

# **MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL GUIDE**

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September 2011

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## Introduction

The Ministry of Government Relations has developed a self-assessment tool for Saskatchewan municipalities focused on indicators of sustainability for municipal government. Municipal government sustainability focuses on eight core areas: governance, administration, finance and financial management, service delivery, public safety, infrastructure, demographics and economic trends, and partnerships.

The sustainability of municipalities and their services is a key objective of the Ministry. A self-assessment tool will help meet the government's aim to work with the municipal sector to identify barriers and opportunities to improve municipal government sustainability. The tool supports the Ministry's priority initiative of working with the municipal sector to enhance professional and administrative capacity.

This is a tool for municipalities, with results for use by municipalities. The tool aims to alert local officials to problems before they become unmanageable and help identify areas of concern. Results are not required to be reported to the province or shared with other municipalities, unless so desired.

This document is intended to guide you through the use and interpretation of the tool and answer some of the "Frequently Asked Questions."

## Executive Summary

Local governments are in the best position to assess their municipality's sustainability, given the necessary information and tools. To this end, the Ministry, in consultation with the municipal sector, including representatives from the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association (SUMA), the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM), New North, and the Rural Municipal Administrators' Association of Saskatchewan (RMAA), undertook the development of a municipal government sustainability self-assessment tool to help municipalities assess their sustainability as local governments.

The developed self-assessment tool is intended to be easy to use and provide municipalities with the opportunity for self-reflection. Based on local knowledge and available data, the tool highlights a municipality's current situation relative to key aspects of municipal sustainability and helps local administrators and council members come to their own conclusions about the sustainability of their municipal government and what actions, if any, are needed to improve it.

Follow up work may include, the Ministry continuing to work with our municipal sector partners to develop appropriate resources and solutions to help municipalities address identified challenges.

## Getting Started

Municipalities are encouraged to complete the Municipal Government Self-Assessment Tool for their municipality to help gauge their current sustainability. The tool can be completed by Council, administration and/or together. Step by step instructions for how to use the tool follow below.

On average, it is expected to take a municipality two and a half hours to complete the self-assessment tool. The length of time it takes to complete will vary based on the size of the municipality, availability of information and Council/staff experience.

Once the tool has been completed, the results can be used by the municipality to assess areas of strength and identify opportunities to focus sustainability efforts. The section below on viewing results provides greater detail on how to interpret the scores.

# Step by Step Instructions

## Navigation

Once you open the self-assessment tool you will see a number of navigation tabs along the bottom of the spreadsheet. The first navigation tab “Intro,” Figure 1, gives a brief introduction on the self-assessment tool including an introduction and instructions.

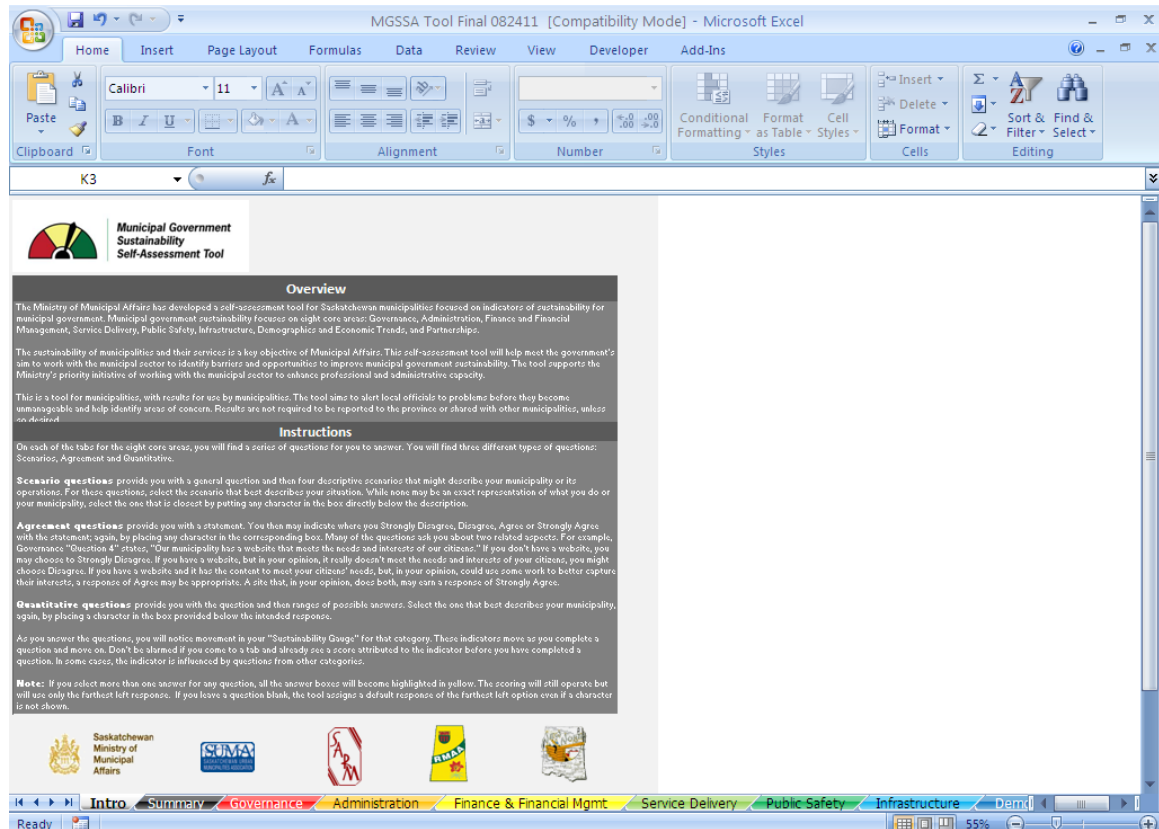


Figure 1 - Intro Tab



Figure 2- Summary Tab

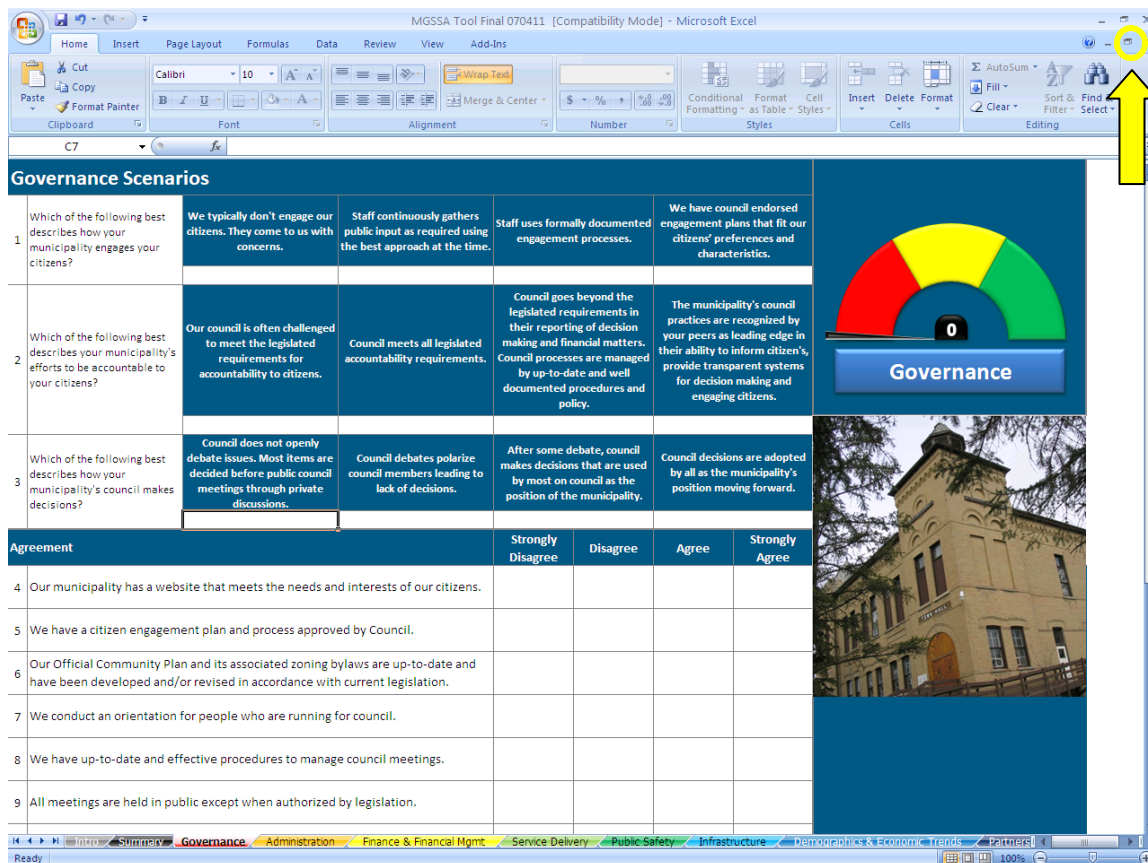
The second tab from the left is the “Summary” screen, Figure 2. The Summary screen will automatically be populated based on the responses entered in the remaining tabs. The remaining eight navigation tabs are for the eight core areas that municipal government sustainability focuses on:

- Governance;
- Administration;
- Finance and Financial Management;
- Service Delivery;
- Public Safety;
- Infrastructure;
- Demographics and Economic Trends; and
- Partnerships.

The gauges that appear on the navigation tabs for each of the eight core areas match the corresponding gauges on the summary screen tab.

## Navigating the response tabs

To complete the tool you must answer the questions within each of the eight core area tabs (See Figure 3). You do not need to answer the questions and tabs in order. You can move from question to question using the tab button on your keyboard and denote your chosen answer with any character that you choose. Depending on your computer monitor settings, you may need to scroll from left to right to ensure you can read all of the questions and responses. As well, it is important to ensure that you have maximized the Excel window so that you can see the response tabs on the bottom of the page. To maximize the screen, click the box in the top right corner, indicated below.



**Governance Scenarios**

1	Which of the following best describes how your municipality engages your citizens?	We typically don't engage our citizens. They come to us with concerns.	Staff continuously gathers public input as required using the best approach at the time.	Staff uses formally documented engagement processes.	We have council endorsed engagement plans that fit our citizens' preferences and characteristics.
2	Which of the following best describes your municipality's efforts to be accountable to your citizens?	Our council is often challenged to meet the legislated requirements for accountability to citizens.	Council meets all legislated accountability requirements.	Council goes beyond the legislated requirements in their reporting of decision making and financial matters. Council processes are managed by up-to-date and well documented procedures and policy.	The municipality's council practices are recognized by your peers as leading edge in their ability to inform citizen's, provide transparent systems for decision making and engaging citizens.
3	Which of the following best describes how your municipality's council makes decisions?	Council does not openly debate issues. Most items are decided before public council meetings through private discussions.	Council debates polarize council members leading to lack of decisions.	After some debate, council makes decisions that are used by most on council as the position of the municipality.	Council decisions are adopted by all as the municipality's position moving forward.

**Agreement**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
4 Our municipality has a website that meets the needs and interests of our citizens.				
5 We have a citizen engagement plan and process approved by Council.				
6 Our Official Community Plan and its associated zoning bylaws are up-to-date and have been developed and/or revised in accordance with current legislation.				
7 We conduct an orientation for people who are running for council.				
8 We have up-to-date and effective procedures to manage council meetings.				
9 All meetings are held in public except when authorized by legislation.				

**Governance**






Figure 3 - Governance Tab



## Entering responses

Indicate your response by entering any character in the box below the choice that best reflects your answer.

All questions are assumed to apply to your municipality, except where noted. If you leave a question blank, the tool assigns a default response of the farthest left option even if a character is not shown.

If you select more than one answer for any question, all the answer boxes will become highlighted in yellow (as shown in Figure 4). The scoring will still operate but will use only the farthest left response.

Governance Scenarios					
1	Which of the following best describes how your municipality engages your citizens?	We typically don't engage our citizens. They come to us with concerns.	Staff continuously gathers public input as required using the best approach at the time.	Staff uses formally documented engagement processes.	We have council endorsed engagement plans that fit our citizens' preferences and characteristics.
2	Which of the following best describes how your municipality's efforts to be accountable to your citizens?	Our council is often challenged to meet the legislated requirements for accountability to citizens.	Council meets all legislated accountability requirements.	Council goes beyond the legislated requirements in their reporting of decision making and financial matters. Council processes are managed by up-to-date and well documented procedures and policy.	The municipality's council practices are recognized by your peers as leading edge in their ability to inform citizen's, provide transparent systems for decision making and engaging citizens.
3	Which of the following best describes how your municipality's council makes decisions?	Council does not openly debate issues. Most items are decided before public council meetings through private discussions.	Council debates polarize council members leading to lack of decisions.	After some debate, council makes decisions that are used by most on council as the position of the municipality.	Council decisions are adopted by all as the municipality's position moving forward.
Agreement		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
4	Our municipality has a website that meets the needs and interests of our citizens.	h			
5	We have a citizen engagement plan and process approved by Council.		h		
6	Our Official Community Plan and its associated zoning bylaws are up-to-date and have been developed and/or revised in accordance with current legislation.				h
7	We conduct an orientation for people who are running for council.			h	
8	We have up-to-date and effective procedures to manage council meetings.		h		
9	All meetings are held in public except when authorized by legislation.				h

Figure 4 - Multiple answer error

## Types of questions

On each of the tabs for the eight core areas, you will find a series of questions for you to answer. You will find three different types of questions: Scenarios, Agreement and Quantitative.

**Scenario questions** provide you with a general question and then four descriptive scenarios that might describe your municipality or its operations. For these questions, select the scenario that best describes your situation. While none may be an exact representation of what you do or your municipality, select the one that is closest by putting any character in the box directly below the description.

**Agreement questions** provide you with a statement. You then may indicate if you Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree or Strongly Agree with the statement; again, by placing any character in the corresponding box. Many of the questions ask you about two related aspects. For example, Governance “Question 4” states, “Our municipality has a website that meets the needs and interests of our citizens.” If you don’t have a website, you may choose to Strongly Disagree. If you have a website, but in your opinion, it really doesn’t meet the needs and interests of your citizens, you might choose Disagree. If you have a website and it has the content to meet your citizens’ needs, but, in your opinion, could use some work to better capture their interests, a response of Agree may be appropriate. A website that, in your opinion, does both may earn a response of Strongly Agree.

**Quantitative questions** provide you with the question and then ranges of possible answers. Select the range that best describes your municipality, again, by placing a character in the box provided below your intended response.

As you answer the questions, you will notice movement in your “Sustainability Gauge” for that category. These indicators move as you complete a question and move on. Don’t be alarmed if you come to a tab and already see a score attributed to the indicator before you have completed a question. In some cases, the indicator is influenced by questions from other categories.

## Viewing results

To view a summary of your answers to the Self-Assessment Tool, go to the “Summary” navigation tab. The responses to each question are rolled up based on specific formulae to provide a sustainability score for each category. The level of these indicators is shown graphically on the eight gauges (See Figure 5).



Figure 5 - Results Summary

The ranges on the gauges are broken down into three equal ranges. In establishing the gauges, the acceptable ranges were broken down into thirds and then formulas were generated based on the acceptable percentages. The ranges indicate the following:

- Red Range: Below 33%  
Gauges scoring in the red range should caution the municipality that this may be an area where sustainability can be improved.
- Yellow Range: 34% - 65%  
Gauges scoring in the yellow range indicate that the municipality is likely moderately sustainable in this area.

- Green Range: Above 66%

Gauges scoring in the green range suggest a highly sustainable municipal organization in this area.

Please note that there is no overall sustainability gauge due to the diversity of municipalities in the province. Differing populations and needs of the municipalities would impact the weighting that the core areas have on overall sustainability.

## Saving results

To save your results, simply save the spreadsheet as you would any other Microsoft document. (See Figure 6) Depending on the version of Excel you are using, when you go to save your results, you may get a compatibility error (See Figure 7). Don't let this concern you. All your data will be saved. The error message simply points out some formatting difference amongst versions of Microsoft Excel.

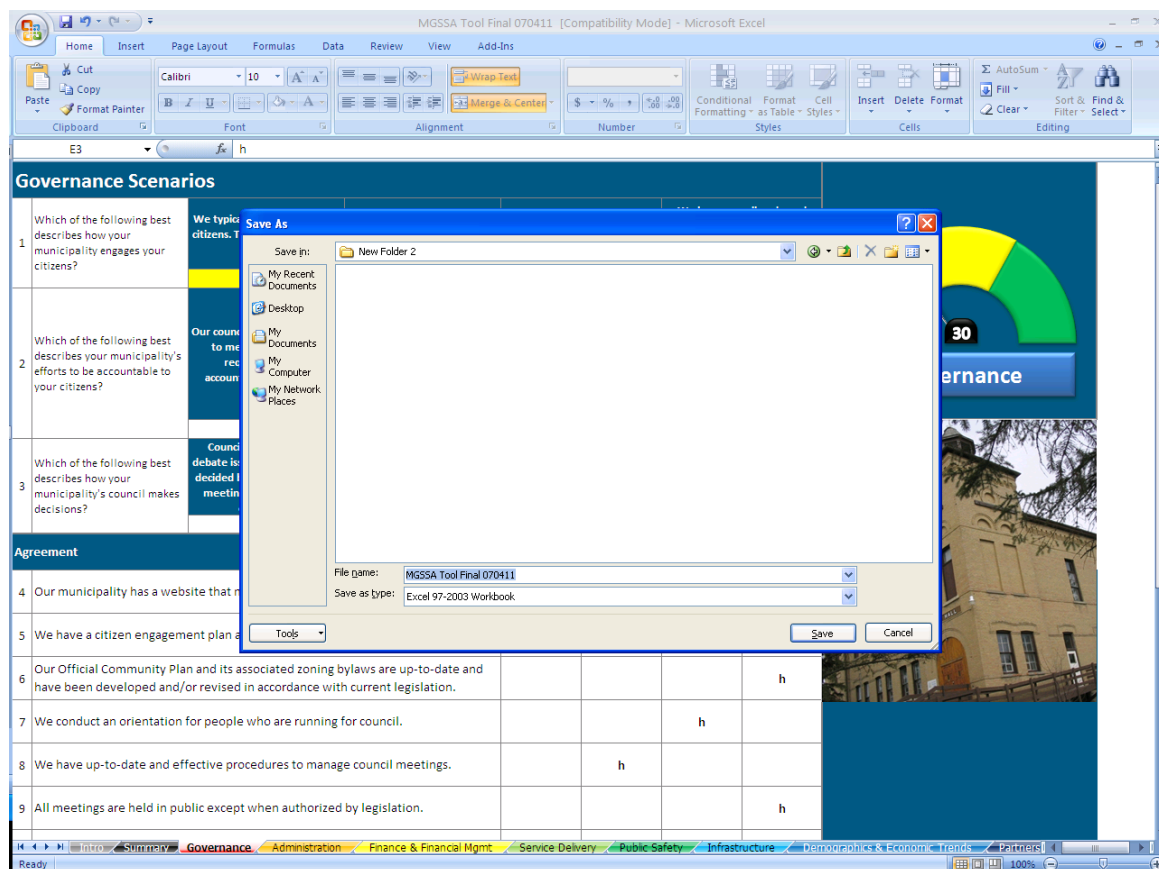


Figure 6 – Saving Your File

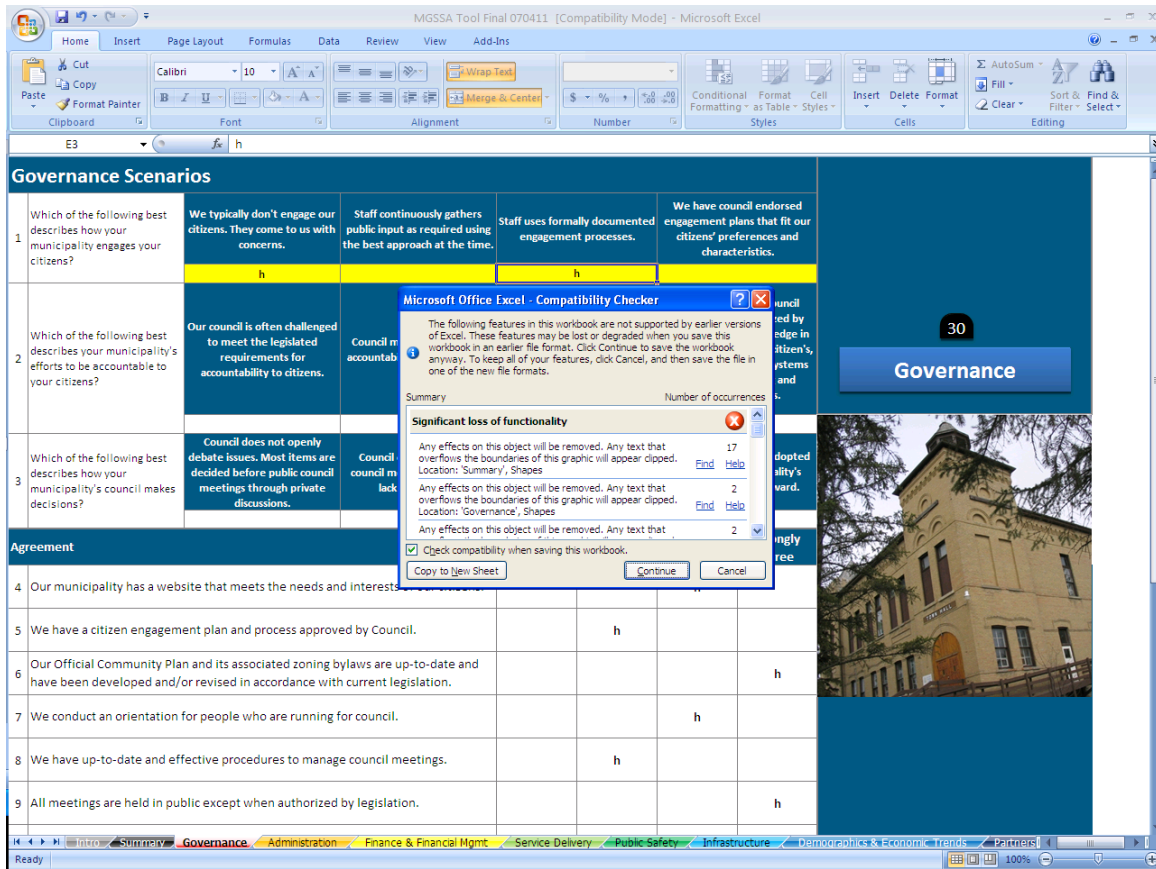


Figure 7 – Compatibility Error

## Printing reports

The tool is already preformatted to print on most printers and printing adjustment should not be required. To print the report select print at the top left hand corner of the tool or press “Ctrl+p.” When the print box appears, select “Entire workbook” in the bottom left hand corner (See Figure 8). Click “OK.” This will print all navigation tabs of the tool.

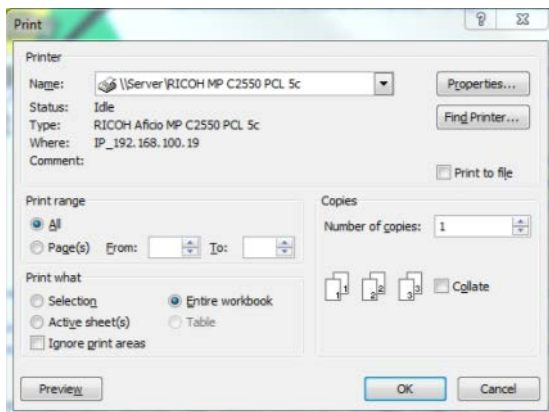


Figure 8 - Printer Settings

## Definitions

1. **Administration** - A significant part of determining the sustainability of municipalities is associated with the capacity of municipal administration, its ability to provide council with accurate and reliable information and its ability to carry out responsibilities required by statute. Another component of the assessment pertains to actual compliance with legislated requirements.
2. **Capital budget** – A plan that details the costs incurred to acquire, construct or improve municipal assets.
3. **Certified administrator requirements** – As outlined in Administrator, Fact Sheet 6.1<sup>1</sup>, the person appointed as administrator must be qualified for urban municipalities under the provisions of *The Urban Municipal Administrators Act* and for rural municipalities under the provisions of *The Rural Municipal Administrators Act*.
4. **Citizen engagement plan** - A document outlining the goals and activities that the municipality will undertake to engage its citizens in local governance and decision making. Associated costs should also be identified.
5. **Core infrastructure** – Assets managed by the municipality that are critical to the day-to-day functioning of the municipality. This could include buried utilities, roads, transit systems, bridges, and water/sewage treatment plants.
6. **Demographics and economic trends** - The decline of rural population has created challenges for municipalities. The economic and social bases of many municipalities have been negatively affected. Municipalities have to recognize the impact of a declining and aging population on tax base, overall economic position, types and costs of services required, and base for volunteer contribution. They may have to seek alternative methods of service delivery where possible. The availability of recreational and cultural facilities, as well as health and education services, impacts long-term viability. Indicators of social and cultural well-being are therefore an indicator of long-term municipal government sustainability. While a consideration in

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.municipal.gov.sk.ca/publications/Council-Responsibilities-Administrator>

ongoing community sustainability, municipal governments have very limited or no control over health and education services. A municipality's direct control related to recreation and cultural activities in its jurisdiction is primarily limited to the establishment of recreational and cultural facilities, infrastructure and services. According to the municipal Acts, one of the purposes of municipalities is to foster economic, social and environmental well-being.

- 7. Emergency Preparedness Plan** – As per *The Emergency Planning Act, 1989*, Saskatchewan municipalities are obligated to establish emergency plans.<sup>2</sup>
- 8. Emergency response exercise** – A simulated event designed to evaluate emergency operations, policies, plans, procedures and facilities; train personnel in emergency management and response duties; and demonstrate operational capability.
- 9. Environmental standards** – Broadly accepted practices and design requirements that support the environmentally responsible and resource efficient practices of municipal assets throughout their lifecycle from design through construction and decommissioning to operation and maintenance.
- 10. Finance and financial management** - Good financial management is one of the cornerstones of the success and continuity of any municipality. It ensures financial resources are properly managed and funds are spent in accordance with the stated priorities and mission of the municipality. This category of sustainability reflects on whether the municipality is following principles of fiscal responsibility, performing ongoing monitoring of its financial health and risks, and following best practices in accounting, budgeting, and the preparation and presentation of financial statements. According to the municipal Acts, municipalities are to provide wise stewardship of public assets.
- 11. Financial risk management plan** – A documentation of the financial risks existing within the municipality, such as, reliance on single sources of tax revenue or capital costs of potentially at-risk infrastructure. For each risk identified, the risk should be evaluated based on the probability that it will occur and the impact it would have.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.municipal.gov.sk.ca/Emergency-Plan-Development>

Then, actions to reduce the occurrence of the risk and/or mitigate its impact should be identified.

**12. Governance** - This is an evaluation of the elected municipal body in an effort to determine if council is complying with the requirements of provincial legislation and practicing principles of good governance. It is recognized that good governance is a requirement for sustainability. According to the municipal Acts, municipalities are to provide good government. Council responsibilities are outlined in Fact Sheet 6.0.<sup>3</sup>

**13. Infrastructure** - Municipalities provide service to residents largely through their core infrastructure portfolio. Infrastructure includes recreational, cultural and utility facilities. In keeping with the varied nature of the municipalities in the province, there is a large variance in the scale and scope of services offered by municipalities. Proximity of services in rural and urban municipalities may vary, as may the revenue generating capacity of their municipal structures. These unique elements must be understood and considered in sound infrastructure planning.

No matter the type of infrastructure, it remains a public responsibility to ensure that infrastructure is managed in a sustainable manner. That is, to ensure that infrastructure will appropriately meet residents' needs now and into the foreseeable future at a manageable cost and consideration of its environmental impact. Need and cost consideration is dependent on an understanding of asset condition and the employment of robust asset management practices. Such practices identify life cycle costs and conditions, prolong asset life, and identify timing and cost of replacement. According to the municipal Acts, municipalities are to provide services, facilities, and other things that, in the opinion of council, are necessary and desirable for all or part of the municipality as well as to provide wise stewardship of public assets.

**14. Lifecycle costing plan** – A documentation of the total cost required to maintain the municipality's infrastructure assets in full performance for its service life. This can include the design, construction, operating, capital and operating leases, maintenance, user and socio-economic costs.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.municipal.gov.sk.ca/Elections-General/Understanding-the-Role/Council-Responsibilities>



- 15. Lifecycle maintenance** – Maintenance activities performed on an infrastructure asset throughout its life to preserve and extend its useful life.
- 16. Long term capital asset management plan** – A documentation of how municipal infrastructure assets will be managed over the long term. Management considers the financial, economic and engineering practices applied so as to maintain the asset in the most cost-effective manner.
- 17. Maintenance** – Planned or unplanned activities related to preserving the asset in its original condition and for the purpose for which it was originally intended. Maintenance generally consists of: inspections, preventative maintenance, repairs and rehabilitation.
- 18. Mandatory services** – Services and facilities that municipalities are required to provide based on legislation.
- 19. Mitigation plan** – Documentation outlining the actions the municipality will take to reduce or eliminate specific risks to the municipality.
- 20. Non-traditional partnerships** - Agreements with other municipal and/or non-municipal entities to provide facilities or services other than Mutual Aid Agreements.
- 21. Operating budget** – A plan outlining the level of spending required to support the municipality's day-to-day operations. Operating costs include labour, maintenance, fuel and insurance.
- 22. Operating grants** – Financial support provided by other levels of government (federal and provincial) to support the municipality's day-to-day operating expenses.
- 23. Optional services** – Services and facilities that are provided based on the opinion of council that they are desirable. This often includes recreational and social services.
- 24. P3** - A public private partnership (P3) is a legally-binding contract between government and business for the provision of assets and the delivery of services that allocates responsibilities and business risks among the various partners. In a P3

arrangement, government remains actively involved throughout the project's life cycle. The private sector is responsible for the more commercial functions such as project design, construction, finance and operations.

**25. Partnerships** - Partnerships are increasingly recognized as an essential component of municipal sustainability. Whether with other municipalities, not-for-profits, school boards, health agencies, First Nations, planning districts or private sector entities, partnerships enable enhanced capacity. When considering partnerships, mutual benefits beyond cost savings should be included. Partners may bring efficiencies of scale and scope, specific technical expertise, enhanced service levels or reduce overall risk.

**26. Public Safety** - The level and type of municipal mitigation, preparedness and response capabilities to reduce or eliminate long-term risks to people, property and the environment from hazards and their subsequent effects is a major concern of municipal governments. Municipal public safety initiatives can encompass fire and police protection, bylaw enforcement, building inspections, emergency planning, street lighting and the monitoring of water and sewage treatment. Meeting public safety needs and legislated requirements is another key indicator of municipal sustainability. According to the municipal Acts, municipalities are to develop and maintain a safe and viable community.

**27. Public safety risk assessment plan** - A documentation of the public safety risks existing within the municipality. For each risk identified, the risk should be evaluated based on the probability that it will occur and the impact it would have. Then, actions to reduce the occurrence of the risk and/or mitigate its impact should be identified. Municipal public safety initiatives can encompass fire and police protection, bylaw enforcement, building inspections, emergency planning, street lighting and the monitoring of water and sewage treatment.

**28. Service Delivery** - The provision of basic services is a fundamental responsibility of a municipality. Determining whether a municipality is able to provide these services in a manner that meets public needs and legislative requirements is an important indicator of municipal sustainability. According to the municipal Acts, municipalities

are to provide services, facilities, and other things that, in the opinion of council, are necessary and desirable for all or part of the municipality.

**29. Service delivery plan** – A documentation of the services and facilities to be provided within the municipality as well as the associated service levels and costs.

**30. Staff learning plan** – A documentation of the learning and development activities to be undertaken by an employee in a given time period. This could include on the job learning such as job rotation, cross-training and mentoring as well as formal training courses, conferences and seminars.

**31. Strategic plan** – A documentation of the municipality's vision for the future and its long-term plan to achieve this vision. This plan is intended to look at the municipality holistically, incorporating citizens' opinions, and giving council and administration a means to chart the future of the organization. The strategic plan should encompass all aspects of the municipality's operations and its plans.

**32. Succession plan** – A course of action outlining a process for identifying and developing internal personnel with the potential to fill key or critical organizational positions. Succession planning ensures the availability of experienced and capable employees that are prepared to assume these roles as they become available.

**33. Volunteers** – Unpaid individuals who agree to assist with services or programs sponsored by the municipality.

## **FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions)**

### ***1. The text in some of the questions does not fit into the cell making it hard to read the question. What do I do?***

Microsoft Excel has some limitations in the ability to format cells. The tool was developed for a screen resolution of 1280 X 960. If you have any other monitor setting, it may not display properly. However, the print feature has been configured to display properly on all printers. We would recommend that you print a copy of the tab that you are working on to ensure that you can see all the questions and responses.

### ***2. Are we required to send this information to the Ministry?***

Results do not have to be reported to the province or shared with other municipalities, unless so desired.

### ***3. If all our scores are “in the green,” does that mean we are sustainable?***

Achieving all scores “in the green” does not necessarily indicate that a municipality is sustainable. Due to the diversity of municipalities throughout the province factors that impact the sustainability of one municipality may not impact another. Green scores indicate that the municipality is functioning at a high level but nothing can guarantee sustainability.

### ***4. If all our scores are “in the red,” does that mean our municipality is unsustainable?***

Achieving all scores “in the red” does not necessarily indicate that a municipality is unsustainable. As indicated above, the diversity of municipalities throughout the province can lead to the sustainability of some municipalities being more impacted by certain factors than others. Red scores help to identify areas for improvement.

### ***5. How are the sustainability scores calculated?***

The scores presented in the gauges on each category tab (and in the Summary tab) are based on your responses to the questions. During the tool’s development, formulas were developed based on a sampling of responses from Saskatchewan municipalities. These formulas include a weighting to the responses based on their contribution to the indicators of sustainability in each category.

**6. *What do I do with the results?***

Sharing results with Council is a good conversation starter for potential improvements. The results will also help to identify areas where goals can be developed for future strategic and operational planning.

**7. *Can this replace our Administrator's performance evaluation?***

No, this tool has not been designed to replace Administrator performance evaluations. There are many questions asked that evaluate things that are outside of the Administrator's control.

**8. *How do my results compare to other municipalities in Saskatchewan?***

Currently, there is no system in place to generate an average score; however, the colour ranges set are based on a small sampling of test data received from Saskatchewan municipalities in developing this tool and can be used as a general indication on comparable performance.

**9. *How can I share my results with other Saskatchewan municipalities?***

The choice to share your results with other Saskatchewan municipalities is up to each municipality. This can be done by saving your completed version of the Municipal Government Self-Assessment Tool spreadsheet and emailing to whom ever you would like to view it. All they will need is a version of Microsoft Excel that meets the technical requirements outlined in the next section of this document.

## Technical Requirements

### ***Software***

The tool requires the installation of Microsoft Office Excel version 2003 or later. Optimal performance will require Microsoft Office Excel version 2007 or later<sup>4</sup>.

Microsoft Office Excel version 2003 requires one of the following operating system configurations:

- Windows Server 2003 or a later version
- Windows XP or a later version
- Windows 2000 Service Pack 3 (SP3) or a later version
- Windows Vista

### ***Hardware***

Microsoft Office Excel version 2003 is a component of Microsoft Office 2003 which requires the following computer requirements:

#### **CPU**

- Pentium processor with a clock speed of at least 233 megahertz (MHz).  
Microsoft recommends a computer with a Pentium III or faster processor.

#### **Memory**

- Microsoft recommends that your computer have a minimum of 128 MB of RAM. An additional 8 MB of RAM are required for each Office 2003 program that runs at the same time.

#### **Available hard disk space**

- Office 2003 requires 400 MB of available hard-disk space. Hard disk requirements vary, depending on your configuration. Custom installation choices may require more or less hard disk space.

#### **Disk drives**

- Office 2003 requires a CD-ROM drive (or compatible DVD-ROM drive) for installation.

#### **Monitor**

- A Super VGA monitor with at least 800x600 resolution and 256 colors is required.

#### **Pointing device**

- A Microsoft Mouse, Microsoft IntelliMouse, or compatible pointing device is required.

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<sup>4</sup> The tool has been designed to run optimally on Microsoft Office Excel 2007. Earlier versions of Excel may experience some formatting issues but should not impact use.

## **Further Information**

For further information, please contact:

### **Advisory Services – Saskatchewan Ministry of Government Relations**

1010 – 1855 Victoria Avenue

Regina, Saskatchewan S4P 3T2

Phone: (306) 787-2680

Fax: (306) 787-3641