

**Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development
Corporate Services
Departmental Audit and Evaluation Branch**

Prepared by:

**Beverley Clarkson, Senior Evaluation Manager
Joanne Rigon, Evaluation Research Assistant**

Assisted by:

New Link Management Consultants

**Management Practices Review
of the Departmental Secretariat**

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Table of Contents

	Page
Executive Summary	i
Background	i
Operating Environment	i
Main Conclusions	ii
Key Findings and Recommendations	iii
Section 1 - Introduction	1
Purpose of the Report	1
Purpose of the Review	1
Section 2 - Review Approach	2
Review Methodology	2
Section 3 - Overview of Departmental Secretariat	4
Departmental Secretariat Profile	4
Organizational Structure	5
Departmental Secretariat's Budgets and Resources	6
Stakeholders and Clients	7
Logic Model	8
Departmental Secretariat Logic Model	9
Section 4 - Findings	13
Description of Operations	13
Document Review	19
Comparative Analysis	20
Section 5 - Conclusions & Recommendations	22
Section 6 - Best Practices	29
Effective Management Practices	29
Performance Comparisons	31
Annexes	
Terms of Reference	
Action plan	

Background

This report presents the results of the Management Practices Review of the Departmental Secretariat, one of a series conducted by the Departmental Audit and Evaluation Branch (DAEB) in recent years. This review was approved by the Departmental Audit and Evaluation Committee (DAEC), chaired by the Deputy Minister in December 1996. The purpose of the review was to identify both operational strengths and areas for improvement, with particular emphasis on the identification of best management practices.

The review covered the mandate and all the activities of the Departmental Secretariat, including clarity of goals, objectives, policies and procedures; linkages to the requirements of the Minister's and Deputies' offices; appropriateness of organization structure and adequacy of resourcing; cost-effectiveness; and best management practices. The study was a generalized review of the secretariat and its activities, with a view to key issues which affect the organization in the discharge of its mandate. The management framework of the current organization was the one reviewed, and no attempt was made to define a new operating structure. Nevertheless, it is quite clear that the organization is operating at a minimum resource level, from both technological and human perspective.

The study was conducted through a combination of in-house and contracted resources with the support of an Advisory Committee. The approach involved multiple lines of evidence, including the application of an organizational review model, document reviews, comparisons with other federal departments, and interviews with key departmental officials.

Operating Environment

The operating environment of the Departmental Secretariat is complex, fast-paced, and demand driven. The clients of the Departmental Secretariat are the Minister's Office, and the offices of the Deputy Minister and Associate Deputy Minister. The Departmental Secretariat exists to ensure the proper functioning of the administrative processes for providing quality information in a timely manner and in a number of different formats. The information may take the form of a briefing note, an answer to a question raised in the House of Commons, a response to a letter, or a reply to a request under the Access to Information and the Privacy Acts.

What is not readily apparent is the nature of the work, and the level of stress associated with the delivery of a quality service. Managing the processes involves ensuring that the requirement from the client is clear and unambiguous, that it is received by the proper program area, and that the response by the program is timely and meets the required quality level. This may mean adding content not provided by the program, or correcting errors and omissions, both activities which the Departmental Secretariat was not originally structured or resourced to address.

The high level of clients' expectations, the restricted and critical timeframes for the delivery of products, and the potential consequences of mistakes or poor quality information add to the level of stress on the organization. To a certain extent, this can be mitigated over time through the development of good working relationships with the clients and with the programs. These relationships are volatile, however, and any change increases the pressure on managing existing issues while attempting to cope with new or amended demands.

The mainstay of the Departmental Secretariat is dedicated, knowledgeable and experience staff who are committed to quality and who place a high priority on meeting the needs of their clients.

Main Conclusions

The main findings of the study indicate that overall, the Departmental Secretariat, while operating in a sensitive and pressured environment, is delivering the services required by its various clients in a positive and effective manner. Departmental Secretariat officials are particularly effective at maintaining positive communications and a problem-solving orientation in their internal and external interactions.

The group is demonstrating leadership in a number of innovative practices, including assisting in the breakdown of departmental "silos" through information exchange and shared decision-making, and promotion of a consultative culture. There is also a move towards a more comprehensive application of information technology, and strong emphasis on meeting the needs of the Minister and Deputies.

Such actions represent a number of best management practices that contribute to improve effectiveness of the Departmental Secretariat. Others include:

- the close links between the Departmental Secretariat and its clients at the management and operational levels;
- the emphasis on employee participation and internal communication to implement a new operating environment;
- the bottom-up reviews conducted internally by the Correspondence Unit and the Access to Information and Privacy (ATIP) Office;

- the practice of “stand-up” meetings to ensure that the issues of the day are clearly defined; and
- the move toward the more comprehensive application of information technology.

Comparatively, based on the interviews conducted and the material reviewed from other departments, it was determined that the Departmental Secretariat at Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development is performing as well as its federal counterparts. From the evidence gathered, it is suggested that the majority of the Departmental Secretariats are operating at a fairly equal level although there may be variations in speed or quality depending on organizational priorities. No one Departmental Secretariat stands out in terms of performance although many are currently reviewing their management practices.

In addition to the positive messages cited, there are, however, possibilities for further efficiencies through improved processes and procedures in the ATIP Office, and there are some concerns relating to the management control framework, accountability and performance measurement.

The intense workload in other areas in the Departmental Secretariat occupies all of the available time, and a considerable amount of extra time, either recorded or not. There is insufficient remaining time to effectively address other than minor problems within the organization, and thus the Departmental Secretariat struggles to improve. Unless a concerted effort is made to focus on and manage the larger issues the situation is unlikely to improve significantly. The major issues facing the organization are complex and inter-related, to the extent that addressing any issue will have an impact on all the others yet each must be addressed to put the organization on a sound management footing.

What is not readily apparent is the nature of the work, and the level of stress which must be managed by each individual and is compounded at the managerial level.

Key Findings and Recommendations

Overall, the findings suggest that:

- the Departmental Secretariat mandate is not clearly defined and with the exception of ATIP, operational policies and internal procedures have not been formally articulated;
- the current organizational structure of the Departmental Secretariat does not take advantage of similarities in the nature of its services to generate efficiencies: the Secretariat Units (Parliamentary Relations, Briefing Unit, Correspondence Division) are not all physically located on the same floor; the Secretariat Units tend to work in isolation; and the two Correspondence Divisions do not necessarily work as a cohesive unit;

- for the most part, existing resources could not be reallocated to address current operational needs. The human and financial resources are particularly stretched when Parliament is in session, and the situation in the ATIP Office is more urgent due to a large backlog which currently requires experienced officers to address it;
- the Departmental Secretariat is generally adept at meeting its objectives. Again, the exception is the ATIP Office which is continually struggling to eliminate the large backlog of requests. There are issues of roles, responsibilities, and accountability surrounding the delivery of the Departmental Secretariat's services. The lack of clarity in these areas tends to change the role of the Departmental Secretariat from one of administering a process to one of adding value through providing content and quality assurance. Under these circumstances, it would be appropriate to re-examine the strategic positioning of the organization, and consequently the structure, the processes, and the resourcing; and
- improvements in the application of technology are required to assist the Departmental Secretariat in improving its service delivery capacity.

Accordingly, recommendations have been made in the areas of the development of an accountability framework, the preparation of operational policies and procedures, and performance measurement. Recommendations are also made regarding risk management, and the need to build on the commonalities inherent in the Departmental Secretariat's various services. They are as follows:

- Recommendation 1:** The Director of the Departmental Secretariat develop and implement a strategic plan that would serve to consolidate and document the role of the organization in the department, and clarify the services it provides. As a component of developing the plan, it may become necessary to address the positioning of the organization and its services within the department, as well as the structure, internal processes and resourcing for service delivery.
- Recommendation 2:** The Director of the Departmental Secretariat establish a formal management framework to operationalize the Departmental Secretariat's strategic plan. At a minimum, this would consist of developing and promulgating a mission statement, objectives, service delivery strategies, policies, and operating procedures.
- Recommendation 3:** The Director of the Departmental Secretariat review the organization's structure and resource utilization to ensure optimal allocation of staff resources, appropriate workload distribution, and cross-fertilization of skills and knowledge. As well, the correspondence activities should be merged and co-located with the Briefing Unit and Parliamentary Relations.

- Recommendation 4:** The Director of the Departmental Secretariat develop and implement a risk management model for the ATIP Office.
- Recommendation 5:** The Director of the Departmental Secretariat develop and implement a performance measurement system focused on the key operational information required to balance productivity and quality.
- Recommendation 6:** The Director of the Departmental Secretariat, in concert with sectors and regions, develop, obtain senior management approval for, and implement, an accountability framework that would:
- define the roles of the participants in the service delivery process;
 - establish standards of service; and
 - provide for ongoing monitoring and reporting of performance.
- Recommendation 7:** The Director of the Departmental Secretariat address the need for the development of a management information system that would address, among other things, the integration of information technology, including the development of functionality requirements, identifying software needs, preparing a rigorous introduction schedule, and immediate implementation.

Purpose of the Report

This report presents the findings of the Management Practices Review of the Departmental Secretariat of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND). It includes a description of the review approach, methodologies, and operational model employed. The findings of the review are presented in terms of the issues outlined in the terms of reference and address concerns surrounding employee stress and burnout, work processes, resourcing, accountabilities, and risk management. A comparative analysis with Departmental Secretariats in other federal departments is also included.

Purpose of the Review

The department has undertaken a series of reviews of management practices in the regions as well as at headquarters in order to identify best practices. The purpose of this study is to review the management practices of the Departmental Secretariat to identify both strengths and areas for improvement with particular emphasis on the identification of strong management practices.

As set out in the terms of reference approved by the Departmental Audit and Evaluation Committee (DAEC) in October 1996, the review addresses the following issues:

- Does the Departmental Secretariat have clearly defined goals and objectives to fulfill its mandate? Are there clear policies and procedures in place to guide the Departmental Secretariat?
- To what extent are the Departmental Secretariat's functions linked to the requirements of the Minister's and Deputies' offices and the department?
- Is the organizational structure appropriate to support an effective service delivery? Are human and financial resources adequate?
- How effective is the Departmental Secretariat in meeting its objectives? What practices are noteworthy?
- Are there more cost-effective ways to meet these departmental objectives?
- What best management practices are in place that contribute to improved effectiveness of the organization?

Section 2 - Review Approach

The review examines the management practices of the Departmental Secretariat since its reorganization in 1993. The review was conducted with a combination of in-house and contracted resources in consultation with an Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee was comprised of Departmental Secretariat representatives, officials from the Minister's and Deputies' offices, and DIAND regional and headquarters representatives, and was chaired by a Manager from the Departmental Audit and Evaluation Branch.

The multiple lines of evidence used to address the review issues include: interviews with Departmental Secretariat personnel, officials in the Minister's and Deputy Minister's offices, DIAND regional program representatives and representatives from Departmental Secretariats in other federal departments; a document review and comparative analysis; and the application of an organizational review model.

Review Methodology

Three main data collection methods were employed as part of the review of management practices. Data collection activities that occurred between December 1996 to March 1997 are described as follows:

1. Interviews with Key Officials

Departmental Secretariat In-Person Interviews: In-person interviews were undertaken with 19 individuals from the Departmental Secretariat. They include: the Director, the Manager and two officers from Parliamentary Relations; the Manager and two officers from the Briefing Unit; the Co-ordinator and seven officers from the Correspondence Division; and the Co-ordinator and three officers of the ATIP Office. The former Director of the Departmental Secretariat was also interviewed. These interviews provided the primary source of information on the Departmental Secretariat's mandate, goals and objectives, key management philosophies, functions, activities, work processes, resources, results, and impacts.

Minister's and Deputy Minister's Offices In-Person Interviews: In-person interviews were also conducted with representatives from the Minister's and Deputy Minister's offices. Three individuals were interviewed from the Minister's Office and two from the Deputy Minister's Office. As the main contributors of work for the Departmental Secretariat as well as the primary beneficiaries of its services, these offices provided additional evidence of the Departmental Secretariat's work processes, functions, and activities.

Regional Telephone Interviews: Telephone interviews were conducted with the representatives of Executive Services in three regions (Saskatchewan, Ontario, and British Columbia). These interviews provided another source of evidence relating to work processes, activities, results, and impacts. Issues of quality and timeliness of products were also addressed.

Other Federal Departments In- Person Interviews: In-person interviews were conducted with Directors or Directors General of Departmental Secretariats (Executive Services) from five other federal departments. They include: Health Canada, Industry Canada, Transport Canada, Environment Canada, and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. The interviews provided information on the management practices and delivery approaches of other Federal Secretariat Units.

2. Document Review and Comparative Analysis

Document Review: Several reviews and audits previously conducted by other federal departments of their Executive Services/Departmental Secretariats were examined and analysed to gain a better understanding of the issues, concerns, and problems confronting them.

Comparative Analysis: A brief comparative analysis of the Executive Service/Departmental Secretariats from the five other federal departments interviewed was also undertaken. The comparative analysis involved examining the variation in management practices in terms of work processes and organizational structure, human resources, and accountabilities.

3. Application of the Operational Review Model

The organizational model applied to this review is a standard approach that has been widely applied in government and other diverse organizations. The operational model is a conceptual framework used to describe a particular set of elements and their relationships. It is used to explain linkages; facilitate communication; delineate processes, functions, and activities; and evaluate completeness in order to improve performance.

This model depicts an organization's operating environment by identifying the stakeholders, clients and beneficiaries and enabling legislation; the organization's mission, objectives, strategies management framework and controls; and its business and operational processes.

By carefully describing and assessing each of the inputs, the work done for them, and the resulting outputs, it is possible to describe the performance of an organization in relation to the expectations of stakeholders, and to suggest ways to affect the level of performance in terms of productivity and quality.

Section 3 -

Overview of Departmental Secretariat

This section provides an introduction to the Departmental Secretariat and presents its organizational structure, activities, budget, resources, stakeholders and clients. As well, a logic model is presented which relates goals and activities to outcomes and impacts.

Departmental Secretariat Profile

The Departmental Secretariat, with the exception of the ATIP Office, plays an important supporting role to the Minister, the Deputy Minister and the Associate Deputy Minister, and provides a key link for the promulgation of the Deputies' values to the program areas of the department. The ATIP Office operates under a different mandate, that manages and administers the department's activities in respect to the *Access to Information Act* and the *Privacy Act*. Nevertheless, the Departmental Secretariat's primary mission is to facilitate the executive functions of the department through the provision of support services. In order to provide these services, the Departmental Secretariat draws upon its specialized knowledge and capabilities related to the executive functions of the department; knowledge of parliamentary and Cabinet systems, processes, and agendas; expertise in writing, editing, and translation for the crafting of appropriate responses to public, parliamentary, and departmental enquiries; a broad perspective on issues and initiatives that may transcend individual branch mandates; and objectivity in dealing with issues of varying sensitivities.

The Departmental Secretariat provides a range of services to the Minister, Deputies, and their respective staffs in the areas of parliamentary relations, briefings, correspondence, and requests made under the *Access to Information Act* and the *Privacy Act*, and as such serves as a central link between the department and the Minister's and Deputies offices. Acting as an extension of the Deputies' offices, the Departmental Secretariat, lead by the Director, ensures that ministerial correspondence and related support functions are carried out expeditiously and efficiently. The Departmental Secretariat is composed of four units that directly report to the Director. The total combined staff of the Departmental Secretariat, including the Director, is thirty-seven full-time equivalents.

The Parliamentary Relations Division (PR): supports the Minister, the Deputies and other departmental officials in preparing the Minister for daily Question Period debates in the House of Commons. It monitors and reports on parliamentary committee activity and co-ordinates preparations for appearances before parliamentary committees. The division co-ordinates parliamentary returns and the tabling of documents in both the House and the Senate. In addition, it provides advice on parliamentary processes and procedures and supports any other ministerial activities in Parliament.

The Briefing Unit (BU): is responsible for providing briefing notes for the Minister's and Deputies' trips and meetings, and responds to special briefing requests from the Minister's and Deputies' offices. The unit is responsible for ensuring that required materials are appropriate, accurate, and timely.

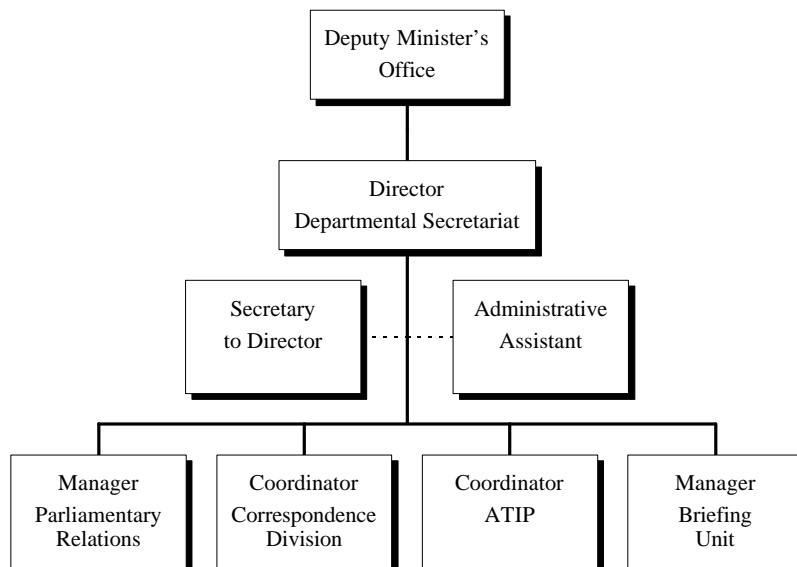
The Correspondence Division (CD): is responsible for ensuring timely, accurate, and sensitive responses to ministerial and departmental correspondence received in the Minister's and Deputies' offices. The division establishes the departmental procedures, style, format, and standards for ministerial correspondence, and draft responses relating to corporate issues, write-in campaigns or other correspondence.

The Access to Information and Privacy (ATIP) Office: is responsible for the administration of the *Access to Information Act* and the *Privacy Act*. The office processes all requests made under the *Acts*, ensures that the legal procedures and deadlines set out in the legislation are adhered to, and provides guidance and advice to departmental officials on the application and interpretation of the *Acts*. The office provides advice to members of the public seeking access to documents; consults with other departments; other levels of government; and third parties on the release of documents; and is the departmental point of contact with both the Information and Privacy Commissioners' offices.

Organizational Structure

Figure 1 is a simplified organizational structure of the Departmental Secretariat.

Figure 1 - Organizational Structure of Departmental Secretariat

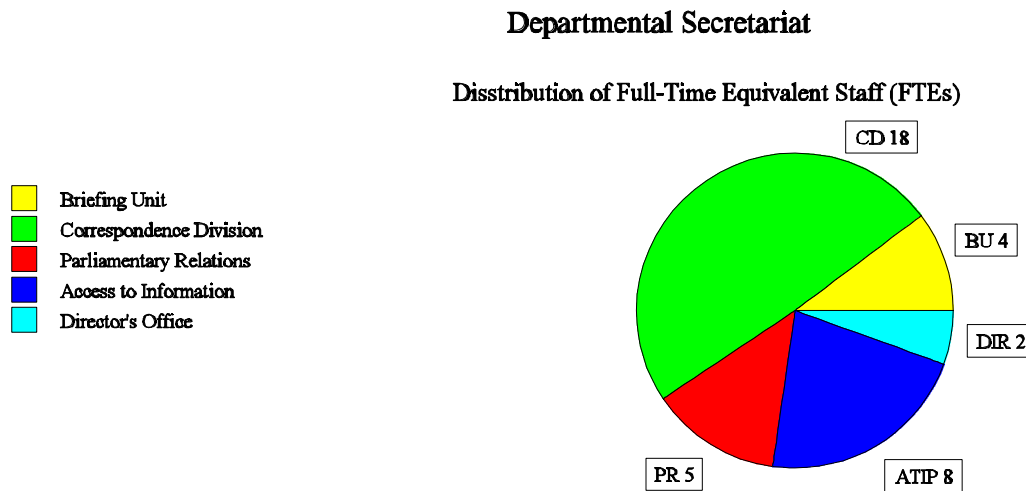


The Director of the Departmental Secretariat reports directly to the Deputy Minister and oversees all activities under the Departmental Secretariat's responsibility. The Director is supported by a secretary while an administrative assistant lends support to the Deputy Minister's Office and the Departmental Secretariat in general. The heads of each unit report to the Director and are responsible for the activities in their area. The Director and the heads of each unit comprise the Departmental Secretariat management team.

Departmental Secretariat's Budgets and Resources

The Departmental Secretariat has a staff of 37 full-time equivalents (FTEs). The distribution of staff is as follows: 4 in the Briefing Unit, 5 in Parliamentary Relations, 18 in the Correspondence Division, and 8 in the ATIP Office. The balance remaining accounts for the Director and the administrative assistant of the Departmental Secretariat.

Figure 2 - Departmental Secretariat FTEs



The table below details the Departmental Secretariat's budget allocations and full-time equivalent (FTE) staff for the last three fiscal years. Financial information for only the last three fiscal years is presented, due to the reorganization in 1993. Any financial information derived from previous years would not be representative of, or comparable to, the Departmental Secretariat's current activities of responsibility.

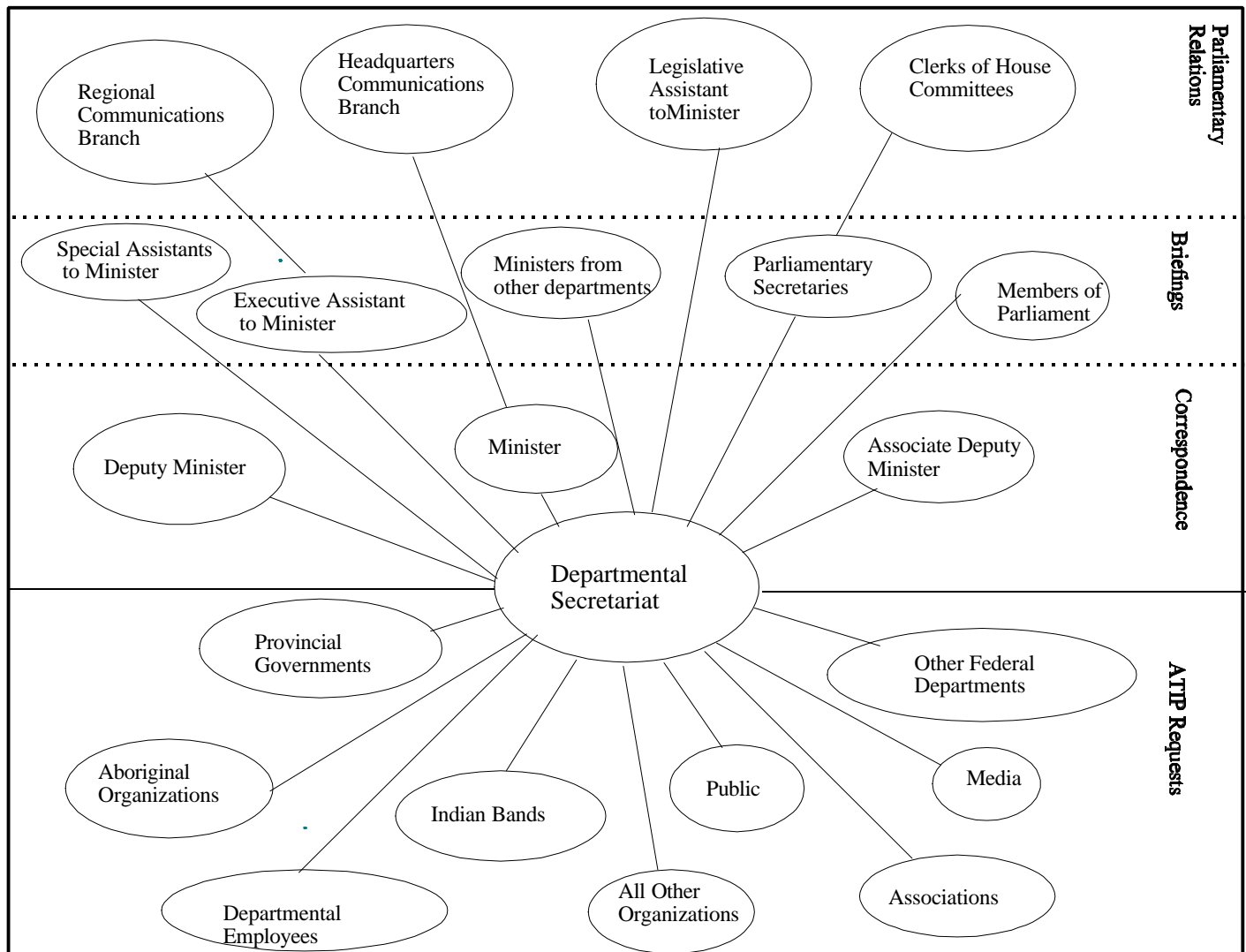
Departmental Secretariat Budgets and Resources			
Years	Budgets*	% change	FTEs
1994-1995	\$1,904,665	---	37
1995-1996	\$1,872,628	-1.68	37
1996-1997	\$1,858,888	-0.73	37

Source: Departmental Secretariat

On average, the breakdown of the departmental budget is salaries: 90% and O & M: 10%.

Stakeholders and Clients

The Departmental Secretariat supports a number of clients and stakeholders both internal and external to the department. The following illustration identifies these clients and stakeholders and outlines their linkages to the Departmental Secretariat.



The diagram illustrates the clients and stakeholders of the Departmental Secretariat as two distinct groups: one group represents those individuals who require assistance with ministerial support functions such as correspondence, briefings, and parliamentary relations; while the other group represents those individuals, groups, and associations who make requests for records under the *Access to Information Act* and *Privacy Act*. The diagram further depicts these clients and stakeholders in various “categories” in order to highlight the area(s) specific to their needs. However, clients are not necessarily limited to each of these “categories”. For example, the Minister and Deputies depend on the Departmental Secretariat’s assistance with ministerial correspondence, but also require assistance with briefings and parliamentary relations. Similarly, individuals who rely on the Departmental Secretariat for briefings may also require assistance with parliamentary relations.

Logic Model

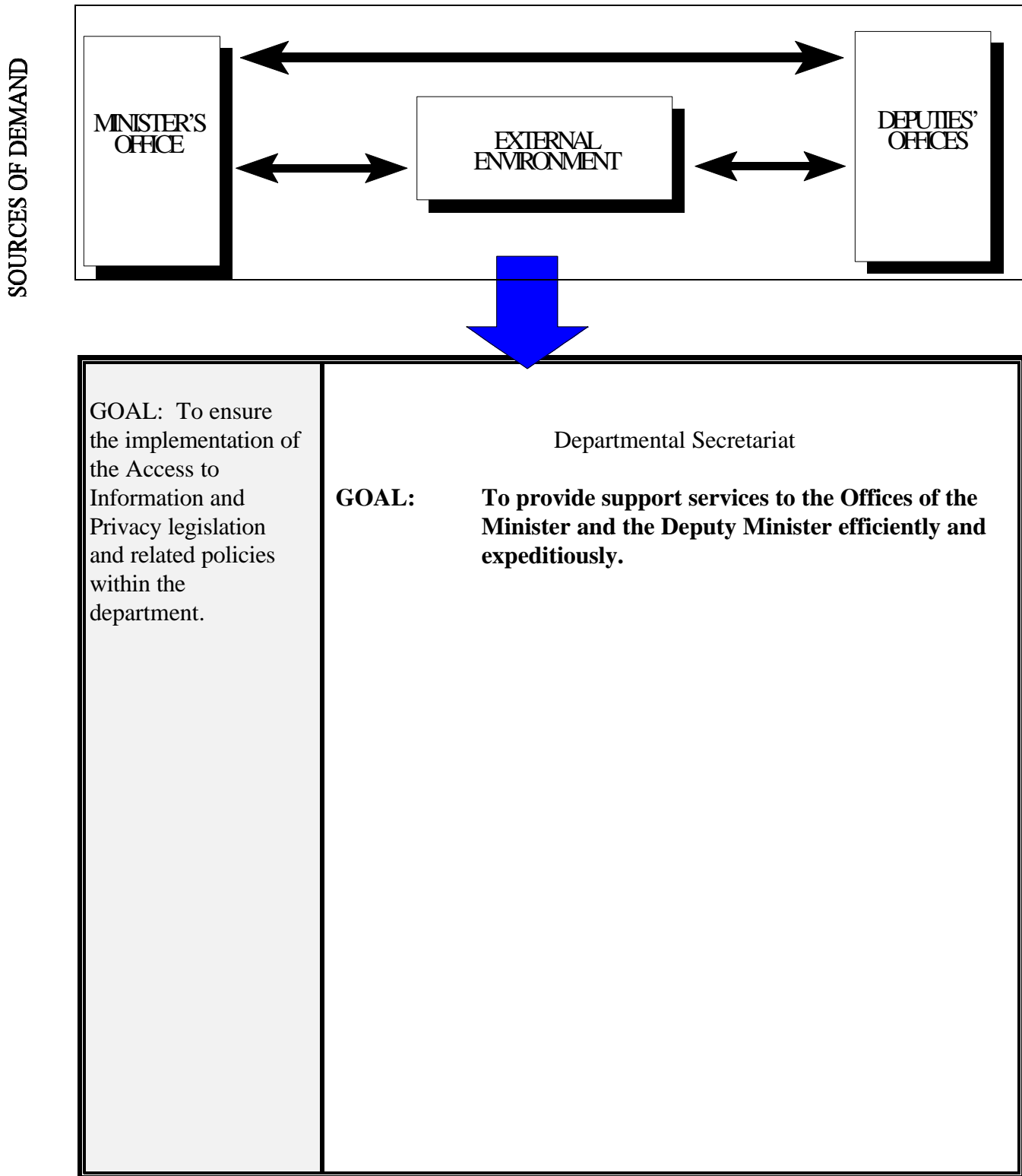
A logic model, outlined on the following pages, was developed to illustrate the link of goals and objectives to primary activities, products, results, and impacts, as a basis for a general understanding of the Departmental Secretariat. This logic model begins with a depiction of the sources of demand of the Departmental Secretariat’s work processes. The Minister’s and Deputies’ offices are identified as the primary sources of demand although some responsibility to the external environment is also recognized. The model goes on to display the goals related to the ATIP Office and to the other activities of the Departmental Secretariat. The Correspondence Division, Parliamentary Relations, and the Briefing Unit exist to provide support to the Minister’s and Deputies’ offices. The ATIP Office is distinct from the other three in that it manages the Access and Privacy programs for the entire department.


For clarity of the logic model, and to facilitate understanding of the Departmental Secretariat’s function, only key activities and products from each activity are displayed. The intended (and anticipated) results of each activity are shown, as are the unintended impacts that may occur regardless of the extent to which the Departmental Secretariat is successful in meeting its goals. In many cases, the result is additional work for the Departmental Secretariat.


The final component of the model is an initial relative risk assessment. The consideration of risk is critical to organizations because as resources continue to shrink, less operational control is possible and more risk-taking will be expected. Public sector managers in particular will be encouraged to employ risk management in the achievement of organizational objectives.



Each activity in the Departmental Secretariat has been assigned a level of risk in relation to the others. The basis for this risk assessment centres on the potential for unacceptable risks or undesirable effects. This includes: **potential embarrassment to the Minister and the Deputies, the increased likelihood of error; the involvement of third parties, and the potential for additional workload.** The ATIP Office has been assigned a high level of risk, as has the Parliamentary Relations Unit; the Briefing Unit has been assigned a lower level; and the Correspondence Division the lowest. It should be borne in mind that this is relative risk within the Departmental Secretariat only, and is not related to other activities of the department.

Departmental Secretariat Logic Model



ATIP	Parliamentary Relations	Correspondence Division	Briefing Unit
Activities			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - process access requests - process privacy requests - process requests for disclosure of personal information to 3rd parties - process requests for consultation - describe the dept's major information holdings for the purposes of InfoSource - provide advice to departmental officials and to the general public - provide training to departmental officials - respond to complaints 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - handle researcher enquiries - coordination of briefing material and responses - provide advice on parliamentary procedure - monitor and inform department of parliamentary activities - provide training sessions & workshops for departmental officials - maintain databank of QP cards, legislation, committee meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - coordinate the preparation of responses for the Minister & Deputies (incl. review, edit & writing of responses) - provide training sessions & workshops for departmental officials - provide technical assistance & advice - identify any problems & corrective measures in the processing of correspondence - verify accuracy of all correspondence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - request, coordinate & review briefing material - verify briefing content - handle special requests/events from DMO - coordinate Minister trip planning, conference calls & follow-ups - provide training sessions & workshops for regional & departmental officials - provide departmental officials with editorial, grammatical & technical assistance - maintain a databank of briefing notes
			

ATIP	Parliamentary Relations	Correspondence Division	Briefing Unit
Products			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - completed requests - completed consultations - response to complaints - contribution to InfoSource - trained departmental officials - oral and written procedural advice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - completed briefing material - response to parliamentary questions and petitions - response to enquiries - tabled documents, responses to questions and petitions - completed committee summaries, weekly reports, notices of meetings & brochures on parliamentary relations - oral and written procedural advice - delivered training sessions & workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - answered correspondence - delivered training sessions & workshops - oral & written functional advice - value-added contribution to correspondence piece - accurate and timely ministerial responses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - finished briefing material & completed briefing books - completed info. packages for new Deputies & Ministers - delivered workshops - itinerary & briefing material produced for trips - follow-up briefing notes to trips produced - briefing note databank
			

ATIP	Parliamentary Relations	Correspondence Division	Briefing Unit
Results			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - satisfied requester - compliance to legislation - informed officials on ATIP legislation - informed public on ATIP legislation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - satisfied enquirer - satisfied parliamentary committees - informed Minister & departmental officials - compliance to legislation & parliamentary rules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - satisfied correspondent - informed Minister & Deputies - satisfied Minister Deputies - more informed departmental staff - standard quality of correspondence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - informed Minister & Deputies - satisfied Minister & Deputies - more informed regional & departmental officials - standard quality of briefing material
			
Unintended Impacts			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - additional requests - non-compliance to legislation - questions in the House of Commons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - additional briefing cards - additional enquiries - additional questions in the House - preparation of speech for adjournment debate - preparation for parliamentary committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - additional correspondence - more training sessions & workshops - additional advice sought - additional guide books to produce - additional tasks assigned 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - additional briefings & material - additional workshops & training sessions - additional enquiries for advice or assistance - additional related tasks or duties from the Minister's or Deputies' Offices
			
Risk			
1 (High)	1 (High)	3 (Low)	2 (Medium)

Description of Operations

This section briefly describes the general structure, workload, and primary activities for each unit in the Departmental Secretariat. Some preliminary observations are also presented to provide a more comprehensive overview of the functions and operations of each unit as well as to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement.

Correspondence Division

In terms of number of staff, the Correspondence Division is the largest of the four units comprising the Departmental Secretariat. The division's main role is co-ordinating the preparation of responses to correspondence directed to the Minister and Deputies or the department. It has a relatively stable workload of 10,000 pieces of correspondence (letters) per year. Of the 10,000 responses approximately 35 percent are prepared by the division - mainly responses to high volume issues (for example, the Lubicon and Davis Inlet situations) and special areas of expertise where program staff trust the Correspondence Division to prepare the draft response for such areas as education and social assistance. Responses for the remaining 65 percent are prepared either at headquarters (40 percent) or in the regions (25 percent).

The linkage between the Correspondence Division and the Minister's Office is via a four-person correspondence unit located in the Minister's Office. At the time of the review, the unit reports separately through the Manager of Administrative Services to the Minister's Executive Assistant and to the Director, Departmental Secretariat.

Observations:

1. The division's use of information technology includes the use of the Ministerial Document Tracking System (MDTS), a word processing system (WordPerfect), a WordPerfect database for signed responses, and e-mail. Although use is made of information technology, the division is still heavily oriented to the physical document. The MDTS is due for replacement in fiscal year 1998-1999 with a system that is electronic file based and employs scanners for document input. It is estimated that the introduction of this new system will substantially reduce the dependence on physical documents as well as improve the functionality for tracking and incorporating revisions to draft responses.

2. The Correspondence Unit in the Minister's Office assigns the due date for the draft response to be forwarded to the Minister's Office for each piece of correspondence. Required response times to correspondence can be grouped by into three priorities, as follows:

- priority 1, for urgent correspondence and for draft responses returned by the correspondence unit in the Minister's Office for rework, has a response time of three to five working days;
- priority 2, for correspondence from members of Parliament and provincial ministers, has a response time of ten working days; and
- priority 3, for all remaining correspondence, has a response time of fifteen working days.

Due dates for priorities 1, 2 and 3 are reviewed daily. Generally, responses for these priorities are handled in a timely manner.

On the other hand, the average number of working days for general responses which represent the bulk of the correspondence, is 22 days - down from 46 days five years ago. Due dates for general correspondence are reviewed manually every one to two weeks depending on the workload for priorities 1, 2 and 3.

Once a past due date is identified a correspondence analyst in the Correspondence Division advises, by e-mail, the Executive Assistant in the concerned program area. This is followed up a week later by the correspondence analyst, by telephone, if there is still no response. If a response is still not forthcoming, the team head follows up, followed by the Co-ordinator of the Correspondence Unit, followed by the Director of the Departmental Secretariat.

Approximately 25 percent of draft responses are late. There are repeat delinquents, but statistics are not kept on this matter. The Minister's Office averages one letter of enquiry per day regarding a late response. Timeliness may be the most significant issue for the Correspondence Division.

3. Quality may be the second most significant issue for the Correspondence Division, despite several correspondence interviewees indicating that it was not an issue. Approximately 20 to 25 percent of all draft responses forwarded by the Correspondence Division to the correspondence unit in the Minister's Office are returned for rework. Although statistics are not kept on the reasons, they generally appear to be as follows:

- responses need a broader perspective;
- responses may require minor changes or revisions; and
- not addressing or missing issues in a letter.

Of the draft responses returned for rework approximately 10% are of a minor nature such as a wording change or supplementary information. The correspondence unit in the Minister's Office is not permitted to make the necessary corrections, but must return the draft response to the Correspondence Division to perform the work.

4. Approximately ten years ago, the Correspondence Division had a policy, procedures, and guidelines manual. This has not been kept up to date. Further, the division has no documented performance standards, goals, and objectives. Finally, it is unclear who has overall accountability for draft responses, the program/region or the Correspondence Division.
5. Recently the Correspondence Division was praised for its work by the Minister's Executive Assistant at an Executive Committee Meeting. This was essentially a tribute to the dedication, knowledge, and experience of the staff in the Correspondence Division. This, in turn, can be traced to:
 - a stable workforce resulting in the maintenance of corporate memory on a wide range of issues;
 - the assignment, to individual staff, of the responsibility for maintaining expertise in selected areas (e.g. Aboriginal health); and
 - the strong emphasis on meeting the needs of the Minister's and Deputies' Offices.
6. The division undertakes a number of value-added activities relating to quality and timeliness, including:
 - development of guidelines;
 - value-added contributions to enhance quality and ensure accuracy;
 - ongoing problem-solving with headquarters and regional staff;
 - conduct of workshops and monthly conference calls to facilitate communication and consultation with regions/sectors to ensure corporate perspective is portrayed;
 - ad hoc meetings; and
 - bottom-up reviews.

Parliamentary Relations Division

The Parliamentary Relations Division has an FTE base of five but a staff of four, including the Manager. The unit has prime responsibility for providing support to the Minister to fulfill his parliamentary obligations and for keeping departmental officials current on issues raised in Parliament that relate to departmental programs. This support covers a range of activities, of which the most work is associated with:

- the co-ordination, review, edit and preparation of question period briefing cards and associated follow-up; and
- active parliamentary committee relations with the House of Commons Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, the Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, and monitoring agendas of all other parliamentary committees for items that relate to the department's programs.

While the House of Commons is sitting, on average four to five briefing cards are updated and one to two new briefing cards are created daily. The workload associated with parliamentary committees varies according to the schedules of the two prime committees of departmental interest, and the inclusion of items, that may relate to the department's programs, on the agendas of all other parliamentary committees.

It is essential that the Parliamentary Relations Division maintain a positive, close, and co-operative working relationship with the Minister's Legislative Assistant to ensure that the Minister is kept abreast of current parliamentary activities and issues related to the department.

Observations:

1. Maintaining the Minister's Question Period Book on a daily basis while the House of Commons sits is a relatively intense and time-pressured activity. Typically, between 8:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m., the new briefing cards and the briefing cards that need updating are identified, developed or updated, reviewed, edited, finalized, and printed, and the revised briefing book is delivered to the Minister's Legislative Assistant and Deputies' offices. This work, involving program and regional staff, is primarily performed by the Manager of the Parliamentary Relations Division supported by one or two of the unit's staff. When Parliament is not sitting the activity changes to generally reviewing and improving the briefing book at a far less intense pace.
2. With only four staff comprising the Parliamentary Relations Division, the protracted illness or absence of one of the staff while Parliament is sitting would stretch the remaining staff to their limits, and perhaps beyond. If two staff were absent, the unit could not cope with the work.
3. When Parliament is not sitting, the work of the Parliamentary Relations Division is lessened and the pace changes in order to focus on other tasks and priorities.
4. It appears that until a new or revised briefing card has been approved by the Minister's Legislative Assistant, accountability for the completion of the work is that of the responsible program or regional officer. Once approved, accountability for the briefing card is assumed by the Parliamentary Relations Division.

5. The general practice of filling vacancies by internal promotion has substantially contributed to the division's performance through specialized knowledge of parliamentary and Cabinet systems, processes and agendas, and departmental and program issues. The Parliamentary Relations staff are highly motivated and dedicated in their provision of executive support services.
6. There is a strong linkage between the Parliamentary Relations Division and the Minister's Office indicating a positive working relationship and commitment to meeting the needs of the Minister.

Briefing Unit

The Briefing Unit operates in a manner similar to the other parts of the Departmental Secretariat. That is to say, it relies on the programs and regions to provide the content of the briefing material that it prepares. The unit is comprised of a Manager, two briefing officers and a clerk and delivers a large number of briefing notes under considerable time pressure. It is reactive in operation, and is subject to the particular style and requirements of the Minister and Deputies whom it serves.

When a request for a briefing note is received, the Briefing Unit reviews the information it has on hand using the dossier system and the WordPerfect files, and determines the area of the department to whom the request should be directed. The request is then forwarded to the appropriate program/regional area for a response to be prepared. The information received in the unit is reviewed for accuracy and timeliness, and modifications are made if required. Completed notes for the Minister are reviewed by the Director. Finally, the briefing note is forwarded.

Observations

1. Material received from the programs/regions may reference correspondence, previous letters, or other communications. The originator may not always include the referenced material, requiring the Briefing Unit to perform a search.
2. The role of the Briefing Unit is unclear. It is uncertain whether it is to draft content or edit and revise briefing notes. As a consequence of its position in the process, the unit is often able to add value to the content of a note. However, this may be at the expense of timeliness.
3. As reported in previous reviews, requests from the Minister's and Deputies' offices for briefing material may not always be clear. The unit requires additional time to clarify the request and to direct it to the appropriate respondent.
4. The time allotted to respond to a request for a briefing note depends on the requester. In a large percentage of cases, the unit has fewer than five days to respond. As the process is presently structured, this requires considerable additional effort on the part of the unit to ensure a note is accurate and timely.

5. The corporate memory of the staff in the unit is a major contributor to its success. The ability to determine the program/region most able to respond to a request can only be developed over time. In the absence of a comprehensive database on departmental issues, the knowledge of the staff in the unit is indispensable.

Access to Information and Privacy Office

The Access to Information and Privacy Office is responsible for managing the department's response to requests for information under the *Access to Information Act* and *Privacy Act*. It operates under legal requirements for disclosure and for timeliness.

When a request is received, the ATIP Office logs it in, assigns it to an officer, and tracks it through the process. The request is forwarded to the appropriate area in the department for action. It is the responsibility of the programs/regions to gather the material requested and to carry out an initial review before sending the information to the ATIP Office. When the material is received in the ATIP Office, a line-by-line scrutiny is conducted to ensure the requirements of the *Acts* are met. Subsequently, the material is released under the authority of the Access to Information Co-ordinator.

The nature of the programs managed by the department contributes to slowing down the process. In particular, there is a considerable requirement to consult with other departments, other levels of government, and the First Nations prior to the release of material. As well, the volume of documents that must be reviewed for each request is increasing, and the ATIP Office is having some difficulty keeping up.

Observations

1. The ATIP Office is not yet in a position to monitor the progress of requests through the process. Significant enhancements are required for the computerized tracking system and need to be addressed.
2. A major effort is being made to structure the work process more effectively. This effort should contribute to improve efficiency and timeliness in the handling and processing of requests.
3. Consultations with the programs/regions take up a considerable amount of officers' time. There is potential to reduce this and speed up the processing of requests through additional training for program staff. However, this would involve time on the part of the ATIP Office that it does not have. The potential to use outside resources to deliver the training should be considered.

4. ATIP officers are very conscientious and diligent in their work. The ATIP Office reviews each document on a line-by-line basis. The risk is that this may delay processing a request to the point where the Information Commissioner receives a complaint and initiates an investigation. A risk management approach to dealing with material could have an impact on the speed with which requests can be processed, but should be viewed in the light of the possibility of improper disclosure. The department may be willing to accept a certain level of risk in one area to lower risk in another given the stress the office is currently experiencing.

Conclusions of Observations: Based on the observations, there exists for each of the Departmental Secretariat units, some room for change and improvement to enhance processing efficiency and quality and timeliness of executive support services. Areas which require some attention include: the application of technology to processes; clear identification of information needs and direct feedback on the quality and use of responses/content prepared by sectoral and regional staff; clear accountability and ownership of products; and risk management.

Document Review

This document review examines studies previously undertaken by several federal departments of their Departmental Secretariats and identifies some of the main themes, concerns, and challenges facing them. The federal departments include: Health Canada, Natural Resources Canada, Justice Canada, Revenue Canada, and Industry Canada.

As stated in the reports reviewed, the primary objective for undertaking many of these studies was to assess the continuing relevance of the Departmental Secretariat to the current and projected needs of the department, and to determine the appropriate profile or roles and functions, general structure and organization, and general level of resources required for the Departmental Secretariat to effectively carry out its mission.

The two main issues addressed in the studies were quality and timeliness. The aim was to determine whether the services provided by their Departmental Secretariat (Executive Services) are of a high quality and timely, since they directly impact on the effectiveness of service delivery.

Other concerns/challenges identified in the studies relate to communications, planning and performance information, working relationships within the department, technology and information management, workload volumes, and resource utilization.

One of the main challenges was ensuring effective communications among the Departmental Secretariat, its main clients (Minister's and Deputies' offices), and other sectors of the department. Open channels of communication and a regular exchange of information, both within and external to the Departmental Secretariat, were not always present.

In terms of planning and performance information, the studies revealed that long-range and short-range plans that reflect the objectives and priorities of the Departmental Secretariat, anticipated workload demands and resource levels and resource utilization did not exist or needed refinement. Performance standards and reporting mechanisms were also lacking in some of the Departmental Secretariats.

The application of technology to operations is also challenging for some of the Departmental Secretariats. The studies revealed that some of the Departmental Secretariats had not yet determined what technological opportunities exist to reduce some of the paper flow and increase the overall efficiency of services.

The studies also mentioned that many of the Departmental Secretariat's services and activities are "invisible" to the department, and that the pressures and challenges of the Departmental Secretariat's roles are formidable and not always appreciated and understood by clients and colleagues.

Finally, given that the operations and activities of the Departmental Secretariats are demand-driven, there is concern to ensure that resources are adequate to meet minimum core service needs and that additional resources are provided to respond to unpredictable peaks and pressures in workload.

Comparative Analysis

Interviews were conducted with representatives from the Executive Services of five federal departments across government. They include: Health Canada, Industry Canada, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Transport Canada, and Environment Canada. The departments were selected based upon their comparability with the Departmental Secretariat at DIAND in terms of total full-time equivalent staff, areas of responsibility, and program areas. From a cursory examination of the activities of the other Departmental Secretariats, the information made available to the review team at least provided a sense of the relative position of the DIAND's Departmental Secretariat.

Some of the commonalities that exist among the Secretariat Units include:

- staff comprised of experienced personnel who "grew up with the organization";
- high-pressured working environment;
- high absenteeism and staff turnover (high / low);
- no formal employee "back-up" system; and
- regular employee overtime.

In the interviews conducted, the respondents acknowledged that Executive Services are high-pressured, stressful organizations in which to work. All have experienced high levels of staff absenteeism, and staff turnover is problematic. In most cases, the respondents indicated that high staff turnover was a major concern, while one respondent felt the opposite; that is, low staff turnover was a major concern. This respondent indicated that like many of the other Departmental Secretariats, the majority of her staff had been working in the Departmental Secretariat for a very long time. With such a low level of staff turnover, there is little opportunity to bring “new blood” to the organization. Additionally, all respondents indicated that little cross-fertilization of staff skills occurs which leaves no opportunity for a formal employee “back-up” system. Thus, unforeseen absenteeism could become quite problematic in times of heightened activity due to internal or external pressures. Overtime in these organizations tends to be the norm rather than the exception and as such, some respondents have built overtime into their budgets for each fiscal year. The Departmental Secretariat at DIAND faces similar challenges and is not an exception to the issues identified above.

Some of the differences identified that make comparability difficult include:

- very different areas of responsibility;
- workloads differ depending on the size and nature of the department;
- turnaround deadlines for briefings and correspondence vary; and
- the number of total FTEs vary.

There is a considerable difference in the size and variety of services provided by the Departmental Secretariats reviewed. In terms of size, the total number of FTEs ranges from 18 to 47, and areas of responsibility range from the provision of messenger services to internal audit. The DIAND’s Departmental Secretariat falls somewhere in the middle of the range of services and provides those that are most common to all Departmental Secretariats. In terms of staff resourcing, the information gathered indicates that the DIAND’s Departmental Secretariat, with 37 FTEs, is slightly above the average of those reviewed.

An interesting difference among the Departmental Secretariats is that turnaround deadlines for briefings and correspondence vary substantially. For example, the Departmental Secretariat in the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food has a turnaround time of 30 days for correspondence dockets, whereas the DIAND’s Departmental Secretariat has a two-week turnaround deadline. Thus, any comparison of production statistics would be misleading if such differences were not recognized.

In the use of technology to support service delivery, the Departmental Secretariat is neither much further ahead, nor much further behind than the other departments. All of the Departmental Secretariats are looking toward increased use of technology, and a variety of systems are being piloted.

Overall, based on the interviews conducted and the materials reviewed, it was determined that the Departmental Secretariat at DIAND is performing as well as its federal counterparts. From the evidence gathered, it is suggested that the majority of the Departmental Secretariats are operating at a fairly equal level, although there may be variations in speed or quality depending on organizational priorities.

Section 5 - Conclusions & Recommendations

This section provides conclusions and recommendations based on findings and observations during the course of the review. As discussed in Section 1 of this report, the management practices of the Departmental Secretariat were reviewed in terms of specific issues.

The overall findings, conclusions, and recommendations included in this section are presented by issue.

Issue: *Does the Departmental Secretariat have clearly defined goals and objectives to fulfill its mandate? Are there clear policies and procedures in place to guide the Departmental Secretariat?*

The basis of a sound management framework is founded on three key elements:

- a clear mandate that is well understood and embraced by employees;
- clearly defined organizational goals and objectives to meet mandated requirements; and
- formally articulated policies and procedures to guide the organization toward the achievement of organizational goals and objectives.

Finding: The Departmental Secretariat mandate is not clearly defined and with the exception of ATIP, operational policies and internal procedures have not been formally articulated.

The mandate of the Departmental Secretariat is yet to be clearly defined. In general, the activities it carries out and the services it provides have emerged over time as those required by their clients: the offices of the Minister and the Deputies. There are close operational and management ties that enable the Departmental Secretariat to meet the requirements of the Minister's and Deputies' offices as they arise.

However, in the absence of a strategic and operational framework provided by a clearly defined mandate and set of objectives, the Departmental Secretariat risks becoming overly reactive, and is in a lesser position to set parameters for service provision.

As well, policies that would contribute to the establishment of a clear accountability framework and procedures that would support the effective and efficient delivery of services are, for the most part, undocumented. The Departmental Secretariat has been fortunate that staff turnover levels have been relatively low permitting operations to continue effectively on the basis of experience and long practice.

However, stability in staffing has both positive and negative attributes. To the extent that corporate memory is a contributor to quality service, low turnover is helpful. In contrast, low employee turnover may provoke or contribute to organizational stagnation in that fewer new ideas are generated, or acceptance of change becomes less enthusiastic. Recruitment efforts may also prove difficult if the organization is not viewed as an innovative place to work.

Conclusion: The Departmental Secretariat must have a clearly defined mandate and objectives to establish a strategic framework to guide its service delivery. As well, there is a need for clear policies and procedures to guide staff in service delivery and to ensure continuity of operations when there is staff turnover.

Recommendation 1: The Director of the Departmental Secretariat develop and implement a strategic plan that would serve to consolidate and document the role of the organization in the department and clarify the services it provides. As a component of developing the plan, it may become necessary to address the positioning of the organization and its services within the department, as well as the structure, internal processes and resourcing for service delivery.

Recommendation 2: The Director of the Departmental Secretariat establish a formal management framework to operationalize the Departmental Secretariat's strategic plan. At a minimum, this would consist of developing and promulgating a mission statement, objectives, service delivery strategies, policies, and operating procedures.

Issue : *To what extent are the Departmental Secretariat's functions linked to the requirements of the Minister's and Deputies' offices and the department?*

Since the Departmental Secretariat provides executive support functions for the Minister's Office and the offices of the Deputy and Associate Deputy Ministers, as well as implementing ATIP legislation, there should be well-established linkages between the functions of the Departmental Secretariat and the stated requirements of those offices.

Finding: Linkages between the Departmental Secretariat and its clients are well established and clear. The Director of the Departmental Secretariat attends Executive Committee meetings to ensure that the Departmental Secretariat is current on all major issues. At the operational level, there are strong positive working relationships between the various Departmental Secretariat units and their counterparts in the Minister's and Deputy Minister/Associate Deputy Minister's offices.

Conclusion: There is no requirement to improve upon the linkages.

Issue: *Is the organizational structure appropriate to support an effective service delivery?*

Both the organizational structure of the Departmental Secretariat and its human and financial resources should be adequate and appropriate to support effective service delivery. The implication is that appropriate performance measures must be in place to monitor resource utilization, and that changes to service delivery requirements can be matched to a change in resource requirements.

Finding: The current organizational structure of the Departmental Secretariat does not take advantage of similarities in the nature of its services to generate efficiencies:

- the Secretariat Units (PR, CD, BU) are not all physically located on the same floor;
- the Secretariat Units tend to work in isolation; and
- the two correspondence divisions do not necessarily work as a cohesive unit.

The Departmental Secretariat has adopted, in common with other Executive Services, an approach to service delivery that divides the organization along product lines: Parliamentary Relations, Correspondence Division, Briefing Unit, and Access to Information and Privacy Office (ATIP). With the exception of ATIP, each unit provides key products and services that are very much alike in content, differing only in the manner and format in which each is researched and delivered. A minor exception can be made for some of the products of Parliamentary Relations, who create some material, such as minutes of meetings of Committees of the House.

The principal role played by each of the units is to manage the process of ensuring that the requirements of the Minister and Deputy Minister's are properly addressed by the relevant program areas. This includes ensuring that the requirement is clear and unambiguous, that it is received by the proper program area, and that the response by the program is timely and meets the required quality level. This may mean adding content not provided by the program, or correcting obvious errors and omissions.

While the similarities and differences in the products do not pose a problem for the Departmental Secretariat in allocating work internally, there is clearly the potential for the work to be duplicated, albeit in a different format. There is also evidence to indicate that programs are not clear on which part of the Departmental Secretariat they should approach for assistance, and time is wasted searching for the correct individual in the correct Departmental Secretariat area.

This approach to structuring for delivery tends to isolate individuals within their own area of expertise. Again, with the exception of ATIP, the nature of the work in each unit tends to be cyclical and demand-driven, there being continuing peaks and valleys in the workload. This results in staff at varying times being either under-utilized or over-burdened, which when overtime is required, has a detrimental effect on salary budgets and provides additional stress on staff. Opportunities to use staff from one unit in another are lost, and no back-up capacity exists should knowledgeable individuals become unexpectedly absent. To minimize the effects of isolation, the Departmental Secretariat has initiated weekly stand-up meetings to clarify issues, raise concerns, and suggest solutions to problems. These meetings permit the breakdown of “silos” by emphasizing information exchange, employee participation in the ongoing operations of the Departmental Secretariat, and the promotion of a consultative culture.

There are two departmental correspondence units, one reporting to the Director of the Departmental Secretariat, and one within the Minister’s Office which also reports to the Director in theory but not in practice. Given the resource constraints under which the Departmental Secretariat is operating, there are clear efficiency advantages which would accrue from blending the two operations. Should there be an opportunity to relocate all secretariat services to the same floor, the previous advantages of having a correspondence unit located close to the Minister’s Office disappear.

Recommendation 3: The Director of the Departmental Secretariat review the organization’s structure and resource utilization to ensure optimal allocation of staff resources, appropriate workload distribution, and cross-fertilization of skills and knowledge. As well, the correspondence activities should be merged and co-located with the Briefing Unit and Parliamentary Relations.

Issue: *Are human and financial resources adequate?*

At the outset of this study, several officials expressed concern with the workload and potential for employee burnout. While there is no operational information available, a preliminary analysis was undertaken.

Finding: For the most part, existing resources could not be reallocated to address current operational needs. The human and financial resources are particularly stretched when Parliament is in session, and the situation in the ATIP Office is more urgent due to a large backlog which currently requires experienced officers to address it.

The comparative analysis carried out in support of this review indicated that the Departmental Secretariat’s operating environment is not unique. For the most part, resources are stretched, the use of technology is not well advanced, and performance measurement takes a back seat to delivery of the product.

The Departmental Secretariat does not have a performance measurement system that monitors the productivity of the various units. In the absence of specific performance indicators, it was necessary to develop a general sense of workload and resourcing to respond to this issue. In general, the Departmental Secretariat is doing a good job of meeting client requirements, particularly in Parliamentary Relations and the Briefing Unit. This is not the case, however, for the ATIP Office, which is well behind in dealing with access requests. Temporary resources are being used to address the backlog, and will continue to be needed until it is cleared. Improvements to the ATIP computer system, as well as the application of the results of the bottom-up process review now underway, should assist the office to meet its operational requirements.

In addition, the need to manage the risks involved in ATIP matters has yet to be addressed. The office does a thorough job of assessing material provided by the programs/regions to ensure that there will be no embarrassment to the department, to the Minister, and so on. However, the programs/regions are doing little pre-screening to assist the office, and when this is combined with the thoroughness of the office's review, constant slippage results. The resources cannot keep up with the demand.

A risk management model that would balance the risk to the department against the consequences of a complaint to the Information Commissioner would help to focus the application of resources to those areas where they are most effective and efficient.

Conclusion: Although the Departmental Secretariat can cope in general with the existing workload, special emphasis needs to be placed on the ATIP Office to assist it in meeting its statutory requirements. Precise measurement of the productivity of the various units cannot be achieved until a performance measurement system is developed and implemented.

Recommendation 4: The Director of the Departmental Secretariat develop and implement a risk management model for the ATIP Office.

Recommendation 5: The Director of the Departmental Secretariat develop and implement a performance measurement system focussing on the key operational information required to balance productivity and quality.

Issue: *How effective is the Departmental Secretariat in meeting its objectives? What practices are noteworthy?*

Finding: The Departmental Secretariat is generally adept at meeting its operational objectives. Again, the exception is the ATIP Office, which has been discussed previously. Nevertheless, there is an overriding issue of the need to clarify the accountability framework.

In general, accountability for the products of the Departmental Secretariat is unclear, and consequently the roles of the participants in the service delivery process vary depending on the program/region. While the ATIP Office has a clear description of its accountabilities and those of the department which has received Deputy Minister's approval, the document is not well known within the department. The amount of work to be done by the Departmental Secretariat, and the value it adds, varies depending on the departmental source of the material. The Departmental Secretariat may need to do very little in the way of editing, it may have to do a great deal, it may have to add content, or in extreme cases it may have to do all three. There are numerous levels of approval and sign-off in programs before material arrives at the Departmental Secretariat, but these appear to add little value, since quality and timeliness vary so widely.

As an example, in the preparation of a reply to a piece of correspondence, programs/regions may reference previous correspondence, studies, surveys, and/or other background information. The referenced material may or may not be included. In its absence, the Departmental Secretariat must track down the missing references and obtain them for inclusion with the correspondence. Further, information may be missing, inaccurate, or out of date; the grammar, spelling, syntax, and overall construction of the material may be poor; and the material may arrive in the Departmental Secretariat with little time to spare, or it may be late. The Departmental Secretariat is aware, in general terms, of the parts of the department that deliver quality information on time, and those that do not.

Accountability of programs/regions for the quality and timeliness of the product has never been clearly defined, and consequently there can be no consistent mechanism for ensuring that it is exacted.

The lack of clarity in accountability permits the role of the Departmental Secretariat to vary, again depending on the extent of the support provided by the programs/regions. In a resource-constrained environment, other parts of the department may rely on the Departmental Secretariat to carry out activities that it should not do, as in the example above. The organization in its current form was structured to provide administrative support and co-ordination to the various processes, with the content to be provided by the program areas. The confusion over roles and responsibilities has greatly increased the amount of content that the Departmental Secretariat needs to add, and has given them the role of quality monitor for all material. This is not one for which they are well suited, since the original structure, internal processes, and staffing were not developed with this role in mind. In consequence, a large portion of the Director's time is absorbed in the final quality assurance role, which greatly impacts on the available time for strategic planning and operational management. Such questions as how and where to position the organization for best service delivery and how to close the existing gap in quality cannot be given the time they need.

Conclusion: The Departmental Secretariat is dependent upon programs/regions for the substantive material in the products and services it delivers. Accountability for the quality of the information and the quality and timeliness of its presentation should be clear.

- Recommendation 6:** The Director of the Departmental Secretariat, in concert with sectors and regions, develop, obtain senior management approval for, and implement an accountability framework that would:
- define the roles of the participants in the service delivery process;
 - establish standards of service; and
 - provide for ongoing monitoring and reporting of performance.

Issue: *Are there more cost-effective ways to meet departmental objectives?*

In a time of resource constraint, other cost-effective ways to meet obligations are of interest, provided that there is no negative impact on the quality and timeliness of service delivery.

Finding: Improvements in the application of technology are required to assist the Departmental Secretariat in improving its service delivery capacity.

One of the keys to increasing productivity and decreasing response time is the application of technology to work processes. The Departmental Secretariat is undertaking a number of distinct initiatives in this area, in some cases in concert with other parts of the department, as in the case of the dossier system. Although the move toward a more comprehensive application of information technology is noteworthy, when viewed as a whole, the Departmental Secretariat still needs an integrated information base that is accessible to all parts of the organization and permits greater co-ordination of activities.

Timeliness of system development and delivery, systems integration, and system functionality are main areas of concern. There are three initiatives under way in the ATIP Office, in correspondence, and in the general dossier system. The database in each of these systems is separate, and the systems cannot cross-link material to each other.

The system used in the ATIP Office has been experiencing a number of problems since it was obtained from the private sector. Insufficient use is being made of its capabilities, and it is not providing a high level of support to the staff.

Conclusion: To ensure a more cost-effective approach in meeting departmental obligations, the Departmental Secretariat needs to strengthen the capacity of its existing electronic information systems and technologies toward a more fully integrated and accessible common information base.

Recommendation 7: The Director of the Departmental Secretariat address the need for the development of a management information system that would address, among other things, the integration of information technology, including the development of functionality requirements, identifying software needs, preparing a rigorous introduction schedule, and immediate implementation.

Section 6 - Best Practices

This section presents some of the most effective management practices observed within the Departmental Secretariat at DIAND in the course of this review. It also provides an indication of how it performs compared with other departments based on readily available information.

Effective Management Practices

In a rapidly changing environment, there is an ongoing requirement to manage resources and operations in the most efficient and effective manner. The commitment to ongoing improvement and support for employees through consultation and opportunities for participation are key factors in ensuring that the services provided by the Departmental Secretariat meet the needs of the Minister and Deputies.

Although the emphasis in this report is on areas where change can be made, the Departmental Secretariat has in place a number of innovative management practices that were determined to be noteworthy. Such practices may provide models or generate ideas for application elsewhere in the department. They include:

- the strong commitment to meet the needs of the Minister and Deputies. The Departmental Secretariat staff show tremendous dedication to ensure the Minister and Deputies and their respective staff have accurate information on current issues and topics involving the department. Parliamentary Relations staff were recently praised by the Minister's Executive Assistant for the timely receipt and quality of briefing material for Question Period. The Correspondence Division and Briefing Unit also lend invaluable support to the Minister's and Deputies' Offices by regularly contributing to the content of a response or note and adding value to the overall quality of the product. The review team found these practices to be outstanding;
- the fostering of positive relations with clients and departmental counterparts at the management and operational levels. In maintaining executive support services, the Departmental Secretariat places numerous demands for information on departmental sectors and regions. To foster a good working relationship, the Departmental Secretariat makes consistent efforts to clarify the context for the information needs of the Minister's and Deputies' offices with counterparts in regions and sectors. This regularly covers briefings, correspondence, and parliamentary relations through E-mail, conference calls, and workshops. The ATIP Office also maintains regular liaison with the regional ATIP staff to ensure the appropriate handling of sensitive requests. In addition, the Director of the Departmental Secretariat has been active in establishing and maintaining informal networks of contacts with the Departmental Secretariats in other federal departments to discuss issues, pilot projects, solutions to problems and share best management practices. These efforts are key to the successful management of the Departmental Secretariat's role and should be continued;

- working to break down departmental “silos” through the promotion of the values of leadership, communication, and consultation emphasized by the Deputy Minister. The Departmental Secretariat has been active in promoting and fostering an open and consultative corporate culture through the application of leadership, innovation and partnership values emphasized in the department’s *Framework For Action*. It uses its interactive position with so many different groups in the department to demonstrate and communicate the values;
- the move toward the more comprehensive application of information technology. One of the keys to sustain executive support services is the application of technology to work processes. The Departmental Secretariat is currently undertaking a number of initiatives to incorporate a more comprehensive application of information technology. For example, the Departmental Secretariat has been piloting a dossier system for senior management that provides information from a variety of sources on departmental and Aboriginal issues and topics. As well, efforts are underway to update the departmental tracking system to meet current functional and operational needs. These activities demonstrate that the Departmental Secretariat is assuming a more active process-management role which will contribute to enhanced efficiency and quality of executive support services;
- new people-oriented management activities, including an emphasis on employee participation and internal communication to implement a new operating environment; the practice of “stand-up” meetings to ensure that the issues of the day are clearly defined; and, the bottom-up reviews conducted internally by the Correspondence Unit and the ATIP Office. The Director of the Departmental Secretariat is committed to promoting an open and consultative corporate culture in which employees directly contribute to management decisions. This is facilitated through regular communication, stand-up meetings and bottom-up reviews. Direct communication between employees and management is encouraged and staff meetings generally engage discussion on strategies to better satisfy client expectations and requirements.

Overall, this review has revealed that the Departmental Secretariat is committed to serving the Minister’s and Deputies’ Offices by providing quality executive support services in a reasonably timely manner. The mainstay of the Departmental Secretariat is its dedicated, motivated and experienced staff and its close ties to clients. Current initiatives centre on administering, maintaining and facilitating support processes and begin to reflect a more proactive management role in sustaining quality executive support services. These efforts reflect a demonstrated leadership and commitment to respond to client needs and requirements.

Performance Comparisons

Additionally, it was determined that the Departmental Secretariat at DIAND is performing as well as its federal counterparts, although other departments like DIAND are currently reviewing their executive support functions and are seeking ways for further improvement.

In an environment of continuing organizational change, the Departmental Secretariat at DIAND will need to stay abreast of operational processes and systems. The recommendations in this report provide for strategies and operational changes that should ensure that the Departmental Secretariat continues to perform with excellence in the future.

Terms of Reference

TERMS OF REFERENCE**REVIEW OF MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN THE DEPARTMENTAL SECRETARIAT**

PURPOSE : To review the management practices of the Departmental Secretariat with particular emphasis on the identification of best management practices.

BACKGROUND : Since April 1, 1992, when new responsibilities had been assigned, the department has undergone significant organizational change. The public sector environment is adapting to new challenges as well as to downsizing and reorganization.

In 1994-1995 the Atlantic, Ontario and British Columbia Regions were reviewed and the results were well received by senior management. In 1996-1997, reviews of management practices will be conducted at headquarters, Quebec and the Northwest Territories. At headquarters, the Departmental Secretariat was identified for review because of its distinctive functions and operations within the department. The Departmental Secretariat interfaces with all elements of the department and as a result, has had to adapt to various demands and develop a number of strategies. This review will provide information on how the Departmental Secretariat is working.

The Departmental Secretariat encompasses the areas of: Parliamentary Relations (PR), Correspondence Division (CD); Briefing Unit (BU); and the Access to Information and Privacy (ATIP) Office and, as such, serves as a central link between the programs and the Minister's and Deputy's Offices with respect to activities under its responsibility.

The Departmental Secretariat is led by the Director who reports directly to the Deputy Minister and is assisted by the heads of each area. There are 37 full time equivalent staff in the Departmental Secretariat. The 1995-1996 budget (excluding salaries) was \$195,005.

SCOPE : The review will examine the Departmental Secretariat from the perspective of various stakeholders; identify the operating requirements, systems and resources; and, identify any outstanding needs and best practices. It is expected that this review will also provide an example for consideration elsewhere in the department.

ISSUES : Key issues to be addressed include :

- does the Departmental Secretariat have clearly defined goals and objectives to fulfill its mandate? Are there clear policies and procedures in place to guide the Departmental Secretariat?
- to what extent are the Departmental Secretariat's functions linked to the requirements of the Deputy Minister's Office and the department?
- is the organizational structure appropriate to support an effective service delivery? Are human and financial resources adequate?
- how effective is the Departmental Secretariat in meeting its objectives? What practices are noteworthy?
- are there more cost-effective ways to meet these departmental objectives?
- what best management practices are in place that contribute to improved effectiveness of the organization?

APPROACH : This review will involve a combination of in-house and contracted resources and will be managed by the Departmental Audit and Evaluation Branch (DAEB). The review will also use multiple lines of evidence including:

- document analysis (literature and file review);
- qualitative and quantitative analysis;
- interviews with key individuals;
- identification of alternative models; and,
- identification and analysis of best practices.

SCHEDULE : The review planning will commence in November 1996 and the report will be completed by March 1997.

COST : It is estimated that the project will cost \$20,000.

APPROVED BY :

Scott Serson
Deputy Minister
December 11, 1996

Action Plan

PROJECT TITLE/TITRE DU PROJET:
 REGION OR BRANCH/RÉGION OU DIRECTION GÉNÉRALE:

Management Practices Review of the Departmental Secretariat
 Departmental Secretariat

(1) RECOMMENDATIONS / RECOMMANDATIONS	(2) REPORT / RAPPORT PAGE NO.	(3) ACTION PLAN / PLAN D'ACTION	(4) RESPONSIBLE MANAGER / GESTIONNAIRE RESPONSABLE (TITLE / TITRE)	(5) PLANNED COMPLETION DATE / DATE PRÉVUE DE MISE EN OEUVRE
<p>1. The Director of the Departmental Secretariat develop and implement a strategic plan that would serve to consolidate and document the role of the organization in the department and clarify the services it provides.</p> <p>As a component of developing the plan, it may become necessary to address the positioning of the organization and its services within the department, as well as the structure, internal processes and resourcing for service delivery.</p>	23	<p>Working with all managers and using tools such as workouts, open spaces etc., develop a strategic plan which will include appropriate timeframes.</p> <p>Depending on available funds, put a contract in place to identify organization options and considerations which will feed into the accountability framework.</p>	Director, Departmental Secretariat	<p>31-12-98</p> <p>31-01-98</p>
<p>2. The Director of the Departmental Secretariat establish a formal management framework to operationalize the secretariat's strategic plan. At a minimum, this would consist of developing and promulgating a mission statement, objectives, service delivery strategies, policies, and operating procedures.</p>	23	<p>Once a strategic plan is in place, involve appropriate staff through workouts and open spaces, develop a plan and time lines to implement these policies and procedures.</p>	Director, Departmental Secretariat	30-09-98
<p>3. The Director of the Departmental Secretariat review the organization's structure and resource utilization to ensure optimal allocation of staff resources, appropriate workload distribution, and cross-fertilization of skills and knowledge. As well, the correspondence activities should be merged and co-located with the Briefing Unit and Parliamentary Relations.</p>	25	<p>Correspondence Units now relocated with Briefing Unit and Parliamentary Relations and have completed phase I (mapping process) of integrating activities of the two correspondence groups.</p> <p>Further efficiencies will be realized once the new tracking system is fully implemented.</p> <p>Currently, resource sharing between the different units is undertaken on an as-required basis.</p>	Director, Departmental Secretariat	30-09-98
<p>4. The Director of the Departmental Secretariat develop and implement a risk management model for the ATIP Office.</p>	26	<p>This will be a top priority for ATIP who will work with Audit and Evaluation to create a risk management model appropriate to ATIP.</p>	Director, Departmental Secretariat	31-10-98

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5. The Director of the Departmental Secretariat develop and implement a performance measurement system focussing on the key operational information required to balance productivity and quality.	26	With accountability framework, strategic plan and mission statement et al place, establish team to produce appropriate performance indicators. Review past exercise and available literature. Partial report by June 1998. Final report after completion of accountability framework.	Director, Departmental Secretariat	30-09-98
6. The Director of the Departmental Secretariat, in concert with sectors and regions, develop, obtain senior management approval for, and implement an accountability framework that would: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • define the roles of the participants in the service delivery process; • establish standards of service; and • provide for ongoing monitoring and reporting of performance. 	28	Obtain necessary funds to engage contractor to work with relevant parties to : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) define the roles of the participants in the services delivery process; b) establish a standards of services and; c) provide for ongoing monitoring and reporting of performance. Obtain senior management approval	Director, Departmental Secretariat	30-09-98 30-11-98 Ongoing
7. The Director of the Departmental Secretariat address the need for the development of a management information system that would address, among other things, the integration of information technology, including the development of functionality requirements, identifying software needs, preparing a rigorous introduction schedule, and immediate implementation.	28	In partnership with MSB dept-wide working group established. Background technical and administration work completed. Decision made to test CS-CIMS, Treasury Board approved system as well as two other products. Pilot project introduced. Phase I - LTS - Evaluate Phase II - PSD - Evaluate Phase III - Quebec Region Evaluation of three products (late November). Decision as to which product to adopt for DIAND. Introduction of new system (early March).	Director, Departmental Secretariat	30-09-98