organization/Human Resource Review, Final Report, June 2001*). At least three CBSCs are therefore trending in the same direction – a significant and growing number of clients are seeking assistance with ongoing management and marketing issues.

As to the second factor, clients were asked what type of business information they were seeking on their last contact with CBSCs. Similarly, potential clients were asked a series of questions about their information needs within the past twelve months. A rough comparison between the two sets of responses is shown in Figure 22 (on the next page). In both cases, it appears that small businesses focus on operational issues to a fairly significant degree.

The Institute has concluded, therefore, that CBSCs are meeting the needs of clients in existing businesses to some extent, but have yet to capture this market as fully as they might. Tools such as Talk-to-Us! could very well prove to be an important innovation in this regard, since it will allow CBSCs to respond directly to immediate client (and potential client) needs, and therefore increase the amount of attention given to operational issues.

**Figure 22: Business Information Needs – Clients and Potential Clients**

*Client Survey, question 3; Potential Client Survey, questions 5, 11, 17, 23, 29 and 35*



## 4.2 Partner Needs

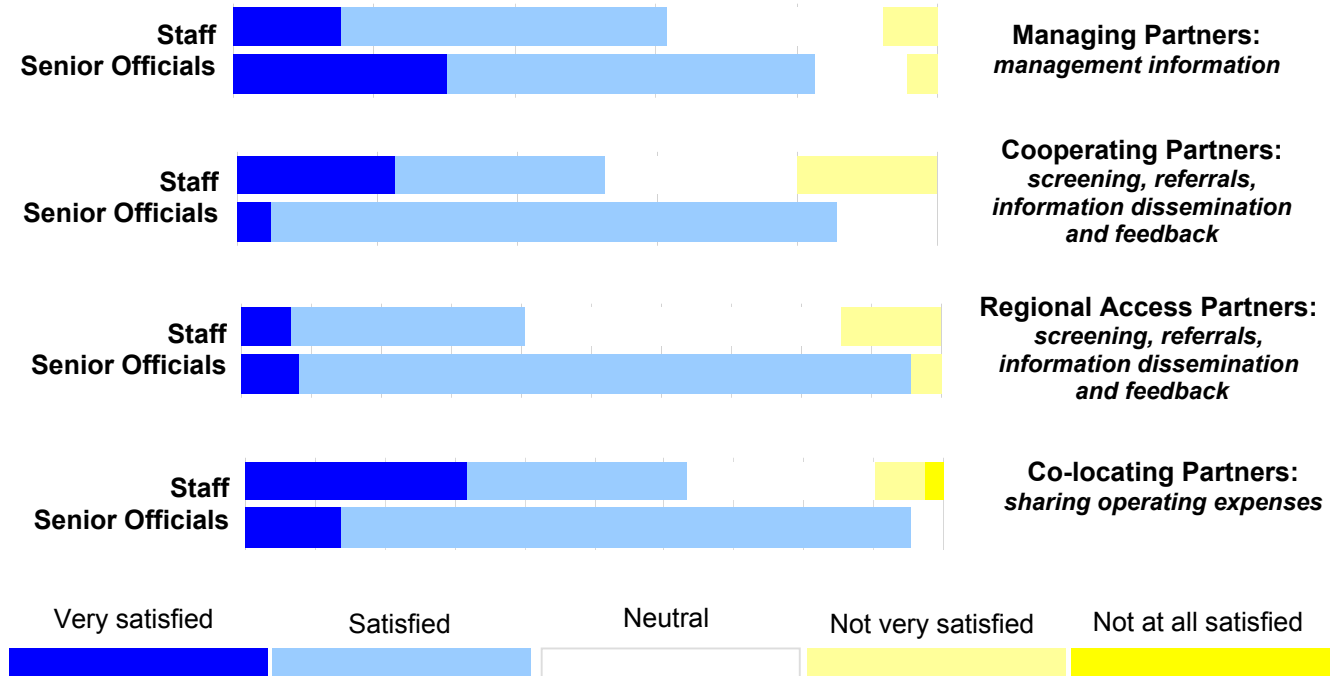
EVALUATION ISSUE	RELEVANCE
EVALUATION QUESTION	Are Partner needs being met?

Partner needs vary depending on the type of relationship that has been established. All Partners, however, need to demonstrate they are not duplicating one another's services. As one senior official said, "The public would not put up with differing government access points; we could not go back." Judging from the greater levels of satisfaction expressed by clients as compared to potential clients (Figures 17 and 18), it is fair to say that the CBSCs are helping to reduce user frustration levels and thus meet Partner needs in this respect. Figures 20 and 21 also testify to the fact that clients who use the CBSCs as a portal to other information found this facility to be a useful one.

Both staff and senior officials were asked a series of questions addressing various Partner needs (Figure 23).

**Figure 23: Meeting Partner Needs – Staff and Senior Official Responses**

*Staff Survey, question 18; Senior Officials Interviews, question 11*

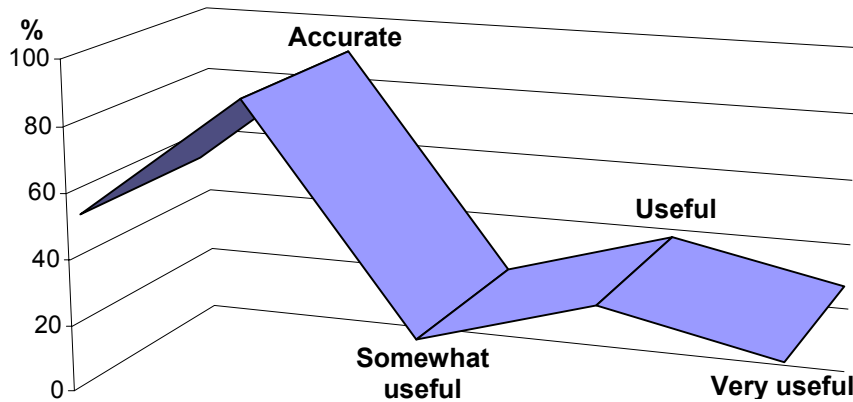


Their replies indicate that senior officials tend to be more satisfied with current arrangements than their staff. The Partners themselves responded favourably when asked about the CBSCs. One interviewee acknowledged that “partnership is cheaper than the alternatives”. Others explicitly recognized that the “process, or network, adds benefits” and that “the CBSC structure allows the total to be greater than the parts”. However, it was pointed out that the “information [provided to Managing Partners] is mostly activity focused” and therefore satisfies only a basic need.

Certainly the referral system is working well. When clients were asked about the accuracy of referrals, they responded positively (Figure 24, on the next page). Approximately 53% received referrals; 91% said they were accurate; and a total of 94.5% said they were somewhat useful, useful or very useful.

**Figure 24: Referrals**

*Client Survey, questions 25 to 27*



The Institute has concluded that CBSCs are meeting basic Partner needs, with one exception – general public awareness.

Government Partners have a need for the public to be aware of their efforts on behalf of small business, which makes up a large part of their constituent audience. For instance, the *Canada - British Columbia Agreement on a Business Service Centre* expressly stipulates that the Partners' collaboration must serve to "ensure recognition of governments' support and funding to this initiative amongst small business clients, service providers and the general public" (clause 2.2f).

To assess whether Partners' awareness needs have been met, the Institute asked potential clients whether they had ever heard of the CBSCs. Approximately two-thirds replied that they had not. In addition, anecdotal evidence (gathered when the Institute was conducting the Client Survey) suggests that the trade name "Canada Business Service Centre" generally has a low recognition factor. Many clients failed to respond until the CBSCs were referred to by their regional name – the Business Link, for example, or Victoria Connects. All four Centres have identified branding as an unresolved issue (this subject is discussed again in connection with the issue of outcomes).

### 4.3 Mandate

EVALUATION ISSUE	RELEVANCE
EVALUATION QUESTION	Is the mandate relevant?

As mentioned earlier, the CBSC mandate is described in the *CBSC Annual Report 2000 – 01* (page 3) as having five aspects:

- to serve as the primary source
- of timely and accurate business-related information and referrals
- on federal programs, services and regulations,
- without charge,
- in all regions of the country.

#### Primary source

A precise meaning of the phrase ‘primary source’ needs to be established before this aspect of the mandate can be evaluated. People seem to use the term somewhat loosely, sometimes meaning ‘pre-eminent’ and at other times meaning ‘elemental’.

The Institute has concluded that the first aspect of the stated mandate is relevant, provided that ‘primary source’ is taken to signify ‘a source of basic information and knowledge.’ This interpretation accords well with the description of Service Objectives outlined in Appendix A of the 1998 *Canada – Manitoba Agreement on a Business Service Centre* which states that the Centre’s focus “will be on efficiently meeting those types of basic business information requests which are commonly directed toward the public sector” (page 21). Business Infosource (Saskatchewan) also exemplifies this approach – its website describes the Centre as “your first stop for business information.” The Information Services Curve developed by the Manitoba CBSC (reproduced in this Report as Figure 5 at page 10) provides a succinct illustration of how the phrase “primary source” is applied in practice.



### **Timely and accurate business-related information and referrals**

Both clients and potential clients reported a need for business-related information (Figure 22, page 25), and referrals are an integral part of providing much of the information. The Institute finds this aspect of the mandate to be relevant.

The National Evaluation Framework has included “sounder / improved business planning and market research” and a “stronger SME community” in CBSC outcomes and impacts, and the Institute has identified improved business literacy in the SME sector as the Centres’ overall outcome. All of these outcomes presuppose a degree of knowledge transfer and application. However, the mandate prescribed in the *CBSC Annual Report 2000 – 01* refers neither to services nor to knowledge transfer.

A distinction needs to be drawn between information and knowledge. Information has been defined as “data presented in readily comprehensible form, to which meaning has been attributed within a context for its use”, whereas knowledge is considered to be “information that has been comprehended and evaluated in the light of experience, and incorporated into the knower's understanding of the world.” (ODLIS) Indeed, the Business Link has captured the essence of the distinction (and elegantly articulated its outcomes) in a brochure that proclaims

MAKE THE LINK. In business, knowledge truly is power. What you know and what you do with it makes all the difference in the world. To help you make a difference, explore the services of The Business Link – a place where small businesses and promising entrepreneurs across Alberta can find the information, support and advice they need to succeed.

Alberta’s brochure raises another point – the focus on small business. All four CBSCs in western Canada have concentrated on the SME sector. BC’s *Strategic Plan 2001 – 2004* is typical of its counterparts when it says the Centre’s purpose “is to support the development and success of small and medium-sized enterprises” (page 2). Yet the mandate described in the current *CBSC Annual Report* fails to mention SMEs.

The Institute is therefore of the opinion that the stated mandate, although relevant, does not fully describe a CBSC’s function.

### **Federal programs, services and regulations**

CBSCs in western Canada are governed by four parallel agreements signed by the federal government and by each of the provincial governments, respectively. All agreements stipulate that the Centres are to provide “a framework for federal and provincial cooperation” and clearly envisage dissemination of both federal and provincial business information.

The Institute has concluded that a *joint* federal/provincial aspect of the mandate is relevant, given the fact that provincial governments have a major impact on business operations (Figure 11, page 15) and deliver many fundamental services such as incorporation and workers’ compensation.

### **Without charge**

This aspect of the mandate appears to the Institute to be superfluous. Although there appears to be little appetite for paying market value fees for service (a subject which is addressed in more detail in connection with the issue of alternatives), on-line business registries typically require users to pay a processing fee, and some CBSCs are in fact charging fees for customized reports (BC is an example).

### **All regions of the country**

The need for business information and services arises wherever a business is located. Accordingly this final aspect of the mandate is relevant.

All four of the CBSCs in western Canada have adopted regionalization as part of their mission. As Saskatchewan stated in its *Operational Plan 2000 – 2004*, the purpose is to extend “comprehensive access to government and business information ... to smaller communities throughout” the province (page 11). Impetus for adding regional nodes to the network accelerated during the Canadian Rural Partnership consultations in 1998, in which support to rural communities “was seen, in many ways, as revolving around the question of how to improve access to information” (page 6). Organizations already delivering business information services have become regional access centres. The delivery mechanism for electronic materials is known as REACH, the acronym for Regional Economic Access and Community Help.

#### 4.4 Intended Outputs

<b>EVALUATION ISSUE</b>	<b>SUCCESS</b>
<b>EVALUATION QUESTION</b>	<b>Have CBSCs produced their intended outputs?</b>

##### Information Services

CBSCs produce an array of intended outputs, summarized in Table 7. New products are being added each year.

**Table 7: Core CBSC Products and Services (1999 – 2002)**

	1999/2000	2000/2001	2001/2002	CBSCs
Business Information System (BIS)	√	√	√	All
Key government publications	√	√	√	All
Government programs and services	√	√	√	All
Other library collections/databases	√	√	√	All
Interactive Business / Export Planners	√	√	√	All
On-line Small Business Workshop	√	√	√	All
Performance Plus (benchmarking)	√	√	√	All
Workshops, seminars etc.	√	√	√	All
Info Guides, Pathfinders etc.	√	√	√	All
Team Canada Inc.	√	√	√	All
On-line business registrations		√	√	BC, SK *
Advisory services (e.g., Guest Advisor Prog.)		√	√	AB, MB
Talk-to-Us!		√	√	All
Business Start-up Assistant			√	All

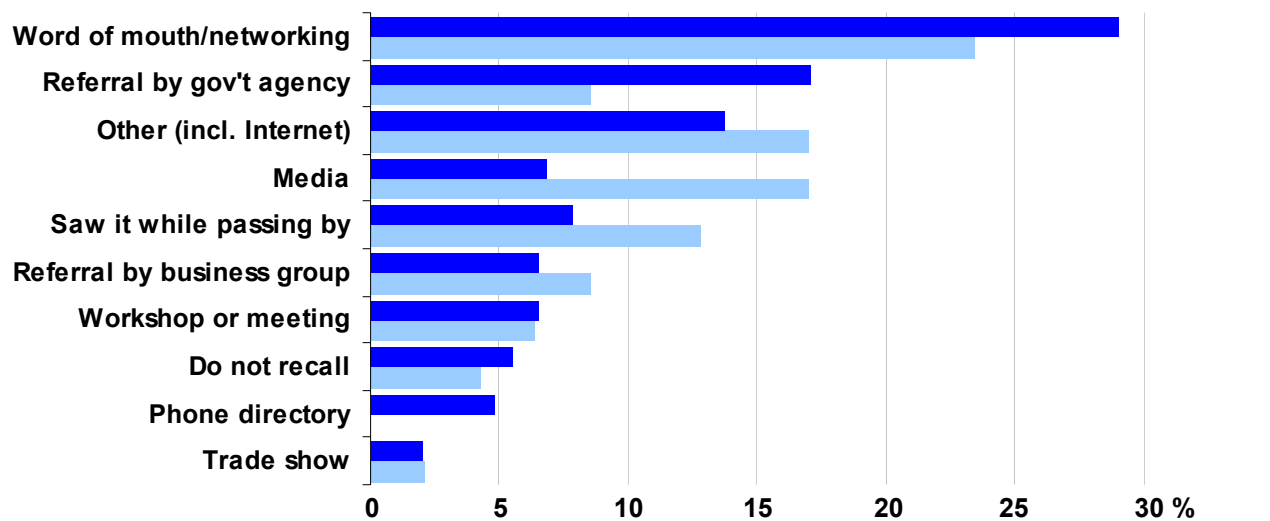
\* Note: full interactive registrations are not available, due to a requirement (imposed by the provincial Corporations Branch) that paper copies of applications be filed in addition to electronic registration.

**Marketing**

CBSCs produce a number of outputs such as brochures, media releases, promotional ads, telephone directory listings and trade show materials. All such outputs are intended to catch the attention of potential customers. To assess the effectiveness of these outputs, the Institute asked both clients and potential clients how they first learned of the Centres. Their replies are summarized in Figure 25.

**Figure 25: Awareness of CBSCs by Source**

*Client Survey, question 2; Potential Client Survey, question 2*



By far the most clients and potential clients heard of the Centres by word of mouth and networking, neither of which are directly influenced by CBSC outputs. The least successful marketing outputs are trade show materials. The Institute has concluded that, although CBSCs are producing intended outputs, few are particularly effective.

**Partnerships**

Intended outputs related to Partnerships include regional access centres, partnership contributions and agreements among a variety of Partners. Figure 2 (page 6) shows that satellite offices and regional access centres have been established in every province. Table 4 (page 8) lists the financial contributions of Managing Partners. In addition, the Centres access and refer to a wide array of materials provided by all types of partner. Agreements between the Managing Partners in each province have all been renewed beyond their original term. The Institute has therefore determined that CBSCs are producing their intended outputs.

## 4.5 Intended Outcomes

<b>EVALUATION ISSUE</b>	<b>SUCCESS</b>
<b>EVALUATION QUESTION</b>	<b>Have CBSCs achieved their intended outcomes?</b>

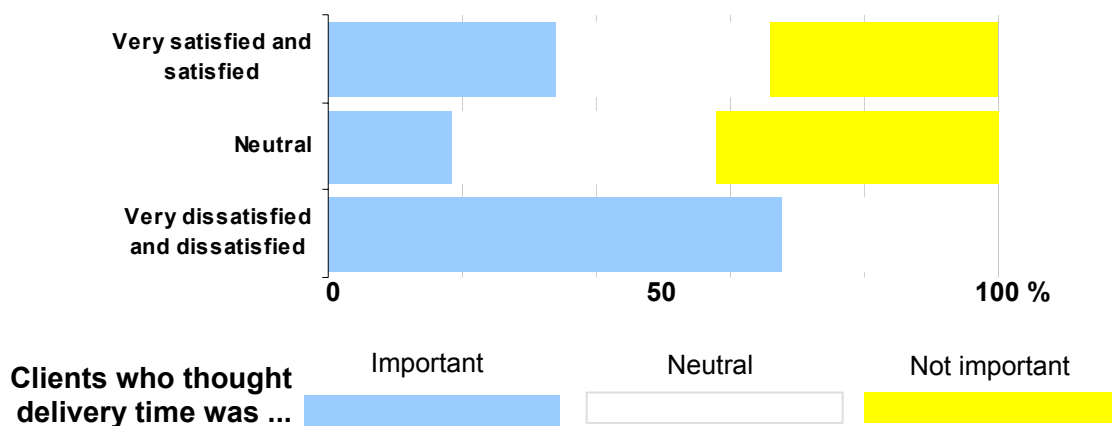
As illustrated in Figure 4 (page 9), the Institute identified two outcomes flowing from Information Services and Marketing – SME (small and medium-sized enterprise) access to timely, accurate and relevant business information and referrals; and SME participation in business planning and analytical practices. The outcome for Partnerships is a single portal to multiple sources of information. These three outcomes are expected to exert a positive influence on business literacy in the SME sector.

### Access to Timely, Accurate and Relevant Business Information and Referrals

The first outcome is regarded by many senior officials and nearly all staff to be fundamental to their mission. As one Partner representative said, “This is our strong point, our main core service.” Clients generally agree – when invited to list significant impacts on their business, several clients identified contacts, community resources and assistance with finding resources. Others said they had “saved a lot of time” and received “speedier documents”, although not everyone was satisfied with the timeliness of information (Figure 26).

**Figure 26: Client Satisfaction Ratings Correlated with Importance of Delivery Time**

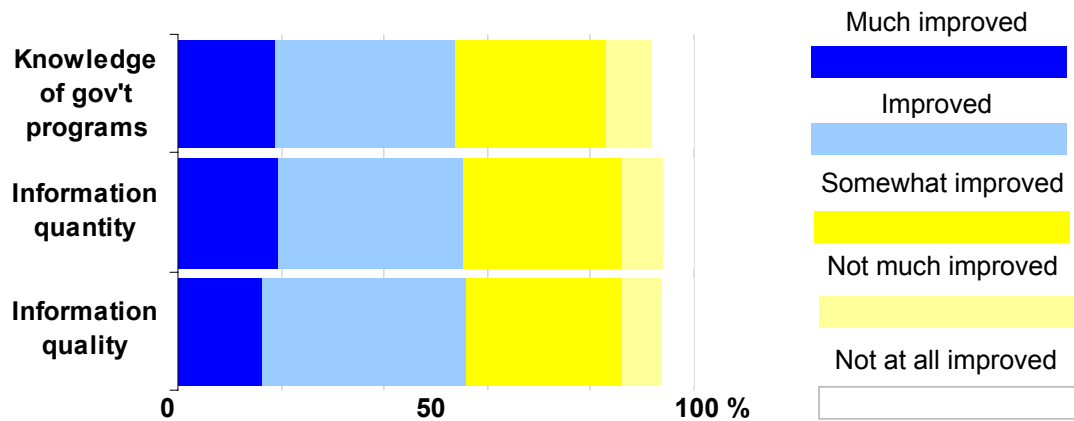
*Client Survey, questions 7 and 8*



All in all, over 85% of the clients surveyed responded that CBSCs helped improve their access to relevant business information. A similar proportion believed their knowledge of government programs, and the quantity and quality of information available to them, had been much improved, improved or somewhat improved by CBSCs (Figure 27). Women reported significantly higher perceptions of improvement than men (Figure 28).

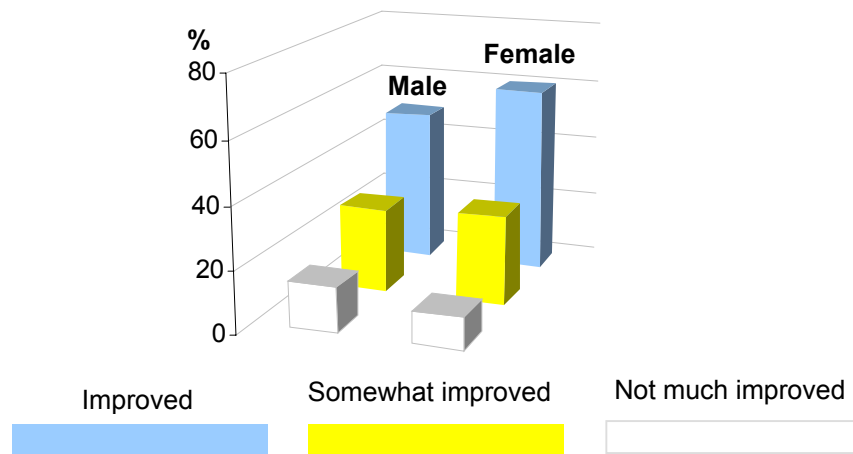
**Figure 27: Clients' Perception of Outcomes**

*Client Survey, questions 30, 32 and 33*



**Figure 28: Clients' Perception of Outcomes by Gender**

*Client Survey, questions 30, 32, 33 and 58*



The Institute is of the opinion that CBSCs have achieved the first of their basic outcomes, although there is room for improvement.

### **SME Participation in Business Planning and Analytical Practices**

The Manitoba CBSC highlighted the strategic importance of business planning and analytical practices in Appendix A to its 1998 agreement between Managing Partners (pages 18 to 19).

A review of academic literature and a variety of surveys have demonstrated the importance of sound business planning to the long-term success of a business venture, whether in the start-up phase or in expansion. ... Yet evidence suggests that most owner/operators lack the time, ability and desire to conduct formal business planning or research. Canadian small business studies indicate that less than one-quarter of *new* businesses actually conduct any formal planning and that fewer than one-third of *existing* businesses conduct any formal planning. The high costs to society of commercial failures makes it clear that long-term survival and prosperity of communities and society overall will require businesses to enhance their dedication to more formal 'tried and proven' practices ....

Client responses to the survey indicate that many owner/operators are indeed taking advantage of the planning and analytical tools and services provided by CBSCs. One person said the most significant impact on his or her business was the "potential problem areas / risks" that CBSC staff had helped identify. Another reported that staff had "got us thinking about all possible angles instead of straight ahead." A third mentioned that s/he received "excellent information to help me make informed decisions," which will "help me serve my clients better." Not all responses were positive, however. One individual sent the message that "I'm still searching and in danger of losing \$600, partly from not having info."

Senior officials recognized both the value of getting SMEs to adopt proven management skills and some of the implications for their core business. "Building more diagnostic and interactive tools helps bring clients along," but, at the same time, "a web-focus brings in a more sophisticated client, increasing the level of service demand, and the need to train our staff."

In addition, increasing sophistication in what one executive called a “demand pull, not a supply push, business” can begin to lure CBSCs further up the Information Services Curve than is warranted by their core mandate (Figure 5, page 10). This phenomenon has been called “mandate creep” by some officials, who acknowledged that a fine line divides primary level services and more in-depth expert counseling. One of the key commitments listed in the summary of a recent CBSC Regional Managers’ Roundtable, for example, is “expand services (value-added services),” which begs the question of whether ‘value-added’ equates to increased levels of human interaction and knowledge intensity (CBSC 2002, slide 13).

The CBSC Mission itself tends to reinforce a temptation to move past providing primary level services. The Mission Statement reads as follows (*CBSC Annual Report 2000 – 01*):

- *to improve the start-up, survival and growth rates of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) by giving business people in every part of Canada access to accurate, timely and relevant information and referrals;*
- *to reduce the complexity of dealing with various levels of government by consolidating business information from the clients’ perspective in one convenient service;*
- *to enable clients to make well-informed business decisions in a global economy; and*
- *to encourage business success through sound business planning, market research and the use of strategic information.*

The phrases italicized above describe what would happen – in an ideal world – if all owner/operators actually absorbed and applied the information and knowledge made available by CBSCs. The words in normal type describe what Centres are, in fact, mandated to do. A gap exists between the two sets of words. The italicized phrases reach beyond the mandate and serve to exhort CBSC staff and management to take on responsibility for outcomes that are beyond their control.



This lack of congruence between the mandate and the mission inevitably leads to confusion. If the mission statement were restated along the lines of “be the best (most responsive, most knowledgeable, most well-connected etc.) providers of business information and knowledge in a manner that can be readily absorbed and applied by SME owners and operators”, then it would reinforce the mandate. It would also give CBSCs a stronger platform from which to build on its successes and secure its position in the years to come.

Taking these factors into account, the Institute has concluded that CBSCs have succeeded in engaging clients in business planning and analytical practices – which is what their mandate is – and have therefore achieved their second outcome – SME participation in business planning and analytical practices.

### **Single Portal to Multiple Sources of Information**

The movement known as *Reinventing Government*, named after the book authored by David Osborne and Ted Gaebler, drove many governments in the 1990s to begin redesigning the way they delivered programs. It was a popular move with the public – anything said to eliminate duplication and overlap won immediate favour. Even better in their view was the idea of dealing with just one, instead of a dozen, officials. The one window, one stop shopping approach looked like an ideal solution and the new Internet seemed full of promise. Very few people anticipated just how complex the challenge to simplify would turn out to be.

CBSCs were pioneers in this new world of alternate service delivery. They quickly adopted ‘best of breed’ design principles: client-centred operations, dynamic partnerships, regional flexibility bolstered by national capacity, triage and TQM. With relatively little in the way of financial backing, but rich in the way of relationships and information resources, the Centres were launched in the early to mid '90s.

Absolutely central to the vision of CBSCs was, and is, the concept of a single portal to multiple sources of information. Its importance to the partnership as an intended outcome is crystal clear. On the other hand, there is much less clarity as to what criteria should be used to judge its success.

### Single Portal

To determine whether the single portal is working well, the tendency has been to rely on a somewhat imprecise criterion, expressed in the National Evaluation Framework as “increased awareness” (Figure 6, page 12). Making awareness synonymous with success, however, leads to a rather gloomy conclusion. As mentioned earlier, only one-third of the potential clients who were surveyed had ever heard of CBSCs. Furthermore, the trade name ‘Canada Business Service Centre’ generally has a low recognition factor, even among clients who have used CBSCs within the past twelve months. These two issues, visibility and branding, are causing senior officials considerable angst.

The issue of CBSC visibility needs to be put into context before an unnecessarily harsh conclusion is drawn. Industry Canada recently published the results of its *Small Business Information Needs Assessment (SBINA) Survey*. Over 1,000 SMEs across Canada were polled by telephone and asked, among other things, (a) whether they had heard about CBSCs, and (b) whether they were aware of federal government websites that provide business-related information. In both cases, one-third of the respondents answered yes. In the second case, however, only half who claimed awareness could identify specific Government of Canada sites. Clearly, visibility is an issue for all government departments, and CBSCs are succeeding as well as most (if not all).

The *SBINA Survey* also established that “business managers pointed most often, by far, to ‘informal’ sources” when asked to identify their most important sources of information. Government sources were rated low on the scale (about 3.5% for both provincial and federal governments). Exactly half expressed agreement with the statement that they “don’t really think of government as a provider of useful business information.” The marketplace, evidently, has not been primed for products and services such as CBSCs have on offer.

Branding takes on a new complexion in this context. Is it name recognition or market receptivity that needs to be addressed? Although the answer may be “partly both”, results from the *SBINA Survey* strongly suggest that branding will not succeed unless potential clients are first prepared to hear the message.

The whole issue is complicated by the question of whether or not SMEs use, or prefer to use, the Internet. The *SBINA Survey* reported that they don't (57% used the phone to get government assistance or information, compared to 19% who used e-mail). The Canadian Federation of Independent Business says they do (CFIB 2001 – 67% e-mail use, based on face to face interviews with 22,500 Canadian members). The Government of Canada's poll shows that 63% of businesses with fewer than 100 employees use the Internet (GOL 2002, page 5). CBSCs themselves are experiencing a shift from personal to web-based client contacts. E-mail inquiries and website visits have soared, for example, while fax-on-demand requests and automated telephone calls have taken a corresponding dive (Figure 16, page 19).

Whatever the answer may be, planning for success with respect to the single portal requires dual tracking – both websites and office sites. And both will require the support of advertising. Contrary to what one might think intuitively, creating a website is not the modern-day version of “build it and they will come”. “Online services must be marketed to drive take up”, according to Accenture in its 2002 benchmarking study of national government on-line services (*Realizing the Vision*, page 12). This point is made all the stronger when applied to the business information marketplace, since potential clients are not prone to put the idea of ‘business’ in the same sentence as ‘government’ with any immediate sense of well-being.

The Accenture report focuses on e-government service delivery. Nevertheless, it does provide some guidance with respect to evaluating a single portal, regardless of whether the portal is web-based or physically located in an office setting. Two types of indicators are suggested: transactional characteristics and customer relationship management (CRM) techniques.

**Transactional characteristics** are important because they directly affect a desired outcome. For a single portal, the intended result is to present one point of access as if it were a window on the entire multi-government world behind it. The CBSC Mission Statement expresses this concept by referring to a “[consolidation of] business information from the clients’ perspective in one convenient service.”

The key here is “*one convenient service*”. In other words, the transaction needs to be completed – otherwise, the client is simply being given the same old run around s/he got before the portal was introduced. Looked at in this way, it is fair to say that CBSCs have, by and large, achieved success with the single portal. Clients in BC, for example, have been able to complete simple transactions like business registrations without the need to access more than one service provider. Clients in the market for specific information or knowledge have also been satisfied, either with items like Pathfinders or with interactive tools like the Business Planner or Performance Plus. Even referrals can be regarded as completed transactions, since clients are led immediately to the resource that is most suited to their needs. CBSCs’ objective of “providing no wrong door” is particularly powerful in this regard.

The situation becomes far more complex, however, when a transaction involves multiple services. In the world of e-government, the literature is beginning to identify thresholds of effectiveness. “If the thing to be exchanged in the transaction can be reduced to a bundle of information, the technology is well-suited to improving the service. ...Such services are often referred to as the ‘low-hanging fruit’ ...” (CCG 2002, page 12). The next level of transaction entails clustering or bundling services in such a way that clients not only access a single portal, but they also receive an integrated service package that is delivered simultaneously (bundled) from a variety of different service providers.

There is some indication that CBSCs are approaching a threshold of effectiveness in providing SME access to business information and knowledge. As one senior official said, “Even in this web-based and non-counseling climate, we still need to path find with our clients.” Regional managers have also talked about introducing new value-added services, which could well lead them into an exploration of bundled services and a possible role as brokers amongst their many Partners. If this occurs, Cooperating, Regional Access, Co-located and Managing Partners will need to develop closer working relationships. Ultimately, seamless service delivery depends on a well-integrated system of interactions between multiple departments in various levels of government. It does not appear that the Partners have achieved this state of integration as yet.

**CRM techniques** focus attention on the customer. In the words of the CBSC Mission, the “*clients’* perspective” is the most important. Accenture developed five indicators to measure CRM (*Realizing the Vision*, page 4). The Institute has adapted three of the indicators as criteria for evaluating CBSC’s single portal:

1. insight: is the client tracked, and the information used to offer a more tailored service to the SME market?
2. intention: is the service organized around client needs (rather than around internal government structures)?
3. interaction: is a client’s individual situation routinely taken into account (as opposed to applying a one-size-fits-all ‘solution’)?

Reviewing these three criteria, the report card on CBSCs is rather less straightforward. The first criterion, insight, raises the specter of privacy rights. Yet, as several senior officials said, “We need to know our clients better.” The Centres ran into this dilemma when asked to provide sample populations for the evaluation survey. They do not systematically track clients in a manner that leads to automatic follow-up or tailor-made services.

On the other hand, CBSCs perform well on the second and third criteria. The Centres have worked hard to organize around client needs and to develop products and services that respond to their particular circumstances. Talk-to-Us! is a good example, as mentioned before. Path finding (of the personal sort, rather than the printed materials) is another. Business information officers perform preliminary needs assessments whenever appropriate to do so, usually when client requests involve more than simple data transfer (Figure 5, page 10).

### **Multiple sources of information**

Both the National Evaluation Framework and the Institute have described partnership agreements as outputs. The number of partnerships can also be taken as a simplistic measure of success when evaluating whether CBSCs have obtained multiple sources of information. The evidence is clear on this point: all CBSCs in western Canada have established relationships with a large number of government departments, as well as with other organizations; they have all maintained a wide array of useful contacts, and they have all built extensive information collections.

Some thought also needs to be given to the significance of CBSC information collections. It has been said that “information is to the knowledge-based economy what oil was to the industrial-based one.” (CCG 2002, page 20) CBSCs are therefore extremely well positioned if they choose to take strategic advantage of their assets. Not only are they custodians of, or have access to, an enormous amount of data, they also have the necessary knowledge to extract the most valuable and reliable segments from the rest of the data, package them, and deliver them to SMEs for immediate consumption. The Centres have been doing just that for years – Pathfinders, Info Guides, the Business Planner and a great many other products are good examples. What they have not done is fully exploit the significance of their contribution. As mentioned earlier, the message that CBSCs deliver reliable, impartial and important value-added business data has yet to reach the marketplace.

All things considered, the Institute has concluded that CBSCs have achieved their third outcome – a single portal to multiple sources of information. However, thoughtful leadership will be required over the next few years in order to optimize results.

It should be noted, before leaving this subject, that the single portal outcome is a supportive one. If done well, the portal enhances SME access to information and facilitates business owner/operator participation in management practices such as planning and analysis. Figure 4 (page 9) illustrates this connection by way of an arrow pointing from the single portal to the other two outcomes.

### **Improved Business Literacy in the SME Sector**

Improved business literacy in the SME sector is beyond the direct control of CBSCs, but is subject to their influence if the three outcomes discussed above are successfully implemented. Given that SMEs have accessed business information and referrals offered by the CBSCs, have used the research services and management tools made available through the Centres, have reported an improvement in their knowledge of government programs, and have said that the quantity and quality of information available to them was also improved (Figure 27, page 34), the Institute believes it is reasonable to assume that business literacy in the SME sector has been positively influenced.

## 4.6 Unintended Impacts

EVALUATION ISSUE	SUCCESS
EVALUATION QUESTION	Were there unintended impacts?

Three main unintended impacts emerged:

1. The strength and success of the CBSC model has given rise to competition where least expected. The federal government is vigorously pursuing its Government On-Line (GOL) initiative, and echoes many of the design principles first adopted by CBSCs when it says "Canadians are looking for seamless service from government ...They want a single place to find all government services that are relevant to them in one place, at one time – a 'single window' into government." (GOL 2002, page 7) The Business Start-up Assistant, developed by CBSCs and its many federal, provincial and local partners, has also been integrated into GOL as one of the government's successes. Plans are afoot to bring more business services on-line through GOL. It is uncertain as yet what role the CBSCs will play within the overall structure, although *BusinessGateway.gc* has clearly positioned the Centres under the business start-up category.

Other governments are also introducing an enhanced web presence. The Government of Alberta, for example, recently launched its new website *ServiceAlberta*. CBSCs are faced with the same competition at both federal and provincial levels.

2. Clients are requesting second generation products and services from CBSCs. As one senior official said, "Seminars and educational sessions are important services. They deal with the more sophisticated client who has already done a web search." Whether this change is impelled more by technology than by CBSC interactions in the marketplace, the impact is putting a strain on CBSC resources.

3. Loss of visibility is an unintended impact. “The more partners we have, the harder it is for us to have an identity” was how this phenomenon was described. Some managers have explored ways to label digital CBSC products through the ‘contact us’ function; others have sought to preserve their identity through incorporation as an independent society (BC) or not-for-profit corporation (Alberta). Many Centres or their satellites have adopted regional trade names that serve to distinguish them in their local marketplaces, although federal GOL sites continue to refer generically to CBSCs, with no provincial or local identification whatsoever. All Centres are exploring more regional alternatives to help build their local identity, explore locally successful program and funding options and build more partnerships with the private and not-for-profit sector.

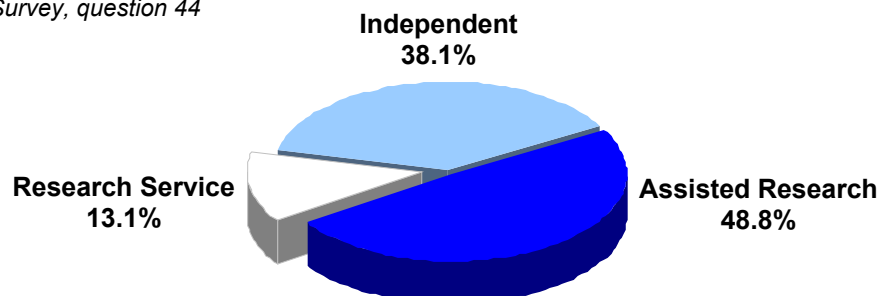
#### 4.7 Cost-effective Alternatives

EVALUATION ISSUE	ALTERNATIVES
EVALUATION QUESTION	Is there a more cost-effective way to deliver the program?

When asked to list additional types of products or services, 11% of the clients suggested “more information on a particular sector of business”. Business counseling, information on government grants and in-depth research assistance ranged in frequency from 9% to 6% respectively. With respect to research, clients were probed a little further to determine whether a market exists for research services. Almost two-thirds said they prefer some assistance or a research service (Figure 29).

**Figure 29: Preferred Methods of Research**

*Client Survey, question 44*





Both clients and potential clients were asked how much, if anything, they would pay for services (Figure 30). Potential clients demonstrate a higher propensity to pay than clients. Fewer people would pay for self serve computers, likely because respondents had access to their own PC (the surveys being web-based). Staff were also asked which of these products or services they would like CBCSs to provide. The percentage responses are provided in the right hand column of Figure 30.

**Figure 30: Willingness to Pay – Clients and Potential Clients**

*Client Survey, question 46, Potential Client Survey, question 47*

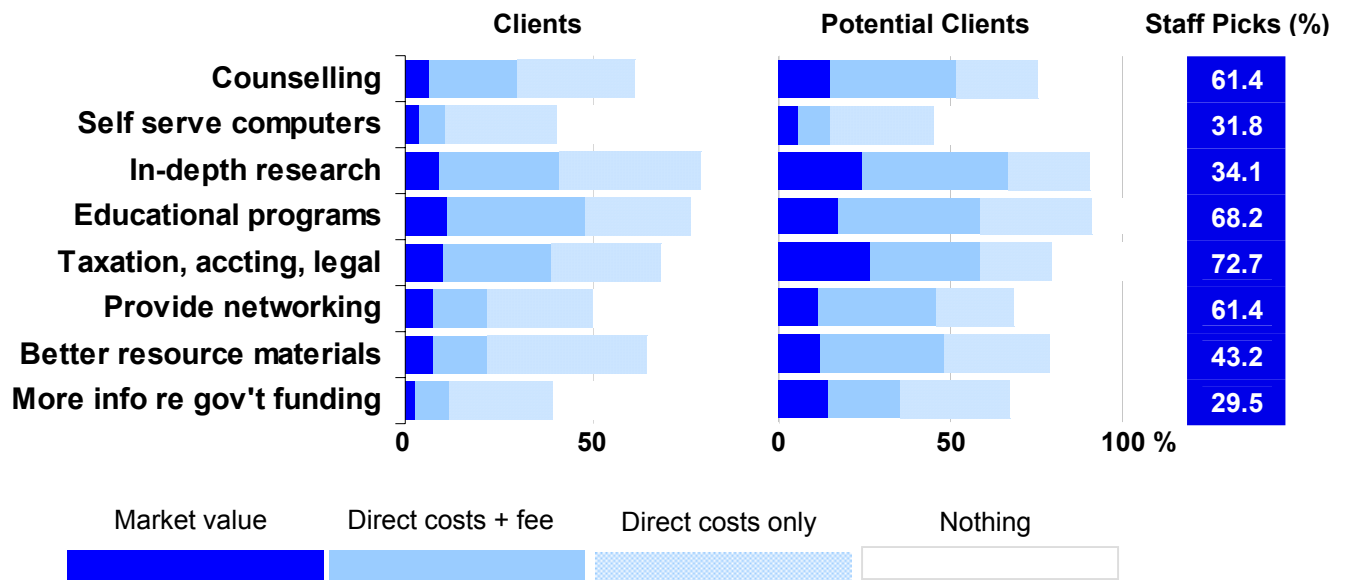
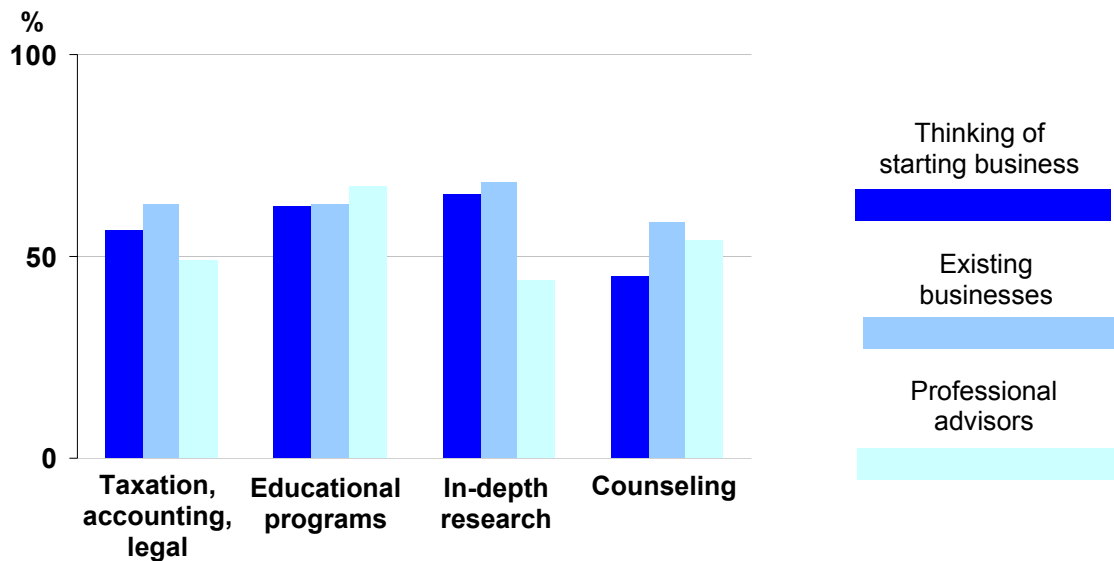


Figure 30 shows there is some market potential for cost recovery or modest service fees. More than 50% of the clients said they would at least pay direct costs, except in the areas of information about government funding, networking and self serve computers.

To determine whether receptivity to paying for some services varies according to the type of client responding, the Institute correlated status with willingness to pay. No significant variations appeared among client groups who were willing to pay either market value or nothing. Aggregating responses for direct costs plus service fee and direct costs only, small variations occur between business start-ups, existing businesses and professional advisors (Figure 31, on the next page).

**Figure 31: Willingness to Pay Direct Costs + Fee / Direct Costs Only, by Category**

*Client Survey, questions 46 and 47*

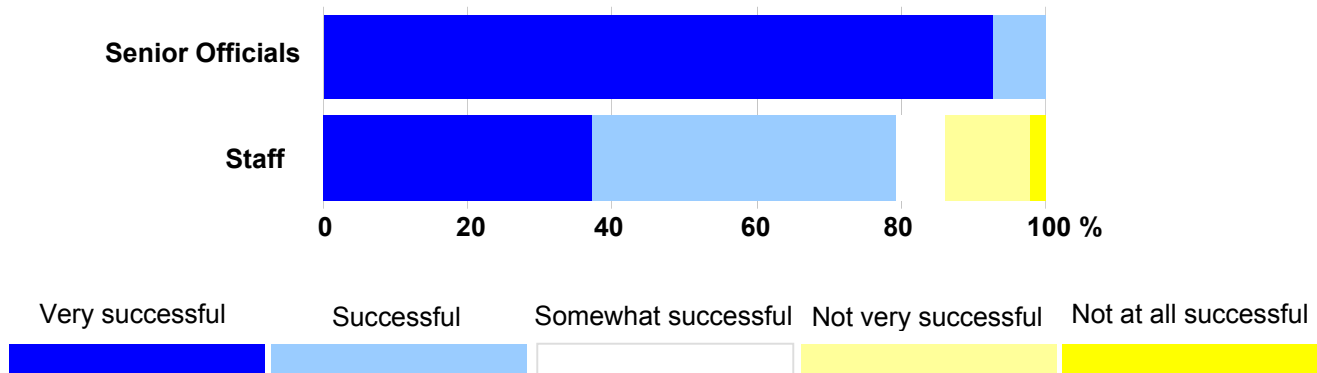


To get some idea of what the market will bear, potential clients were asked to specify a range of prices they paid for services purchased from other sources. Very few replied. Of the seven who said they had paid for market information, three said they spent more than \$100; the others spent no more than \$50. The largest number of respondents (15) said they paid more than \$100 for managing an existing business. In view of the low number of responses, this question did not provide reliable data.

Generally speaking, senior officials and staff believe that CBSCs have been successful in maximizing information and referral services while minimizing costs. Senior officials took a more positive view of the overall situation than staff (Figure 32, on the next page). As one executive officer pointed out, “activity has increased while costs have been held”. Several mentioned that moving to a web-based platform would help manage scarce resources. In addition, about 40% of the staff felt that research services could be offered more effectively if client demand were increased. Similarly, roughly half thought increased demand would improve the effectiveness of training sessions.

**Figure 32: Maximizing Service, Minimizing Costs**

*Staff Survey, question 11, Senior Officials Interviews, question 9*



## 4.8 Design and Delivery

EVALUATION ISSUE	ALTERNATIVES
EVALUATION QUESTION	Are there alternative ways to design and deliver the program?

CBSCs were built on a strong foundation. The principles which guided their design are as true today as they were five or ten years ago when the Centres were first created. The program, in broad outline, is designed to

- ✓ be client-centred and available throughout the whole service area;
- ✓ offer seamless service delivery in response to primary business-related information and knowledge needs of the SME sector;
- ✓ use triage to direct clients to the next most appropriate service provider;
- ✓ function as a network including departments and agencies from federal, provincial and municipal governments as well as private sector organizations;
- ✓ answer to a management committee comprised of partners, rather than bosses; and

- ✓ institute systematic feedback from clients and other stakeholders to ensure that the program continuously improves and adapts to changing circumstances.

This last point is particularly important, because the circumstances within which CBSCs operate are changing quite significantly. The marketplace is in transition, for one thing. Client profiles are shifting to include a larger proportion of established businesses. Both clients and potential clients are rapidly moving away from old technologies such as fax and telephone, and the Internet presents new opportunities as well as new challenges. The second major change is competition. Other public and private sector service providers are vying with one another and with CBSCs to deliver the same kind of services and products that the Centres have offered over the past decade or so. Although leaders in their field, CBSCs are now feeling pressure from rival organizations, many of whom have more resources at their disposal, and (because they are funding Partners) have the option of choosing to dominate the field.

In this environment, *product* design and delivery options assume a higher priority. There is no doubt that CBSCs have created a culture of continuous improvement for their product line. Table 7 (page 31) demonstrates that new services and business tools are being introduced on a regular basis. In addition, regional managers identified development of on-line tools and websites as one of five major themes at a recent roundtable discussion of priorities for the coming year (CBSC 2002, slide 15).

During the study phase of the evaluation, the Institute asked both senior officials and staff to make suggestions with respect to design and delivery options. Many commented on the need to concentrate on web-based solutions. Virtually everyone agreed that state-of-the-art technology (and skilled technical support staff) will be needed to respond to changing client demands. Better use of current information technologies was also mentioned. For example, one staff member made the simple, but potentially effective, suggestion that CBSCs “use a centralized computer/Internet kiosk for clients to download or print documents (rather than relying on printed brochures and books, which require frequent updates).” However, no one offered specific suggestions as to how current challenges might be addressed at a strategic level.

## 5.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Institute's evaluation addressed three issues: relevance, success and alternatives.

### 5.1 Relevance

Three evaluation questions framed the assessment of relevance – are client needs being met? are Partner needs being met? and is the mandate relevant?

#### **Meeting Client Needs**

CBSCs are meeting most client needs, although they have yet to capture the market for operational business needs as fully as they might.

The emphasis placed on serving start-up business clients has paid dividends in terms of client ratings. New business start-up information was deemed highly useful by respondents to the Client Survey (Figure 20, page 22).

However, CBSCs (at least in the prairie provinces) are experiencing a shift in their market towards clients who own or operate an existing business. The shift is quite dramatic in some provinces. Manitoba, for instance, has gathered statistics that show a 100% increase in the number of existing businesses over the past year, confirming a four year trend. Saskatchewan and Alberta have documented a similar trend. This market segment (both clients and potential clients) demonstrated a significant interest in information and business tools related to operational issues (Figure 22, page 25), yet the extent to which they found CBSC products and services useful was relatively low compared to start-up clients (Figure 21, page 23).

#### **Meeting Partner Needs**

Basic partner needs are being met. Clients have rated the referral service highly; 90.4% said they were accurate and a total of 94% said they were somewhat useful, useful or very useful. Partners themselves responded favourably when asked about the CBSCs, commenting that the network adds benefits and that the total is greater than the parts. However, one senior official made the point that tracking information provided to Managing Partners is mostly activity focused and therefore satisfies only a basic need.

### **Mandate**

The Institute concluded that CBSCs' mandate – as practised by the Centres – is relevant. The way it is written in the *CBSC Annual Report 2000-01*, however, leaves much to be desired.

One issue that arose with respect to a review of the mandate was the meaning of the phrase 'primary source'. Some people use the term to signify pre-eminence; others interpret it in the sense that basic products and services are being delivered. The Institute concluded that the second of the two meanings accurately describes what CBSCs actually do.

Clients and potential clients reported a need for management skills as well as business-related information. The Business Link has described the situation succinctly by saying "what you know and what you do with it makes all the difference in the world." CBSCs are responding to both needs. Although the written mandate specifies information (and referrals), it fails to mention knowledge. Nor does it refer to the SME sector, which constitutes a CBSC's target market. To this extent, the written mandate does not fully describe a Centre's function.

The written mandate incorrectly describes the information (and knowledge) being disseminated by CBSCs. They deal with far more than just "federal programs, services and regulations". Apart from materials provided by provincial, municipal and private sector Partners, CBSCs have developed and promoted general business data and tools such as the Interactive Business Planner. Furthermore, the written mandate states that CBSC services and products are delivered without charge, which is manifestly wrong. Business registrations typically require payment of a processing fee, and some CBSCs are in fact charging fees for services (customized reports are an example).

## 5.2 Success

Three factors were considered in evaluating success – intended outputs, intended outcomes and unintended impacts.

### Intended Outputs

The Institute concluded that CBSCs are producing their intended outputs, although shifting market demands and increasingly prevalent use of information technologies are presenting the Centres with some challenges.

An array of information products and services are made available through the Centres, and new ones are added each year (Table 7, page 31). The change in emphasis from start-up to operational issues should encourage CBSCs to put a greater amount of effort into products and services directed at ongoing business needs of the SME sector.

Figure 25 (page 32) highlights the fact that most clients and potential clients hear about CBSCs through word of mouth or networking. Only 2% were introduced to the Centres at a trade show, which suggests that this activity and associated outputs could be curtailed.

CBSCs have succeeded in producing partnership outputs, most notably by coordinating a total of 136 regional access centres and three satellite offices across the four western provinces (Figure 2, page 6). All Centres have renewed their operating agreements for a second term.

### Intended Outcomes

CBSCs have achieved their intended outcomes, of which there are three (Figure 4, page 9):

- SME access to timely, accurate and relevant business information and referrals;
- SME participation in business planning and analytical practices; and
- a single portal to multiple sources of information.

The Institute believes it is reasonable to assume that these three outcomes have exerted a positive influence on business literacy in the SME sector.

CBSCs identified SME access to information and knowledge as their core service. Clients generally agree that the Centres have achieved this outcome. Although not everyone was satisfied with the time it took to deliver services or products (Figure 26, page 33), over 85% of the clients responded that CBSCs helped improve their knowledge of government programs, and the quantity and quality of information available to them (Figure 27, page 34). In addition, CBSCs have recognized the strategic importance of management skills in the SME sector, and have succeeded in engaging SMEs in business planning and analytical practices.

Senior officials have recognized some of the implications of getting SMEs to adopt proven management skills. “Building more diagnostic and interactive tools helps bring clients along,” but, at the same time, “a web-focus brings in a more sophisticated client, increasing the level of service demand, and the need to train our staff.”

Executives have also identified a temptation to move further up the Information Services Curve (Figure 5, page 10) than is warranted by the CBSC mandate (a phenomenon described as “mandate creep”). In addition, the CBSC Mission tends to reinforce this temptation (page 36). It contains a great many phrases that reach beyond the CBSCs’ mandate, and encourages CBSC staff and management to take on responsibility for outcomes that are beyond their control.

The single portal outcome, when implemented successfully, enhances SME access to information and facilitates business owner/operator participation in management practices such as planning and analysis. Figure 4 (page 9) illustrates this connection by way of an arrow pointing from the single portal to the other two outcomes.

CBSCs were pioneers in developing a one-window approach to service delivery. They have, by and large, succeeded in implementation, although a number of issues arose in evaluating this outcome.



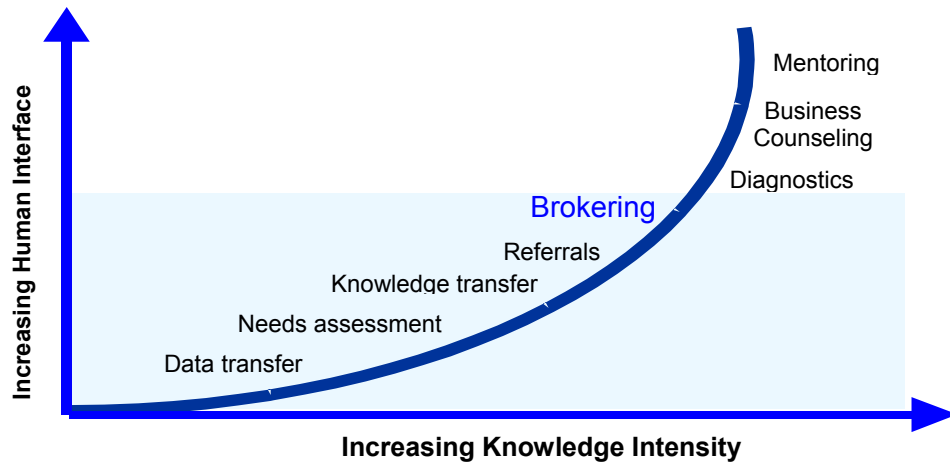
Increased awareness, a somewhat imprecise criterion, has been used over the past few years to judge whether the single portal has succeeded. Equating awareness with success has led to pessimism, because only a third of the potential client market has ever heard of CBSCs. The pessimism is unwarranted, however. The same number of SME owner/operators said they were also aware of federal government websites, but half of them failed in their attempt to identify specific sites (page 38). Clearly the CBSCs are succeeding as well as most (if not all) government departments in the visibility stakes.

Industry Canada's poll revealed another, more fundamental, characteristic of the SME market – half of the respondents agreed that they “don't really think of government as a provider of useful business information.” This finding raises important implications for CBSCs. It strongly suggests, for example, that branding will not succeed unless potential clients are first prepared to hear the message.

Planning for success with respect to a single portal in today's marketplace requires dual tracking – both websites and office sites. In addition to changing client profiles, CBSCs are experiencing a dramatic shift in the way clients access their products and services. Website visits and email have increased substantially; fax-on-demand and automated telephone use have taken a corresponding dive (Figure 16, page 19). Even walk-in traffic has declined over the past three years. In absolute numbers, however, CBSCs continue to deal with large volumes of client requests, whether digital, automated or officer assisted. Advertising is required, regardless of mode of access, if CBSCs want to increase their market share.

The Institute used four criteria to assess effectiveness of the single portal. First, it determined that clients could complete most transactions with a CBSC without having to resort to other sources. This achievement is made easier by the fact that CBSC transactions tend to involve relatively simple exchanges. It is possible that CBSCs will move to the next level of transaction – bundling services (bringing several service providers together in a single, simultaneous transaction). In this scenario, CBSCs would not actually deliver the services, but would co-ordinate the activities of others who dispense expertise requiring increased levels of interaction and knowledge intensity. The Information Services Curve would then look something like Figure 33 (on the next page).

Figure 33: The Information Services Curve Revisited



If CBSCs take on the role of co-ordinators to bundle services – in effect acting as brokers to implement a seamless government – then their Partners would need to accelerate existing efforts in order to achieve the necessary degree of service and delivery integration.

The other three criteria all fall under the heading of customer relationship management (CRM).

The extent to which clients were tracked (for the purpose of offering more tailored services to the SME marketplace) was examined. CBSCs do not systematically track customers, and so did not satisfy this criterion. Privacy rights complicate this issue but, as the Centre for Collaborative Government has said, “privacy can, and sometimes is, used as an excuse” for inaction (CCG 2002, page 18).

The extent to which CBSCs have organized their services around client needs was examined. CBSCs more than ably satisfied this criterion.

The extent to which CBSCs have routinely taken a client’s individual situation into account was examined. Again, CBSCs met requirements for this criterion.

The number of partnerships is a simplistic measure of success for the second part of the outcome – multiple sources of information. All CBSCs have succeeded in establishing relationships with a large number of government departments, as well as with other organizations; they have all maintained a wide array of useful contacts, and they have all built extensive information collections.

CBSCs have not, however, fully exploited their strategic advantage as custodians of and gatekeepers to their information (and knowledge) collections.

Three unintended impacts emerged: competition, more sophisticated clients, and loss of visibility (“the more partners we have, the harder it is for us to have an identity”). Many senior officials also raised the issue of governance in connection with the incorporation of two Centres (as a society in BC, and a not-for-profit corporation in Alberta). The Institute has not addressed this issue since it is beyond the scope of the current evaluation.

### **5.3 Alternatives**

A series of questions was asked of both clients and potential clients regarding their willingness to pay for services and products. Figure 30 (page 45) shows there is some market potential for cost recovery or modest service fees. There are small variations according to the type of client responding to the questions (Figure 31, page 46). Potential clients demonstrate a higher propensity to pay than clients.

The Institute determined that, in the case of CBSCs, alternatives to what may be termed product design and delivery are more important than alternatives to program design. The Centres were built on a strong foundation. The principles which guided their design are as true today as they were five or ten years ago. Success has led to emulation – rivals are now threatening to dominate the field. Competition, together with the changes in market demand discussed earlier, have put a fair amount of pressure on CBSCs. They have succeeded in creating a culture of continuous improvement – the number of new services and business tools introduced over the past three years is proof of their ability to adapt to changing circumstances. However, there was little evidence that CBSCs in the four western provinces have developed a cohesive set of ideas or actions that would address current challenges at a strategic level.

## 5.4 Evaluation Process

The evaluation was undertaken in five phases. After an initial Preparation Phase, a Design Phase Report served to confirm the sampling frame, survey and interview instruments with the Evaluation Steering Committee.

The Institute applied a methodology that is consistent with the *National Evaluation Framework* and the questions identified in the *Framework* as Common Measurement Tools (CMT). Eight research questions were framed to focus the evaluation on the three issues of relevance, success and alternatives (also sometimes called effectiveness). Five lines of evidence were used to evaluate CBSCs: a Client Survey, a Potential Client Survey, a Staff Survey, interviews with senior officials and a review of related research, pertinent documents and statistics from the National Secretariat's Client Service System data base.

The Study Phase executed the surveys, interviews and document reviews. Initial findings were reported to the Evaluation Steering Committee for comments on field research to date. The comments have been taken into account in the final Reporting Phase of the evaluation.

The Institute found that CMT questions identified in the *Framework* required some minor modification for use in the survey instruments (see Appendix B). It has also observed that several CMT questions were not relevant to the issues being examined in the current evaluation. The Institute has recorded its observations in Appendix C.

CBSCs have customized their approach to data collection, resulting in a range of data sources and quality across the Centres. Most of the data were activity-based and tracked the number of clients using different products or access modes. Very little outcome-based or potential market information was made available.

## 6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

### Meet the market head on

- Focus on business operational issues, with the objective of creating a balanced portfolio of information and knowledge products and services that meet the needs of existing businesses as well as those of start-up businesses in the SME sector.
- Develop a customer relationship management (CRM) strategy that enhances the Centres' ability to target basic SME information and knowledge needs, while respecting privacy rights. This strategy should also be designed to move beyond activity-based data in order to provide Managing Partners with meaningful information about the SME sector.
- Conduct market research to develop a 'best of breed' profile of potential clients in the SME sector.
- Test the market potential for cost recovery and modest service charges.
- If a communications strategy is adopted and implemented, focus on key messages about reliable, impartial and important value-added business data. Be specific about how SME owner/operators will benefit.
- Explore the next generation of the one-window approach, extending single access to provide bundled services in addition to bundled information packages.

### Meet the competition head on

- Identify best e-government practices and demonstrate that Business Service Centres in western Canada meet or exceed requirements to satisfy the criteria for success. As a first step, adopt the performance measures outlined in the Accenture Report (*eGovernment Leadership – Realizing the Vision*), and include CBSC results in its annual and other reports.
- Engage the Client Services Advisory Committees in designing web-based services and products.

- Explore the feasibility of becoming GOL's lead agency for developing policy and standards related to e-government SME programs. In particular, capitalize on the Centres' competitive advantages in this field. For example, CBSCs enjoy a dual presence in the SME market – 'clicks and mortar' – which could pay dividends if a CRM strategy and potential market research were deployed to best effect.
- Continue to explore ways of increasing the profile of Centres and Partners. *BusinessGateway.gc.ca* provides a precedent – it identifies provincial partners by displaying their flag as a logo. Using logos both on-line and off may offer a simple but effective answer to participants in the Business Service Network who need recognition.

#### **Look after the fundamentals**

- Refine the mandate to reflect what Business Service Centres in western Canada actually deliver, and align the mission with the mandate. Specifically, focus the mission statement on the three outcomes within a Centre's control – SME access to business information and knowledge, SME use of planning and analytical practices (management skills), both supported by a single portal with multiple sources of information and knowledge.
- Develop a strategic plan.
- Continue to provide a cadre of technical support staff to enhance each Centre's capacity to exploit both current and future information technologies, and capitalize on the technology's flexibility to meet differing regional needs.
- Review the survey results with respect to CMT questions. Specifically, WD and the Treasury Board Secretariat may wish to consider linking potential market research and CRM strategies with future applications of the Common Measurement Tools.



## **APPENDIX A:**

### **TERMS OF REFERENCE**



Western Economic Diversification Canada  
Diversification de l'économie de l'Ouest Canada

**Canada**  
**Audit and Evaluation**

## **Terms of Reference**

# **Evaluation of the Canada Business Service Centres (CBSCs)**



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## **Project Title**

*Evaluation of the Canada Business Service Centres*

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The Project Authority will closely manage the evaluation work performed by the individual or firm contracted by Western Economic Diversification (WD) to conduct the evaluation.

## **Purpose of the Evaluation**

In accordance with Treasury Board expectations and with WD Audit and Evaluation Work plans approved by the Departmental Audit and Evaluation Committee (DAEC), an evaluation of the Canada Business Service Centres (CBSCs) will be carried out.

Treasury Board guidance states that evaluation is expected to deliver timely, useful, relevant and credible information on the continued relevance of government policies and programs, on the impacts they are producing and on opportunities for using alternative and more cost-effective policy instruments or program delivery mechanisms to achieve stated objectives. Evaluation is expected to produce timely and pertinent findings that managers and other stakeholders can use with confidence.

The purpose of this project is to provide senior management with an independent examination and assessment of the CBSCs, advising on their relevance, success and effectiveness.

## **Objectives of the Evaluation**

T.B. Guidance states that the full range of evaluation issues should be considered during the conduct of an evaluation: (a) Does the policy or program continue to be consistent with departmental and government-wide priorities and does it realistically address an actual need? (Relevance), (b) Is the policy or program effective in meeting its objectives, within budget and without unwanted outcomes? (Success); (c) Are the most appropriate and efficient means being used to achieve objectives, relative to alternative design and delivery approaches? (Cost-effectiveness).

This evaluation will address the questions above in a manner consistent with current TB guidance, standards and expectations on evaluation and with the attached Evaluation Framework for the CBSCs as produced by Industry Canada in consultation with program and evaluation staff at WD. The Framework forms the basis for the evaluation work.

## **Scope of the Evaluation**

In keeping with TB Policy for evaluation, the evaluation will focus on issues of relevance, success and cost-effectiveness.

## The Relevance of CBSCs

The program relevance question is whether CBSCs continue to be consistent with departmental and government-wide priorities and if it realistically addresses an actual need. The focus is on the continued relevance of the program in light of present social and economic conditions and government policy. Here the issues are:

- Are CBSCs still needed for current government policy, even assuming they are producing as expected;
- Do CBSCs continue to be accurately focused on the problem or issue they were addressing; and
- Are the CBSC mandate and objectives adequately stated?

Comparing the current program activities with the mandated activities and examining the continued plausibility of the links between the program's activities and both its objectives and intended impacts and effects will develop an understanding of the rationale of the program.

## Success of CBSCs

Program success issues deal with two sets of questions. First, success is assessed in terms of the achievement of the programs objectives; *Has the program achieved what was expected?* Second, program success is considered in terms of the program's results by asking the question; *What has happened as a result of the program?*

Consideration of the outputs produced and the intended immediate, intermediate and final outcomes (where possible, on an agreement-by-agreement basis, and recognizing methodological and program limitations) of the CBSCs will help us determine what has happened as a result of the program. The evaluation however, will look at all of the results attributed to the CBSCs (both intended and unintended) regardless of stated objectives. In this evaluation, we will consider success in terms of determining the manner and the extent to which stated and appropriate objectives are achieved as a result of the program.

## Cost Effectiveness of CBSCs

Cost-effectiveness issues revolve around whether the most appropriate and efficient means are being used to achieve CBSC objectives - particularly relative to alternative design and delivery approaches.

## Managing the Evaluation

### Responsibilities

The Project Authority is responsible for directing and managing the execution of the evaluation in accordance with WD's approved Policy on Evaluation and the TB Policy on Evaluation. Together with the Project Authority, WD and CBSC program management is responsible for ensuring an unimpaired ability of the contractor to carry out his or her responsibilities including identification and access to all relevant documentation.

### Standards

The evaluation of the CBSCs will conform to the current Evaluation Policy and the evaluation standards contained therein as published by the Treasury Board of Canada.

## Resources

Resources for this project will be provided through Audit and Evaluation by contracting the evaluation out to an individual(s) or firm with appropriate evaluation knowledge and experience. A maximum total budget of \$70,000 [travel and GST are included in this amount] has been set aside for this effort. Bidders will be expected to provide sufficient information to demonstrate how the methodology will meet the objectives of the evaluation. A&E may provide additional internal resources as required and warranted.

Ideally, the individual or firm contracted will:

- Have knowledge of the subject matter, including: CBSCs in general; federal-provincial economic cooperation efforts in Western Canada; WD's structure and mandate; and the Government of Canada grants and contributions funding mechanisms;
- Have past experience in conducting complex evaluations in the federal government environment that include elements of shared jurisdictional responsibility;
- Be familiar with client consultation and interviewing techniques;
- Have good communication skills;
- Be expected to work within the time constraints set for the contract; and
- Develop and submit an appropriate work plan for the evaluation.

A Request for Proposal process will be undertaken and submissions will be assessed on a points ranking system as applied by Audit and Evaluation and overseen by the Project Authority.

## Methodology

The approach and methodology used for this evaluation project will be in keeping with the guidance contained in the attached Evaluation Framework and with the policy guidance provided by the Treasury Board of Canada. Further details will be developed in consultation with the Project Authority.

The proposed evaluation will cover all CBSCs supported by WD and include a sample of suitable nature (to be determined) to cover the issues and questions outlined in a manner that provides confidence as to the results of the evaluation.

## Time Frame

This project is somewhat time sensitive. The evaluation will be initiated in the fourth quarter of FY 2001-2002 to be completed in the first quarter of FY 2002-2003. More specific timelines and milestones will be developed in the RFP and resulting proposals. A presentation of findings from the fieldwork that will form the basis of the Draft and Final reports will be expected by mid-April, 2002. A formal Draft report is expected by the end of April 2002, with the Final report from the consultant due by the end of May 2002.

## Reporting

Draft and Final Evaluation Reports - consistent with the reporting standards provided by A&E and Treasury Board - will be provided directly to the Project Authority who will distribute copies to WD managers and staff as well as to provincial managing partners for comment. WD's Departmental Audit and Evaluation Committee will provide both comment and approval. Once finalized, reports will be shared publicly in keeping with TB's Evaluation Policy.

## **Briefly About the Canada Business Service Centres**

The Canada Business Service Centres are a network of 12 centers, one in every province, the Northwest Territories and the Yukon, resulting from co-operative arrangements among 28 federal business departments, provincial governments and, in some cases, private sector organizations. The mission of the CBSC is to improve the start-up, survival and growth rates of small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) by giving business people in every part of Canada convenient access to accurate, timely and relevant information and referrals. A regionalization initiative to expand the network by using existing organizations as intermediaries to deliver services is underway.

The attached Evaluation Framework provides additional information on the CBSCs.



## **APPENDIX B:**

### **SURVEY QUESTIONS**

**B1. Client Survey**

**B2. Potential Client Survey**

**B3. Staff Survey**

## Client Survey (CS)

CMT: Common Measurement Tool  
M: Mandatory question  
NEF: National Evaluation Framework  
FW: CBSC 1999 Evaluation

#	Question	NEF #	CMT M	FW Table #
CS 1	Have you used the services of the Centre in the last twelve months?	A1		3.10
CS 2	How did you first learn of the Centre? (10 categories given)	B1		3.9
CS 3	On your last contact with the Centre, what type of business information were you seeking?	C1	M	3.11
CS 4	During the last twelve months, how many times have you contacted the Centre, including your last contact?	D1		3.17
CS 5	In the end, did you get what you needed from our organization?	C2, D3	CMT	
CS 6	Were you served in the official language of your choice?	D7	M	
CS 7	How satisfied were you with the time required to deliver the service/product?	D9	CMT	
CS 8	How important is delivery time to you?	D9	CMT	
CS 9	How satisfied were you that the service was provided in a fair and equitable manner?	D10	CMT	
CS 10	How important is service fairness and equity to you?	D10	CMT	
CS 11	Overall, how satisfied were you with the accessibility of the services?	D11	CMT	3.23
CS 12	During the last twelve months, did the Centre deliver services to you by telephone?	D13		3.12, 3.19
CS 13	In general, how satisfied were you with the telephone consultation service provided by the Centre in the last twelve months?	D14	M	p.38
CS 14	Did you have an in-person consultation at a Centre in the last twelve months?	D13		3.12, 3.19
CS 15	How satisfied were you with the waiting time at the Centre?	D19	CMT	3.16
CS 16	How important is waiting time to you?	D19	CMT	
CS 17	How satisfied were you that the staff were competent?	D20	CMT	3.16
CS 18	How important is competent staff to you?	D20	CMT	
CS 19	How satisfied were you that the staff were courteous?	D21	CMT	3.16
CS 20	How important is courteous staff to you?	D21	CMT	
CS 21	In receiving the service, how satisfied were you that you were informed of everything you had to do in order to get the service? (i.e., was there adequate signage; did you need to make an appointment; did you receive good verbal instructions)	D22	CMT	3.23
CS 22	How important is this type of assistance to you?	D22	CMT	
CS 23	Which of the Centre's products or services have you used in the last twelve months (including your last contact)?	D27	M	3.18
CS 24	In general, how satisfied are you with the information the Centre provided to you in the last twelve months?	D2, 28	M	3.15

## Client Survey (continued)

CMT: Common Measurement Tool  
M: Mandatory question  
NEF: National Evaluation Framework  
FW: CBSC 1999 Evaluation

#	Question	NEF #	CMT M	F W Table #
CS 25	Did the Centre provide you with any referrals to specific people or organizations outside the Centre itself for additional information?	D31		3.25
CS 26	Was the referral contact information provided by the Centre accurate?	D33	M	3.27
CS 27	How would you rate the usefulness of the information provided by the specific people or organizations?	D35	M	3.28
CS 28	How did you use the information you obtained from the Centre on your last contact? (Check all that apply) (19 categories given)	E1		3.13
CS 29	How important was using this information in the creation/operation of your business?	E2		3.14
CS 30	To what extent has the Centre helped to improve your knowledge of available government programs and services for business?	E3	M	3.33 - 3.39
CS 31	To what extent has the Centre helped to improve your access to relevant business information?	E6	M	3.33 - 3.39
CS 32	To what extent has the Centre helped to improve the quantity of information available to you for making business decisions?	E9		
CS 33	To what extent has the Centre helped to improve the quality of the information available to you for making business decisions?	E10		3.33 - 3.39
CS 34	What was the most useful thing the Centre provided to you? (19 categories given)	E11		
CS 35	To what extent do you agree that the Centre helped you to pick up new ideas for your business?	E12		3.33- 3.39
CS 36	Has the Centre had any other significant impacts (positive or negative on your business (or potential business)?	E13		
CS 37	Please briefly describe these other significant impacts.	E13		
CS 38	What other sources of business information have you used in the last twelve months in addition to the Centre? (please list)	F2	M	3.30
CS 39	What additional types of products or services, if any, would you like to see provided by the Centre?	C3, 4 F5	M	7.4
CS 40	Are there any products or services currently offered by the Centre that you feel are NOT needed or relevant?	F6	M	7.6
CS 41	What are these products or services?	F6		7.6
CS 42	Do you have any suggestions for improving the Centre?	F8		7.10
CS 43	What are your suggestions? (Check all that apply) (20 categories given)	F9		
CS 44	How do you prefer to do research? (3 categories given)	F11		
CS 45	How interested would you be in using each of the following products and services? (8 categories given)	F10		
CS 46	How much would you be willing to pay for the following products and services? (8 categories given)	F12		7.7



## Client Survey (continued)

CMT: Common Measurement Tool  
**M**: Mandatory question  
 NEF: National Evaluation Framework  
 FW: CBSC 1999 Evaluation

#	Question	NEF #	CMT <b>M</b>	F W Table #
CS 47	Which category best describes your situation at the time of your last contact with the Centre? (5 categories given)	G1	<b>M</b>	3.1
CS 48	If you selected other in the previous question, please describe your situation at the time of your last contact with the Centre.	G1	<b>M</b>	
CS 49	(If existing business), in what industry sector does your business operate? (5 categories given)	G2		3.4
CS 50	How many years has your business been in operation? (7 categories given)	G3		3.2
CS 51	How many people, including both full and part time employees and yourself, are currently working with your company? (9 categories given)	G4		3.5
CS 52	(If thinking of starting a business), in what industry sector would your business most likely operate? (5 categories given)	G6		3.4
CS 53	When do you expect your business to begin operations? (6 categories given)	G7		
CS 54	How many people, including both full and part time employees and yourself, would you expect to employ by the end of your first year of operation? (9 categories given)	G8		
CS 55	What is the highest level of education that you have completed? (10 categories given)	G11		
CS 56	What is the language you first learned in childhood and still understand? (3 categories given)	G12	<b>M</b>	3.6
CS 57	Which of the following age groups do you fall into? (7 categories given)	G13		3.7
CS 58	Gender?	G14		3.8

## Potential Client Survey (PS)

CMT: Common Measurement Tool  
**M**: Mandatory question  
 NEF: National Evaluation Framework  
 FW: CBSC 1999 Evaluation

#	Question	NEF #	CMT <b>M</b>	FW Table #
PS 1	Have you ever heard of the Canada Business Service Centre?	A1	<b>M</b>	4.8
PS 2	How did you first learn of the Centre?	A2	<b>M</b>	4.9
PS 3	Have you ever used the products and services of the Centre?	B1	<b>M</b>	
PS 4	What is the main reason you have never used the products and services of the Centre?	B2	<b>M</b>	4.10
PS 5	In the last twelve months, did you need information on starting a new business?	B3	<b>M</b>	4.11
PS 6	Where did you obtain this information?	B4	<b>M</b>	4.11
PS 7	How satisfied were you with the information (new business start-up) you obtained?	B5	<b>M</b>	4.11
PS 8	Did you pay for this information (new business start-up)?	B6		
PS 9	Choose a range that best represents the amount you paid for the information (new business start-up) you obtained? (5 categories given)	B6		
PS 10	To what extent do you agree that the amount you paid for the information (new business start-up) represented good value?	B7		
PS 11	In the last twelve months, did you need information on managing an existing business?	B8	<b>M</b>	4.11
PS 12	Where did you obtain this information (managing a business)?	B9	<b>M</b>	4.11
PS 13	How satisfied were you with the information (managing a business) you obtained?	B10	<b>M</b>	4.11
PS 14	Did you pay for this information (managing a business)?	B11		
PS 15	Choose a range that best represents the amount you paid for the information (managing a business) you obtained. (5 categories given)	B11		
PS 16	To what extent do you agree that the amount you paid for the information (managing a business) represented good value?	B12		
PS 17	In the last twelve months, did you need information on government acts or regulations?	B13	<b>M</b>	4.11
PS 18	Where did you obtain this information (government acts / regulations)?	B14	<b>M</b>	4.11
PS 19	How satisfied were you with the information (government acts / regulations) you obtained?	B15	<b>M</b>	4.11
PS 20	Did you pay for this information (government acts / regulations)?	B16		
PS 21	Choose a range that best represents the amount you paid for the information (government acts / regulations) you obtained? (5 categories given)	B16		
PS 22	To what extent do you agree that the amount you paid for the information (government acts / regulations) represented good value?	B17		
PS 23	In the last twelve months, did you need information on available government programs or services?	B18	<b>M</b>	4.11

## Potential Client Survey (continued)

CMT: Common Measurement Tool  
M: Mandatory question  
NEF: National Evaluation Framework  
FW: CBSC 1999 Evaluation

#	Question	NEF #	CMT M	FW Table #
PS 24	Where did you obtain this information (available government programs or services)?	B19	M	4.11
PS 25	How satisfied were with the information (available government programs or services) you obtained?	B20	M	4.11
PS 26	Did you pay for this information (available government programs or services)?	B21		
PS 27	Choose a range that best represents the amount you paid for the information (available government programs or services) you obtained. (5 categories given)	B21		
PS 28	To what extent do you agree that the amount you paid for the information (available government programs or services) represented good value?	B22		
PS 29	In the last twelve months, did you need market information (e.g., local, provincial, national and international as well as government procurement)?	B23		4.11
PS 30	Where did you obtain this information (market information)?	B24		4.11
PS 31	How satisfied were you with the information (market information) you obtained?	B25		4.11
PS 32	Did you pay for this information (market information)?	B26		
PS 33	Choose a range that best represents the amount you paid for the information (market information) you obtained. (5 categories given)	B26		
PS 34	To what extent do you agree that the amount you paid for the information (market information) represented good value?	B27		
PS 35	In the last twelve months, did you need product or commodity sourcing information? (e.g. lists of suppliers, potential buyers, distributors, trade shows, franchisers, etc.)	B33		4.11
PS 36	Where did you obtain this information (sourcing information)?	B34		4.11
PS 37	How satisfied were you with the information (sourcing information) you obtained?	B35		4.11
PS 38	Did you pay for this information (sourcing information)?	B36		
PS 39	Choose a range that best represents the amount you paid for the information (sourcing information) you obtained. (5 categories given)	B36		
PS 40	To what extent do you agree that the amount you paid for the information (sourcing information) represented good value?	B37		
PS 41	Thinking back to the business information sources you have used, did you experience any difficulties in obtaining the information you were seeking?	B43	M	4.12
PS 42	What were these difficulties?	B44	M	4.13
PS 43	By what means do you prefer to receive your business information?	E1		4.16

## Potential Client Survey (continued)

CMT: Common Measurement Tool  
M: Mandatory question  
NEF: National Evaluation Framework  
FW: CBSC 1999 Evaluation

#	Question	NEF #	CMT M	FW Table #
PS 44	Thinking back to the business information sources you have used, how could these information sources be improved?	F1	M	4.14
PS 45	Would you be willing to pay for any improvements?	F2		
PS 46	How interested would you be in using each of the following products and services? (8 categories given)	F3		
PS 47	How much would you be willing to pay for each of the following products and services? (8 categories given)	F4		
PS 48	Which category best describes your current situation? (5 categories given)	G1	M	
PS 49	If you selected other to the previous question, please describe your current situation.	G1	M	
PS 50	(If an existing business), in what industry sector does your business operate? (5 categories given)	G2		4.3
PS 51	How many years has your business been in operation? (11 categories given)	G3		4.1
PS 52	How many people, including both full and part time employees and yourself, are currently working with your company? (9 categories given)	G4		4.4
PS 53	(If thinking of starting a business), in what industry sector would your business most likely operate? (5 categories given)	G6		
PS 54	When do you expect your business to begin operations? (4 categories given)	G7		
PS 55	How many people, including both full and part time employees and yourself, would you expect to employ by the end of your first year of operation? (9 categories given)	G8		
PS 56	In what type of business or profession are you currently involved? (7 categories given)	G10		
PS 57	What is the highest level of formal education that you have completed? (5 categories given)	G11		
PS 58	What is the language you first learned in childhood and still understand? (3 categories given)	G12		4.5
PS 59	Which of the following age groups do you fall into? (7 categories given)	G13		4.6
PS 60	Gender?	G14		4.7

## Staff Survey (SS)

#	Question
SS 1	How familiar would you say you are with the products and services offered through the Canada Business Service Centre(s) (CBSCs)?
SS 2	Is there still a need for the CBSCs to "improve the start-up, survival and growth rates of small and medium-sized enterprises by giving businesspeople in every part of Canada access to accurate, timely and relevant information and referrals"? (CBSC Mission)
SS 3	Is there still a need for the CBSCs to "reduce the complexity of dealing with various levels of government by consolidating business info from the clients' perspective in one convenient service"? (CBSC Mission)
SS 4	Is there still a need for the CBSCs to "enable clients to make well-informed business decisions in a global economy"? (CBSC Mission)
SS 5	Is there still a need for the CBSCs to "encourage business success through sound business planning, market research and the use of strategic business information"? (CBSC Mission)
SS 6	What role does the CBSC play in disseminating information to businesses or prospective entrepreneurs? (select all that apply) ( <i>4 categories given</i> )
SS 7	What additional types of products or services would you like to see provided by the CBSCs? (select all that apply) ( <i>8 categories given</i> )
SS 8	How successful do you think that the CBSCs have been in achieving their objectives of providing convenient access to accurate, timely and relevant information and referrals?
SS 9	How successful have the CBSCs and gov't been to date in creating awareness of the Centres?
SS 10a	How satisfied do you feel the clients are with the products that are delivered?
SS 10b	How satisfied do you feel the clients are with the time required for delivery of service?
SS 10c	How satisfied do you feel the clients are with the provision of fair and equitable treatment?
SS 10d	How satisfied do you feel the clients are with the accessibility of services?
SS 11a	The CBSC has had a number of impacts and effects. How successful would you say that the CBSCs have been in: Providing information and referrals as its core function?
SS 11b	The CBSC has had a number of impacts and effects. How successful would you say that the CBSCs have been in: Providing flexible arrangements to capture regional diversity?
SS 11c	The CBSC has had a number of impacts and effects. How successful would you say that the CBSCs have been in: Maintaining a presence and visibility in every province?
SS 11d	The CBSC has had a number of impacts and effects. How successful would you say that the CBSCs have been in: Maximizing information and referral services while minimizing costs?
SS 12	Are there better ways for the CBSC to deliver its products?

## **Staff Survey (continued)**

- SS13 What are your suggestions to better deliver CBSC products. (select all that apply) (*4 categories*)
- SS 14 Are there services offered for which the demand/value added is too low to justify the cost? (select all that apply) (*5 categories given*)
- SS15 Are there methods or tools which could be employed to enable the CBSCs to deliver services in a more cost-effective manner?
- SS 16 If you answered yes to the previous question, please describe your suggestions briefly.
- SS17 Are there services which could be offered more effectively if client demand could be increased? (select all that apply) (*5 categories given*)
- SS 18a How successful do you think the CBSCs have been in providing: Managing partners with mgmt information about the Centre?
- SS 18b How successful do you think the CBSCs have been in providing: Cooperating partners with screening and referrals of their clients, information dissemination and feedback?
- SS 18c How successful do you think the CBSCs have been in providing: Co-located partners with shared operating expenses?
- SS 18d How successful do you think the CBSCs have been in providing: Regional access partners with the same services as cooperating partners?



## **APPENDIX C:**

## **METHODS**

## Methods

### Scope

Three issues defined the scope of the evaluation: relevance, success, and effectiveness related to design and delivery alternatives.

### Methodology

The evaluation methodology was consistent with the *National Evaluation Framework for the Canada Business Service Centres* developed by Industry Canada.

Five methods were used:

1. A survey of 282 clients, stratified by province.<sup>1</sup>
2. A survey of 134 representatives (potential clients) of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in western Canada, who were not previously clients of the CBSC.
3. A census of front-line and second-line staff in each Centre.
4. Interviews with 37 senior officials.
5. Document reviews.

The surveys were primarily web-based, and self-administered. After discussion with the client, the Macleod Institute sent an introductory e-mail from Western Economic Diversification (WD) to all prospective respondents. The Institute followed up with e-mail invitations to all prospective respondents. Respondents accessed the survey questionnaire over the Internet, and responded directly on-line. A small number of surveys were administered over the telephone, using the same questionnaires.

### Client Survey

A survey instrument was prepared (Appendix B), based on the *National Evaluation Framework* (NEF) as requested by WD. All questions in the Common Measurement Tool (CMT) were included although some required minor modifications (they were either split into two questions, or slightly rephrased to suit the survey medium). All other mandatory questions in the NEF were also included, with similar modifications where appropriate. Some optional NEF questions were not pertinent to the three evaluation issues being addressed, and were therefore not included. In the result, the survey totaled 58 questions.

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, 300 responses were received, but the province of origin could not be established for 18. The total stratified by province is therefore 282.



The Institute requested each Centre to provide either a list of all clients who accessed the Centres over the past 12 months, or a random, stratified sample of those clients. The lists were to provide names, mode of access, phone numbers and email addresses for each client. The Centres provided the following:

- **British Columbia:** Approximately 300 client authorization cards from walk-in clients, collected in two installments over a total of about four weeks after the evaluation was initiated.
- **Alberta:** Approximately 3,900 names and phone numbers, with a few hundred e-mail addresses.
- **Saskatchewan:** Approximately 900 names and phone numbers, with a few e-mail addresses.
- **Manitoba:** Approximately 1,050 names and phone numbers, without e-mail addresses.

The sample populations provided by the Centres were mainly comprised of walk-in and telephone clients. Sample frame coverage is therefore weighted towards walk-in clients, particularly in BC where it is also biased in favour of clients visiting the Centre within one four week period.

The Institute randomized the client lists provided by the Centres, using a random number generator. Where there were insufficient e-mail addresses, clients from the randomized list were called and asked to provide their email address. The WD introductory letter, Institute invitation and survey questionnaire were then sent by e-mail.

A sample target of 68 was set for each province. The sample size was selected to yield a precision of +/- 10% at a 90% confidence interval in each province and an overall precision of +/- 5% at a 90% confidence interval. An initial sample size of 113 per province was chosen, reflecting an expected response rate of 60% (based on predicted response rates in recent web-survey literature).

During the first ten days of the survey, the Institute sent two reminder e-mails to non-respondents. The Institute followed up with telephone reminders to the remainder of non-respondents. The response rate was about half what was anticipated in most provinces, so the Institute sent out a second batch of invitations in order to reach the target sample size. The statistics are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1: Client Survey Statistics**

	BC	AB	SK	MB	Totals
<b>Initial Sample Size</b>	222	350	139	160	871
<b>Responses (#)</b>	66	69	63	78	282 *
<b>Response Rate (%)</b>	29.7	19.7	35.3	48.6	32.3
<b>Precision @ 90% confidence</b>	+/- 10.1%	+/- 10%	+/- 10.4%	+/- 9.4%	+/- 4.9%

\* See footnote 1, page C-1.

### Potential Client Survey

A survey instrument was prepared (Appendix B), based on the *National Evaluation Framework* (NEF) as requested by WD. All questions in the Common Measurement Tool (CMT) were included, although some required minor modifications (they were either split into two questions, or slightly rephrased to suit the survey medium). All other mandatory questions in the NEF were also included, with similar modifications where appropriate. Some optional NEF questions were not pertinent to the three evaluation issues being addressed, and were therefore not included. In the result, the survey totaled 60 questions.

The Institute surveyed 134 representatives of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in western Canada. The sample frame was a database of western Canadian SMEs maintained by a commercial directory service. The Institute randomized the SME lists provided by the directory service, using a random number generator, and stratified the lists by province. An introductory letter from WD, the Institute's invitation and a survey questionnaire were then sent by e-mail.

A sample target of 68 was set for each province. The sample size was selected to yield a precision of +/- 10% at a 90% confidence interval to allow meaningful analysis at the provincial strata. As a result, the survey achieved an overall precision of +/- 7.1% at a 90% confidence interval. An initial sample of 250 SMEs in each province was prepared (based on predicted response rates in recent web-survey literature). During the first ten days of the survey, the Institute sent an e-mail reminder to non-respondents. The Institute followed up with telephone reminders to the remainder of non-respondents. When response rates fell below expectations, a second sample of 250 SMEs in each province was invited to take the survey. In total, 2,000 SMEs were contacted. The statistics are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2: Potential Client Survey Statistics**

	<b>BC</b>	<b>AB</b>	<b>SK</b>	<b>MB</b>	<b>Totals</b>
<b>Initial Sample Size</b>	500	500	500	500	2,000
<b>Responses (#)</b>	21	31	46	36	134
<b>Response Rate (%)</b>	4.2	6.2	9.2	7.2	6.7
<b>Precision @ 90% confidence</b>	+/- 17.9%	+/- 14.8%	+/- 12.1%	+/- 13.7%	+/- 7.1%

### Staff Census

The Institute identified 59 front-line and second-line members of the staff at each CBSC from personnel lists provided by the Centres. An introductory letter from WD, the Institute's invitation and a survey questionnaire were then sent by e-mail. E-mail reminders were sent from the Institute within the first ten days if the prospective respondent failed to reply. In addition, CBSC General Managers were asked to send a blanket e-mail reminder to all staff.

The survey instrument was prepared and finalized after discussions with WD's Evaluation Steering Committee (Appendix B). A number of mandatory questions from the NEF were mirrored in the staff survey. The questions were intended to elicit thoughtful responses from staff involved in day to day client interactions and Centre operations, and to generate ideas for possible improvements.

A total of 46 staff members responded to the census. There is no sampling error associated with a census. Since the response rate was 78%, the results should be highly representative of all staff members. The statistics are summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3: Staff Survey Statistics**

	<b>BC</b>	<b>AB</b>	<b>SK</b>	<b>MB</b>	<b>Totals</b>
<b>Initial Census Size</b>	14	18	10	17	59
<b>Responses (#)</b>	8	14	7	17	46
<b>Response Rate (%)</b>	57.1	77.8	70.0	100.0	78.0

### **Senior Officials Interviews**

The Institute interviewed 37 senior officials in-person or by telephone. The non-random sample (selected after discussions with the Centres' Evaluation Steering Committee) included CBSC general managers, federal and provincial Managing Partners in each province, and a selection of key informants representing Co-operating and other Partners, the National Secretariat and WD headquarters staff (see Appendix E for a list of interviewees, together with a copy of the interview guide). An interview guide was prepared and finalized after discussions with WD's Evaluation Steering Committee. The interviews were partially structured, but largely open-ended. They were intended to elicit in-depth responses from officials, to help provide a deeper understanding of the issues and to generate ideas for possible improvements. The statistical reliability of the sample is not known.

### **Document Review**

The Institute reviewed a wide-range of documents (Appendix F) including:

- current and previous Partnership Agreements,
- annual reports and operating plans, budgets, and incorporation documents,
- data from the National Secretariat's Client Service System (usage statistics by mode of access provided by the Centres),
- previous evaluation reports, round table discussions and other internal documents,
- sample informational and promotional items,
- client satisfaction surveys, an exit survey (BC) and feedback on the website, and
- relevant literature.

### **Observations**

The *National Evaluation Framework* stipulated that the client questionnaire include 8 CMTs (prescribed by the Treasury Board Secretariat) and 14 mandatory NEF questions (prescribed by the CBSC National Secretariat). The NEF also prescribed 20 mandatory questions for the potential client questionnaire. As a result, the client and potential client surveys evolved into long and unwieldy instruments.

CMTs largely measure a citizen's impression of service quality (staff courtesy, competence, fairness and timeliness). They are intended to track levels of client satisfaction across the entire federal government. However, none of the quality of service questions<sup>2</sup> was germane to the current evaluation. Similarly, the CBSC National Secretariat's intention is to "facilitate the compilation of a national picture and to help track trends in subsequent evaluations." The NEF mandatory questions were far more to the point, but even so there were a few which might have been replaced with others better suited to the evaluation's purpose.

Survey design is a concern because it affects the willingness of prospective respondents to participate. Answering 50 to 60 questions requires a significant time commitment from respondents. Redundancy (asking the same question several times) is useful if meant to triangulate evidence. If merely an artifact of combining surveys designed for quite separate purposes, redundancy unnecessarily burdens the respondent. In addition, too many open-ended questions in a self-administered survey tend to be inconvenient for the respondent. Many participants, once they realize how long it is taking, jettison the exercise by failing to complete the questionnaire. Others (rightly or wrongly) anticipate tedium and simply avoid getting involved.

The Institute recognizes and appreciates the valid objectives behind both CMTs and NEF mandatory questions. Some consideration could, perhaps, be given to running separate surveys, each dedicated to a primary set of objectives.<sup>3</sup> Efforts to focus the question set may help reduce respondent fatigue.

Another important design factor is the sample frame. As mentioned earlier, the sample frames given to the Institute did not provide complete coverage of the clientele since they were weighted to walk-in and telephone customers. This distribution created some limitations on how the samples could be used. It prevented the Institute from stratifying the samples by mode of access, for example.<sup>4</sup> Another limitation was imposed by the way BC collected its sample population in two tranches within one month, starting after the evaluation was initiated. This sample frame provided a snapshot of clients, rather than the intended sample of individuals who had used the Centre over the past twelve months. Consideration could be given to maintaining appropriate sample frames for use as and when required over time. A customer relationship management (CRM) strategy is one option that would provide ongoing sample frames.

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<sup>2</sup> The CMTs include a simple query regarding outcomes ("In the end, did you get what you needed from our organization?"). This one question was relevant to the current evaluation.

<sup>3</sup> The BC CBSC conducted an exit survey, for example. Exit polling is a good device to check service quality issues because the experience is still fresh in the client's mind. Pop-up surveys are also being run on CBSC websites, and are a good tool to track quality of service.

<sup>4</sup> Although it can be said that, in the whole population of clients, Internet is the most common mode of access.

## **APPENDIX D:**

### **SURVEY RESULTS**

- D1. Client Survey – All**
- D2. Client Survey – BC**
- D3. Client Survey – AB**
- D4. Client Survey – SK**
- D5. Client Survey – MB**
- D6. Potential Client Survey – All**
- D7. Staff Survey – All**

## **APPENDIX D:**

### **SURVEY RESULTS**

- D1. Client Survey – All**
- D2. Client Survey – BC**
- D3. Client Survey – AB**
- D4. Client Survey – SK**
- D5. Client Survey – MB**
- D6. Potential Client Survey – All**
- D7. Staff Survey – All**

The survey results are  
reproduced on the enclosed CD



## **APPENDIX E:**

### **SENIOR OFFICIALS' INTERVIEWS**

- E1. Interviewees**
- E2. Interview Guide**



## LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Alberta Economic Development

**Rick Siddle**

Executive Director, Regional Dev't Branch

Alberta Economic Development

**Rick Sloan**

ADM, Tourism and Industry

Alberta Economic Development

**Evgenia Stoyanova**

Division Project Officer, Tourism and Industry

Apeetogosan (Metis) Development Inc.

**George Vass**

General Manager

Asper Centre for Entrepreneurship (U of M)

**Rob Warren**

Director

BC Chamber Of Commerce

**John Winter**

President

BC Competition, Science & Enterprise

**Mike Cowley**

Director, Small Business

BC Competition, Science & Enterprise

**Chris Nelson**

ADM Trade and Investment

BC Competition, Science & Enterprise

**Rob Pysden**

ADM, Provincial Director

Business Infosource / CBSC (SK)

**Diana Matsuda**

Manager

Business Link / CBSC (AB)

**Rodger Cole**

General Manager

Business Link / CBSC (AB)

**Linda Chorney**

Communications Director

Business Services aux Entreprises / CBSC (BC)

**Melody Carruthers**

General Manager

Business Service Centre / CBSC (MB)

**Shannon Coughlin**

General Manager

Credit Union Of Central BC

**Wayne Proctor**

Director of Lending Services

Industry Canada

**Robert Smith**

Executive Director, National Secretariat

Industry Canada (National Secretariat)

**Sandy Stiles**

Management Consulting Centre

Manitoba Industry, Trade & Mines

**Hugh Eliason**

Deputy Minister

Manitoba Industry, Trade & Mines

**Tony Romeo**

Director, Small Business & Coop. Dev't Branch

Manitoba Industry, Trade & Mines

**Rod Sprange**

ADM, Trade and Investment

Red Deer & District Business Development Corp

**Kathy Lineham**

Manager

Saskatchewan Industry & Resources

**Debbie Harrison**

ADM, Development and Support

Saskatchewan Industry & Resources

**Van Isman**

Executive Director, Business & Coop. Services

**LIST OF INTERVIEWEES (Continued)**

Saskatoon & District Chamber of Commerce  
**Kent Smith-Windsor**  
Executive Director

Saskatoon Regional Economic Dev't Authority  
**Anne Broda**  
Chief Operating Officer, Director of Business Dev't

Western Economic Diversification (AB)  
**Doug Maley**  
Assistant Deputy Minister

Western Economic Diversification (AB)  
**Jim Fleury**  
Director General, Program Dev't & Strategic Serv.

Western Economic Diversification (BC)  
**Ardath Paxton-Mann**  
Assistant Deputy Minister

Western Economic Diversification (MB)  
**Orville Buffie**  
Assistant Deputy Minister

Western Economic Diversification (SK)  
**Terry Gibson**  
Assistant Deputy Minister

Saskatoon Regional Economic Dev't Authority  
**Dale Botting**  
Chief Executive Officer

SEED Winnipeg  
**Brad Franke**  
Community Business Coordinator

Western Economic Diversification (AB)  
**Wendy Stewart-Fagnan**  
Acting Director, Client Services

Western Economic Diversification (AB)  
**Stephan Lameroux**  
Manager, Service Partnership Secretariat

Western Economic Diversification (BC)  
**Frank Eichgruen**  
Director, Client Services

Western Economic Diversification (MB)  
**Darryl Millar**  
Director, Client Services

Western Economic Diversification (SK)  
**Pat Perry**  
Director, Client Services

## Senior Officials Interview Guide

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### 1 Introduction

As you know, the Canada Business Service Centres, operated by provincial and federal partners across western Canada, continuously strive to improve their service to clients. The Centres have therefore contracted the Macleod Institute to conduct an independent evaluation of their operations.

You have been selected as part of the western Centres' staff and management teams to take this survey, which is an important part of the evaluation. It is intended to collect information about your experience with the Centre, as well as your suggestions for improving the service. Your answers will be kept completely confidential.

Several of the questions relate to the Centres' Mandate, Mission and Principles. For your convenience we've reproduced that information below:

#### **Mandate:**

To serve as the primary source of timely and accurate business-related information and referrals on federal programs, services and regulations, without charge, in all regions of the country.

#### **Mission:**

- To improve the start-up, survival and growth rates of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) by giving business people in every part of Canada access to accurate, timely and relevant information and referrals;
- To reduce the complexity of dealing with various levels of government by consolidating business information from the client's perspective in one convenient service;
- To enable clients to make well informed business decisions in a global economy; and
- To encourage business success through sound business planning, market research and the use of strategic business information.

#### **Principles:**

- information and referrals remain the CBSC's core function;
- flexible arrangements are needed to capture regional diversity;
- the CBSCs have a presence in every province and federal visibility remains a priority;
- the CBSCs should maximize information and referral services to SMEs while minimizing costs;
- the initiative should support federal priorities vis-a-vis targeted groups (e.g., youth, rural, Aboriginals, etc.) and product lines (e.g., export, technology, etc.); and
- partnerships are used to access information, develop databases and delivery services.

Should you have any questions about how to complete this survey, please call 1-877-717-3193 to discuss it with an associate of the Macleod Institute. If you call outside of business hours, please leave a message, including your phone number, and someone from the Macleod Institute will return your call the next business day.

## 2 Questions

1) How familiar would you say you are with the products and services offered through the Canada Business Service Centre(s) (CBSCs)?

- Not at all familiar
- Not very familiar
- Somewhat familiar
- Familiar
- Very familiar

Why?

2) Is there still a need for the CBSCs to "improve the start-up, survival and growth rates of small and medium-sized enterprises by giving businesspeople in every part of Canada access to accurate, timely and relevant information and referrals"? (CBSC Mission)

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Why?

3) Is there still a need for the CBSCs to "reduce the complexity of dealing with various levels of government by consolidating business information from the clients' perspective in one convenient service"? (CBSC Mission)

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Why?

4) Is there still a need for the CBSCs to "enable clients to make well-informed business decisions in a global economy"? (CBSC Mission)

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Why?

5) Is there still a need for the CBSCs to "encourage business success through sound business planning, market research and the use of strategic business information"? (CBSC Mission)

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Why?

6) What additional types of products or services would you like to see provided by the CBSCs? (select all that apply)

- Counselling
- In-depth research
- Self-serve computer workstations
- More up-to-date and improved resource materials (videos, databases, etc.)
- More information on government funding
- Educational programs (workshops, seminars, training)
- Provide networking opportunities
- Taxation/accounting/legal advice

Why?

7) How successful do you think that the CBSCs have been in achieving their objectives of providing convenient access to accurate, timely and relevant information and referrals?

- Not at all successful
- Not very successful
- Somewhat successful
- Successful
- Very successful

Why?

8) How successful have the CBSCs and government been to date in creating awareness of the centres?

- Not at all successful
- Not very successful
- Somewhat successful
- Successful
- Very successful

Why?

9) The CBSC has had a number of impacts and effects. How successful would you say that the CBSCs have been in:

	Not at all successful	Not very successful	Somewhat successful	Successful	Very successful
Providing information and referrals as its core function?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Providing flexible arrangements to capture regional diversity?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Maintaining a presence and visibility in every province?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Maximizing information and referral services while minimizing costs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Why?

10) Are there better ways for the CBSC to deliver its products?

- Yes  No

11) How successful do you think the CBSCs have been in providing: (select all that apply)

	Not at all successful	Not very successful	Somewhat successful	Successful	Very successful
Managing partners with management information about the centre?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cooperating partners with screening and referrals of their clients, information dissemination and feedback?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Co-located partners with shared operating expenses?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Regional access partners with same services as cooperating partners?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Why?

12. Would you say the partnerships still effective?

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree



- Agree
- Strongly agree

Why?

13. Are the costs of being a partner in the Centre greater than the worth of the impacts and benefits?

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Why?

14. Are there any innovations or best practices from the Centres and partnerships that are worth learning from?
15. Are there any overall lessons learned?
16. Anything else?

Thank you.



## **APPENDIX F:**

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## **APPENDIX G:**

### **EVALUATION TEAM:**

### **Biographical Notes**

**Elaine McCoy, QC**

**Responsibility: Project Manager**

Elaine McCoy is President of the Macleod Institute at the University of Calgary. A lawyer and former Alberta cabinet minister, Ms. McCoy has 30 years experience in regulation and policy development in the private and public sectors. She has directed and designed numerous policy and program evaluations at the government level and in the private sector. Among other achievements, Ms. McCoy pioneered and led the Alberta government in the use of business plans and initiated the use of delegated regulatory organizations in Alberta. She created and led *Reinventing Government* workshops that were later adopted at the provincial level. Ms. McCoy was invited to and attended a session on the Service Improvement Initiative, to become proficient in the use of the Common Measurement Tool. She is Vice-Chair of Alberta's Climate Change Central, is a member of the Minister's Environmental Protection Advisory Committee, and serves on the Alberta Economic Development Authority.

**Thom Stubbs, MA**

**Responsibility: Evaluation Team Leader**

Mr. Stubbs has senior and program management experience as a project team leader, senior official and Deputy Minister. He has extensive policy development, analysis and evaluation experience with government programs. Mr. Stubbs is known for his ability to work with large, multi-disciplinary teams and interests to help foster a collaborative and productive outcome. He is currently leading a portion of the National Forest Strategy Evaluation for Natural Resources Canada. Mr. Stubbs was a founding Director of the Yukon Evaluation Society and is the Vice-President of the Wild Rose Chapter of the International Institute for Public Participation and a member of the Alberta Arbitration and Mediation Society.

**Richard Lloyd, MPA**

**Responsibility: Senior Analyst**

Mr. Lloyd has over 20 years experience in public strategy, policy and program development, public consultation, research and program evaluation, including several years as a Director of Policy, Planning and Evaluation. He has extensive experience in economic development policies and strategies including infrastructure development, regional economic development programming, and trade policy. Mr. Lloyd has managed or directed many projects and has a solid background in team building, negotiating, and group facilitation. He has served as a member of the National Council of the Canadian Evaluation Society, and is a member of the Institute of Public Administration of Canada.

**Ian Reid, BSoc**

**Responsibility: Research Assistant**

A past employee of the federal government with Industry Canada, Mr. Reid has extensive experience in program management at the federal level. He is an awarded, analytical, results-oriented professional with over 5 years experience conceiving, designing and managing a variety of programs and projects built upon extensive partnerships with the private, not-for-profit and government sectors. Mr. Reid wrote the Memorandum to Cabinet for consideration in the 1998 federal budget, providing the rationale and argument that led to expansion of the Community Access Program (CAP) to include urban communities.

**Susan Patey, BSc, MEdes**

**Responsibility: Research Assistant**

Ms. Patey holds a Master's of Environmental Design from the University of Calgary, and has a strong background in client and public consultation. She has substantial experience in interviewing participants on sensitive issues, and has been successful in developing constructive relationships to achieve project goals. Ms. Patey's efficient research skills have proven to be instrumental in distilling pertinent information from broad bodies of knowledge contributing to a high-quality, cost-effective product.