

Web Unites Senior Services

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At last year's GTEC conference in Ottawa, Helen McDonald, Canada's Acting CIO articulated a compelling vision for the delivery of government services that are personalized, citizen-centric and integrated across ministries, departments and agencies.

With the Seniors' Services Mapping Initiative that vision is much closer to being realized. We were able to take the information from hundreds of government Web sites and put it on to one Web site. Joanne Harrington.

Partners in this landmark project hail from different Canadian jurisdictions. But they have one thing in common - a clear idea of the types of online services Canadians over 65 need from government.

And that consensus, says one federal staffer, is vital to the project's success. "[It has enabled us to] address seniors' needs in the Web world," said Joanne Harrington, project director, Seniors' Cluster, Veterans Affairs Canada, who coordinated the mapping program.

But arriving at this consensus was not easy.

Flagged off in July 2003, the Seniors' Service Mapping Initiative brought together 16 people - all subject matter specialists, representing a cross-section of jurisdictions. They participated in three, two-day workshops over a three-month period, according to a Business Transformation Enablement Program (BTEP) case study.

Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat's BTEP provides planning and design tools that organizations can use to improve internal interoperability and integration among its disparate sections.

By applying the models in the BTEP "Toolkit" the group of 16 identified 203 services that overlapped across government levels. That made it possible to identify opportunities for information sharing, collaboration, and service delivery consolidation (such common case management) and integration.

"We were able to take the information from hundreds of government Web sites and put it on to one Web site," Harrington said.

Participants in the mapping initiative, she said, were able to identify potential changes that would improve service delivery to seniors across four levels of government (federal, provincial, regional and municipal).

Harrington said the Web site aggregation was done federally, and the provinces have employed the same procedures in populating provincial Web sites. At the end of the day, she said, it just takes time to bring parties responsible for the various programs and services together.

"We had to define who this senior person was," Harrington said. "This is typical when you have different people responsible for old age pensions or health services, or home care."

A breakthrough came when participants started asking the right questions, including: Why do seniors come to government? What do seniors, their families and their caregivers require the government provide?

Harrington said that was the point at which the group was able to begin mapping of all the services that needed to be delivered.

"It was a turning point," Harrington said. "It took time to define what exactly it was that everybody was responsible for delivering."

The workshops uncovered many processes that needed to be eliminated or completed by

another level of government, different from the one currently tasked with handling them.

A key consultant on the project was Skip Lumley, now chief methodologist at Chartwell Inc., the IT management consultancy, who at the time he was working for the Treasury Board, Service Transformation Group in Ottawa.

Lumley, who was on board in a government capacity from day one, echoed Harrington's thoughts. He said the entire Seniors' project hinged on the common approach to describing government operations...so participants from other jurisdictions could sit down and ask: "What can we do for seniors?"

"For the first time everyone could see the point where we could get to talk the same language," Lumley said.

Participants are currently discussing with their managers and executives ways to further develop these change-making projects and develop more detailed and useful business cases for service improvement for seniors.
