

# The Project

The project is managed by government and small business agents of the now defunct Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture. The manager responsible for Electronic Service Delivery in the Small Business Branch is the person in charge and project's main entrepreneur. Interview subjects agreed that the project owes a great deal to the entrepreneurial spirit of the manager and his staff. They further agree that what makes the project remarkable is its particularly sound management.

## Approach

An incremental approach was adopted for this project launched in British Columbia. Project staff tried to deal with problems one at a time as they cropped up, and to add as many products as partners. This phased approach should enable the introduction of other services in addition to the current registration services. To make British Columbia's economy competitive, the project attempted to transform government's treatment of business from red tape to a red carpet. This innovative project is definitely an example of the public administration of tomorrow.

## Objectives

The official purpose of OSBR is to:

1. Reduce the procedures and bureaucracy involved in business registration;
2. Shorten the timeframe for businesses;
3. Simplify business registration to improve applications for partner agencies.

In terms of operations, the aim was to cut down on the:

1. Steps involved in filling out the required government forms;
2. Cost, time and problems faced by business owners filling out the forms; and
3. The time and cost for the public administration in processing the forms.

They also hoped to publicize the project to increase use of it, thereby stimulating new business creation. The program is available to all British Columbia businesses, though the primary target is small business, which accounts for 99% of enterprises in the province.

Administratively, the project endeavoured to reorganize government services available to the public, streamline existing procedures, improve access to government services and enable on-line financial transactions.

## Regulatory Framework

A legislative change was required to make OSBR possible. The *Business Paper Reduction Act* served to lift the legal barriers through deregulation rather than legislation, which might have involved lengthier discussions. Yet one remaining obstacle to the development of OSBR is the need for a signature on certain applications. A request to solve the problem has been submitted to the newly elected government. In more general terms, government regulations could be substantially reduced to make the province's economy more competitive.

## Implementation

First of all, federal government cooperation was sought to harmonize sales tax registration applications. The Ministry of Small Businesses also wanted to bring in municipalities, which proved to be a much longer process. In a series of meetings attended by representatives of provincial government ministries, the federal government and municipalities, discussion focused on reaching agreement on common rules, drawing up specifications for the system, and discussing the risks of electronic service delivery.

Participants had to develop a standard terminology for all the government services involved, agree on system efficiency in terms of time, make it user-friendly for the public, and ensure compliance with each partner's requirements and obligations. The latter represented a major turnaround for government agencies that had always worked in isolation in the past, a topic we will come back to later. The project succeeded despite inadequate funds at first. The partners had not requested funding, which was a mistake. First of all, none of the

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partners felt they were the ones carrying the ball and, secondly, the lack of resources made the project fragile.