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A Discussion Paper for a Centralized Government Call Centre  
(Widely circulated to leaders within the Public Service)

Office of Governance  
Government of Belize

April 2007

## YOUR GOVERNMENT. YOUR WAY.

### **1. Introduction**

The Government of Belize is adopting a new “service oriented approach” to ensure that citizens have simple and convenient access to high quality products, services and information.

In the past, Government structured itself around its ministries and departments - rather than the service needs of citizens. To obtain a service from government, citizens had to go to a government office (often several miles away), wait in line, fill in a set of forms, to find they didn't have the necessary information with them. Having completed one task, citizens sometimes then had to go to another government office to complete a related transaction with a different ministry.

Things have changed. Citizen expectations for responsive, high-quality government services are increasing. Taxpayers are demanding that services be timely, accurate and efficient - and designed around their needs, not the structure of government. In turn, Government has realized that it is in “the customer service business” and that it must simplify access to common services, introduce modern business practices and continuously improve performance standards.

The Government of Belize, through the Office of Governance, would like to introduce an extensive Service Modernization Programme aimed at transforming public sector service delivery throughout the country. The programme revolves around five key principles:

1. Place the citizen at the centre of government's service delivery model (citizen-centric);
2. Adopt a one-stop-shop approach to assist citizens in completing several transactions in a single “visit” (in person or via electronic means);
3. Exploit Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to simplify user access and convenience;
4. Remove unnecessary bureaucracy, red tape and inefficient business processes from government programmes and services; and
5. Introduce an “Extra Mile, Extra Smile” ethic into customer service.

## 2. The Transformation is Underway

The Service Modernization Programme is already underway and several important initiatives are currently in progress including:

1. The introduction of the Council on Good Governance and Public Sector Modernization (CGM);
2. Public Service Merit Awards Programme;
3. Public Officer Skills Development in topics such as Strategic Planning, Evidence-Based Policy Development, Organizational Review, Results-Based Performance Management, Customer Service and Professional Report Writing;
4. Computer Training for Public Officers;
5. Most ministries and departments have introduced initiatives aimed at greater efficiency, effectiveness and improvement of service delivery - with the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Natural Resources, Local Government and the Environment at the forefront of these changes; and
6. Most of the payroll processes have been automated with salary and deduction transfers made online directly into Public Officers bank accounts.

## 3. e-Government

Electronic Government (e-Government) is the application of ICT within public administration. It represents a radically new way for Government to interact with its constituents, clients and partners. e-Government extends the “reach” of Government. It provides everyone with access to information and services, from virtually any location, and at any time. Designed and implemented effectively, e-Government can significantly improve the perception of public administration and overall confidence in Government. Service standards can be enhanced and customer satisfaction levels improved. e-Government also has the potential to provide tangible savings in the amount of time, money and human resources required to deliver public services. This is especially important at a time when most government organisations are looking to do-more-with-less, and reduce the overall cost of service delivery.

The Government of Belize has taken an important first step into e-Government with the introduction of its National e-Government Portal - [www.governmentofbelize.gov.bz](http://www.governmentofbelize.gov.bz)

The Portal provides a single point of entry for citizens to access a variety of government information sources and services.



The Office of Governance is currently developing a plan for further enhancing the Portal to make it more intuitive for users and to provide more information and services online.

#### 4. 1-800-4-Belize

The telephone is the most commonly used form of ICT in the country. Although only seven percent of Belizeans are Internet users<sup>1</sup>, over half of the population (approximately 160,000) has regular access to a telephone (fixed line and/or cellular).

As the cost of personal computers and Internet connectivity will continue to remain beyond the reach of much of the population for the foreseeable future, the option of accessing value-added government information and services via the telephone becomes increasingly attractive for both government and its citizens.

The concept of providing information and services through a central government call centre is becoming increasingly popular and is now being adopted by several countries around the world. In principle, the model works as follows:

1. A convenient telephone number (1-800-4-Belize?) to a central government call centre that provides information and advice for the most commonly requested government services;
2. A low-cost, preferably free, call for citizens
3. Services can be provided in any of the official languages of the country;
4. If the question is unique, complex or requires programme specific input the customer service representative will direct the caller to the specific ministry or department.

The benefits of a centralized government call centre are fairly obvious:

##### *For Users:*

- Simpler, more convenient access to government - one number to call, no need to worry about which ministry to call
- Improved service
- Savings in time and money
- Improved perception of government

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<sup>1</sup> International Telecommunications Union (ITU) ICT Statistics 2005.

*For Government:*

- Improved governance
- More consistent service delivery standards
- Allows ministries to focus on programme specific and value-added tasks rather than “routine questions”
- Improved efficiency with potential rationalization and cost savings
- Improved public perception of government
- Catalyst for further public sector modernization and a move towards “seamless government”

## 5. International Benchmark

The Government of Canada is widely recognized as the world’s leading jurisdiction in terms of integrated service delivery and has been ranked in first place in terms of public sector service transformation for the past five years by the international consulting company Accenture.



Service Canada is the central government organization responsible for providing one-stop access to public services. Service Canada manages online government information and services ([www.servicecanada.gc.ca](http://www.servicecanada.gc.ca)) and has hundreds of one-stop Service Canada Centres situated across the country that deliver a variety of common services at centralized government offices.

Service Canada also operates the government’s central call centre - 1 800 O-Canada. 1 800 O-Canada is the primary telephone access point for up-to-date information on more than 3,000 programmes and services offered by more than 180 government departments. The call centre has approximately 90 bilingual (English/French) customer service agents available online at anytime. The centres receive approximately 1.25million calls per year and can satisfactorily address clients requests approximately 90% of the time. The average time spent answering a call is approximately 4 minutes - with unusual or programme-specific requests being directed to the appropriate department.

## 6. Moving Forward

There would appear to be significant merit in evaluating the feasibility of a centralized call centre for the Government of Belize. The following tasks are recommended to assist in moving this analysis forward:

1. Discuss the concept with selected ministries and other potential stakeholders to determine level of interest and support;

2. Approach funding institutions such as the Commonwealth Secretariat, UNDP or CARICAD with a view to providing funding for the production of a business case to look at the costs, benefits, opportunities and risks of introducing a centralized call centre;
3. Consider establishing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Canada to advise and assist Belize with its National ICT and e-Government programmes; and
4. Assemble a project team comprising of persons from all sectors to develop the call centre business case. It is anticipated that the task would take approximately three months to complete.

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