

Canada Border Services Agency: Remote Traveller Processing Pilot

The Initiative

In January 2016, the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) successfully implemented a technology-based pilot solution at the Morses Line, Quebec, port of entry (POE) to address challenges inherent to effective and efficient delivery of its mandate at small and remote POEs. This pilot allows an officer sitting over 700 kilometers away to process travellers through a secure technology solution.

Background

The CBSA is charged with a complex mandate. Created directly in response to the 9/11 terror attacks, the Agency provides integrated border services that safeguard national security and public safety, while facilitating the movement of legitimate people and goods, to support a free society and promote economic prosperity. The CBSA processes millions of travellers and commercial releases, and collects billions in duties and taxes daily. CBSA is Canada's first line of defence at the border, preventing inadmissible people and goods from coming into the country, supporting the fight against international terrorism, and serving Canadians 24/7.

More than 80% of the 97 million travellers who enter Canada each year do so at the 20 largest POEs. In contrast, some small and remote POEs on the land border process as few as 1800 travellers per year.

Ordinarily, travellers entering Canada are required to report in person to an officer. As a result, expansion of service generally requires an increased number of officers and a correlating infrastructure investment.

Increasingly limited by budget constraints, the Agency invests in operations based on return on investment, determined by volumes and transactional values. While economies of scale have allowed the Agency to achieve exceptional levels of effectiveness and efficiency at larger POEs, the same is not true for small and remote POEs where, given low traveller volumes, transactional service delivery costs as much as 35 times more than that of larger POEs. When a POE is open, a minimum of two officers must be on staff regardless of volumes.

For small and remote communities along the land border, regardless of cost, access to border services is crucial. In addition to being a gateway to business and employment markets, the local POE is often the only access to essential services including hospitals, grocery stores, schools, or gas stations located on the other side of the border.

Leadership

Success could not have been achieved without collaborative leadership at senior levels of the Agency's Programs, Information, Science and Technology, and Operations (National Headquarters and Regions) Branches. As the project evolved, United States Customs and Border Protection and local community leaders were actively engaged.

Public accountability necessitates that Government agencies demonstrate due diligence in the administration of public funds and changes in service delivery. This often creates multiple layers of oversight, which can become a barrier to innovation. Public accountability also causes

Government to be risk averse and develop programs that remain safely within the boundaries of existing public policy. Without risk, innovation cannot flourish.

CBSA leaders boldly challenged existing Government processes and encouraged the project to innovate on the outer edge of existing public policy and drive policy change, not only in the solution itself, but in the development and implementation of the solution.

Execution

CBSA leadership fostered innovation by assembling a multi-disciplinary team from across the Agency's branches, comprised of engineers, information technology experts, policy and program analysts, and most importantly, front-line officers. Where these disciplines would ordinarily work in isolation and each apply their expertise only at specific intervals, they became a project team, working in true collaboration, where the entire team was fully engaged throughout the process. Integration of officers from the field, from initial needs analyses to solution implementation, firmly established a user-centric approach to design thinking.

The project team worked in an accelerated and recurring cycle of problem identification, design, deployment and testing, and return to problem identification. On a weekly basis, the team achieved what would typically take a month of consultations, reporting and decisions. As progress quickly outpaced established processes for reporting and decisions, leaders entrusted and delegated the authority to the team to accept and manage risk for which they remained ultimately responsible.

Organizational Learning

The CBSA used the pilot to transform Agency thinking about border management at both the strategic and operational levels, demonstrating that it is in fact possible to facilitate movement of legitimate goods and travellers and strengthen border security simultaneously.

At the same time, CBSA leadership demonstrated that increased collaboration in a user-centric approach can successfully deliver innovative and effective change without introducing unacceptable risk to public sector organizations.

Results

The solution provides increased access to border services for travellers. Travellers arriving at the Morses Line, Quebec, POE outside of staffed hours are processed remotely by an officer located 700 kilometers away in Hamilton, Ontario.

To date, the Morses Line POE has seen a 20% increase in overall traveller volumes with no additional risk to border security as demonstrated by the results of random and selective traveller examinations.

Innovative methods of data compression and transmission enable traveller processing via a kiosk housing audio and video equipment, as well as supporting document readers, CCTV systems and other remotely operated infrastructure such as crash proof gates to ensure border security. Should an onsite officer presence be required, the processing officer can dispatch officers from 13 kilometers away at St-Armand, Quebec.

Efficiencies have been realized in increased service, expanding from 8 hours per day to 24, without the same level of cost or pressures for staffing.

Most importantly, remote traveller processing will allow the Agency to maintain, and even expand, effective and efficient service at small and remote POEs, ensuring the communities that rely on them remain sustainable.

Next Steps

In order to deliver results and recommendations to Government with respect to expansion, the team is continuing collaboration to analyze results and benefits.

Final recommendations how the solution can be replicated to best benefit Canadians, the Agency and its partners, along with proposals for changes to policy, including legislation, that have potential to realize even greater benefit.