

The Government of Belize



COMMONWEALTH SECRETARIAT SUPPORT IN DEVELOPMENT OF THE NATIONAL ICT POLICY AND E-GOVERNMENT AGENDA FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF BELIZE

February 2007



A Partnership between the Government of Belize and The Commonwealth Secretariat



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BACKGROUND

The Government of Belize is embarking on a progressive agenda of improving governance, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and e-Government to assist in national development and the modernization of the public service.

Over the period January 30th to February 2nd, a team from the Commonwealth Secretariat worked closely with Mrs. Myrtle Palacio and her colleagues from the Office of Governance to undertake the following activities:

- January 29th and 30th-** **COMSEC Consulting Team Arrive**
Mr. Devindra Ramnarine – Commonwealth Secretariat (January 30th)
Mr. David Little - PSTG Consulting (January 29th)
- January 30th -** **Introductory Meeting with:**
The Hon. John Briceno –
Deputy Prime Minister
Mrs. Myrtle Palacio –
Director, Office of Governance
Ms. Michelle Longworth
Manager, e-Government
Office of Governance
- February 1st -** **Participation in a workshop on “Improved Governance and Public Sector Performance”**
George Price Centre – City of Belmopan
- February 2nd -** **Participation in a national conference on the way forward for advancing the National ICT Policy and e-Government Agenda**
Radisson Hotel – Belize City

The aim of this brief report is to provide a summary of the meetings and consultations and a recommended series of next steps to assist in advancing the National ICT and e-Government agenda's in Belize.



THE CURRENT STATUS OF ICT AND E-GOVERNMENT IN BELIZE

Based on the meetings and discussions which took place over the duration of the short consultation, it would appear that a number of ICT related initiatives are underway in Belize - although there is no integrated national ICT plan in place at this time.

Although PC's and Internet connectivity into homes remains in its formative stage, telephone penetration (fixed line and cellular) is relatively high. Belize has a monopoly telephone provider – BTL – that provides reliable telephone services throughout the country. There are a significant number of Internet cafes through Belize City, Belmopan and other towns and villages. There are also a number of community centres that provide computer and Internet access – including the George Price Centre which offers high quality facilities in Belmopan.

A number of International Funding Institutions are keen on assisting Belize accelerate its national ICT agenda. In 2004, UNESCO began a project “ICT for reducing poverty of indigenous people in the Caribbean” addressing poverty in isolated indigenous communities using integrated community media and the creation of multimedia products as the focus for a sustainable human development strategy. However, as these initiatives are not being undertaken within the framework of a broad national ICT strategy, the projects are not integrated and often fail to deliver the desired benefits.

Government is looking to introduce ICT and increased levels of automation to improve efficiency and service quality. A Human Resource Management System is currently being implemented and a central government website has recently been introduced (<http://www.belize.gov.bz>) by the Office of Governance. The website provides a very good platform for moving towards citizen-centric electronic service delivery which is seen as an important next step in moving towards increased levels of e-Government.



The Public Sector Reform document entitled: *Charting the way forward – 2000 and beyond, outlines the following strategy in respect of information technology:* “If the Belize Public Sector is to keep pace with developments in the global sphere, its modernization must embrace advancements in information technology



(IT). The Government will therefore seek to modernize the Belize Public Sector through information technology to facilitate efficient decision-making, public administration and policy implementation. It will also seek to provide an information policy framework for Government institutions.

The Office of Governance was commissioned in September 2005 with the following areas of strategic focus:

Human Resource Development and Management:

- Human Resource Management
- Training and Development
- Succession Planning
- Policy Development

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and e-Government

- ICT and e-Government Projects
- Policy and Strategy Development
- Training
- Government website / portal

Governance and Modernization Initiatives

- Customer Service
- Governance Awareness
- Management Systems and Processes

OBSERVATIONS

During the various meetings, discussions and presentations it became apparent that there was:

- a) A clearly recognized need for a National ICT Policy and Strategy that complements and builds upon the National Development Plan for Belize (which is currently being completed);
- b) A broad national desire to see more government information and services being made available electronically – primarily via telephone and the Internet;
- c) A requirement to evolve the current government website into more of a service oriented portal; and
- d) A need for supporting agencies, such as the Commonwealth Secretariat, CARICAD and UNDP, to assist with funding and access to specialist support.



PROPOSED WAY FORWARD

It is proposed that the Government of Belize and Commonwealth Secretariat continue to develop their collaboration and that the following initiatives be undertaken:

Short Term (1-4 months)

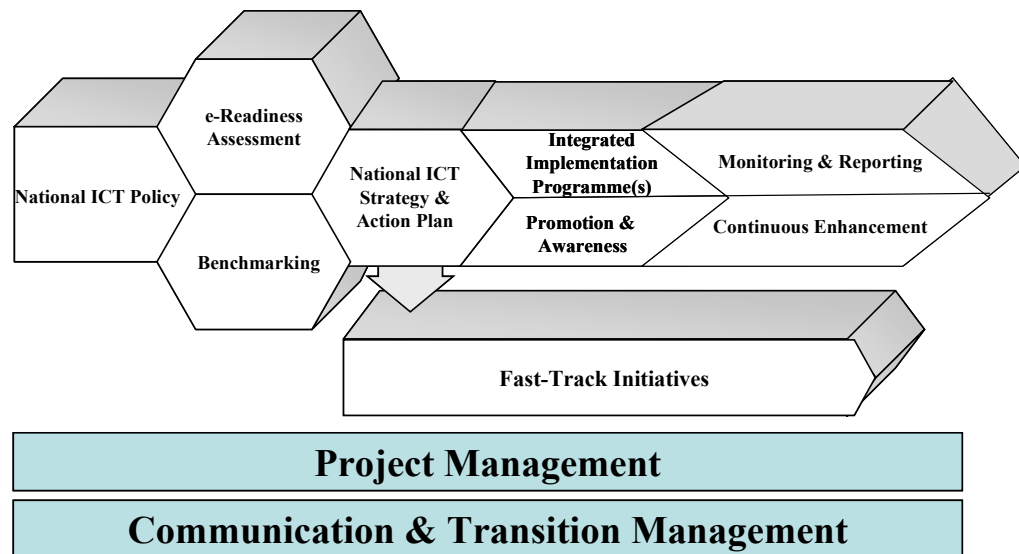
1. **Development of a National ICT Policy** - which provides a clear statement of government intent to embrace, design and implement a national “connectivity” strategy for Belize with a view to maximizing the potential of Information and Communications Technology to enhance social, economic, cultural and public administration conditions in the nation. It will be important for this Policy to complement the National Development Plan;
2. **Development of a Prototype e-Government Portal** – which will build on the current government website and provide a proof-of-concept on how government information and services could be packaged into an intuitive, service oriented and client-centric design. The prototype could then be used to discuss the feasibility of client-centric service delivery with all government and agencies to determine if the required service, process and organizational changes would be successful if introduced within the public service; and
3. **Feasibility Study on a centralized Government Telephone Service Centre** – as the diffusion of telephones is far greater than that of computers it was thought that the concept of a centralized government call centre to provide information and advice on a broad number of common citizen and business requests would be an excellent way to improve service standards and the perception of government as a service oriented organization.

Medium Term (4-12 months)

1. **Development of a National ICT Strategy** – which outlines a series of integrated ICT initiatives aimed at firmly moving Belize into the Global Information Society and offering broad social, economic, cultural and public administration benefits to all segments of the population. The Strategy would be supported by e-Readiness and Benchmarking Assessments and would also identify the necessary governance and financial arrangements that would be required to facilitate effective



implementation. To ensure the strategy development process runs efficiently it is proposed that the Government of Belize follow the ICT Strategy development process that has been recommended as international best practice by the Commonwealth Secretariat. The need for a participative, multi-stakeholder approach and details of the various steps within the methodology were described in some detail at the conference in Belize City on February 2nd.



- 2. Commence the process of moving “all appropriate government information online” through a centralized e-Government Portal –** this would obviously depend on the outcome and feedback resulting from the initial Portal prototype identified above. As many back office systems are unlikely to be in place to enable online transactions and services, it is felt that the placement of “all appropriate information online” could be a realistic initial objective as it will require limited back-office technology implementation and therefore reduce the complexity, cost and time required. In the future, as back-office systems installed, it may be possible to move “all appropriate government services and transactions on-line”.

Acknowledgements

The Commonwealth Secretariat wishes to thank the Director, Office of Governance and her team for their hospitality during the short visit to Belize. The Office of Governance is putting place a number of measures and projects to improve governance, ICT, e-Government and public sector performance. The



Commonwealth Secretariat remains committed to providing support to the Government of Belize in advancing these nationally important initiatives.

