

Explanatory Note

The Need for Change

In March during budget estimates debate, the Premier advised the legislature that a major review of government communications was underway and would result in a restructuring of government communications this June. That review is now complete and the new service delivery framework is ready for implementation.

The Premier has acknowledged that the government must do a better job of communicating its vision, priorities, policies and actions to British Columbians. Moreover, it must do that more efficiently and cost effectively, with a smaller budget and fewer FTEs.

Simply put, the current communications structure has not adequately served the government's communications needs and fiscal requirements. It has been too large, rigid and bureaucratic to properly serve British Columbians' desire for timely information about the decisions, changes and improvements that government is making on their behalf.

A new structure for government communications is required to:

- improve British Columbians' access to public information that more clearly communicates what their government is doing on their behalf;
- streamline operations, eliminate duplication and reduce avoidable costs;
- improve efficiency, effectiveness and coordination;
- increase flexibility to better utilize communications resources where and when they are needed, and to expedite the flow of information to ministers, the media and the public;
- improve strategic planning within ministries and across government;
- foster closer working relationships based on mutual trust and confidence;
- encourage greater productivity, creativity and political sensibility; and
- establish greater individual and collective accountability.

This can be accomplished with substantially fewer FTEs, provided that everyone working in the new structure is capable, compatible with the new model, and equally dedicated to advancing the government's aims and objectives. It will also necessitate moving to a new shared service delivery framework that fosters greater flexibility, confidence, competence and accountability at every level.

This will demand a new work ethic and political culture that ensures all Public Affairs Bureau employees work together as one team with all ministers and their staff to meet the government's communications needs and objectives. In particular, it will require a greater emphasis on generalist skills, supported by enhanced strategic planning and political direction. It will also mean that the "silos" approach

to communications that typically characterizes the organization of ministry communications will be replaced by a cohesive group of communicators who all play an active role in the various facets of communications, with far greater interministry coordination.

The New Structure

The new Public Affairs Bureau will be responsible for all government communications staff and budgets, organized under two divisions: a Communications Division and a Support Services and Operations Division.

The Communications Division will be fully staffed by Order in Council appointments that report to the Premier's Chief of Staff through the Executive Director, Andy Orr. This change reflects the unique and demanding nature of communications work required by ministers to properly communicate within the broad political context in which they operate. It acknowledges that communications is inescapably a function aimed at giving expression to the vision and priorities for which the government is politically accountable.

The Support Services and Operations Division will be staffed by a mix of excluded public service employees, Order in Council appointments and contractors who report to both the Deputy Minister to the Executive Council and the Chief of Staff, through the Assistant Deputy Minister, Claudia Willimovsky.

Functions such as correspondence and direct public information provided through Enquiry BC and other public enquiry mechanisms are not included in this new communications structure. Staff dedicated to those and other communications activities within ministries outside of the Public Affairs Bureau, such as those serving agencies, boards and commissions, are not included in this process.

The Communications Division

The Public Affairs Bureau's Communications Division will provide direction, advice and communications staff to support ministry communication needs. Under the leadership of the Executive Director of Communications, ministries will have a communications director and staff devoted to meeting their needs.

The Executive Director of Communications will be broadly responsible for government-wide communications staffing and management, overall media relations, and the execution of communications goals, objectives and strategies.

The Manager of Media Relations and Media Monitoring will report to the Executive Director of Communications and will supervise a small staff who will provide centralized shared service support to ministries for those functions.

The media relations unit will provide support to ministries on a 24/7 basis, to ensure provincial, regional and multicultural media receive the information they need in the most appropriate way possible. The individuals working in this shop will supplement the media relations capacity available to ministries through their assigned communications directors and allotted complement of public affairs officers. They will also help lead and coordinate media relations for major media events and in day-to-day relations with the regional and multicultural media, working out of Victoria and Vancouver.

The media monitoring unit will be responsible for supplementing and enhancing media monitoring done at the ministry level, to ensure breaking issues are identified for quick response by communications directors. The goal is constant hour-to-hour, "one-window" media monitoring capacity, with a central technical capability for monitoring provincial, regional and multicultural media in every medium. The unit will perform this function from 5 a.m. to 8 p.m., seven days a week. This will help ministries keep abreast of the issues in their policy areas as they develop, and respond quickly to public statements that are misleading or factually incorrect.

In addition to the centralized communications resources described above, all ministries will have an assigned complement of communications staff. Larger ministries will continue to have staff assigned strictly to them, while smaller ministries will generally share staff with other ministries. The size of the staff complement allocated to each ministry will vary with the resources required to do the job, within the overall number of FTEs available to the Public Affairs Bureau for all government communications needs. Typically the ministries' assigned FTE complement will be about half as large as it was previously, ranging from five to 13 FTEs.

Nine ministries will have a dedicated communications director and communications staff, located in their ministry office, as will the Treaty Negotiations Office. The other ministries will each have an assigned communications director and communications staff who will be shared between two or three ministries. They will generally be located on-site where ministries already share the same office space.

Communications directors will be accountable to both the Premier and their assigned Minister(s). They will be the principal communications contact with the Minister's office and will be accountable for the following functions:

- Ministry strategic planning
- Issues management
- Quick response
- Media relations
- Ministry communications services
- Staff supervision and direction
- Interest group communications

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Communications staff will be accountable to their respective communications director for providing the following services to their assigned Minister(s):

- Issues management and talking points
- Ministry communications plans integrated with the government plan
- News releases and backgrounders
- Publications content
- Speech writing
- Notes and strategies for legislative introductions
- Web content
- Media monitoring
- Event planning and management

Communications staff assigned to ministries will no longer be responsible for the preparation of cabinet submissions, cabinet briefing notes, public 1-800 program information lines, mail/e-mail correspondence, web maintenance and technical administration, ministry intranet services, or community/public liaison. Those services will be provided by ministry staff, as determined by each Minister and his/her Deputy Minister, in consultation with the Deputy Minister to the Executive Council.

Ministry communications staff will continue to be responsible for providing and supervising web content, including the provision of information for web posting and the monitoring of all posted materials for accuracy and timeliness. Non-communications staff will in future perform all other website functions.

Web design will henceforth be the responsibility of the central Support Services in the Public Affairs Bureau. Technical website maintenance, administration and support will be provided through designated ministry staff and the BC Internet Services group in the Ministry of Management Services.

Under the new structure, all regional communications positions will be eliminated. Tasks that fall into the general realm of responsibilities outlined above for ministry communications services staff will be performed by those personnel, supported by central Public Affairs Bureau staff. This includes local media relations, issues management, media monitoring, local advertising design/placement/procurement, etc. Other tasks currently provided by some regional communications staff will be assumed by other ministry personnel, as identified and designated by deputy ministers in consultation with the Deputy Minister to the Executive Council.

Administrative support staff will be significantly reduced. Only communications branches with ten or more professional staff will have a dedicated administrative support position. Staff in the Support Services and Operations Division will provide administrative support where needed. Otherwise, each ministry's communications services unit will be responsible for such basic tasks as faxing, photocopying,

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telephone answering, scheduling, and formatting/editing/proofing documents, which have often been provided by administrative support staff.

Support Services and Operations Division

The Support Services and Operations Division will provide a wide range of support services to ministry communications staff including graphic design, writing and editorial services, presentation techniques, news release distribution, media monitoring, human resource management, advertising and marketing, events support, e-communications services, and a full range of operational and administrative support.

Under the leadership of the Assistant Deputy Minister, Claudia Willmovsky, this division will ensure that government lives within its overall communications budget, common standards, protocols and procedures are developed and ministries adhere to them. The division will also be responsible for coordinating cross-government initiatives such as preparation of the Throne Speech, copyright and other legal matters.

In Summary

The new communications structure is aimed at improving communications across government at a greatly reduced cost to taxpayers. This year's budget for the Public Affairs Bureau is \$34.5 million, a reduction of \$4.8 million. The further reductions we are making to staff through this change will result in additional savings estimated at \$2.2 million annually.

The government recognizes that it must do a better job of giving people the facts and information they want and need to properly understand the changes their elected officials are making in the public interest. By the same token, the government is intent on ensuring that all misinformation is immediately corrected.

The new structure is aimed at communicating more efficiently and effectively through a shared service approach that fosters greater flexibility, confidence, competence, and cost effectiveness at every level.