Circum Network inc.
management and research consulting

74 du Val-Perché Street
Hull, Québec J8Z 2A6
(819)770-2423, ▤ (819)770-5196
service@circum.com
http://circum.com

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*Evaluation of Government on the Net 03,
"Transcending Technology, Creating
Community"*

Final Report

Presented to

Dr. Michel Gauthier
Director, NRC Information Services
Canada Institute for Scientific and Technical Information
National Research Council Canada
1200 Montreal Road
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0R6

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the results of an evaluation of the *Government on the Net 03 Conference*. It is based on participant comments gathered through more than 1,200 session-specific feedback report cards and some 88 post-conference Web questionnaires; exhibitor comments collected through self-administered questionnaires; and, views of some 372 non-participants who are members of the target groups and who completed a Web survey.

OBSERVATIONS

- Overall, participants were satisfied with their experience.
- The conference format may be becoming dated; smaller sessions and practical workshops are perceived to provide more value.
- Key areas for improvement focus on content:
  - improve speakers familiarity with the federal government issues and practices — delegates expect that presenters will speak to their problems;
  - raise the content strength and focus on emerging issues — some presentations were basic and some content was simple rehash;
  - increase the discussion of technical issues, best practices and success stories — often opposed to "philosophical" debates.
- Suggested process improvement include:
  - merger with other federal conferences to increase content load and reduce the number of requests for professional development within delegates' organizations;
  - handouts on site and presentations on the Web site,
  - clarify the language of presentation before hand.
- The composition of the delegate pool is shifting away from policy analysts and program managers toward individuals with IM/IT positions: more than one third of delegates held positions directly related to the Internet compared to one in five in 2001 whereas representation from policy analysts and program managers decreased by a factor of two.

- Attendance has dropped by some 33% between 2001 and 2003.
- Exhibitors were generally satisfied but attendance was an issue.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Conference Format

- Emphasize smaller sessions and practical workshops even more than is the case now.
- Because some organizations limit access to "conferences" but have looser rules concerning "professional development" events, re-label GovNet as a professional development event rather than a conference.
- Invest in the development of on-line archives.

Promotion

- Clearly define the target clientele (is it IM/IT personnel or program/policy analysts or some other group?).
- Market according to the target clientele (identify themes and approaches relevant to the chosen target clientele, and promote to them that group in particular).
- Review the communications program to better reach non-participants.
- Develop marketing plans specifically to increase return delegates.

Conference Program

- Maintain/reassert the focus on emerging issues (as opposed to technical issues that can be studied elsewhere) with a clear emphasis on the federal government.
- Develop the program according to the target clientele.

Exhibition Program

- If the exhibition component is to be repeated, build the program to increase attendance; in particular, make the exhibition available during workshops which attract a different pool of individuals.
- Reconsider whether the exhibition component is worth the effort considering the value derived by delegates.

Workshops

- Ensure that workshop presenters tailor their presentation to the reality of federal public servants.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of an evaluation of the 2003 conference *Government on the Net*. The conference was held on April 14 to 17, 2003 at the Government Conference Centre in Ottawa, and consisted of two days of plenary and breakout sessions, followed by two more days of interactive workshops. Attendance in the first two days was 333, including some complimentary registrations. Of those, 124 participated also to one or more workshops. An additional 151 persons participated in one or more workshops but not in the first two days, for a total of 484 individuals reached by this edition of GovNet. The ten workshops attracted 449 registrations, with people attending one, two or three workshops. Some 42 exhibitors rented space at the conference. The conference targeted federal public servants in the information area as well as webmasters and members of policy groups; it also aimed at line managers.

Three groups were included in the feedback exercise:

• conference **attendees** are of course prime targets for feedback. In addition to contributing to the profile of participants, these individuals can comment on the following aspects: ① why they decided to attend the conference, to identify which levers (e.g., promotion conduits, messages) are effective in attracting the target population; ② what they

thought of each session, to feed into the development of the content and logistics of the next conference; ③ how they react to the entire conference, to determine strengths and weaknesses of the conference and possible new design and promotion angles for next year;

- conference **non-attendees** are part of the target population, but declined to participate; they include individuals who attended in 2001 but did not in 2003. Conference organisers need to know ① who they are, to improve communication targeting; ② why they did not participate; ③ what their needs are, to develop a conference program that will be attractive to them;

- conference **exhibitors** invested significant resources to display at the conference. It will be important to determine ① how they evaluate their likely return on investment; ② whether they would come back or recommend this experience to others; ③ which aspects could be improved.

These groups were canvassed using three concurrent methodologies:

- *Immediate session-specific feedback in the form of **report cards*** containing a few questions and open space. These report cards were distributed at the beginning the sessions and workshops and filled in on site. Ballot boxes were available at the back of the rooms for participants to deposit their cards. More than 1,200 such cards were completed. The card is reproduced in Appendix 1 of the companion technical report.

- *A follow-up **Web survey** of attendees and non-attendees.* All 289 attendees for whom an e-mail address was available were invited to complete a Web survey about their experience, along with 479 individuals who attended in 2001 but not in 2003 and some 2100 additional individuals thought to belong to the conference target group based on their job title as identified in GEDS. The data collection took place between May 8 and May 20, 2003, with a few additional questionnaires being completed up to May 29. The questionnaire was based on issues raised by the organising committee, the 2001 conference questionnaire and the Common Measurement Tool developed under the auspices of the CCMD. The questionnaire itself and

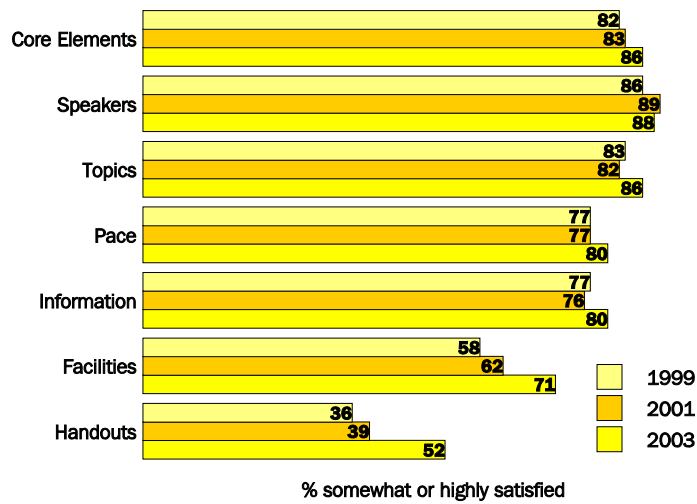field results are presented in Appendix 2 of the companion technical
report.

- **Self-administered questionnaires** *with exhibitor*s during their last day
  of presence on site. The questionnaires were hand-delivered and the
  return could be done in-person on site during the same afternoon or by
  fax. All exhibitors who had not completed the survey were telephoned
  three to five days after the conference to motivate them to complete the
  questionnaire. Thirty-three feedback forms were completed. The
  questionnaire itself and results are presented in Appendix 3 of the
  companion technical report.

The next three chapters highlight the results from each source. Chapter 5
summarises the conclusions.

Chapter 2

REPORT CARDS

EXHIBIT 2.1 • Overall satisfaction levels according to report cards

Category	1999	2001	2003
Core Elements	82	83	86
Speakers	86	89	88
Topics	83	82	86
Pace	77	77	80
Information	77	76	80
Facilities	58	62	71
Handouts	36	39	52

% somewhat or highly satisfied

Report cards were distributed at the beginning of each plenary, break-out session and workshop. Some 1,235 were returned. Their format is reproduced in the companion technical report along with the detailed frequency distributions of the various responses and the transcription of the comments.

The results indicate that:

- The level of satisfaction with the quality of speakers and with the topics covered exceeded 85% overall (88% and 86% respectively) when considering the participants who rated "somewhat" and "highly" satisfied. These results compare

favourably with those of 1999 and 2001.[1]

- The pace of the sessions and the quantity of information gained rated a little lower, at 80%. These levels are slightly higher than in 2001.

- These four aspects (quality of speakers, topics, pace and information gained) are highly inter-correlated. Together, they form the core elements of satisfaction. On the basis of a summary scale including these four ingredients, 86% of participants rated the core elements satisfactory (49% highly satisfactory). Satisfaction with core elements increased in 2003 compared to the previous two conferences.

- Facilities were rated satisfactory 71% of the time — which represents a significant improvement over 1999 and 2001.

- Handouts were a sore point in 1999 and 2001; they remain a topic of criticism but the level of satisfaction with them has jumped in 2003 — from 39% to 52%.

- Historically, workshops achieved the highest levels of participant satisfaction followed by breakout sessions and plenaries. In 2003, Technology stream sessions obtained top ratings (94% satisfied) followed by cultural change sessions (90% satisfaction). Workshops obtained an 86% rating.

- Partnership sessions (pioneering a new area) received a rating of 76%.

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[1] Most differences in satisfaction ratings between 1999 and 2001 do not reach statistical significance, which is not surprising considering the size of the samples available for analysis. Nonetheless, the direction and magnitude of the changes are reported. The fact that most differences point in the same direction adds credence to the hypothesis that real change occurred between the two conferences.

EXHIBIT 2.2
Satisfaction expressed via the report cards
(% somewhat and highly satisfied)

Aspect	ALL FEED-BACK	Plena-ries	Cultural change	Partner-ships	Techno-logy	Work-shops
Core elements (speaker, topic, pace, information	86%	82%	90%	76%	94%	86%
Quality of the speakers	88%	87%	92%	80%	96%	88%
Topics covered	86%	83%	91%	83%	93%	86%
Pace of the session	80%	76%	84%	76%	88%	83%
Information gained	80%	76%	88%	73%	85%	83%
Facilities	71%	71%	61%	73%	78%	73%
Handouts	52%	31%	57%	54%	25%	72%
n Core elements	1216	500	177	88	170	281
Handouts	655	186	96	39	67	267

- The highest score of satisfaction in each category went to the following sessions:
  - plenaries: The Role of the Internet on State Modernization (94%);
  - Cultural change stream: The Future of Citizen E-Engagement (97%);
  - Partnership stream: Managing Partnerships, A Personal Perspective (100%);
  - Technology stream: Connectivity and Remote Communities (100%);
  - workshops: Service Transformation and Governance (100%).

Chapter 3

PARTICIPANTS AND NON-PARTICIPANTS

This chapter reviews the results of a telephone survey of 88 conference participants and 372 non-participants (of which 71 had been delegates in 2001). The questionnaire, methodology, field results and detailed frequency distributions are presented in Appendix 2.
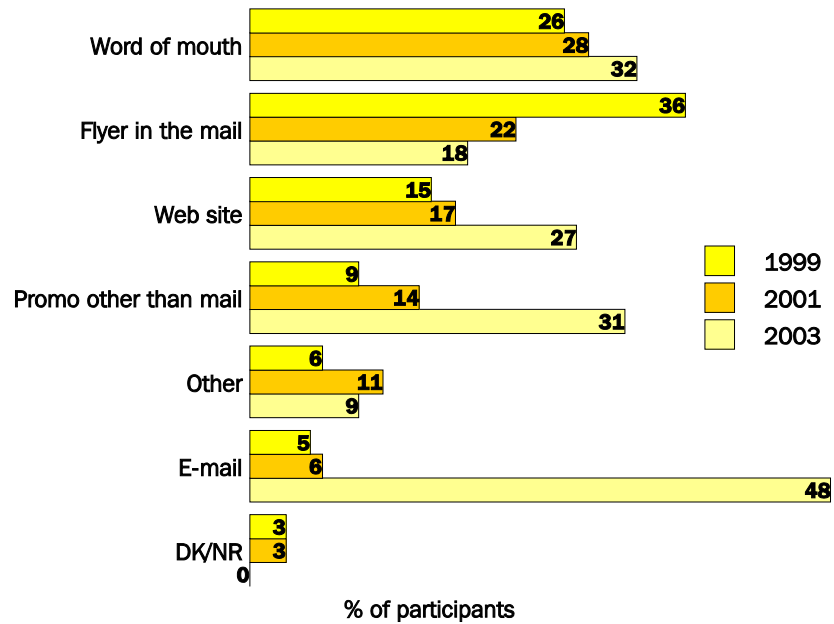
3.1   Participants

- The pool of delegates comprised mainly people whose employment was IM/IT-related. This is a significant shift from the 1999 and 2001 conferences which attracted information workers foremost.

  The participant pool was composed of 35% of people whose job was IM/IT-related (31% in 1999, 20% in 2001); 31% had employment in the information field (42% in 1999, 39% in 2001); and, 18% were active in the policy and program field (24% in 1999, 38% in 2001).

- As exhibit 3.1 demonstrates, e-mail messages from conference organizers has rapidly become the dominant mode of information about GovNet. The GovNet Web site has also grown into a significant source of information. In parallel, regular mail has become a secondary source.
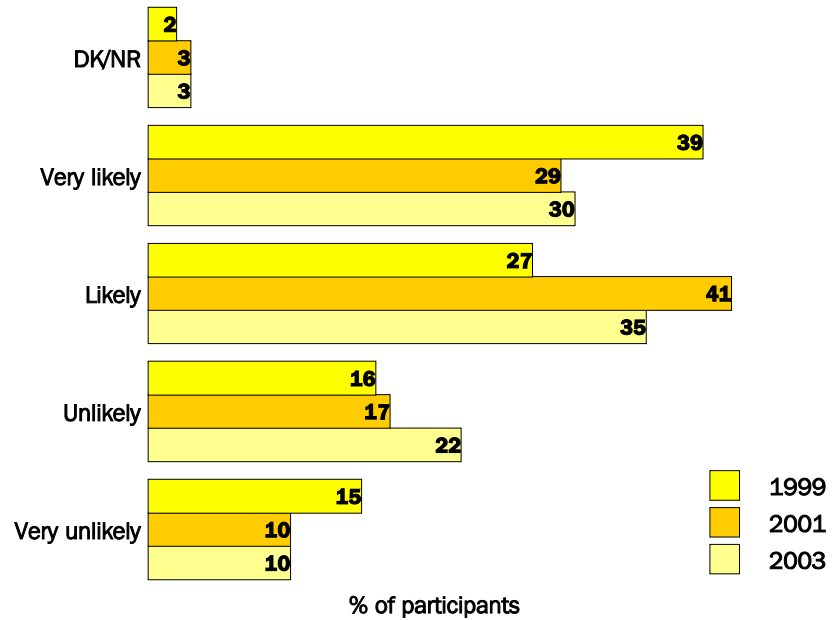
EXHIBIT 3.1 • Source of information in Govnet

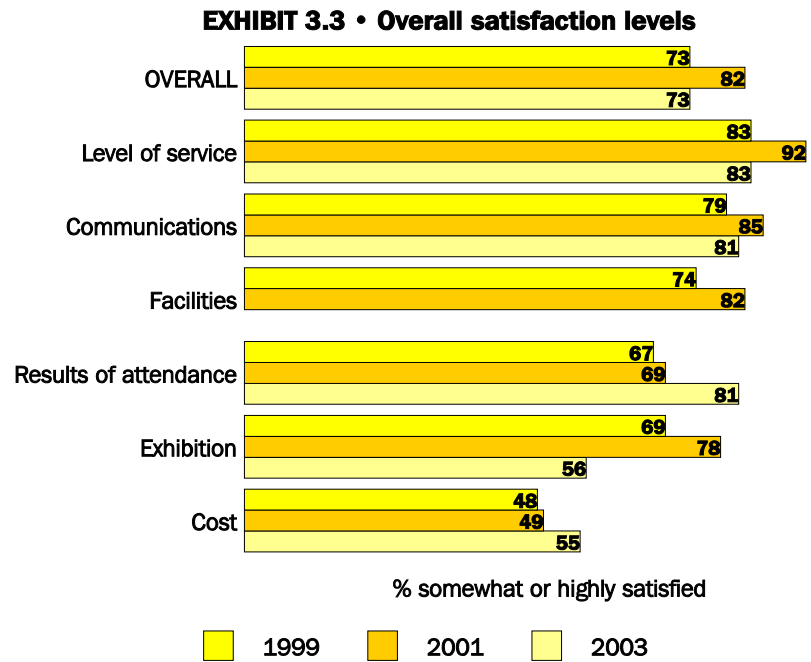| Source	1999	2001	2003
Word of mouth	26	28	32
Flyer in the mail	36	22	18
Web site	15	17	27
Promo other than mail	9	14	31
Other	6	11	9
E-mail	5	6	48
DK/NR	3	3	0

% of participants

- The majority (68%) of participants attended the conference to keep abreast of the state of the art; roughly similar-size groups indicated that their prime goal was to network (6%) and to get training (9%). The patterns of participant objectives is similar to that uncovered in 1999 and in 2001.

- The overall satisfaction level was 73%. This represents a decrease from 83% in 2001 but a stable figure when compared to 1999.

- Two thirds (65%) participants declared being likely to attend another Government on the Net conference next year (compared to 67% in 1999 and 71% in 2001). These figures should be conceived as additional indicators of satisfaction — not as expectations of real behaviour; in fact, according to verifications conducted by GovNet 03

staff, only 13% of 1999 delegates participated in 2001 and 17% of the 2001 were present in 2003.

EXHIBIT 3.2 • Likelihood of returning

Category	1999	2001	2003
DK/NR	2	3	3
Very likely	39	29	30
Likely	27	41	35
Unlikely	16	17	22
Very unlikely	15	10	10

Legend: 1999, 2001, 2003

% of participants

- Satisfaction with the level of service obtained is highest, at 83%, followed by the quality of communications (81%). The former dimension was strongly influenced by positive feelings toward the registration procedures and the courtesy of on-site personnel.

- Satisfaction with the results of attendance rose sharply in 2003, to 81%, from 68% in 2001 and 67% in 1999.

- The exhibition component was less satisfying (56%) as was the cost of the conference — although, in this latter case, satisfaction was in fact up.

- The availability of handouts (or lack thereof) was a usual sore point with 55% indicating that they were somewhat satisfied or very satisfied with them.

EXHIBIT 3.3 • Overall satisfaction levels

Category	1999	2001	2003
OVERALL	73	82	73
Level of service	83	92	83
Communications	79	85	81
Facilities	74	82	
Results of attendance	67	69	81
Exhibition	69	78	56
Cost	48	49	55

% somewhat or highly satisfied

☐ 1999   ☐ 2001   ☐ 2003

- Some 75% were satisfied with the extent to which the conference met their needs (63% in 1999 and 2001).

- The key aspects which determine whether a delegate intends to attend next year are: the quality of speakers, the topics covered under the various streams and in plenaries and the conference meeting needs. By inference, repeat attendance is much less a function of contacts made, quality of on-site service or the exhibition program.

- Participants would have liked to see the following topics covered more fully:
  - technical aspects of government on-line;
  - medium management (e.g., e-mail policy, risk management);
  - content management;
  - interdepartmental collaboration;
  - what other departments are doing and how;

- also, specifically, GOL issues and issues related to Common Look and Feel.

- Delegates indicated that the following were the key subjects of interest to them at the conference:
  - partnerships;
  - Web and Intranet usability;
  - cultural change and the transformation of organizations;
  - open source software;
  - metadata;
  - communities of practice.

- According to delegates, the key positive features of GovNet 03 were:
  - the opportunity to keep abreast of initiatives across government, the opportunity to network;
  - strong presenters;
  - relevance of the topics to the current situation;
  - cutting-edge topics that go beyond the day-to-day routine;
  - (very few mentions of aspects not related to content such as conference location, format, etc.).

- Key priorities for improvements noted by delegates were:
  - ensure speakers are familiar with the federal government issues and practices;
  - merge with other federal conferences;
  - offer handouts on site and post presentations on the GovNet Web site;
  - clarify the language of presentation before hand;
  - raise the content strength and focus on emerging issues — some presentations were basic and some content was simple rehash;
  - increase the discussion of technical issues, best practices and success stories — often opposed to "philosophical" debates.
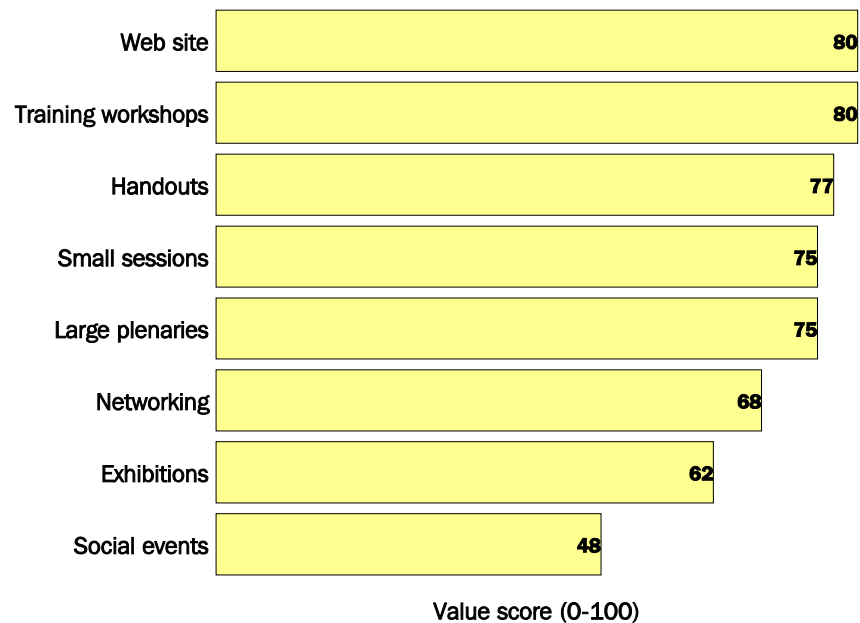
3.2   *Non-Participants*

- The non-participant pool who had not been to the 2001 conference was composed of 7% of people whose job was IM/IT-related; 46% had employment in the information field; and, 42% were active in the policy and program field (program managers and policy analysts, according to the survey). In comparison, non-participants who were delegates in 2001 were more likely to hold an IM/IT position (18%) and less likely to work in communications or information (19%) or in program management or analysis (39%).

- 90% of 2001 delegates who did not attend in 2003 had heard of the Government on the Net 03 conference prior to April 14. Among the rest of non-participants, 30% knew of the conference. Notoriety measured this way rated at 64% for Web-associated employees, 46% for information-driven individuals and 29% for policy and program management personnel.

- For one third of non-participants (30%), lack of time explained their non-attendance. Lack of funds came in second, followed by the interest generated by the conference program.

- Topics of interest to non-participants in the context of a conference focussed on government and the Internet included:
  - use made of government information available on the Internet by the public; public satisfaction with existing on-line systems;
  - uses of the Internet by the Canadian government and by governments in other countries;
  - compliance with government standards, privacy regulations, accessibility issues, communications policy, Web usability, copyright law, etc.;
  - key emerging trends in the use of the Internet by governments, in managing Internet presence, in e-commerce, in managing on-line information, in managing security risks, etc.;
  - uses of the Internet: research, training, cooperation, citizen engagement, outreach, etc.;

- best practices and practical training.

3.3   *Conference format*

- Given four possible ways to stay abreast of key trends, conference participants preferred practical workshops and seminars (51%), followed by large-scale conferences (25%), communities of practice (22%) and distance learning (1%). P references of non-participants were similar.

- The GovNet target client group (as defined by its delegates and individuals in the two non-participating groups) values training workshops and the conference Web site "where conference material are posted" highest when they attend a professional conference. These are followed closely by handouts, small sessions where interactions can take place and large plenaries featuring renown speakers. Social events and an exhibition program are secondary value features of a professional conference.

EXHIBIT 3.4 • Value derived from various formats

Format	Value score (0-100)
Web site	80
Training workshops	80
Handouts	77
Small sessions	75
Large plenaries	75
Networking	68
Exhibitions	62
Social events	48

Value score (0-100)

- The target client group valued equally the contribution of experts and of practitioners as conference presenters. They were keener on the value of government representatives than on that of industry representatives and they clearly valued the messages of Canadian presenters over that of foreign presenters.

Chapter 4

EXHIBITORS

Contacts were made with every exhibitor at the conference to complete a two-page feedback form. All exhibitors were contacted again within one week of the conference to motivate them to return the questionnaire. Thirty-three forms were returned out of 42 exhibitors. A copy of the form and detailed results are presented in the companion technical report.

The main findings are as follows:

* Exhibitors displayed a high level of satisfaction with the conference facilities, the booth space they were offered and the composition of the pool of exhibitors (88%, 93% and 84% respectively).

* Exhibitors' reaction to the price of their presence remained low in 2003 (58%), particularly among public sector exhibitors (44%).

* Satisfaction with the results of the presence at the conference has plunged to 47% in 2003. Based on qualitative feedback, it appears that exhibitors were unimpressed with the turnout; they also questioned where delegates had sufficient influence to affect their organization's decisions.
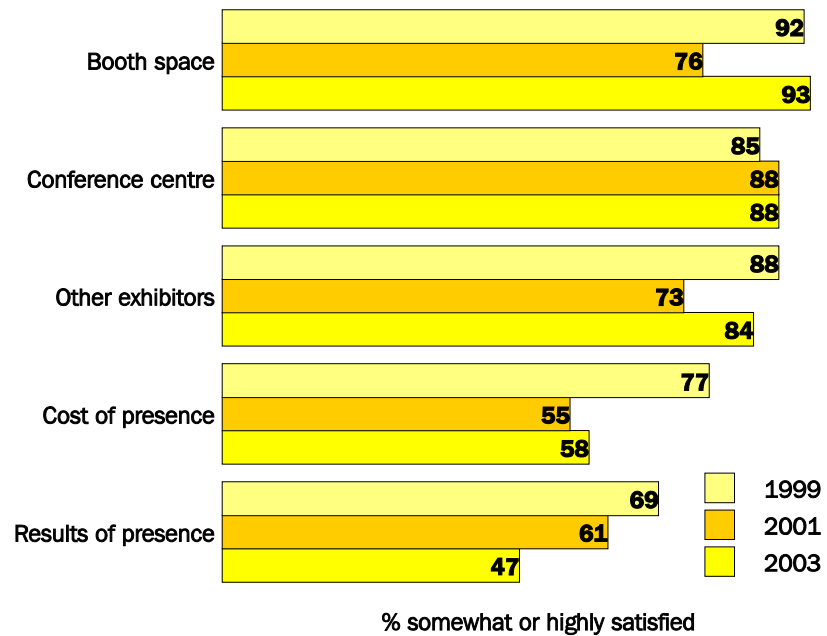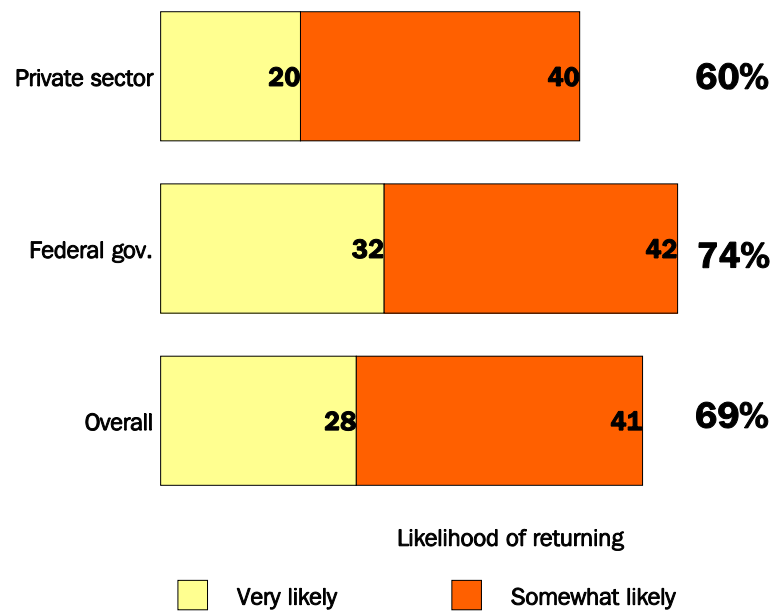
EXHIBIT 4.1 • Exhibitors' satisfaction levels

Booth space
- 1999: 92
- 2001: 76
- 2003: 93

Conference centre
- 1999: 85
- 2001: 88
- 2003: 88

Other exhibitors
- 1999: 88
- 2001: 73
- 2003: 84

Cost of presence
- 1999: 77
- 2001: 55
- 2003: 58

Results of presence
- 1999: 69
- 2001: 61
- 2003: 47

Legend:
- 1999
- 2001
- 2003

% somewhat or highly satisfied

EXHIBIT 4.2
Satisfaction expressed by exhibitors
(% somewhat and highly satisfied)

Aspect	ALL FEED-BACK	Federal govern-ment	Private sector	Unlikely to come back	Likely to come back
Conference centre	88%	95%	73%	56%	100%
Booth space	93%	95%	91%	89%	94%
Other exhibitors	84%	91%	73%	63%	90%
Results of the presence	47%	60%	20%	11%	59%
Cost of presence	56%	44%	80%	38%	69%
n	32	21	11	8	20

- Overall, 69% of exhibitors stated that they are somewhat or very likely to return to the conference next year (similar to the result obtained in 1999 and 2001). The figure is higher for federal organisations (74%) than for private sector companies (60%).

- The elements of satisfaction most closely related to the likelihood of returning are the exhibitor's reaction to the results of the attendance, the conference centre and cost.

- Not surprisingly, the drop in attendance in 2003 had a detrimental impact on the experience of exhibitors.

EXHIBIT 4.3 • Exhibitors' likelihood of returning

	Very likely	Somewhat likely	
Private sector	20	40	**60%**
Federal gov.	32	42	**74%**
Overall	28	41	**69%**

Likelihood of returning

☐ Very likely   ■ Somewhat likely

Chapter 5

CONCLUSIONS

This evaluation contains a small number of important observations which are summarized below along with suggestions for improvements.

- ***Overall, participants were satisfied with their experience.***

Observations
- 86% satisfied with core elements of the sessions.
- 73% satisfied overall according to the post-conference survey.
- 65% of participants are likely to attend next year (considered as another measure of satisfaction, not as likely behaviour, as past data show).
- The sessions with the highest ratings dealt with emerging and futures issues.
- Satisfaction with handouts increased significantly from previous GovNet conferences.

Suggestions
- Maintain the focus on emerging issues.

- ***The conference format may be becoming dated.***

  Observations • Plenary sessions generally garner less positive
    feedback than smaller sessions.
  - Stream-based presentations in smaller groups
    received the most positive feedback.
  - Practical workshops and seminars are the preferred
    means of keeping abreast of issues.
  - Two thirds of delegates attended the conference
    primarily to keep abreast of the state of the art.

  Suggestions • Emphasize smaller sessions and practical workshops
    even more than is the case now.

- ***Key areas for improvement focus on content, with a pinch of
  process.***

  Observations • Suggested content improvement include
    - speakers familiar with the federal government
      issues and practices;
    - raise the content strength and focus on emerging
      issues — some presentations were basic and
      some content was simple rehash;
    - increase the discussion of technical issues, best
      practices and success stories — often opposed to
      "philosophical" debates.
  - Suggested process improvement include
    - merger with other federal conferences;
    - handouts on site and presentations on the Web
      site;
    - clarify the language of presentation before hand.
  - Many non-participants share the thematic interests
    of participants.
  - GovNet target client group values training workshops
    and the conference Web site highest. Social events
    and an exhibition program are secondary value.

  Suggestions • Focus conference themes on emerging issues (as

opposed to technical issues that can be studied elsewhere) with a clear emphasis on the federal government.

- Invest in the development of on-line archives.
- Ensure that workshop presenters tailor their presentation to the reality of federal public servants.

- ***The composition of the delegate pool is shifting.***

Observations
- More than one third of delegates held IM/IT positions compared to one in five in 2001.
- Representation from policy analysts and program managers decreased by a factor of two.

Suggestions
- Clearly define the target clientele (is it IM/IT personnel or program/policy analysts or some other group?).
- Market according to the target clientele (identify themes and approaches relevant to the chosen target clientele, and promote to them that group in particular).

- ***Attendance has been low.***

Observations
- Attendance dropped some 33% from 2001. While some other Canadian conferences experienced the same trend in 2003, others did not observe a reduction in attendance.
- 30% of non-participants who had not been present at GovNet 01 knew of GovNet 03; this was the case of 90% of non-participants who attended GovNet 01.
- 17% of 2001 delegates returned on 2003 (13% of the 1999 delegates returned on 2001).
- The main barriers to participation were the availability of time, the cost of the conference and the relevance of the program.

- Some organizations limit access to "conferences" but have looser rules concerning "professional development" events.

Suggestions
- Review the communications program to better reach non-participants.
- Re-label GovNet as a professional development event rather than a conference.
- Develop marketing plans specifically to increase return delegates.

- ***Exhibitors were generally satisfied but attendance was an issue.***

Observations
- 88% satisfaction with the conference centre.
- 92% satisfaction with booth space.
- 47% satisfaction with the results of the presence (down from 69% in 1999 and 61% in 2001).
- 58% satisfaction with the cost (55% in 2001 and 77% in 1999).
- 69% of exhibitors likely to return.
- Numerous delegates enrolled only in workshops and, therefore, were not exposed to the exhibition program.

Suggestions
- If the exhibition component is to be repeated, build the program to increase attendance; in particular, make the exhibition available during workshops which attract a different pool of individuals.
- Reconsider whether the exhibition component is worth the effort considering the value derived by delegates.