

## Extending the Boundaries of Municipal Partnerships

Antigonish County, Inverness County, Richmond County, Victory County, The Towns of Mulgrave, Port Hawkesbury, Antigonish, District of Guysborough and the District of St. Mary's have formed The Intermunicipal Computers Services Corporation to work together and save money. Nine municipalities created a separate entity, called "Intermunicipal Computer Services Corporation," a partnership in 2011 that has allowed them to share costs and share use of two computer programs; Diamond Municipal Solutions and ABM Integrated Solutions.

The Diamond Municipal Solutions system handles all accounting, property tax, utility, sales and payable transactions for each of these municipalities and two of the nine municipalities are using it for their payroll in addition to the other features. ABM Integrated Solutions is an external organization working as a hosted exchange server for the municipalities. ABM Solutions works like iCloud software, maintaining the Diamond Municipal Solutions online, keeping it secure and conveniently accessible remotely. Diamond Solutions System has enhanced reporting capabilities and analysis of information, which is used in decision making on a daily basis. Municipal employees log into the ABM Integrated Solutions portal each day to access the Diamond System, but each municipalities Diamond information is kept completely separate from the other eight municipalities; security and privacy is paramount.

Since the implementation of Diamond Municipal Services, the nine municipal units continue to work together through records management, software upgrades, professional development, and professional training. This professional network of municipalities also provides administrative insight, support, and informal learning opportunities for staff. These initiatives have allowed them to realize fiscal efficiencies and a higher level of service excellence. This relationship is so unique that it is recognized outside of local government by winning the Pioneer Award in 2012 for innovation and collaboration from Diamond Municipal Solutions Inc.

In 2011 Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations provided the group with a one-time grant of \$200,000 to assist the group with these initiatives. In the beginning, cost savings was the greatest benefit but they have become partners, and a network and support system for potential opportunities in the future.

Currently, a Virtual City Hall & E-send programs are being developed for these municipalities. E-send will enable these municipalities to email tax bills, utility bills, cash receipts, invoices and other documents to their residents. Virtual City Hall (VCH) is a citizen engagement tool that requires only a single login by the citizen or stakeholder to see their accounts. Whether they have multiple accounts of a single type (such as several tax properties) or they have taxes, utilities, pets, business or more, they can see them all in a single window. They will also have the ability to pay any bill directly from the Virtual City Hall portal. It will also easily allow lawyers, real estate agents and others to automatically generate tax certificates or search for a property anytime and anywhere. Both of these products will be a welcome addition to their current processes and allow them to better meet the needs of their citizens.



For more information  
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