

**IPAC Panel Discussion
Excellence in Public Administration
June 18, 2008
Lord Nelson Hotel**

Introduction:

Good afternoon.

Thank you for inviting me to be here today to participate in this special event honouring the 50th anniversary of IPAC's Nova Scotia Regional Group.

Today's discussions focus on a topic which is near and dear to me as CAO of the Halifax Regional Municipality - Excellence in Public Administration. Before I talk specifically about our theme today, excellence, I want to share with you my perspectives on how municipalities differ from our federal and provincial counterparts.

In my opinion, competency, commitment and decision making of municipal governments affect our daily lives more directly than any other level of government. This is why municipalities must demand a demonstrated commitment to continuous improvement with the goal of excellence.

Although true of all government levels, responsiveness in municipalities has a significant priority placed on it - we are the front line, we are the closest to the citizen and, in fact, our staff are on your local TV network answering for their recommendations. In this respect, municipalities and their staff are very different from other levels of government. As stated, we deliver the services that impact your daily lives - and we hear about it regularly, the good and the bad. Our staff are directly accountable to the public and the Council - there is no anonymous civil service at the municipal level, no party system which creates very different political dynamics. The positive aspects of this are obvious - transparency, accountability and accessibility. But there are negatives as well... we can not offer our employees a faceless public

service (as it has often been referred to). We need to take more specific actions to support and retain our employees and to show excellence in the public service.

Today, I am going to talk about three high level goals which help us to achieve excellence within the Halifax Regional Municipality. They include:

1. Attracting and retaining the best and brightest
2. Improving Performance
3. Providing Citizen centred service delivery

Attracting & Retaining the Best & Brightest

The challenges before governments at all levels in this province, and for that matter, all over the globe, have never been greater. Dedicated professionals who share the vision of serving others — whether they do so in government organizations, the non-profit sector or private institutions — are needed to make our communities a better place. Municipalities across Nova Scotia are facing an impending labour shortage. The statistical reality is that there are simply not enough young people to replace retiring baby boomers. Within the next decade in Nova Scotia, for every two people who are retiring, there will be less than one person to take their place. As the labour market tightens, municipalities will have to contend with increasing competition for skilled employees.

HRM has designed a new recruitment campaign. We have discovered that awareness of generational diversity is critical, as these groups tend to look for different things when seeking employment. Recruitment strategies need to have a multi-generational approach, using different tools and messages for different audiences.

Some of our current strategies include a new web based recruiting system, internal and external recruiting fairs, the use of recruiting agencies for hard to fill positions, advertising in target specific publications, and outreach partnerships with agencies such as MISA, Workbridge and FUSION Halifax to name a few.

Relative to improving performance, the municipality strives to align business activities to the vision and strategy of the organization, improve internal and external communications, and monitor organizational performance against strategic goals.

We have 4 main areas. Each priority area addresses challenging areas of public policy; about which residents and Council are concerned, and are where improvements in delivery and outcomes are required. Each may require the involvement of more than one Business Unit and more than one level of government, and each may require a level of engagement by individual citizens and local communities.

1. **Implementation of Strategic Initiatives** which include 4 Council Focus Areas: Tax Reform, Community Development, Public Safety and Infrastructure; as well four other strategies which include the Cultural Plan, Economic Strategy, Immigration and Atlantic Gateway.
2. **Practicing Fiscal Responsibility**
3. **Making HRM an Employer of Choice**
4. **Providing Excellence in Service Delivery**

How does a municipality the size of HRM run its operations efficiently, effectively and economically? A “business” like HRM is a conglomerate spanning at least 12 different lines of businesses; highly diversified in terms of the services they deliver, the business practices that support them, and ... the culture that underlies their operations

The diversity of services, helps the city operate more efficiently by moving the focus of city services to outcomes and customers. Just as critical, it makes city operations transparent and accountable, which has improved public perception of the city in showing verifiable, successful results.

As an organization, HRM is committed to providing timely and accurate information on the state of municipal services and operations; providing management with operating targets and a means to track progress to increase management accountability; and providing a public window into the city's operating environment to regain public confidence in the city's competence.

There are however, challenges to building municipal performance measures. First, local government operations cannot be summarized in a single financial metric; there is not a common bottom-line goal in public services. Second, local governments lack a unified culture; they do not provide a single line of service. Police services possess a military culture ... planning departments have a culture comparable to an academic institution ... public works is similar to a manufacturing operation. And third, government information is public, which raises issues the private sector can avoid.

Government has always been accountable to their constituents for what they do and how they use provided resources. However, there has been a resurgence of the "right to know" attitude among the public over the past decade. Many different methods and attempts to demonstrate quality and performance have surfaced in the administration of public and government entities. Most recently, the idea of performance management and reporting the performance to external users has increased, in the attempt for public accountability. However, the frequency and amount of information being collected, measured, used, and reported varies greatly.

At this time, HRM is finalizing performance indicators that will be externally focussed on broad outcomes that are relevant to HRM. These performance indicators will assist managers: (1) set standards and outcome objectives; (2) Measure performance against goals, standards or benchmarks; and (3) communicate results. These performance measures will also shift staff thinking and focus, as well as provide a practical technique for quantifying and establishing accountability for excellence in service, throughout the organization.

Relative to Citizen Centred Service Delivery, we are striving to build a culture in Halifax Regional Municipality where citizen focussed service delivery is recognized by all employees as a priority and personal responsibility.

We are committed to modernizing our management practices to ensure that HRM is community-focussed, values-driven, results-oriented and committed to responsible spending. HRM employees have a critical role to play in achieving excellence in service delivery. Staff have designed an accountability system that tracks all citizen requests through the Corporate Call Centre and on the web. Service standards have been established for requests/complaints, and senior management is now in a position to monitor staff's customer service accountability by reviewing performance against service standards.

Increased Citizen Engagement equates to better understanding & higher levels of trust in Municipal Government. Today, more than ever, a strong coordination is required amongst the various levels of government. Intergovernmental cooperation is key to ensuring success in meeting citizen needs, and providing effective and efficient public service. In fact, HRM needs to work with both government and non-government partners to further common objectives. The major forest fire this past week-end is a perfect example of this.

HRM continues to place more emphasis toward the development and delivery of strategic communication efforts, with a particular emphasis on promoting HRM's "good news" stories, both internally and externally. Residents should be made aware that HRM successes are the result of the Administration and staff carrying out the policies and direction as set by Council.

HRM's new social marketing campaign, ***Good Neighbours, Great Neighbourhoods*** has recently been launched. Good Neighbours is a program brand – it is a way for us to highlight the good work that is under way within and throughout our communities.

Key to this theme, is that HRM commits to stand out as a great neighbour while encouraging every citizen to do the same. We are promoting excellence at all levels in our organization, and our community.

Summary

So, in summary, in order for HRM to reach excellence, we must first have excellent public services. What we offer to the public must be of the highest quality. That means those services must meet citizens needs and they must be accurate and useful.

Secondly, we must have excellent delivery of services. What we provide must be accessible, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, where there is demand. It must be easy to use, and it must be timely.

Thirdly, we must have excellent systems to support service delivery. Innovation, however, must never come at a cost to quality. The systems we use must be reliable and accommodating. The information they contain must be accurate, relevant and up-to-date. Above all, they must deliver the expected benefits to the client.

To be successful, excellent management and leadership must be in place to determine results. We need realistic plans, shared information about the status of projects, and good communications between all parts of the project teams. That means openness and honesty, which can only come from mutual trust and co-operation; from partnership between HRM staff and the various communities they serve. More importantly, is the need to develop good intergovernmental relations and cooperation. Our clients don't really understand, or for that matter - care, which government level is responsible for which service.

The Public Service has always been one of this country's greatest assets - it is the strong foundation upon which good government rests.

I'd like to conclude by thanking all of you for your commitment to excellence - your

participation in IPAC, your career choice - your service to the public good, it exemplifies what excellence is all about. As an 35 year civil servant, I am honoured to be here today to share this important anniversary and this important topic with you.

Thank you.