



Evaluation of the Priority Administration Program

FINAL REPORT

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Public Service Commission

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive summary	iii
1. Introduction	1
1.1 The Priority Administration Program.....	1
1.2 Evaluation objectives and issues.....	9
1.3 Study methodology	9
1.4 Limitations of the research	14
2. Relevance	17
3. Design	21
3.1 Priority Information Management System, Web site and forms	21
3.2 Referrals, screening and assessment of priority persons	26
3.3 Timing and timeliness of the Priority Administration process	36
3.4 Post-referral activity	46
3.5 Knowledge, training and communications	50
3.6 Monitoring and data quality control	58
3.7 Current governance and transition.....	60
4. Outcomes/success	63
4.1 Number assessed, referred and hired annually.....	63
4.2 Perceived access to qualified candidates	70
4.3 Fairness, transparency and merit-based appointments.....	73
4.4 Overall program satisfaction	77
4.5 Suggested benefits, weaknesses and improvements.....	78
5. Efficiency and economy	81
5.1 Efficiency and cost-effectiveness	81
6. Conclusions and recommendations	85
Annex A: Alternatives	93
Annex B: Interviewees	97

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to present the findings and recommendations resulting from data collection undertaken for the Evaluation of the Priority Administration (PA) Program. The research was conducted between October 2010 and February 2011 for the Executive Management Committee and the President of the Public Service Commission (PSC), as part of the approved rolling PSC Risk-based Five-year Evaluation Plan for 2009-2014.

PRIORITY ADMINISTRATION

Priority entitlements provide certain persons with the right to be appointed, in priority to all others, pursuant to the *Public Service Employment Act* (PSEA) and the *Public Service Employment Regulations* (PSER) to positions for which the individual meets the essential qualifications. Priority entitlements help persons cope with career transitions due to various life and employment events such as work force adjustment, becoming disabled, returning from extended leave and relocating with one's spouse or common-law partner. The entitlements also help the employer retain skilled employees and meet its obligations toward work force adjustment.

The PSC is responsible for administering the provisions of the PSER and PSEA with respect to priority entitlements. The PSC is, among other things, responsible for setting and maintaining an administrative infrastructure (the Priority Information Management System, or PIMS) to link priority persons with federal public service positions being staffed. Organizations are responsible for registering their own priority persons in PIMS; counselling their own priorities about their entitlements; and searching for, assessing and appointing priority persons, as appropriate.

Priority clearance is required for virtually all appointment processes, with some exceptions. To obtain priority clearance, the organization conducting a staffing process contacts the PSC to see whether there are any priorities to be considered for the position at hand. Priority clearance is given if the PSC does not identify any suitable priorities or if the PSC and the organization agree that those referred are not qualified. Furthermore, priority persons may self-refer to any position being staffed through an appointment process.

EVALUATION OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The evaluation was designed to address the key issues of relevance and performance (effectiveness, efficiency and economy). Evaluation results will contribute to the identification and implementation of any potential improvements or refinements to the program. The primary client for the evaluation is the PSC, but evaluation findings will also be relevant and useful to a broader audience of stakeholders (i.e. federal organizations, priority persons, unions, the Treasury Board and Parliamentarians).

The evaluation methodology incorporated multiple lines of evidence and data from different primary and secondary sources in order to ensure that the findings were valid and captured key points of view on the PA Program. The research for the evaluation was comprised of a document review, key informant interviews, two on-line surveys (with priority persons and with human resources (HR) advisors and hiring managers) and two focus groups (one with HR advisors and one with PA advisors and managers of operations).

As with any evaluation study, there are limitations associated with the research. These include:

- ***Varying levels of familiarity with PA among survey respondents:*** In the survey context, priority persons and HR advisors have the greatest exposure to the program, while HR assistants play a more limited role. Similarly, many hiring managers lack familiarity with the program and could not comment on a range of questions.
- ***Potential bias among interview respondents:*** While PSC staff and management have extensive personal experience with the PA Program, they also bring to the results the potential for personal bias. This potential bias was mitigated by examining the broad set of interview results across all respondents, and by the triangulation of data sources to compare interview findings with other lines of evidence (e.g. focus groups, survey data and program data).
- ***Accuracy of survey sampling frame unknown:*** Survey sampling lists provided for the HR advisors, assistants and hiring managers contained many duplicate entries with different e-mail addresses (largely resulting from organizational and domain name changes). In the survey of priority persons, there was a greater than 10% attrition rate, and likely some invitations to participate in the survey did not reach their destinations due to invalid e-mail addresses. Presumably, this would have been a more common experience among priorities who had been in the system longer.

FINDINGS

Relevance

Priority entitlement is rooted in legislation, and the PSC is responsible for ensuring that the provisions of the PSEA and PSER with respect to priority entitlements are respected. The program is seen as being necessary (legally and morally) to protect persons with priority entitlement facing career changes or other events beyond their control. Furthermore, the need for the program is expected to increase in the near future, due to layoffs resulting from spending restraints. While the PA Program is seen to support staffing efforts in theory, the practical reality of its delivery appears to be that this support is limited by misconceptions among hiring managers (of priority candidates being “poor candidates”), a preference among managers to select their own candidates and improper use of the program (clearances not being sought at the start of a process, before other candidates are identified or considered).

Design

Web site, Priority Information Management System and forms

HR professionals expressed reasonably high levels of satisfaction with the PA Web site and with most aspects of PIMS. In interviews, PSC staff and management reported that PIMS has and continues to undergo improvements based on feedback provided. Several PSC interview respondents also noted that any weaknesses are not within the general design of the forms or system, but are primarily around consistent delivery and use of these both by PA advisors and hiring organizations. Priority persons reported lower levels of satisfaction with the user-friendliness of the Web site and with PA forms, although priority persons who receive a higher level of assistance with their job search are less apt to find these problematic.

Referrals

Most priority persons have been referred to an appointment process by the PSC at least once, and report having received an average of four referrals from the PSC. Fully three quarters of priority persons report having self-referred to at least one appointment process. Roughly three quarters of priority persons also report having participated in some type of formal assessment (e.g. interview, test or reference check) in their most recent process.

Satisfaction with the number of referrals made per process is moderate (and lower among hiring managers than HR professionals). Concern was expressed regarding the accuracy of referrals, or the “fit” between candidates referred and the essential qualifications of positions (with this concern again being more marked among hiring managers). Priority persons also expressed low satisfaction with the screening process (whether priority persons are being referred to the right type of jobs).

Most hiring managers and HR professionals are of the opinion that PSC referral of priority persons is generally too broad. This perspective is less commonly expressed by priority persons themselves, but is nonetheless shared by one third of priority persons.

PA advisors noted that generic position descriptions and lack of clarity about essential qualifications and corresponding skills of candidates can represent obstacles to accurate referrals, and state that they prefer to refer broadly rather than to have a priority person miss out on a potential opportunity. PA advisors also identified a potential need to review and update skill codes to improve referrals. Hiring managers, HR professionals and PA advisors all concurred that increasing the role of the priority person in the process (by increasing transparency of referrals) may help alleviate this situation.

Priority persons were somewhat satisfied with the assessment conducted as part of their most recent referral experience. Less than half believe that they were given sufficient opportunity to prepare for their most recent appointment process, but six in ten agree strongly that they were fairly assessed, which compares favourably to the Survey of Staffing.

Survey results and interview findings suggest that priority persons decline job opportunities or even referrals on processes for a variety of reasons. Work location, type of work and fit with qualifications are some of the reasons for which priority candidates may decline potential opportunities.

Timing and timeliness of the Priority Administration process

PIMS data indicates that the average time for the PSC to provide PA referrals on a process was two days in 2008-2009 and 2009-2010, and that clearance was provided in an average of five days following assessment of referrals. Satisfaction with the timeliness of the issuance of clearances and referrals is modest at best (which may not be surprising, given that this program is a legislative requirement). Ratings of satisfaction with the overall timing of the PA process are even more tepid. PA staff maintained that they have fairly strict standards for turnaround time on issuing clearances and referrals and that, for the most part, these are met. They suggested that delays typically occur within the hiring organization. HR advisors in the focus group concurred that clearances and referrals are generally provided quite promptly, noting that delays typically result from the time required to contact and assess the priorities referred. PIMS data reveals that hiring organizations require 14 days on average to return feedback on the assessment of referrals. The perceived low accuracy of referrals exacerbates this situation. In terms of perceived impact on the overall speed of recruitment, the HR community is also largely negative.

Priority persons in the survey indicated experiencing longer time lines in terms of the PA process and with the reported time for initial contact by the PSC. The reported time frame for contact is shorter among those who reported assistance with job searches from the home organization. The total lapsed time reported by priority persons for the full staffing process (among those referred) is just over nine weeks, and this is considerably shorter for cases that have taken place since April 2010. Given these long time frames, it is not surprising to find that satisfaction of priority persons with the PA Program is only modest with regard to timeliness.

The ability to run other components of the staffing process concurrently while waiting for priority clearance is well known by hiring organizations. However, PSC staff and management caution that the rights of priority persons can be compromised if organizations proceed before obtaining a clearance. If priorities are referred after an organization has already received candidates of their own, they may be reluctant to consider priorities over their own candidates.

Post-referral activity

Priority persons report that they are not consistently receiving feedback on the results of assessments when they are referred. Furthermore, those who receive feedback often say that they are not receiving a full and clear explanation of why they were not placed. Also, there is a lack of clarity or understanding among priority persons as to the mechanisms or steps in place to appeal decisions. Although there is only limited direct evidence from the study on this issue, there appears to be a potential for the PSC to play a greater post-referral role. This could help ensure that priority persons receive the feedback they require, as well as ensuring follow-up with priorities to improve support and ensure that proper counselling is provided.

Knowledge, training and communications

Based on the focus groups and interviews, the roles and responsibilities of the hiring organization, the PSC and the home organization are not clearly understood. Hiring managers are not always clear on their responsibilities or the correct functioning of the PA process. Home organizations also appear unclear in some cases regarding their responsibility for priorities once they are registered. This lack of clarity compromises the support that priorities receive and increases the burden on PA advisors (when home organizations do not fulfil their responsibilities).

Only half of the HR professionals surveyed received any training on PA or PIMS. While HR professionals generally rate their knowledge of PA as strong, HR advisors participating in the focus group identify a need for refresher training. PA advisors suggested that training packages be developed by the PSC for delivery by PA advisors. These could be developed as on-line tutorials for HR advisors. Partnering with the Canada School of Public Service to provide course content pertinent to PA was also suggested. Instituting an HR PA specialist within organizations (such as currently exists within the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade) was also outlined as a measure that would improve expertise within organizations.

Current training of PA advisors is described as largely informal. PSC staff and management identified a need for more formal training to ensure consistent delivery of PA and to reduce errors within the system. Not surprisingly, given the lack of clear understanding of roles and limited training, evidence points to room for improvement in terms of communication, outreach and support from the PA Program. In addition to formalized training, PA advisors suggested mentoring and access to current interpretations / past decisions as additional tools.

Priority persons do not typically feel well supported by their home organizations, although there is a fundamental difference in support experienced among different priority groups of employees. Priority persons surveyed also pointed to a lack of fundamental information about the program and priority entitlements. That said, survey evidence also highlighted that support and contact with home organizations and the PSC make a large difference in whether or not priority persons have the information they need to participate fully and intelligently in the program.

Monitoring and data quality control

PSC staff and management participating in interviews, as well as the focus group, identified significant weaknesses in current monitoring systems and procedures, and a need for increased monitoring of both home and hiring organizations in terms of program abuse and accuracy of data entry and coding. PA advisors also identified a need to increase monitoring and consistency of their own work, potentially through a peer review process.

Governance and transition

There is a strong divide in opinion among PSC management and staff interviewed as to the impact of the shift in administration from the Policy Branch to the Staffing and Assessment Services Branch, and about the success of the transition process.

Some also identified concerns to address within the current governance structure and administrative environment, including a need to build a stronger team environment in PA delivery, increase support and communication to and among PA team members and increase access to expertise and formal training, to ensure consistent delivery.

Outcomes/success

Placement of priorities

Based on system data provided by the PA Program, the placement rate of priority persons has averaged 59% over the past four fiscal years. The placement rate appears to vary significantly by priority category, and is highest for Canadian Forces and Royal Canadian Mounted Police medically released personnel, followed by surplus employees and leaves of absence. As well, a large proportion of priority appointments are made within a few specific public service classifications, including CR, PM and EC. The vast majority of priority appointments involve women. Geographically, most appointments are made in the National Capital Region and the Ontario and Quebec regions.

Access to qualified candidates

Satisfaction with access to potentially qualified candidates as a result of PA is only moderate, and is much lower among hiring managers than among HR professionals. Evidence collected throughout the evaluation points strongly to the quality of fit between a process and candidates (rather than the skills and qualifications of candidates) as the likely driver of this result. The overall quality of candidates is generally assessed positively, although a need to ensure that candidates with labour relations issues are not inappropriately placed into the PA system is underscored.

Priority persons are similarly unconvinced that the program offers them significant access to good jobs, although those who have not been in the system as long, as well as those who were placed as a result of their entitlement, are more positive.

Ability to place priorities

The overall effectiveness or success of PA in placing priority persons in jobs is not rated highly by priority persons or hiring managers, although HR professionals are somewhat more positive. There was some suggestion that the ability to place priorities could be improved by providing organizations with more direct access to PA candidates as an inventory or bank of employees.

Fairness, transparency and contribution to merit-based appointment

Opinions coming from hiring managers, HR professionals, priority persons and interview respondents were mixed on the subject of whether the PA process is fair to priority persons, is transparent and leads to merit-based appointment decisions. Priority persons expressed the greatest concerns with transparency and fairness, including concerns with lack of feedback, receiving insufficient information to prepare for a process and lack of access to support.

Overall program satisfaction

The experiences of priority persons and hiring managers with PA highlight modest satisfaction with the process. Few hiring managers and HR professionals perceive PA as having a positive impact on satisfaction with recruitment generally. Many priority persons do not evaluate their experience highly, and only a third consider PA to be an effective mechanism for obtaining employment.

Efficiency and economy

Some interview respondents suggest that efficiency and effectiveness could be improved by increasing understanding of the program, ensuring appropriate use, improving accuracy in referrals or creating an inventory of priority persons that can be directly accessed by hiring managers.

The average cost per request received by the PA Program (based on program costs divided by number of clearance requests) over the past four fiscal years was \$37. The cost per referral made was \$69 in 2009-2010. The cost per referral decreased from \$93 in 2006-2007 to \$57 in 2008-2009. The average cost per referral for the review period was \$74. Furthermore, in 2009-2010, a total of 1 645 new cases were registered in PIMS, which translates to 91 files per PA advisor. Finally, the cost per indeterminate placement (for the PSC, excluding costs for assessment by hiring organizations) was \$2,206 in 2009-2010, for an average of \$2,182 over the past four years.

However, these ratios do not provide an indication of the extent to which referrals were aligned to position requirements (essential qualifications).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The PA Program is seen as highly relevant and is very likely to become even more critical in coming months, when an expected work force adjustment takes place across the federal public service and places potentially thousands of public servants into surplus positions. This presents the program with an urgent problem, given that much of the qualitative and quantitative evidence from this evaluation suggests that the program is not functioning as well as it could under the current conditions and would be considerably more taxed by the impending changes to the staffing activity level.

Study findings point to a program that, at its core, is well established and reasonably structured. There are also processes, procedures and tools in place to enter priorities into the system and make referrals to appropriate jobs. Nonetheless, this evaluation highlighted modest levels of satisfaction across all stakeholder groups involved with the program, from both qualitative and quantitative evidence collected in the study. Much of the concern points to one (or more) of three fundamental and interrelated elements: 1) lack of information and training needed to operate optimally in the program, including insufficient clarity about / understanding of roles and responsibilities among all stakeholder groups; 2) lack of accountability and monitoring to enforce accountability; and 3) less than optimal/strategic organization and use of program expertise and tools.

Recommendations include the following:

- **Roles and responsibilities** – Better definition and communication of roles and responsibilities, development of information materials for organizations to support their own role of informing and guiding hiring managers and priority persons, designation of a key contact in each organization (as centralized PA expertise).
- **Governance and process management** – Create and support more team building across offices (workload, best practices, consistency of judgments, mentoring, oversight); review processes to look for efficiencies and standardize across regions; assign PA advisors strategically according to expertise. Use most experienced to build capacity, develop training/support materials, provide expertise advice and increase monitoring/quality control. Ensure easy access to PA. Review recourse mechanisms.
- **Training of PA advisors and operational managers** – Formalized training packages addressing the PSEA and PSER, classification, labour relations, staffing and assessment; mentoring available on-line and on the job; training module and/reference guide for managers to support in supervisory function.
- **Increase quality of referrals** – Increase level of involvement of and transparency with priorities to declare interest; review and update codes, and offer training to ensure that organizations are using them correctly; review priority coding based on post-referral assessment and update/change as required; increase accountability of all concerned, including priority persons in terms of deciding which positions to be referred to, making themselves available and replying promptly.
- **System enhancements** – Adapt PIMS to include additional communication features (e.g. auto-replies to priorities on registration, post-referral results to the PSC and home organizations); allow for more detailed and contextual information that PA staff can share and increase consistency; and provide information to priorities (e.g. statement of merit criteria) to involve them in referral judgements/process.
- **Monitoring and accountability** – Implement quality assurance function (accuracy of coding and advice); develop an accountability framework to distil elements, responsible parties, roles and responsibilities, with clear targets and consequences. Performance indicators required to assess fulfillment of obligations.
- **“Rebranding”**– Following changes, efforts could be made to “rebrand” the PA Program and communicate it broadly to organizations.

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to present the findings and recommendations resulting from data collection undertaken for the Evaluation of the Priority Administration (PA) Program. The research was conducted between October 2010 and February 2011 for the Executive Management Committee and the President of the Public Service Commission (PSC), as part of the approved rolling PSC Risk-based Five-year Evaluation Plan for 2009-2014. This introductory chapter provides a description of the PA, the overall purpose of the evaluation and the methodology employed.

1.1 THE PRIORITY ADMINISTRATION PROGRAM

a) Nature of priority entitlements

The *Public Service Employment Act (PSEA)* and *Public Service Employment Regulations (PSER)* govern appointments to positions in the public service. Among their provisions are clauses that provide an entitlement, for limited periods, for certain persons who meet specific conditions to be appointed in priority to others.

Priority entitlements help persons cope with career transitions due to various life and employment events such as work force adjustment, becoming disabled, returning from extended leave and relocating with one's spouse or common-law partner. The entitlements also help the employer retain skilled employees and meet its obligations in work force adjustment.

With certain exceptions, priority entitlements apply to all appointment processes. This means that:

- The entitlements apply across all regions and all organizations subject to the PSEA;
- There are no limits to the occupational groups and levels to which a priority person is entitled to be appointed, except in the case of the reinstatement priority;
- Areas of selection in an appointment process do not apply to persons benefiting from a priority entitlement;
- Priority persons may self-refer for any job being staffed or about to be staffed, in which case their priority entitlement must be respected;
- Priority persons need only meet the essential qualifications, referred to in paragraph 30(2)(a) of the PSEA, of the position to be appointed and the conditions of employment (e.g. security clearance, language proficiency and overtime). They are not required to meet any other merit criteria, such as current or future asset qualifications, operational requirements or organizational needs; and

- Priority entitlements do not apply to specified term employees and casual workers.

The entitlement to a priority is not "granted" at the discretion of either the PSC or organizations in the public service. Persons who meet the conditions specified in the PSEA or the PSER automatically acquire a personal right that is guaranteed by legislation. Therefore, the entitlement is not dependent on the person being referred to an organization by the PSC.

There is a ranked order to priority entitlements based on the legislation. "Statutory" priority entitlements in the PSEA take precedence over the "regulatory" priority entitlements found in the PSER. There is also a further ranked order to the statutory priorities.

- ***Priority entitlements under the PSEA (in order of ranked importance):***

- ◇ Organization's own surplus employees: The term "surplus" is used to identify an indeterminate employee who has been declared surplus to requirements by the deputy head and who may therefore be laid off.
- ◇ Leave of absence: Employees on a leave of absence, where their positions have been staffed indeterminately, or employees who replaced them on an indeterminate basis, if they are displaced when the employee returns from leave.
- ◇ Lay-off: Persons who have been laid off due to a lack of work, the discontinuance of a function or the transfer of work or a function outside the public service.

- ***Priority entitlements under the PSER (no ranked order):***

- ◇ Surplus employee: An employee from another organization who has been advised by the deputy head that their services are no longer required, but before any lay-off becomes effective.
- ◇ Employee who becomes disabled: An employee who becomes disabled and who, as a result of the disability, is no longer able to carry out the duties of their position.
- ◇ Canadian Forces (CF) and Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) members: Certain members released or discharged for medical reasons.
- ◇ Surviving spouse or common-law partner: Surviving spouses or common-law partners of public service employees or CF/RCMP members, if death is attributable to performance of duties, have a priority entitlement that is only applicable to external advertised processes.
- ◇ Relocation of spouse or common-law partner: Employees on leave due to such relocations, whose positions have not been staffed indeterminately.
- ◇ Reinstatement: Certain priority persons who are appointed or deployed to a position in the public service at a lower level.

There have been modifications made over time to priority entitlements. Most recently, the PSER were amended in 2010 to establish new priority entitlements for surviving spouses or common-law partners and to clarify certain provisions with respect to the priority entitlements for employees.¹ In addition, the priority entitlement for persons who cease to be employed in an excluded position in the Office of the Governor General's Secretary has been repealed through the *Regulations Amending the Office of the Governor General's Secretary Employment Regulations, 2010*.

b) Operation of the priority administration system

The PSEA and PSER provide for the appointment of certain persons in priority to all others. Organizations are mainly responsible for registering their own priority persons in the PSC's priority system; counselling their own priorities about their entitlements; and searching for, assessing and appointing priority persons, as appropriate. The PSC is, among other things, responsible for setting and maintaining an administrative infrastructure (the Priority Information Management System, or PIMS) to match priority persons with federal public service positions being staffed. PIMS consists of a national inventory of priority persons, which organizations must use.

PIMS is an electronic Web-based tool of the Policy Branch (PB) of the PSC. It helps ensure that entitlements to a priority appointment are valid and respected. The system provides federal organizations governed by the PSEA with a way to register their priority persons and to conduct inventory searches for priority clearance. The PSC maintains PIMS, and hiring organisations must search the inventory of priority persons through an automated on-line process that provides priority referrals based on criteria such as education and skills, types of jobs and the person's mobility. This allows the PSC to match jobs with priority persons who appear to meet the essential qualifications for the position. A priority clearance number is required before proceeding with an appointment process. In addition, organizations can use PIMS to:

- View a priority person's résumé;
- Send referral results to the PSC;
- Obtain a list of their own priority persons; and
- Generate statistical reports to help manage their responsibilities toward priority administration.

Priority clearance is required for virtually all appointment processes, with some exceptions, including casual and acting appointments. Deployments and assignments, as they are not appointment processes, are not subject to priority clearance. Other exceptions include reclassifications, extensions and Federal Student Work Experience Program appointments.² A staffing action is not normally conducted until the organization is given a priority clearance number. Organizations initiate the clearance process by submitting a Request

¹ www.psc-cfp.gc.ca/prad-adpr/index-eng.htm

² www.psc-cfp.gc.ca/prad-adpr/guide/sarc-adec-eng.htm

for Priority Clearance through PIMS to see whether there are any priorities to be considered for the position at hand.

PIMS performs an initial high-level match, and then the PSC reviews profiles of priority persons and refers those who are available and who appear to meet the requirements of the position. PIMS automatically matches the priority inventory with the job specifications, based on position location, position tenure (indeterminate or specified term), occupational group and level, job type/skills, official language proficiency and availability of the priority person.

The hiring manager carries out an assessment of the persons referred against the essential qualifications of the position. Priority persons are not required to meet the asset qualifications. If the priority person is found qualified, an appointment is made.

Priority clearance is given if the PSC does not identify any suitable priorities or if the PSC and the organization agree that those referred are not qualified. The clearance number is normally valid for the length of time that it takes to complete the staffing action. The PSC can, however, intervene in the process, if required, to respond to changing priority situations. It is important to ensure that persons entitled to priority are treated fairly and that the process and outcome are transparent.

Furthermore, priority persons may self-refer to any vacant position being staffed through an appointment process, even after a clearance number is provided, and their entitlement must be respected.

c) Roles and responsibilities

Roles and responsibilities of the PSC with regard to PA are to:

- Administer the provisions of the PSER and PSEA with respect to priority entitlements;
- Ensure that good staffing practices and the legislative framework for priorities are followed in a fair and transparent manner;
- Set and interpret policies;
- Set and maintain an administrative management system to match priority persons with jobs being staffed (e.g. PIMS);
- Provide information and guidance to priority persons, public service organizations, the employer and bargaining agents; and
- Monitor the validity of an individual's entitlements and organizational respect for the entitlements.

Roles and responsibilities of hiring and home organizations are as follows:

- Ensure that priority rights are respected and that priorities are properly counselled and coded prior to registration;
- Register their own priority persons in PIMS;
- Assess priorities before all others in a process;
- Appoint qualified priorities ahead of all others;
- Contact screened-in priority persons for interest and provide information about the position being staffed and the means of assessment;
- Screen priority persons referred by the PSC, using information available through PIMS or from the priority person (for specified term appointments only);
- Assess interested priority persons against the essential qualifications;
- Respond to requests from persons with disabilities for accommodation in the assessment process, as in any other staffing process; and
- Provide timely, written feedback to priority persons about the results of their assessment, with clear and full explanations of reasons, if they are not being appointed.

Roles and responsibilities of priority persons are to:

- Actively participate in the PSC's priority registration and referral processes;
- Conduct independent job searches; and
- Self-refer, if they believe that they meet the essential qualifications.

d) Jurisprudence

There have been complaints and legal actions launched in the past by persons with a priority entitlement who believe that their rights were not fully respected. Priority persons do have several means of recourse if they feel that their priority entitlement is not being administered properly. In *Thomas C. Cahill vs. the Attorney General of Canada* in 2002, an applicant alleged that he was not treated in a manner that accorded with his statutory priority pursuant to subsection 30(1) of the former PSEA. Although his case was dismissed and his application for judicial review denied by the court, the Honourable Madam Justice Layden-Stevenson did stipulate in her decision that “The PSC is accountable for creating an administrative infrastructure which would give meaning to Section 30(1) of the PSEA, by ensuring that candidates with a priority right to appointment are treated according to their entitlement.”³

³ Oversight Plan. Priority Administration, 2006-2007

e) Program governance and resources

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the PB and the Staffing and Assessment Services Branch (SASB) of the PSC outlines a governance framework for the transfer of PA employees from PB to SASB that took effect January 2009. The respective roles and responsibilities of PB and SASB are outlined in this MOU. Overall, PB retains the functional lead for the administration of priority entitlements, including automated system maintenance and redesign, the development of operational tools and guidelines and the provision of authoritative policy interpretation. PB is also responsible for external public service-wide monitoring (using PIMS) and provides SASB with regular statistics. SASB is responsible for day-to-day administration: monitoring clearance requests, verifying priority entitlements, providing advice to organizations and priority persons and delivering information sessions.

The Staffing Operations and Services Division (SOSD) within SASB acts as the liaison for information flow between PB and SASB for Strategic Consultation and PA functions. Questions or issues arising in regional offices will pass first through SOSD to see whether they can be resolved within SASB. If necessary, SOSD will consult with PB and channel the response back to SASB.

The Senior Vice-President of PB and the Vice-President of SASB are responsible for the role of their respective branches with regard to PA.

In terms of program resources, effective January 2009, PB transferred 22 full-time equivalents to SASB for delivery of PA. The MOU identifies the cost of PA for fiscal year 2009-2010 as \$1,425,468 in salaries and \$123,209 in non-salary costs (for a total of \$1,548,677).

Table 1.1: Breakdown of program resources by fiscal year before and after the transition

Year	Priority Administration Sub-activity 145	FTE	Salary		Non-salary	
			Budget	Actuals	Budget	Actuals
2006-2007	067200-Non-delegated Authorities	23.52	\$1,585,993	\$1,567,850	\$108,627	\$89,257
2007-2008	067200-Non-delegated Authorities	22.28	\$1,608,153	\$1,571,606	\$47,682	\$46,303
2008-2009	067200-Non-delegated Authorities	20.13	\$1,428,293	\$1,251,069	\$73,691	\$72,111
2009-2010	035100-Strategic Staff Prior Admin	20.43	\$1,423,710	\$1,503,106	\$61,804	\$35,387
	067200-Non-delegated Authorities	1.23	\$92,884	\$92,791	\$1,529	\$1,518
	Total	21.66	\$1,516,594	\$1,595,897	\$63,333	\$36,905
2010-2011	035100-Strategic Staff Prior Admin	18.01	\$1,520,889	\$1,423,454	\$51,512	\$49,121
	067200-Non-delegated Authorities	4.19	\$361,766	\$406,901	\$1,375	\$1,375
	Total	22.2	\$1,882,655	\$1,830,355	\$52,887	\$50,496

f) Program logic

In general terms, a logic model illustrates how the activities of a policy, program or initiative are expected to lead to the achievement of final outcomes. The logic model serves to identify the short-, medium- and long-term outcomes of a policy, program or initiative. In that sense, it serves as a road map for the program. The logic model for the PA Program is presented visually in Exhibit 1.1.

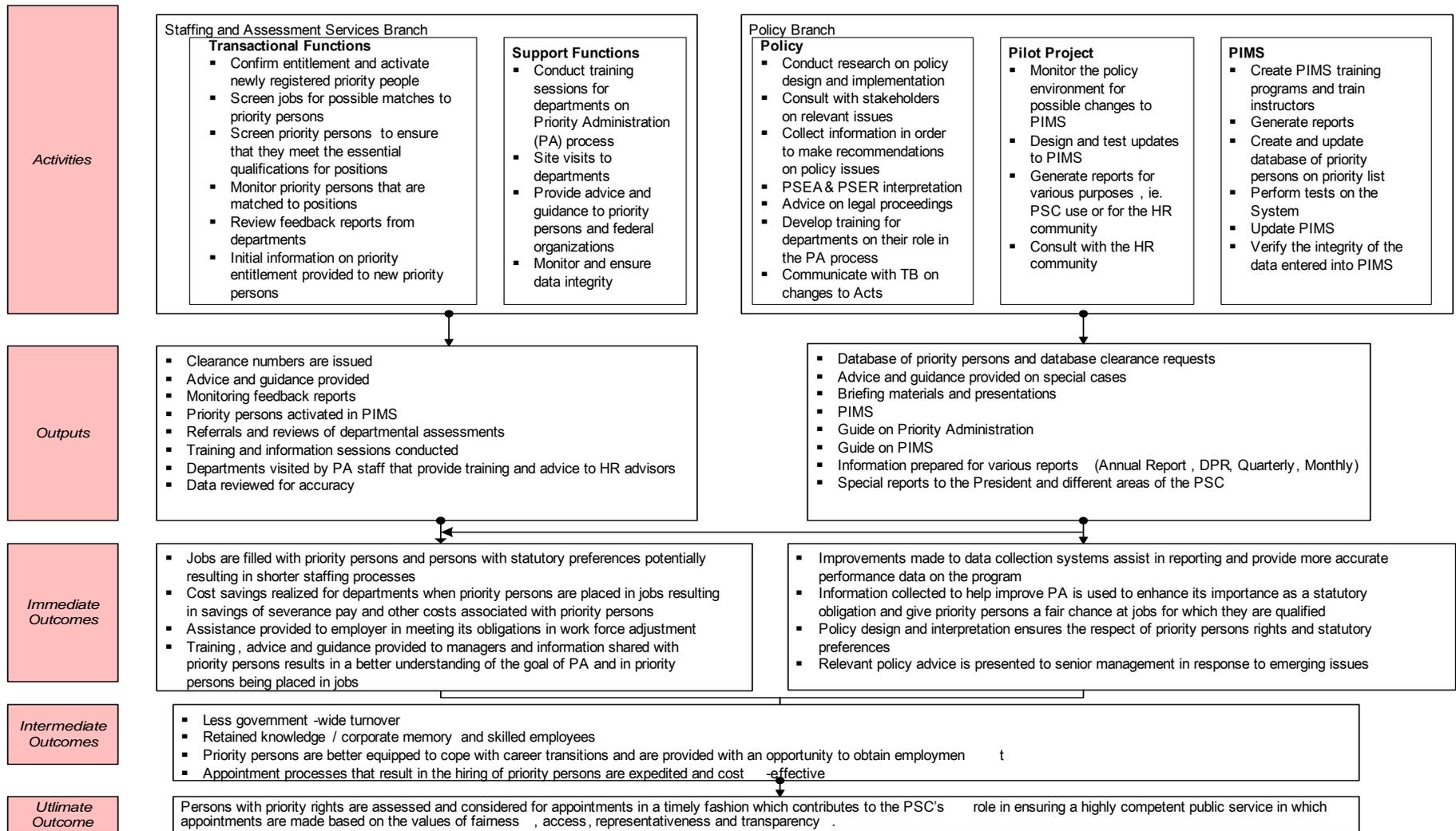
The 2010-2011 Report on Plans and Priorities identifies the following key expected results of the program sub-activity and the performance indicators that will serve to monitor performance.⁴

Key expected results	Key performance indicators
Proper consideration for appointments of persons with priority rights	Percentage of individuals with priority rights appointed
Non-delegated authorities administration systems and procedures allow for proper monitoring of delegated authorities	Level of efficiency and management of non-delegated authorities administration systems and procedures (quality and accuracy of data entered in PIMS)

⁴ www.psc-cfp.gc.ca/abt-aps/rpp-rpp/2010-2011/rpp-113-eng.htm

Priority Administration

2011/05/04



1.2 EVALUATION OBJECTIVES AND ISSUES

The objective of the evaluation is to assess the relevance and performance of the PA Program in support of the PSC's mandate. This evaluation is being conducted as part of the approved rolling PSC Risk-based Five-year Evaluation Plan for 2009-2014. Evaluation results will contribute to the identification and implementation of any potential improvements or refinements to the program. The primary client for the evaluation is the PSC, but evaluation findings will also be relevant and useful to a broader audience of stakeholders (i.e. federal organizations, priority persons, unions, the Treasury Board and Parliamentarians).

The evaluation has been designed to address the key issues of relevance and performance (effectiveness, efficiency and economy). Questions and issues to be addressed in the Evaluation of the Priority Administration Program include the following:

1. Is the program relevant and consistent with government-wide HR renewal priorities?
2. Do priority persons perceive that PA provides priority persons across Canada with access to job opportunities in the federal public service?
3. Is the program appropriately designed? What is the clients' satisfaction rate with various components of the program?
4. How effective is the program? Is it able to match the right type of priority persons with the right jobs?
5. Which priority types demonstrate better placement rates? Are there significant differences between priority groups in terms of experience, values and willingness to work?
6. What impact does the program have on the time it takes to staff?
7. What should the federal public service consider in updating the program and/or PIMS? What potential approaches or design changes could improve the cost effectiveness of the PA Program?
8. Should the PSC play a more active role in the post-referral phase?
9. To what extent is the program providing value for money?

A detailed evaluation matrix was prepared for the evaluation by the PSC, and is provided in Appendix A.

1.3 STUDY METHODOLOGY

The research for the evaluation was comprised of a document review, key informant interviews, two on-line surveys (with priority persons and with HR advisors and hiring managers) and two focus groups (one with HR advisors and one with PSC PA advisors and managers of operations). Each line of evidence is described briefly below.

a) Key informant interviews

A series of 37 key informant interviews were completed as part of this evaluation. Interviews were conducted with PSC staff and management (17) and with external stakeholders, including union representatives (2), representatives of the employer (5), organizational Associate Deputy Ministers, Directors General, Directors and an HR advisor (5), priority persons (4) and hiring managers (4). Of these interviews, 20 were conducted by EKOS and 17 by PSC evaluation staff. The list of interviewees is available in Annex B. Following the on-line surveys, a series of four interviews were undertaken with priority persons who had responded to the survey to explore evaluation questions in more detail. Similarly, four interviews were undertaken with hiring managers who had responded to the survey, and one interview was completed with an HR advisor (while additional HR advisors were consulted in a focus group setting). PSC staff and management, as well as union and employer representatives to be interviewed, were selected with the assistance of the PSC. Priority persons, hiring managers and HR advisors interviewed were selected randomly from several regions (e.g. Western, Ontario, Quebec and Maritimes) from survey respondents who indicated a willingness to complete a follow-up interview.

Semi-structured interview guides comprised mostly of open-ended questions. The inclusion of open-ended questions allowed the interviewees to explain their responses in depth and detail. Most interviews were conducted by telephone, although a few respondents in the National Capital Region (NCR) opted for an in-person interview. Interviews ranged from 20 to 40 minutes for hiring managers, priority persons, union representatives and HR advisors, while the average interview was between 60 and 90 minutes for PSC staff. All interviews were conducted in the official language of choice of the respondent.

b) Focus groups

Focus groups were conducted following completion of the survey and interview work. They were designed to both address core evaluation issues, and to obtain further detail or insight into issues raised through the interviews and by the survey. Two focus groups were held: one with HR advisors and one with PSC PA advisors and managers of operations. These focus groups were conducted by teleconference. Each group was bilingual, with participants being able to contribute in the official language of their choice. Recruitment of HR advisors began with a question in the on-line survey. From this list of survey respondents willing to participate, the final interviews were conducted by bilingual interviewers. PSC PA advisors and managers of operations were recruited from a list provided by the PSC. Each discussion group was two hours in length.

c) Surveys

Two surveys were conducted as part of the evaluation with the following respondent groups. Each was conducted as a self-administered, on-line survey:

- **Priority persons (past and current):** The PSC provided the e-mail addresses⁵ of the entire population for the period under study. A total of 2 278 priority persons were invited to complete the survey. A total of 323 were found to be invalid (duplicate cases, not applicable, invalid e-mail address), leaving 1 955 valid cases in the initial sample drawn. The survey was initiated on November 19, 2010, and an e-mail invitation was issued to all those within the sample. A reminder e-mail was sent on November 30. The survey was completed on December 20, 2010. In total, 684 priority persons responded to the survey, for a response rate of 35%.
- **Staffing/HR advisors and hiring managers:** A total of 6 166 hiring managers and HR professionals were drawn for the survey. A total of 1 747 entries were considered invalid (duplicates, invalid e-mail addresses, not applicable – e.g. no longer working in the HR field, inability to get through the organizational firewall). The remaining valid sample included 4 394 entries. The survey was initiated on November 16, 2010. A reminder e-mail was issued on November 30, 2010. The survey was completed on December 21, 2010. A total of 1 142 responded to the survey (including 360 hiring managers, 590 HR advisors and 127 HR assistants), for a response rate of 26%. It is likely that the response rate is actually higher than this, given that the valid sample is actually a smaller base (with more duplicate e-mail addresses and ineligible sample members who no longer work in HR). This is the valid sample we were able to establish, however, based on returned e-mails, duplication we could assess and the removal of ineligible cases from those who indicated this to us when invited to conduct the survey.

In some cases respondents were asked to rate their answers on a five-point scale. In some cases the scale went from a low of 1 (not at all) to a high of 5 (extremely, completely, to a high extent), with a midpoint of 3 (moderately, to some extent). These were used in ratings of satisfaction, extent and degree to which statements were true. In the reporting of results these scaled responses were collapsed into 1-2, 3, and 4-5 in the following way:

Satisfaction – 1-2 = low satisfaction, 3 = moderate satisfaction, 4-5 = high satisfaction

Extent - - 1-2 = low extent, 3 = some extent, 4-5 = high extent

True - Extent - - 1-2 = not true, 3 = moderately true, 4-5 = very true

⁵ The list may include residential e-mail addresses; therefore, potential respondents received a notification before the survey was administered, to obtain their consent.

In other cases the scale went from a negative to a positive (e.g., negative/positive impact, disagree/agree). In these questions there was a neutral middle (e.g., neither agree nor disagree, no impact). In the reporting of these results the negative responses were collapsed (1-2) and the positive answers were collapsed (4-5) and labelled disagree/negative impact, or agree/positive impact.

d) Profile of survey respondents

The following are key characteristics of the populations who responded to the surveys of HR advisors, hiring managers and priority persons.

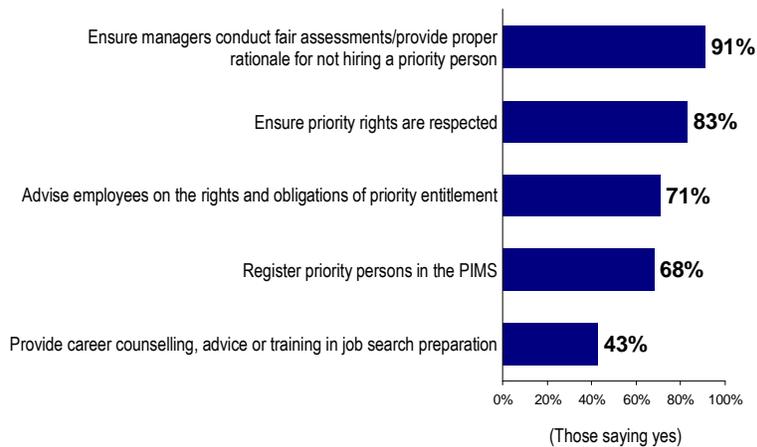
Human resources community and hiring managers

- A majority (58%) of HR professionals and hiring managers who responded to the survey represented large organizations; that is, those with 2 000 or more full-time equivalents.
- Nearly half (45%) are located in the NCR. Others are most likely to be located in the Quebec (13%) or Ontario (11%) regions, excluding the NCR. This is comparable to the actual distribution of the public service population (NCR 43%, Ontario 13% and Quebec 11%).
- Exactly half of the sample is made up of HR managers or advisors. Of these, 31% are hiring managers, 11% are HR assistants and 8% described themselves as “other.”
- Most respondents have been involved in federal government staffing for three to five years (33%) or six to ten years (25%). Some 17% have been involved for over 15 years, followed by those involved for 1-2 years and 11-15 years, both at 12%. Only 2% reported involvement dating back less than one year.

Virtually all HR advisors report that they are responsible for ensuring that managers conduct fair assessments and provide proper rationale for not hiring a priority person (91%). Over eight in ten say that they are responsible for ensuring that priority rights are respected. Seven in ten advise employees of their rights and obligations and seven in ten register priority persons on PIMS. Just under half say that they provide career counselling or advice or training in job search preparation. This low proportion of career counselling relative to the high proportion of those ensuring fair assessment can be explained by the fact that, volume-wise, there are many more clearance requests resulting in referrals to assess than there are priorities registered in the system.

Level of Involvement

“Are you or were you responsible for the following?” [HR Professionals]



Priority persons

- Priority persons responding to the survey were most likely to be classified under relocation of spouse or common-law partner (40%) or CF/RCMP medically released (21%).
- More than half of those who responded to the survey (56%) are currently employed in the federal public service. Still, nearly one in five (17%) are unemployed and looking for work. Also, more than half (57%) were not successfully placed in a position through PA, although some still had a valid priority entitlement.
- In terms of substantive group, respondents were most likely to identify themselves as CR or PM (15% each), or AS (12%). A total of 7% indicated their classification to be AT. All other categories were reported by fewer than 5% of respondents.
- Nearly two thirds (63%) of survey respondents participated in an appointment process as a priority person between April 2008 and December 2010.
- Respondents were most likely to have been referred to the Department of National Defence (21%), followed by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (10%) and RCMP civilian staff (7%). All other organizations were identified by 5% or fewer.

Seven in ten priority persons responding to the survey said that they signed a consent form to be registered in PIMS. By and large, the remaining one in four (26%) do not recall whether or not they signed the form.

1.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The evaluation methodology incorporated multiple lines of evidence and data from different primary and secondary sources to ensure that the findings were valid and captured key points of view on the PA Program. The evaluation included both qualitative (interviews, focus groups) and quantitative (surveys) methods, in addition to information and data available from program documentation and PIMS. Both qualitative and quantitative evidence was gathered from priority persons, as well as from HR staff involved in the program and hiring managers using the program in their staff processes. Qualitative evidence was collected from PSC staff as the most appropriate method for this segment (given the need for detailed and contextualized information from a small group of individuals).

With any evaluation study, there are limitations associated with the research. The reader is encouraged to take the following limitations into account when reviewing the findings from this report.

- ***Respondents had limited information:*** In the survey context, priority persons and HR advisors have the greatest exposure to the program and are in a good position to comment on their experiences. HR assistants, however, have a more limited role and, therefore, results from this segment should be interpreted with this in mind. Similarly, hiring managers can often be characterised by their lack of familiarity with the details of the program. Many hiring managers, particularly those with small teams, may only experience the PA Program once every few years and typically rely on the expertise and advice of their HR advisors. Many hiring managers could not comment on a range of questions related to the program and how well it functions.
- ***Potential bias among interview respondents:*** While PSC staff and management have extensive personal experience with the PA Program, they also bring to the results the potential for overly focusing the findings in a particular direction, based on a particular issue or agenda that they bring to the discussion. To offset this, efforts were made during the analysis to look at the broad set of results across all PSC representatives, rather than the views of one individual. This was also mitigated, to some extent, by the triangulation of data sources to compare interview findings to other lines of evidence (e.g. focus groups, survey data and program data).
- ***Accuracy of survey sampling frame unknown:*** There was a high level of attrition in both survey samples. The lists provided for the HR advisors, assistants and hiring managers was particularly poor, with many duplicate entries with different e-mail addresses (largely resulting from organizational and domain name changes). With the high rate of turnover described by many in the study, it would also not be surprising to find that many of the entries belong to individuals no longer working in that organization or position. Because the survey was collected through an on-line invitation, however, it is difficult to assess the exact attrition, although we believe it to be fairly high. That said, there is less evidence available to suggest that many in the HR community or hiring managers who should have been included were left off the list. If some were, likely they would have been much newer members of the community, and therefore less likely to have had experience with the PA Program. We assume that the sample of priority persons was relatively up to date and accurate, although even in this sample there was a greater than 10% attrition rate, and likely some of our invitations to participate in the survey did not reach their destinations due to invalid e-mail addresses, limiting the scope of whom the survey included. Presumably, this would have been a more common experience among priorities who had been in the system longer.

2. RELEVANCE

The issue of relevance was addressed primarily through key informant interviews, as well as through a review of program documentation. Under the issue of relevance, questions explored through the evaluation include the continuing need for the program, the extent to which it supports current government priorities and the extent to which the program supports or impedes other staffing efforts.

As noted in Chapter 1 (Introduction), priority entitlements, as embodied in the *Public Service Employment Act* (PSEA) and the *Public Service Employment Regulations* (PSER), help persons cope with career transitions due to various life and employment events such as work force adjustment (WFA), becoming disabled, returning from extended leave and relocating with one's spouse or common-law partner. The entitlements also help the employer retain skilled employees and meet its obligations in work force adjustment. The legal responsibilities resulting from the PSEA and PSER are also reflected in the *Work Force Adjustment Directive*, an agreement signed by bargaining agents and the Treasury Board.

Within the Program Activity Architecture (PAA) for the Public Service Commission (PSC), the Priority Administration (PA) Program fits under activity 1.10, entitled “Appointment Integrity and Political Neutrality.” The expected result of this activity is that “recruitment strategies, staffing practices and political activities consistent with the PSEA and PSC strategic outcome are implemented across the public service.”⁶ Stemming from this activity is the “Non-delegated Authorities” sub-activity, which administers authorities that are not delegated to organizations, such as the oversight of the PA of persons with specified entitlements and of the *Public Service Official Language Exclusion Approval Order* through the provision of timely authoritative advice and interpretation to respond to public service-wide needs.⁷ This activity and sub-activity in turn contribute to the overall intended strategic outcome of the PSC, which is “to provide Canadians with a highly competent, non-partisan and representative public service, able to provide service in both official languages, in which appointments are based on the values of access, fairness, transparency and representativeness.”

The ongoing need for the program was discussed in key informant interviews. Interview respondents were unanimous in their agreement that the program is relevant, necessary and supportive of government priorities. Many interview respondents (particularly PSC staff and management) underscored the fact that this program is rooted in legislation and therefore not optional. In this sense, the program, at minimum, is viewed as necessary in order to meet those legal requirements. The federal government and the PSC are obligated to protect the rights of priority individuals and to assist organizations in meeting obligations under the PSEA.

⁶ www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/rpp/2010-2011/inst/psc/psc01-eng.asp#toc4

⁷ www.psc-cfp.gc.ca/abt-aps/rpp-rpp/2010-2011/rpp-113-eng.htm

In terms of overall program relevance, several PSC staff and management interviewed also described a sense of obligation to assist public servants and others who face changes in their career that are beyond their control, such as those who are declared surplus, or Canadian Forces or Royal Canadian Mounted Police personnel who have been injured on the job in service to their country. Similarly, hiring managers and human resources advisors interviewed also generally spoke of the relevance or need for measures to assist public servants who are in a situation of priority entitlement.

Several senior officials also noted that the need for this program can be expected to increase in the near future. They acknowledged the fact that reduced budgets and WFA commitments would increase pressure on the system in the near future. This view was echoed by the President of the PSC in a recent newspaper article that describes the number of priorities as growing and notes that this growth is expected to continue as spending restraints are introduced.⁸

The role of the PSC with regard to WFA has ebbed and flowed over the past 15 years. In the mid-1990s, during the Program Review, the PSC played a very active role and took on a number of additional WFA-related duties. This included providing counselling services to employees and training to managers, and trying to find placement for affected employees who had been advised that they would be declared surplus within a specified period of time. The PSC also oversaw retraining opportunities for affected/surplus employees and denied clearance if an organization could not adequately explain why retraining was not possible. The roles of the PSC with regard to WFA were amended in 2004-2005, and the PSC is no longer responsible for retraining. However, the current atmosphere (including the impact of strategic reviews, the budget freeze, the administrative review and modernization initiatives) has resulted in WFA activity for some organizations, and may result in WFA activities for others in the near future. Given the role that the PSC has played in the past, there may be interest in having the PSC enhance its current role with regard to WFA.

a) Support and impediments

Finally, the extent to which the program complements and supports or impedes staffing efforts was also explored in key informant interviews. Most interview respondents (both inside and outside the PSC) noted that the program supports the staffing process by providing quick and easy access to internal candidates without going outside the public service or undertaking an appointment process. For example, a few key informants recognized the value of looking within an organization first to find talent. However, several interviewees noted that, while the program does support staffing in theory, all hiring managers may not share this view or understanding and that incorrect use of the program may limit its effectiveness. Hiring managers may view the PA process or program as impeding the staffing process as a result of the following: a) a misconception or myth among some hiring managers that priority persons are poor-quality candidates or employees; b) a desire among hiring managers to select their own candidates; and c) incorrect use of the program by hiring managers who seek a clearance late in the staffing process rather than at the outset. While hiring managers interviewed expressed their support for measures to assist priority persons and

⁸ Crunch looms for public service. Ottawa Citizen, December 29, 2010
www.ottawacitizen.com/news/Crunch+looms+public+service/4035725/story.html

agreed with the overall relevance of the program, many expressed the view that PA is often perceived as an “obstacle” to overcome in the staffing process. One comment was made to the effect that, in the context of specialized positions, competencies are not necessarily transferable from one organization to the next.

The majority of senior officials (inside and outside the PSC) suggested that PA needs to be “rebranded” or marketed as an attractive staffing tool or opportunity to staff positions efficiently and effectively. One senior official interviewed felt that the program could benefit from a name change. Two interviewees (external to the PSC) mentioned that the PA Program should be used as a practical tool to support common staffing initiatives; however, that would require interorganizational collaboration and leadership, as individual managers could not undertake this on their own. Organizations are collectively responsible for leveraging the public service talent. One of these respondents also mentioned that, if priority persons were pre-assessed, they could be included in organizational or PSC-led pools and, even if there were a fee, it would still be more cost-effective than running high-volume external processes such as for CR and AS positions. A senior official noted that PA can at times interfere with succession planning, when a priority must be considered over a deserving employee ready to advance; this sends a conflicting message to hiring managers (who should be encouraged to undertake succession planning) and to staff (who should be rewarded for good work). This was also raised in the context of having to reconsider Department Staffing Activity Report–planned staffing and strategic bridging of students who can no longer be hired when there are priority persons identified and appointed.

Key findings: *Priority entitlement is rooted in legislation, and the PSC is responsible for ensuring that the provisions of the PSEA and PSER with respect to priority entitlements are respected. The program is seen as being necessary (legally and morally) in protecting persons with priority entitlement facing career changes or other events beyond their control. Furthermore, the need for the program is expected to increase in the near future, with layoffs resulting from spending restraints. While the PA Program is seen to support staffing efforts in theory, the practical reality of its delivery appears to be that this support is limited by misconceptions among hiring managers (of priority persons being “poor candidates”), a preference among managers to select their own candidates and improper use of the program (clearances not being sought at the start of a process before other candidates are identified or considered).*

3. DESIGN

The issue of design and delivery was explored through all lines of evidence, including interviews, focus groups and surveys of priority persons, hiring managers and human resources (HR) professionals. A number of evaluation questions pertaining to program design and delivery were explored. The following sections examines elements of the program (Priority Information Management System, or PIMS; Web site; forms); the referral, screening and assessment of priority persons (and the appropriateness and accuracy of referrals); the timing and timeliness of the Priority Administration (PA) process; post-referral activity (feedback, recourse and the post-referral role played by the Public Service Commission (PSC)); knowledge, training and communications surrounding the program; monitoring; and governance and transition.

3.1 PRIORITY INFORMATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM, WEB SITE AND FORMS

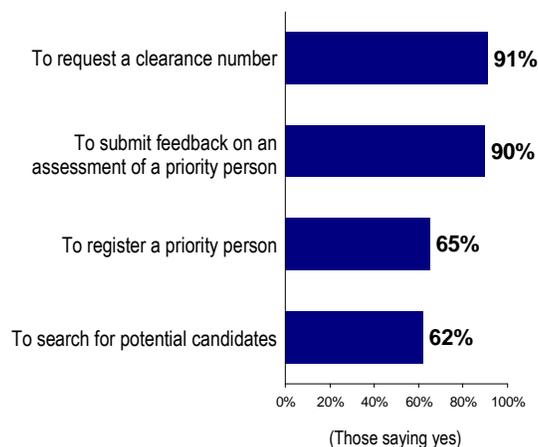
a) System use

According to survey results, virtually all HR professionals use PIMS to request clearance numbers (91%) and submit assessment feedback (90%). Considerably fewer use the system to register a priority person (65%) and search for potential candidates (62%). Use of the system to request a clearance and provide feedback on assessment are typically highest among HR professionals located in the National Capital Region (NCR), where the volumes are highest. The system is less often used to provide feedback among those located in the Quebec region (84%). Use of PIMS to search for potential priority persons is more frequent among HR staff with greater knowledge of the program. This is also the case for use of PIMS to register a priority person; those with the longest history in HR have the greatest knowledge of the program and training in PA/PIMS. It is also more frequently used to register priorities in the Western regions (76%), and least cited in the NCR (59%). According to program data, the greatest concentration of priority cases is in the NCR, followed by the Ontario and Quebec regions (see Section 4.1).

The survey findings suggest that HR advisors are using the system for more varied reasons than are HR assistants, which is consistent with findings from the focus group with HR advisors. Based on these focus group discussions, the role of HR assistants in the PA process appears to vary significantly depending on the organization. Some HR advisors noted that HR assistants play a minor role in the PA process, limited to entering data; others described assistants as having a more integral role. Several focus group participants noted that advisors maintain the contact with hiring managers, while assistants play more of a supporting or administrative role (the extent of which varies by organization).

Use of PIMS

“Have you ever used the Priority Information Management System (PIMS)?”
[HR Professionals]



n=697

PA Evaluation 2010

In terms of data quality, seven in ten HR respondents (72%) reported that they always ensure that the position number is accurate; in 18% of cases this is done “often,” and in the remainder of cases (10%) this is done only sometimes or never. The most consistent checking is reported in the Atlantic region, as well as among HR assistants.

In a separate exercise conducted to validate data quality in PIMS, two fields were of central focus: position number and rationale for non-advertised processes. These fields were designated as important because the PSC is hoping to use data from PIMS to reduce the current manual reporting burden of organizations through the quarterly reports, while improving the rigor of data related to non-advertised processes. This places an additional emphasis on the need for high quality in these fields. Further to a PSC study of advertisements derived from administrative data sources versus the quarterly staffing activity report template, initial attempts to match PIMS data to JAIS⁹ in spring 2010 resulted in limited coverage. The 2009-2010 data revealed that 60% of clearance numbers had a valid position number that could be used to match PIMS and JAIS information. After the data were cleaned up and processed, up to 85% of position numbers entered in PIMS could be matched to JAIS. However, to limit the data manipulation required to link the position numbers, it was recommended that there be a quality control mechanism in place to ensure that accurate information is entered in the system to improve data quality of PIMS for linkage purposes.

⁹ Job-based Analytical Information System

In addition, it was also suggested that data quality be reviewed through an extensive file review by PA staff once a quality control/monitoring framework is in place. This file review would explore such areas as coding entered in the system and appropriate rationale for not appointing a priority.

b) User-friendliness of the Web site

The PA Web site is perceived to be moderately or highly user-friendly, according to HR professionals surveyed. Almost half (47%) assessed their satisfaction with the user-friendliness of the site as high. Three in ten rated it as moderately user-friendly. Fewer than two in ten (15%) rated the Web site poorly in terms of user-friendliness. Those with a high level of familiarity with the PA process are more apt to view the Web site to be user-friendly.

User-friendliness of the PA Web site is evaluated more poorly by priority persons than by HR professionals. Only one in four (25%) priority persons surveyed reported a high level of satisfaction with the user-friendliness of the Web site. A similar proportion (27%) reported moderate satisfaction. Almost half (48%), however, indicated a low level of satisfaction on this point. (It should be noted that 32% did not respond to the question and were removed from the calculation for these findings.)

Priority persons who indicated having obtained little assistance with their job search reported a low level of satisfaction with the user-friendliness of the site much more often. Conversely, those placed through the PA Program and those referred by the PSC are more apt to have reported a high level of satisfaction. Those located in the NCR were less apt to respond to this question (49% did not respond).

c) Priority Administration forms

Only three in ten (28%) of priority persons reported a high level of satisfaction with PA-related forms. Another 32% reported moderate levels of satisfaction. Four in ten, however, rated their satisfaction as low. Satisfaction with PA forms increases with the recency of the date of the respondent's first priority entitlement. As well, those who received greater assistance with the job search, those placed through PA and those referred by the PSC are all typically more satisfied with forms.

d) Satisfaction with the Priority Information Management System

Overall satisfaction with PIMS is moderately high. Just over half (52%) of HR professionals surveyed expressed a high level of satisfaction. That said, only 8% rated themselves with a low level of satisfaction. (Four in ten were in the middle, with moderate satisfaction.)

Results regarding the level of privacy of PIMS are high, with three in four providing a positive rating. One quarter of survey respondents were unable to respond to this question and were removed from the calculation of results.

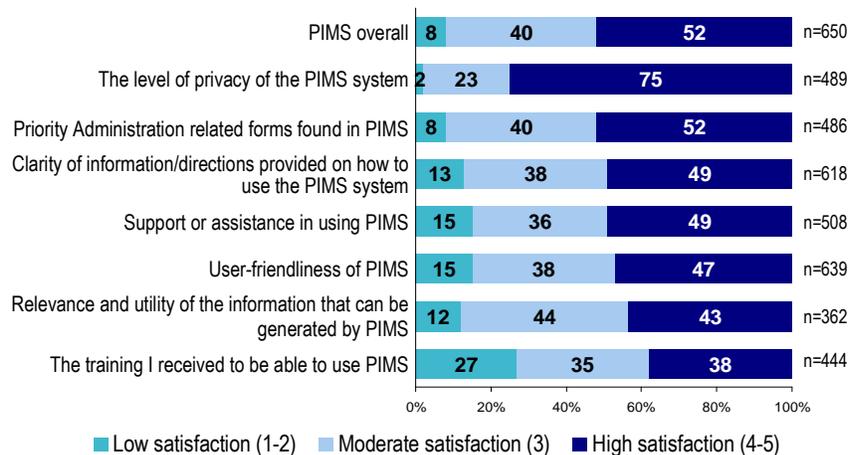
Half (49%) of HR professionals were satisfied with the clarity of information and directions provided on how to use PIMS, and with the support or assistance provided in using PIMS, according to survey results. Similar results are found regarding PA-related on-line pages (forms) to be filled in PIMS. Relevance and utility of the information generated by PIMS was found to be satisfactory by 43%.

Just under four in ten (38%) rated themselves satisfied with the training received to use PIMS, while 27% rated their satisfaction as low. The proportion of respondents satisfied with the training received increases with the number of years of experience in HR (from 21% of those with less than three years' experience to 44% of those with six years' experience or more).

Across the board, satisfaction was significantly higher among those with a high level of knowledge of the PA process and among respondents who have received training on PA or PIMS.

Satisfaction with PIMS Overall

“What is your satisfaction level with PIMS on...?” [HR Professionals]



PA Evaluation 2010

In interviews with PSC management and staff, several respondents described PIMS as a “good” system and noted that it is undergoing constant improvements based on feedback. They appreciated the active and ongoing efforts to solicit feedback on PIMS and to make corresponding improvements. One PSC interview respondent and focus groups participants identified a need to better define job types and skill codes, given the number of entry errors. One HR advisor noted that there is insufficient information to guide them, which often results in errors and corresponding delays. Similarly, PA advisors suggested that there may be a need to review and update skill codes to ensure that they remain relevant. They further noted that, in some instances, HR assistants are responsible for choosing skill codes without the supervision of an advisor, yet they are not qualified to do so. Finally, they also identified a significant gap between codes used by the Department of National Defence (DND) and the rest of the public service. Given that DND accounts for approximately a third of priority registrations, it would be worthwhile for PA advisors to work closely with DND HR advisors to provide them with training on coding and with assistance in selecting appropriate codes equivalent to military classifications, not solely based on salary equivalency. Evaluation findings point to a need for general training on coding for all major users, as well as PSC monitoring and correction of coding for increased accuracy of referrals.

Several PSC interview respondents noted that the weaknesses are not within the general design of the on-line pages or system, but primarily concern consistency of delivery and use of these both by PA advisors and home and hiring organizations. Lack of knowledge, experience and training are all perceived to contribute strongly to errors and inconsistencies.

HR advisors participating in the focus group expressed some frustration with the rigidity of PIMS in terms of being unable to update a request if they are only changing the type of appointment and not the criteria or qualifications (e.g. changing a request to a non-advertised rather than advertised process). Having to cancel and resubmit a request is perceived as adding a burden and time to the recruitment process. Additionally, one participant noted that it would be useful to be able to add more than one contact within PIMS for e-mail updates to avoid the situation of a process being stalled when the primary contact is away, absent or on vacation.

Key findings: *HR professionals expressed reasonably high levels of satisfaction with the PA Web site and with most aspects of PIMS. In interviews, PSC staff and management reported that PIMS has and continues to undergo improvements based on feedback provided. Several PSC interview respondents also noted that any weaknesses are not within the general design of the on-line pages or system, but primarily concern consistent delivery and use of these both by PA advisors and hiring organizations.*

Priority persons reported lower levels of satisfaction with the user-friendliness of the Web site and PA forms, although priority persons receiving a higher level of assistance with their job search are less apt to find these problematic.

3.2 REFERRALS, SCREENING AND ASSESSMENT OF PRIORITY PERSONS

a) Intensity of the referral experience

Priority persons reported having been referred to a position or competition for a position by the PSC four times on average. A small minority (6%) reported never having been referred to a position by the PSC, while 62% reported having been referred between one and nine times. Some priority persons reported a much higher number of referrals: 16% reported having been referred between 10 and 19 times, and 17% reported 20 or more referrals. According to PIMS data, the average number of referrals per priority person for indeterminate positions¹⁰ in 2010-2011 was 2.3 both nationally and in the NCR.

Priority persons located in the NCR were more apt to report a higher number of referrals. Those who became a priority as a result of relocation tended to report fewer referrals on average.

Most priority persons also reported having referred themselves to a position (78% have self-referred, while 22% have never self-referred). Of those who have self-referred, most priority persons (64%) have self-referred to positions fewer than ten times.

Priority persons who reported having received greater assistance with their job search are less likely to have self-referred to a position (28% of those who reported receiving a higher level of assistance have never self-referred, versus 17% of those who received less assistance with their search).

b) Appropriateness of screening and referrals

HR professionals expressed moderate satisfaction with the number of priority persons referred per appointment process. Hiring managers reported even less satisfaction, believing the referrals to be too broad. A total of 42% of HR professionals, but only 32% of hiring managers, are highly satisfied with the number of persons referred per process. Another 49% of hiring managers, and 44% of HR staff, are moderately satisfied. Those with higher knowledge of the PA process were more apt to express satisfaction on this point.

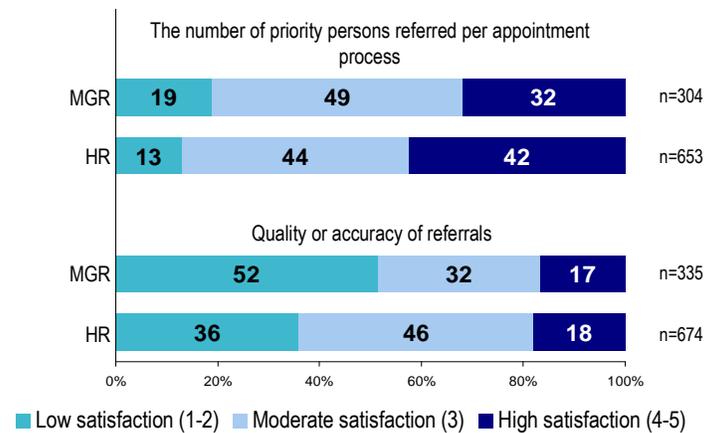
¹⁰ Note that only clearance requests for indeterminate positions used to calculate average as requests for term positions are sent directly to organizations for screening; therefore, all priorities identified on term positions are automatically 'referred.'

Some HR advisors participating in focus groups and one PSC manager interviewed noted that the number of referrals per process can be particularly high (e.g. up to 15) in processes for administrative or clerical positions, where there tend to be the greatest number of priority persons. Other HR advisors, however, said that they have never experienced this situation, or that this was the exception rather than the rule. Additionally, they note that there may be little to distinguish priority persons in some junior classification categories. Some suggested a random selection method or cap on the number referred to limit priority persons to a manageable number (e.g. 10) per process. Others argued that it would be difficult to balance a cap with the requirements of the legislation and the rights of priority persons. They noted that, if a maximum of five priority persons were referred and none found suitable, it would be unfair to issue a clearance knowing that there are many other (potentially qualified) priority persons for the position. Although a limit on referrals is not legally possible, it nonetheless points to a need for better screening capacity.

More than the number of persons referred per process, satisfaction with the fit between referrals and the essential qualifications of positions is a significant concern to hiring managers and HR professionals. Only 17% of hiring managers and 18% of HR professionals surveyed expressed a high level of satisfaction with the quality or accuracy of referrals. Low levels of satisfaction are most prominent among hiring managers, with more than half (52%) expressing low satisfaction. HR professionals not satisfied is still high, but not as high at 36%. In both groups, however, those not satisfied far outweigh those who are strongly positive. Limited satisfaction with the quality or accuracy of referrals is higher among those with greater knowledge of the process and among those who have assessed four or more priority persons.

Screening Process – Referrals

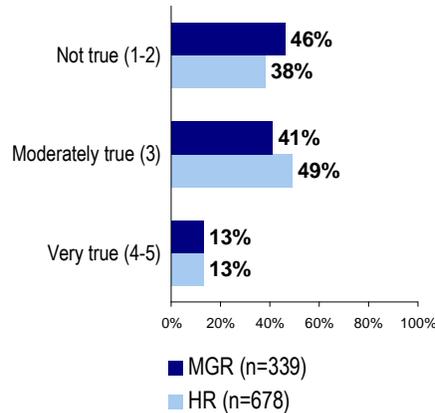
“What is your level of satisfaction with the following elements of PA?”



Further to this, only 13% of hiring managers and HR professionals agreed that “priority persons are generally a good fit for the essential qualifications.” In fact, again, disagreement far outstrips agreement on this measure, with more than a third of HR professionals and almost half of hiring managers disagreeing.

Referrals

“Priority persons are a good fit for the essential qualifications.”



Based on survey evidence, priority persons generally believe that they met the essential qualifications for the last position to which they were referred. Eight in ten priority persons agreed that they met the essential qualifications to a great extent in the most recent process to which they were referred; 11% felt that they met these to a moderate extent and only 7% felt that they were a poor fit for the essential qualifications. This agreement is much higher, however, among those who were actually appointed as a result of this most recent process (94% felt that they met the qualifications to a high extent).

The lion’s share of hiring managers and the majority of HR professionals are of the opinion that PSC referral of priority persons is too broad. Overall, 82% of hiring managers and 68% of HR advisors are of the opinion that referrals are made too broadly. Only 30% of HR staff and 17% of hiring managers believe that referrals are accurate or “about right.”

This opinion is less strong among priority persons but nonetheless is shared by three in ten priority persons (30%). The majority (64%), however, believe that referrals have been fairly accurate. Priority persons who are surplus or have been laid off are more apt to believe that they are generally referred too broadly, while those with priority entitlement as a result of a relocation are more apt to believe the referrals to be accurate. Those who have been successfully placed are also more apt to agree that referrals have been accurate.

Table 3.1: Perceptions of referrals: hiring managers, HR professionals and priority persons

Survey of hiring managers and HR professionals (n=1142)			Survey of priority persons (n=371)	
Response	Hiring managers n=307	HR n=679	Response	Priority persons
Too broad	82%	68%	Always too broadly	8%
			Mostly too broadly	22%
About right	17%	30%	Mostly about right	48%
			Always about right	16%
Too narrow	1%	2%	-	-

Despite the fact that priority persons are less concerned with the accuracy of referrals, priority persons surveyed expressed only limited satisfaction with the screening process (e.g. whether priority persons are being referred to the right type of jobs). Only 25% of priority persons expressed a high level of satisfaction with the screening process. Another 28% rated themselves as moderately satisfied. Almost half (47%) reported low satisfaction.

Low satisfaction with the screening process is less common among those who have more recently received priority entitlement. Low satisfaction is also less common among priority persons who are being relocated and more marked among those who are surplus or laid off. Satisfaction is higher among Canadian Forces (CF) and Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) medically released personnel. This is also true of those who received greater assistance with their job search, those successfully placed and those referred by the PSC.

Although satisfaction with the screening process is low, it is important to note that there is a significant difference in the process undertaken for term versus indeterminate positions. If the position is indeterminate, PIMS sends the names to PSC PA advisors for a secondary screening. The PSC will compare the job specifications in the request to the attributes of the identified priority person(s). If priorities are being referred, PIMS sends the organization the names of those priority persons so they may be assessed for the position. Organizations MUST contact any priority persons referred to them in this manner for assessment before all others. If the position is determinate (term), PIMS sends the names of identified priorities directly to the organization, without additional screening by PSC staff. In this situation, organizations may perform their own screening of the identified priority persons based on information available from PIMS. A PA advisor will then monitor the screening performed by the organization to ensure the validity of the information provided. Since the survey did not ask about whether priorities were being referred for term or indeterminate positions, it is difficult to assess these results through this filter.

In interviews and focus groups, concerns were expressed by priority persons, hiring managers and HR advisors interviewed regarding the fit between essential qualifications and priority referrals. First, some priority persons interviewed described being referred to positions for which they did not feel qualified, only to be questioned as to why they declined the referral and told that this may jeopardize their entitlement. As well, some hiring managers interviewed and HR advisors (interviewed and participating in the focus group) noted that there is not always a good fit between referrals and the position, which leads to frustration on the part of both the priority person and the hiring manager.

HR advisors participating in the focus group described the accuracy of referrals as being a complex interplay of the information in the priority persons file, the PA Program referrals and the information available on a position from the hiring organization. Several further noted that it is difficult to ensure accurate referrals in categories such as AS or CR, where there is a tremendous breadth of positions, and to ensure that priority persons are referred properly. They suggested both making the information on a position available to the priority person when they are referred, and also additional counselling with priority persons at the time they are registered in PIMS to ensure that they are aware of the types of positions to which they may be referred and narrow the scope to what they are actually interested in.

HR advisors participating in the focus group noted that mismatching of priority persons to positions occurs less often in situations of self-referral. When self-referring, priority persons are often applying for a promotion; they feel confident that they qualify and tailor their CV and application according to the specific position. They also noted, however, that in these situations, the priority persons can be assessed along with other candidates and are not considered to the exclusion of others. According to the *Guide on Priority Administration*, because self-referrals often occur after an organization has started its staffing process, the PSC will allow self-referred priority persons seeking positions at levels higher than their substantive level to be assessed along with the rest of the candidates involved in the process, provided that the organization does not jeopardize the duration of the priority person's entitlement in so doing. For self-referrals to equivalent or lower-level positions, the priority person must be assessed before the other candidates to ensure fairness in their assessment and to avoid having them compared with the rest of the candidates.

In the focus group with HR advisors (and in an interview with a hiring manager), several participants noted that it is also not uncommon to have the same priority referred several times for the same or similar positions, despite their previously declared lack of interest in the type of work (e.g. in a correctional facility) or where they have been previously assessed as unqualified. The same situation can occur in a collective process, where the same individual is referred repeatedly to the same stream in the same pool. The hiring organization has a responsibility to contact the priorities referred, according to several respondents, which is a source of frustration given the time required to contact and assess them (when they may already know from prior experience that they are unsuited or uninterested in the position). It was suggested that this type of information (e.g. lack of interest in the type of work or unqualified for a specific position) be updated in the priority persons file to avoid this situation. It was also suggested that this may be alleviated somewhat by making the statement of merit criteria and information available to the priority candidate each time they are referred (i.e. making the process transparent) to give the candidate a chance to decline the referral or to prepare if they are interested or feel qualified.

HR advisors participating in the focus group, and several hiring managers interviewed, also acknowledged that priority persons are not always well prepared for an appointment process, or that their résumé is not always well suited to the process. One HR advisor (focus group) identified a potential need to provide priority persons with some assistance or training on job searching within the public service to help them prepare. One hiring manager interviewed noted that CVs received from priority persons tend to be “generic” and insufficiently tailored to the position under recruitment, placing the priority person at a disadvantage over other potential candidates whom the hiring manager may have in mind. Two hiring managers interviewed argued that priorities are rarely given sufficient information to prepare for a process, and are often unaware that they have been referred or of the nature of the position to which they have been referred. In interviews, a senior official external to the PSC identified a need for the PSC to play a greater role in supporting priority persons who may never have been to an interview or prepared a résumé before. It may be difficult for the home organization to provide this support consistently to priorities spread out across the country.

PSC staff and management interviewed mentioned a tendency to make referrals too broadly, particularly in cases where advisors lack experience. They also pointed to a lack of consistent guidelines available. One interview respondent notes that there may be inconsistencies, in that “no two advisors manage the same process exactly alike.”

PA advisors participating in the focus group identified several obstacles to ensuring accuracy in referrals. They noted that the description of the positions received from hiring organizations can be very generic, which makes it difficult to determine whether a priority person is qualified. For example, if organizations only specify a need for project management skills in the essential qualifications, when they are actually seeking a specialized scientist, referrals will be too broad. This points to a need for the inclusion of sufficient details in the statement of merit criteria. Alternatively, where a priority person’s CV suggests that they may be a fit for a position but lacks the details to be sure whether or not it is a precise fit, advisors may prefer to err on the side of caution and refer more broadly than risk a missed opportunity. PA advisors also noted that they are not responsible for referrals where term positions are involved (these are generated by PIMS).

PA advisors concurred that there may be room to increase transparency by increasing the role that priority persons play within the process. Advisors noted that some hiring organizations will contact priority referrals by e-mail, provide them with the statement of merit criteria for the position and ask them to indicate their qualifications and/or interest in the position. This provides the priority person with an opportunity to tailor their CV, should they be interested. PA advisors suggested introducing a matching tool similar to the one used by the Federal Student Work Experience Program (FSWEP).¹¹

¹¹ The FSWEP computerized inventory is designed to search for and select candidates who meet the job requirements set by the hiring organization.

c) Assessment experience of priority persons

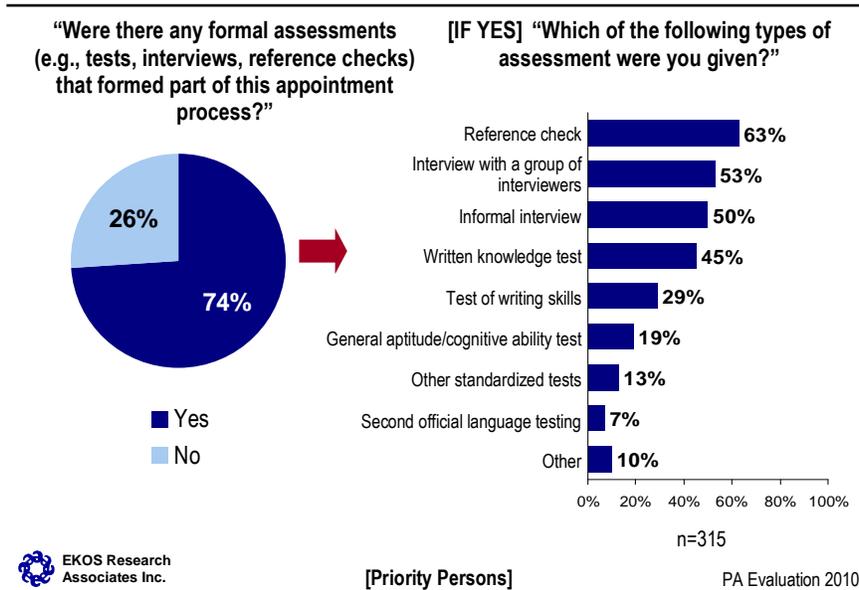
Over four in ten priority persons who have participated in at least one appointment process report having been assessed at the same time as other candidates in a process (42%). Two in ten have never experienced this situation (18% did not report having been assessed simultaneously with other candidates), while 40% did not respond to this question (and were likely not aware of whether there were other candidates being assessed in a given process).

Priority persons referred by the PSC must be assessed prior to other candidates, to ensure fairness in their assessment and to avoid having them compared with the rest of the candidates. Only in the case of a priority person requesting consideration for a higher-level position (through self-referral) can a hiring organization opt to assess such priority persons along with other candidates. These assessments must be conducted in a timely manner to ensure that priority persons' entitlements are not jeopardized.

Most priority persons (74%) who have participated in at least one appointment process through the PA Program (whether self-referred or referred by the PSC) noted that some type of formal assessment (e.g. test, interview or reference check) was undertaken as part of the process (regardless of whether they were appointed or not). For one quarter, however, no formal assessment was undertaken. Those who were successfully placed are more apt to report having undergone some type of formal assessment (87%).

In terms of the type of formal assessment conducted, most priority persons surveyed reported having undergone a reference check (63%). Over half reported participating in a formal interview with more than one interviewer (53%); 50% reported participating in an informal interview or meeting with the hiring manager; and 45% reported having written a knowledge test. Less common are a test of writing skills (29%), a general aptitude or cognitive ability test (19%), other standardized tests (13%) or official language testing (7%).

Assessment Experience



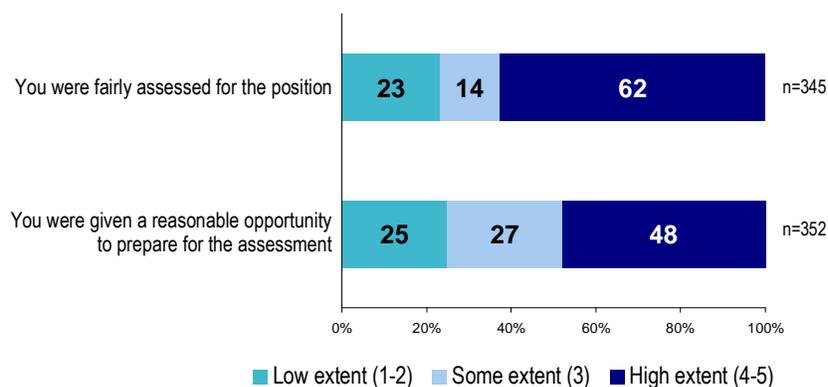
Those actually placed through the PA Program or the last assessment process in which they participated are more apt to report having participated in an informal interview (64%) or reference check (82%), but less likely to report having written a knowledge test (31%). Those referred but never placed are more likely to have written a knowledge test (59%).

Priority persons surveyed were somewhat satisfied with the assessment process experienced in the most recent referral in which they participated. Six in ten said that they were assessed fairly for the position to a high extent. This compares favourably with the results of the Survey of Staffing – Cycles 1 and 2, which showed that between 42% and 48% of survey respondents (public service candidates) agreed to a high extent that they were fairly assessed on their abilities, knowledge and personal suitability. Returning to the survey of priority persons, half said that they were given a reasonable opportunity to prepare for the assessment. That said, there is some dichotomy in these results. One in four also said that they were not assessed fairly and were not given reasonable opportunity to prepare (i.e. rated each of these to a low extent).

The more recent the priority appointment or entitlement, the more likely priority persons feel that they were given a reasonable opportunity to prepare. Priority persons who indicated that they received greater assistance with their search are also more apt to agree that they received sufficient opportunity to prepare.

Experience of Priority Persons with Assessment Process

“To what extent did the following occur in last referral?” [Priority Persons]



Priority persons who are currently employed in the public sector, placed through the PA Program, appointed through their most recent appointment process or referred directly by the PSC are all more apt to agree that they were assessed only on essential qualifications.

In interviews and focus groups, it was noted that, in collective processes, managers will often have fewer essential qualifications and more assets that will be applied later on in the process based on the requirements of the positions to be filled. In a sense, asset qualifications in those processes are often used as essential qualifications, but because priorities only need to meet the essential qualifications, they may be ill-equipped to occupy these positions, which is a source of frustration for all involved. In those instances, managers should perhaps be encouraged to identify essential qualifications by stream.

Those employed in the public sector, those who received greater assistance with their job search, those placed through the PA Program and those referred by PSC are all much more likely to feel that they were fairly assessed in their most recent appointment process.

d) Priority persons' refusal rate

Hiring managers and HR professionals were asked to indicate whether, in their experience, priority persons have ever refused job opportunities for which they were deemed qualified. Fully 65% indicated that priority persons have refused such opportunities. The incidence of refusal is somewhat lower in the NCR (at 59%). Hiring managers are less apt to have experienced this (58%), compared to HR advisors or assistants. The incidence increases with years of experience in HR and the number of priority persons assessed.

The reasons given for priority persons refusing opportunities include type of work (30%), work location (23%) and tenure (12%). Unavailability (7%) and group and level (4%) are identified far less often as reasons for refusal. Work location is more often identified as a reason for refusal outside the NCR and the Quebec region, while type of work is more often the reason for refusal identified by respondents in the NCR.

In interviews with priority persons, several reported declining positions outside their geographical area, or declining a referral to a position for which they did not feel qualified.

Results of both the surveys and interviews suggest that the refusal of priority persons to be referred relates to the broader issues of mismatched referrals and referrals that are too broad.

One senior official interviewed (external to the PSC) suggested that home organizations should be encouraged to take a bigger role in following up with priorities who are self-eliminating in processes, to understand why and to ensure that their decisions are merited. This respondent suggested that the home organization be notified every time one of their priorities is referred. Although this could be possible for surplus employees, other priority types would need to consent to this.

Key findings: *Most priority persons have been referred to an appointment process at least once by the PSC, and report having received an average of four referrals from the PSC. Fully three quarters of priority persons report having self-referred to at least one appointment process. Roughly three quarters of priority persons also report having participated in some type of formal assessment (e.g. interview, test or reference check) in their most recent process.*

Satisfaction among hiring managers and HR professionals with the number of referrals made per process is moderate. Concern was expressed regarding the accuracy of referrals, or the “fit” between priority persons referred and the essential qualifications of positions. Hiring managers, in particular, are not satisfied on this point. Priority persons also expressed low satisfaction with the screening and referral process (whether priority persons are being referred to the right type of job).

Most hiring managers and HR professionals are of the opinion that PSC referral of priority persons is generally too broad. This perspective is less commonly expressed by priority persons themselves, but is nonetheless shared by one third of priority persons.

PA advisors noted that generic position descriptions and lack of clarity around essential qualifications and corresponding skills of priority persons can represent obstacles to accurate referrals, and state that they prefer to refer broadly rather than to have a priority person miss out on a potential opportunity. PA advisors also identified a potential need to review and update skill codes to improve referrals. Hiring managers, HR professionals and PA advisors all concurred that increasing the role of the priority person in the process (by increasing transparency of referrals) may help alleviate this situation.

Priority persons express limited satisfaction with the assessment conducted as part of their most recent referral experience. Less than half believe that they were given sufficient opportunity to prepare for their

most recent appointment process. Furthermore, six in ten believe that they were assessed only on the essential qualifications of the position, and the same proportion agree strongly that they were fairly assessed (although it is important to note that over one in ten were unable to respond to these questions).

Survey results and interview findings suggest that priority persons decline job opportunities or even referrals for processes for a variety of reasons. Work location, type of work and fit with qualifications are some of the reasons why priority persons may decline potential opportunities.

3.3 TIMING AND TIMELINESS OF THE PRIORITY ADMINISTRATION PROCESS

a) Timing of clearances and volume of requests

Program data indicates that the average amount of time required for the PSC to provide referrals was two days in 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 (and has increased to three days in 2010-2011). Following referrals, hiring organizations take on average 13 days to provide feedback on the assessment of referrals (14 days to date in 2010-2011). Following this feedback, it takes the PSC five days on average to review feedback and issue a clearance number.

Table 3.2: Time to clearance when priority persons are referred*: national averages 2008-2009 to 2010-2011

Fiscal year	Average # days for PSC to refer	Average # days for org. to return feedback	Average # days for PSC to provide clearance (includes feedback review)	Average total <u>calendar days</u> between date request rec'd and clearance # provided
2008-2009	2	13	5	20
2009-2010	2	13	5	20
2010-2011	3	14	6	23

Source: PIMS. Indeterminate clearance requests with referrals excluding cancelled requests – up to and including February 15 (updated February 24, 2011)

*On average, PIMS issues an automatic clearance (no priority persons identified) in 48% of clearance requests. Auto-clearances are excluded from the national averages.

The time required to provide referrals and issue clearance numbers varies by region or province, largely as a result of differences in volume and PA personnel.

**Table 3.3: Time to clearance when priority persons are referred: regional averages
2010-2011***

Province/Territory Base office code	Average # days for PSC to refer	Average # days for org. to return feedback	Average # days for PSC to provide clearance (includes feedback review)	Average total calendar days between date request rec'd and clearance # provided
British Columbia	4	19	7	30
Alberta	2.5	11	3	16.5
Saskatchewan	2	14.5	4	20.5
Manitoba	2	20	4	26
Ontario (excl. NCEOR)	1	15.5	5	21.5
NCEOR	3.5	12	6	21.5
Quebec (excl. NCEOR)	2	20	5	27
New Brunswick	4	20	5	29
Nova Scotia	4	22	7	33
Newfoundland	4	25	9	38
Prince Edward Island	4	17.5	5	26.5
Nunavut	.5	13	7	20.5
Northwest Territories	2	9	10	21
Yukon	5	8	8.5	21.5
NATIONAL average	3	14	6	23

Source: PIMS. Indeterminate clearance requests with referrals excluding cancelled requests – up to and including February 15 (updated February 24, 2011)

*On average, PIMS issued an automatic clearance (no priority persons identified) in 48% of clearance requests (2006-2007 to 2010-2011). Auto-clearances are excluded from the national averages.

In terms of volume, the number of requests nationally has been decreasing from 47 580 in 2008-2009 to 31 939 in 2010-2011. However, there is still a month and a half to go before the end of the fiscal year. Over the same period, the proportion of priority persons identified has increased from 49% to 61%. At the regional level, 51% of service requests come from the National Capital and Eastern Ontario Region (NCEOR), followed by 11% from Quebec and 7% from Ontario (excluding the NCEOR).

Table 3.4: Number of national service requests for the period from 2006-2007 to 2010-2011

Fiscal year	Service requests received	Number of positions requiring clearance (term and indeterminate)	Requests auto-cleared	Service requests with priority persons identified
2006-2007	35 418	64 473	17 594	17 824
2007-2008	41 951	76 202	22 332	19 619
2008-2009	47 580	78 800	24 445	23 135
2009-2010	42 730	68 775	19 014	23 716
2010-2011*	31 939	49 199	12 584	19 355

Source: PIMS* (2010-2011 up to and including February 15, 2011)

Table 3.5: Number of regional service requests for the period from April 1, 2010, to February 15, 2011

Province	Service requests received	Number of positions requiring clearance (term and indeterminate)	Requests auto-cleared	Service requests with priority persons identified
British Columbia	2 412	3 084	990	1 422
Alberta	1 677	2 069	803	874
Saskatchewan	949	1 063	539	410
Manitoba	1 182	1 458	592	590
Ontario (excl. NCEOR)	2 392	3 525	1 215	1 177
NCEOR	16 307	27 782	4 908	11 399
Quebec	3 517	4 891	1 803	1 714
New Brunswick	965	1 914	438	527
Nova Scotia	1 406	1 864	602	804
Newfoundland	512	823	304	208
Prince Edward Island	215	263	115	100
Northwest Territories	182	194	124	58
Nunavut	108	115	81	27
Yukon	89	92	57	32
Outside Canada	26	62	13	13
Total:	31 939	49 199	12 584	19 355

Source: PIMS (2010-2011 up to and including February 15, 2011)

b) Satisfaction with timeliness

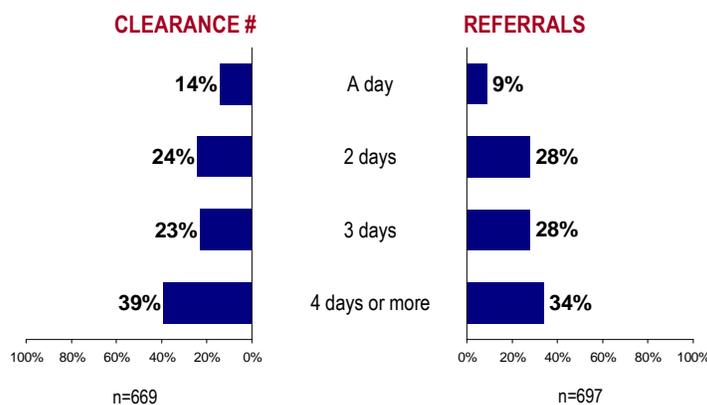
Given the nature of the program, one that is mandated and which HR professionals and hiring managers are legislated to use, it may not be surprising that satisfaction levels regarding timing and turnaround time are modest. In fact, across the board, generally four in ten expressed positive views, while another four in ten were modest in their ratings and one in five were negative. In terms of timeliness of the issuance of clearances specifically, 38% of hiring managers and 46% of HR staff say that they are satisfied. HR professionals in Ontario are more positive than those in other regions (66% expressed satisfaction). Satisfaction is lowest in the NCR, where only 37% are satisfied. One senior official interviewed noted that the PSC was slower at providing clearance numbers and referrals during the summer months.

Results are similar for referrals. In terms of satisfaction, 42% of HR professionals and 36% of hiring managers are satisfied. Similar proportions are moderately satisfied. Among managers, just over one in four (27%) expressed limited satisfaction, although this number is lower among HR professionals (17%). Satisfaction levels also follow the same regional patterns as is found for issuing clearances.

From the reporting of actual time taken for referrals, again, one in three reported a one- to two-day turnaround (37%), while 28% said that it takes three days. One in three (34%) reported four or more days. According to PIMS data, the referrals are received within 2.2 days. Again, Ontario, one of the regions with two PA advisors, reported the quickest turnaround.

Reported Turnaround for Clearance and Referrals

“Based on your experience with the majority of cases, how long does it generally take to receive a clearance number/referrals after submitting a priority clearance request?” [HR Professionals]

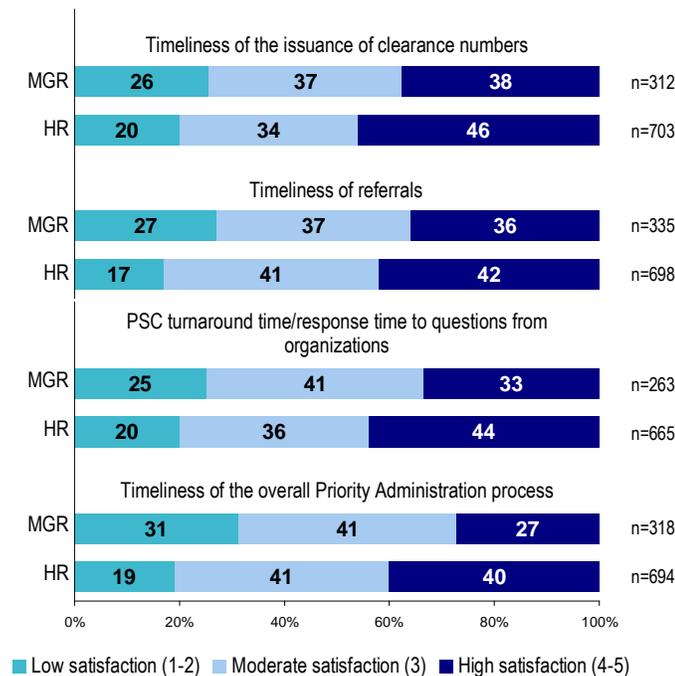


Ratings of satisfaction with the overall timeliness of the PA process are even more tepid among hiring managers. Although four in ten HR professionals indicated satisfaction, only one in four hiring managers said the same. Another 41% are moderately satisfied in each group. One in five (19%) HR professionals said that they are not satisfied, and this rises to three in ten hiring managers. In this case, the Ontario region stands out as considerably more satisfied, although even in this region only 56% are satisfied. It should be noted that, according to PIMS, while PA advisors take roughly two days to refer cases and five days to issue a clearance once feedback is received on any assessment of priority cases, hiring organizations take an average of 13 days to return the assessment feedback to PSC.

Similarly, just over four in ten HR professionals and one in three hiring managers said that they are satisfied with the turnaround time for the PSC to respond to questions. Roughly four in ten (36% of HR professionals and 41% of hiring managers) said that they are only moderately satisfied. One in five HR professionals and one in four hiring managers said that they were not very satisfied. As with other results, findings are more positive in Quebec and Ontario.

Timeliness

“What is your level of satisfaction with the following elements of PA?”



PA Program advisors and managers have a different view, based on results of the interviews. Although many would not be surprised to hear that the hiring organizations feel that the process is slow and costly in terms of recruitment time, PA staff maintained that they have fairly strict standards for turnaround time on issuing clearances and referrals and that, for the most part, these are met. Several PA advisors suggested that the PA process can take quite a long time if hiring organizations are not quick in their own responses. Also, several PA staff said that, when hiring organizations do not bring PA into the recruitment process early enough, they are stuck at the last minute trying to push through all of the steps in a very compressed period of time. If hiring organizations come to PA early in their process and complete their own steps in a timely manner, then the entire PA process can be completed within two weeks.

HR advisors participating in the focus group noted that clearances are generally provided quite promptly if there are no priorities (e.g. within three business days), and were largely more positive than was reflected in the survey findings. Nonetheless, some HR advisors also said that the level of service has been eroding in the past year or so from what they have come to expect in the past. When priorities are referred, participants also suggested that they experienced little delay in the provision of referrals from the PSC. They noted that the delay, and the frustration, result from the time required to contact and assess the priorities referred. As discussed under quality of referrals, this is particularly frustrating when the match between priorities and the job is not high and when the same (mismatched) priorities are referred over and over, with many priorities having no interest in the positions for which they are being referred. According to some HR advisors in the focus group, priorities may take weeks to respond to their call, introducing significant delay to the process and resulting in frustration for HR staff and hiring managers. They also noted that priorities can be referred from across the country, adding to the challenge of contacting and assessing them. They may also have to undertake testing with priority if this is required of the process. Some advisors noted that the PSC may follow up with them to inquire about why they are taking so long in assessing referrals. The number of referrals can also be a source of delay. In some cases, advisors indicated an average of only two or three referrals, but several cited many instances of ten or more referrals. They also noted that, if the process drags on, the PSC may refer additional priority persons to the process, thus adding to the work load. According to the *Guide on Priority Administration*, the PSC expects assessments of priority persons to be conducted within 60 days of a referral. Delays in assessments (i.e. over 60 days) may result in the PSC cancelling a request and requiring that a new request be submitted.

Furthermore, HR advisors participating in the focus group described inconsistencies in the advice or service they receive from PA advisors. In the words of one advisor, “we have a fantastic contact; the problem is that when they are away we get different advice.” Another noted, “we try to go to the same couple of advisors every time over all others because we know they will answer us promptly and clearly.” They also described “ups and downs” in terms of the speed of advice, information, referrals and clearances received from PA advisors. They noted that in periods of high demand or when advisors are away, service is understandably slower. One HR advisor interviewed noted a recent decline in the speed of service received.

A few hiring managers interviewed expressed frustration with the timing of PA within the staffing process, or the time that obtaining a clearance can add to the time to staff. One hiring manager interviewed suggested that the clearance needs to happen quickly at the start of the process in order to ensure fairness to priority persons (that they receive a fair assessment before other candidates) and to other staff who may be considered for the position.

In interviews with senior officials external to the PSC, two interview respondents noted the importance of obtaining referrals as quickly as possible at the outset of a staffing process to expedite the process. They suggested that, once a clearance is provided on a staffing action, the organization should be free to proceed. Managers are frustrated if they receive a referral later in the process when they are already close to issuing a letter of offer. This can occur in situations where a priority person self-refers.

c) Impact of Priority Administration on speed of recruitment and workload

In terms of the perceived impact of PA on the overall speed of recruitment, the HR community is largely negative, with only 20% saying that it has a positive impact and 62% providing a negative rating. Some 17% said that it had no impact. So, for every individual who recognized the positive benefit of the availability of a pool of candidates, three felt that the impact is negative on the speed of their recruitment process. Hiring managers were marginally even more negative than HR professionals; 67% said that the impact is negative in this segment. It is the larger organizations (with 2 000 or more employees) that more often reported a negative impact (68% saying the impact is negative, compared with 55% of HR representatives in smaller organizations). Similarly, those HR respondents who have assessed more priority persons (four or more) were also more inclined to see the impact on recruitment as negative. Also, representatives in Western regions (where there are fewer PA advisors) were more apt to be negative (69% providing a negative rating).

Table 3.6: Perceived impact on the speed of the overall recruitment process

Impact of PA on the speed of the entire recruitment process (hiring managers and HR professionals n=1044)		
	Negative impact on speed of recruitment (1-2)	Positive impact on speed of recruitment (4-5)
Overall	62%	20%
Organization size		
<2 000	55%	25%
2 000+	68%	17%
Region		
NCR	63%	19%
Atlantic	59%	24%
Quebec	57%	24%
Ontario	56%	25%
Western provinces	69%	18%
Position		
Manager	67%	17%
HR	61%	22%
No. of priority persons assessed		
1-3	66%	17%
4+	70%	18%

Just over one in four HR advisors responding to the survey agreed strongly (28%) that PIMS places a considerable workload on HR specialists. Just over one third said that this was moderately true, and one third said that this was not the case.

d) Efficiency of running concurrent processes

The vast majority of hiring managers and HR professionals reported being aware that they can run other components of the staffing process concurrently while waiting for priority clearance (94%). This awareness was highest among HR advisors (at 97%).

Nine in ten hiring managers and HR professionals (90%) said that they run other components of the staffing process while waiting for a priority clearance. Half of those who run other components concurrently said that this has a high impact on saving time in the staffing process. Hiring managers were less apt to agree with this (42%). Some 18% said that it saves little or no time. Four in ten said that it saves a moderate amount of time. Those in the HR community who have a higher knowledge of PA and PIMS were more apt to say that running concurrent processes has a high impact on time savings.

In interviews with PSC staff and management, most respondents agreed that the potential to run components of the staffing process concurrently is generally known among hiring organizations. However,

they cautioned that there is a limit as to what can and should be done in advance of obtaining a clearance. Hiring organizations can prepare the job advertisement but are not supposed to interview or assess candidates prior to clearance. In the words of one interview respondent, “they don’t want to go too far down the road only to find out it was a waste of time.” Interview respondents cautioned that the rights of priority persons can be compromised if organizations proceed before obtaining a clearance. If priorities are referred after an organization has already received candidates of their own, they may be reluctant to consider priorities over their own candidates.

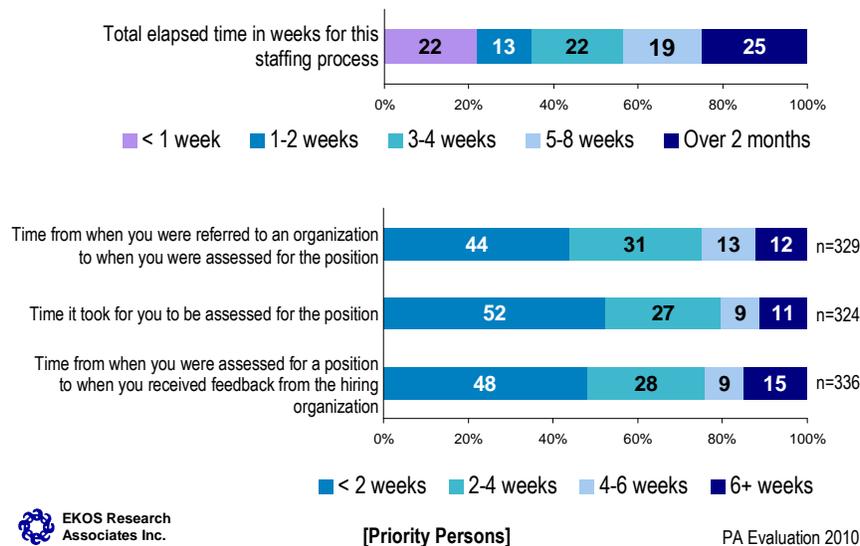
e) Timing and timeliness of the process for priority persons

Priority persons in the survey indicated a much longer time line. For example, 54% of priority persons said that it took up to two weeks for the PSC to contact them about their priority entitlement (although it is unclear whether this delay was a result of the home organization or PA staff). Three or four weeks were reported by 24%, and over one in five said that it took more than a month to receive a call from the PSC. It is interesting to see that the time frame was shorter among those who reported assistance with job searches from the home organization, suggesting that home organizations that are on top of the process result in quicker contact. In fact, the average time for PSC contact in an active home organization was 3.3 weeks, compared with 8.3 weeks in non-supportive organizations.

The total elapsed time reported by priority persons for the full staffing process (among those referred) was just over nine weeks. This is considerably longer among earlier cases (whose first priority entitlement was before 2009) and shortest for cases that have taken place since April 2010. Again, the time frame was different for priority persons from supportive home organizations (i.e. 6 versus 12 weeks). It was also shorter for those in administrative and program classifications relative to other employees, and in cases where they were referred by the PSC, relative to self-referred cases.

Looking at specific time frames for referral to assessment, assessment and receipt of feedback, roughly half of applicable cases said that they waited less than two weeks. Another 30% said that it took two to four weeks for these steps to occur, and the rest (between one in five and one in four) said that these steps took longer than a month each.

Turnaround Time



For priority persons who were appointed to an indeterminate position as a result of their priority entitlement, four in ten said that it took less than five months to be appointed to their position from the start of their priority entitlement. Another one in four (24%) said that it took 6 to 11 months from entitlement to appointment. For 13%, it took 12 to 18 months and another 7% described an 18-month process from entitlement to their appointment to the position. For a full 18% of cases, the full period between gaining their entitlement to their appointment took two years or more to complete. Again, the length of process reported was considerably shorter among those with a more supportive home organization, suggesting that more active involvement with priorities results in quicker referrals and appointments. It should also be noted that priority persons can request not to be referred for portions of their entitlement period.

Given these long time frames, it is not surprising to find that satisfaction with the PA Program among priority persons is only modest with regard to timeliness. Only one in three priority persons (29%) said that they were satisfied. Another 28% were modestly satisfied. Four in ten (43%) were not satisfied. Satisfaction was greater among those reporting more supportive home organizations (45% satisfied, compared with only 19 satisfied among the less-supported respondents, where fully 56% were not satisfied). Satisfaction was also higher among CF/RCMP members who have been medically released (36%) and lowest among surplus employees, where 51% are not satisfied. Naturally, satisfaction was also higher among priority persons who have been successfully placed and lowest among those who have been referred but not placed.

Key findings: Satisfaction with the timeliness of the issuance of clearances and referrals is modest at best. Ratings of satisfaction with the overall timing of the PA process are even more tepid. PA staff maintained that they have fairly strict standards for turnaround time on issuing clearances and referrals and that, for the most part, these are met. They suggested that delays typically occur within the hiring organization. HR advisors in the focus group concurred that clearances and referrals are generally provided quite promptly, noting that delays typically result from the time required to contact and assess the priorities referred. The perceived low accuracy of referrals exacerbates this situation. In terms of perceived impact on the overall speed of recruitment, the HR community is also largely negative.

The ability to run other components of the staffing process concurrently while waiting for priority clearance is well known by hiring organizations. However, PSC staff and management caution that the rights of priority persons can be compromised if organizations proceed before obtaining a clearance. If priorities are referred after an organization has already received candidates of their own, they may be reluctant to consider priorities over their own candidates.

Priority persons in the survey indicated that they experienced longer time lines in terms of the PA process, with the reported time for initial contact by the PSC being three to four weeks for half of the respondents. The reported time frame for contact is shorter among those who reported assistance with job searches from the home organization. The total lapsed time reported by priority persons for the full staffing process (among those referred) is just over nine weeks; it is considerably shorter for cases that have taken place since April 2010. Given these long time frames, it is not surprising to find that satisfaction of priority persons with the PA Program is only modest with regard to timeliness.

3.4 POST-REFERRAL ACTIVITY

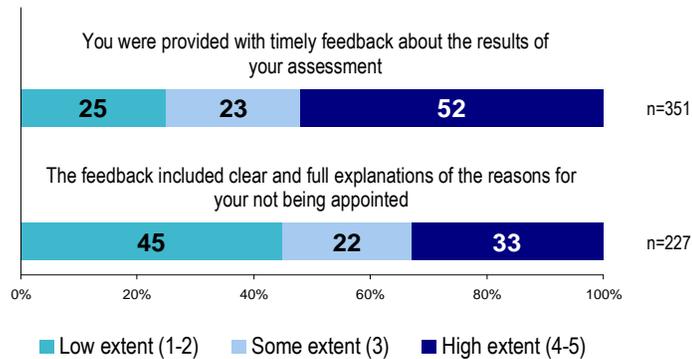
a) Feedback – appeals process

Priority persons are only modestly positive about the feedback that they receive from hiring organizations on the results of the assessment when they are referred for a position. About half of priority persons (52% of applicable cases in the survey) stated that they were provided timely feedback from the hiring organization. One in four said that they were not offered timely feedback. Another one in four (23%) said that they were offered timely feedback to some extent. This rose to seven in ten among those who were appointed as a result of the referral and 72% among those who were referred by the PSC (as opposed to those who self-referred). It was also higher among priority persons in the Atlantic region. Priority persons who are currently employed within the public sector, those placed as a result of their referrals, those who were supported by their home organization in conducting job searches and those in program and administrative classifications were more apt to report having been offered feedback.

One in three indicated that feedback from their last referral included a clear and full explanation of the reasons for their not being appointed. More than four in ten, however, said that this was only true to a limited extent.

Availability and Quality of Feedback

“To what extent did the following occur in last referral?” [Priority Persons]

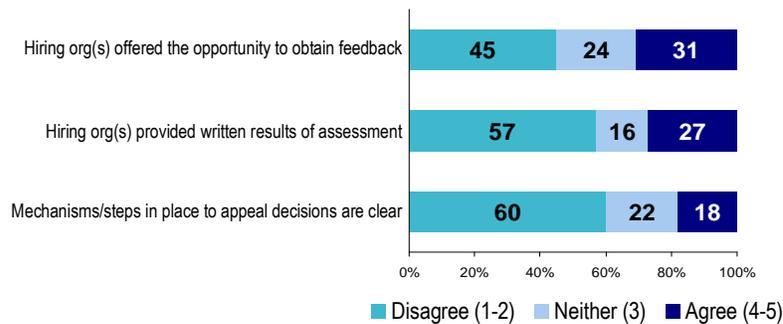


One quarter of priority persons (27%) referred for a position reported that they were provided with a written assessment of the results of the referral. A full 57% said that they were not provided with a written assessment of the referral results. Although still not high, the proportion of priority persons provided with a written assessment rises to 40% among those who were referred by the PSC (as opposed to those who self-referred), yet in both cases this is an obligation. Those referred after January 2010 and those reporting greater support from their home organization were also marginally more apt to say that they received written results of any assessments from referrals.

Fewer than one in five survey respondents (18%) also agreed that they are clear on the mechanisms or steps in place for them to appeal a decision. Over half (60%) disagreed, saying that the steps were not clear regarding possible appeals. Lack of clarity was even more concentrated among priority respondents who are not currently employed and those who do not feel that they have been provided with much assistance with job searches from their home organization. Those somewhat more apt to say that they are clear on the steps in the appeals process are priority persons who have been referred by the PSC (as opposed to those who self-referred), although even in this case only 37% are clear on the appeals mechanisms in place.

Extent of Feedback

“To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following?” [Priority Persons]



PA advisors participating in the focus group insisted that hiring organizations are required to provide timely, written feedback to priority persons about the results of their assessment, with clear and full explanations of the reasons if they are not being appointed (as per the *Guide on Priority Administration* — see Section 1.9). They noted that, if they receive notification from an organization that a priority person was not qualified, they expect to see feedback attached. It should be noted that the *Guide on Priority Administration* also states that the PSC can refuse or revoke a priority clearance, thereby preventing the organization from making an appointment. They noted, however, that they would have no control over any processes for term positions. The PSC's Investigations Directorate (ID) can also investigate complaints related to external appointment processes. For internal appointment processes, the priority person can submit a complaint to the hiring organization's deputy head, as well as to the PSC. In addition to its investigative role, the ID also has the authority to look at internal appointment processes by means of an audit. This occurs when the Directorate receives information about a possible error, omission or improper conduct in an internal appointment process. In such cases, the Directorate reviews the information and determines whether an investigation has already been, or should be, conducted. If so, a recommendation will be made to the deputy head to that effect, and the PSC will offer to conduct the investigation on their behalf. If the deputy head takes no action, the ID may, on its own initiative, conduct an audit into the process. In addition, a PSC interviewee recommended that there be a review of current recourse mechanisms for priority persons in consultation with the Legal Affairs Branch in order to implement, if appropriate, a common and fast-track mechanism that could assess complaints related to the assessment of priority persons and render decisions prior to the expiry of entitlements.

Participants also expressed concern over organizations that indicate that they were “unable to contact” the priority person. They suggested that it would be preferable if the priority person received an automatic

e-mail notification when the code of “unable to contact” is used to ensure that they have in fact been notified of the referral.

PA advisors also noted that roles and responsibilities surrounding recourse are unclear. They said that the only true recourse is investigation and that is not applicable in all cases, as the recourse mechanism available depends on the type of appointment process (internal vs. external). They reported that they do not have the authority to override the decision of the hiring organization if it appears that they have undertaken the assessment correctly. They noted that they may also not be aware that a priority has a concern about the assessment until after a clearance is already provided. They underscored a need for timely access to expertise or support from a resource person who is knowledgeable and experienced in PA in situations where it may not be clear whether a priority person was fairly assessed. According to senior PSC management, a clear mechanism for recourse that is specific to priority persons is also required.

b) Role of the Public Service Commission in post-referral

There is little evidence in the study addressing this issue, although there is considerable evidence on the issue of quality of referrals and follow-up process that suggests the need for a greater role for the PSC in the post-referral process. When asked specifically, survey respondents unanimously agreed that a greater role is needed (86% of hiring managers and 91% of HR professionals). The greater the exposure to the PA Program (e.g. HR advisors relative to assistants and hiring managers, those rating their knowledge of the program higher and those having been trained on the program and PIMS), the greater the likelihood of arguing for an increased role for the PSC in the post-referral process. Also, having experience with priority persons who were not found qualified increases the likelihood of arguing for a greater PSC role. Results are also more in favour of a greater PSC role in post-referral among HR professionals in Quebec and in Western regions than elsewhere in Canada.

According to one PA advisor interviewed, more opportunity to add notes to PIMS on the exchange between PA advisors and hiring organizations (e.g. requests for information, changes, nature and outcome of follow-up) would be useful so that PA staff can keep a running log of what is happening with the file. This would enable the PSC to be more on top of how the referral is proceeding and what follow-up/challenges might be necessary. Another PA interviewee emphasized the need for greater clarity of roles and responsibilities so that home organizations can spend more time counselling and preparing priority persons and so that less time is required of PA advisors in referral and post-referral processes. In addition, one senior official was concerned about priority persons who continuously turn down job offers.

In interviews with PSC staff and management, some interviewees also noted a possible role for the PSC to follow up on priorities and hiring organizations following referrals to determine reasons why a priority declined an offer, or reasons why the hiring organization did not find priority persons referred to be qualified. This follow-up could contribute to a clearer understanding of the accuracy of referrals and how they could be improved; understanding of whether organizations are accurately assessing referrals; the removal of

potential instances of labour relations or performance issues; and the discouragement of potential “cherry picking” by priority persons. This is further discussed in Section 3.6 (Monitoring).

Key findings: *Priority persons report that they do not consistently receive feedback on the results of assessments when they are referred. Furthermore, those who receive feedback often say that they are not receiving a full and clear explanation of why they were not placed. Also, there is a lack of clarity or understanding among priority persons as to the mechanisms or steps in place to appeal decisions. Although there is only limited direct evidence from the study on this issue, there appears to be a potential for the PSC to play a greater role post-referral. This could help ensure that priority persons receive the feedback they require, as well as ensuring follow-up that would improve the counselling and support provided to priorities.*

3.5 KNOWLEDGE, TRAINING AND COMMUNICATIONS

a) Clarity/understanding of roles and responsibilities

Based on the focus group with HR advisors and on interviews with hiring managers, the roles and responsibilities of the hiring organization, the PSC, priority persons and the home organization are not clearly understood. HR advisors participating in focus groups stated that “having to explain to hiring managers the types of priorities that exist, how they are assessed and their responsibilities as hiring managers is a constant problem.” Hiring managers interviewed expressed some confusion or lack of understanding of the PA process. One hiring manager noted: “it is unclear to me what the different priorities are, how it works and our responsibilities.” Another noted, “it is never clear to me when we are supposed to check for priorities and when it enters into the process; I’ve dealt with priorities at the start of a process and at the end.”

HR advisors participating in the focus group also demonstrated confusion and lack of understanding about the division of roles and responsibilities within PA. In particular, they expressed confusion over who is responsible for the priority once they are registered. For example, one noted that some priorities request that HR advisors forward them job advertisements for job openings, although they felt that ensuring access to opportunities was a PSC role. HR advisors felt that priorities are “confused; they don’t know who to contact for what.” Some HR advisors also noted that, while they recognize that it is the home organization’s responsibility to register priorities, there is a lack of clarity about whose responsibility it is to follow up with a priority on referrals and the quality of offers. In the words of one HR advisor, “who is looking out for them?” One also noted that there is no direction or information about what happens to a priority when their entitlement expires (who contacts them, what counselling they receive, if any, and whose responsibility this is). HR advisors participating in the focus group were most often of the view that most of the responsibility for priority persons belongs to the PSC.

Consistent with findings from the HR advisor focus group, PA advisors participating in the focus group noted that one of the biggest areas of confusion regarding roles is the responsibility for priority persons. Home organizations seem to think that, once the priority is registered, the organization is no longer responsible for them. These comments drive home the point that home organizations are not clear on the fact that priorities are still their own employees, for whom they have primary responsibility. This is often an issue for employees granted priority entitlement as a result of a leave of absence. It is also an issue for spousal relocation cases, as these employees are in a new region and often lack contact with the home organization. One PA advisors noted that they are sometimes challenged by home organizations who disagree that they have any responsibility. PA advisors agreed that it would be helpful to expand on the organizational role in the *Guide on Priority Administration*. It would also be helpful to have a resource to direct them to in the case of disagreements.

Program documentation seems to be unclear or overlapping with regard to roles and responsibilities towards priority persons. Section 1.8 of the *Guide on Priority Administration* clearly states that home organizations are required to:

- Counsel the priority person on the benefits and obligations of priority entitlement and the role that the organization will play in supporting career transition; and
- Provide career counselling, advice or training in job search preparation.

At the same time, the job description of the PA advisor identifies the “provision of counselling services to priority beneficiaries on priority entitlements” under client service results.

In addition to confusion about the role and responsibilities of home organizations, PA advisors noted that priorities may also lack understanding of roles. In the words of one PA advisor, “priorities think that they’re part of a PSC ‘program’ but they are not. We are managing priorities on behalf of organizations.” Several advisors also suggested that it would be useful to have an information package that home organizations could provide to priorities to explain PA, the process, their role, the role of the home organization and that of the PSC. They noted that very little counselling is typically provided to priority persons by their home organization.

One HR advisor participating in the focus group noted that their organization has one person designated with the responsibility for priorities (follows them, provides support) and described this as being “a huge benefit,” given that “we cannot be experts on priorities in addition to everything else.” PA advisors in the focus group also suggested that each organization have an individual assigned to PA, which would lighten the workload of PA advisors and shift some responsibility back to where it belongs. They noted that there is a constant loss of expertise and knowledge within the HR community as a result of turnover; this may also help address that situation by creating pools of expertise. Some noted, however, that this would not be realistic in small organizations, which may rarely have priority cases

Survey results also indicate some lack of clarity regarding roles and responsibility. Just over half (54%) of respondents gave a high rating to the program contributing to HR advisors and assistants being informed of

their role in the priority administration process. That said, one in three provided only a moderate rating. One in eight said that the program contributed little to HR professionals being informed of their role in the priority administration process.

b) Training and support

Survey results from HR professionals provided mixed opinions on the training and knowledge aspect of PA. Fully two thirds of HR advisors surveyed rated their knowledge of the PA process as high, and almost six out of ten (63%) agreed that they have the knowledge and expertise needed to provide advice to priority persons in their organization. Three quarters (75%) gave high ratings to their knowledge and expertise related to PIMS.

Just over half (55%) of HR professionals responding to the survey reported that they received training on the PA process and/or PIMS. Of those, almost two thirds (63%) described formal training, while almost equal proportions described informal training or training within their organization (15% and 13%, respectively).

More specifically, among those who received formal training from the PSC, six in ten rated the training session positively, indicating a high level of satisfaction (and only 5% indicated a low level of satisfaction). The same is true of the PIMS user manual, and three in four rated the instructors highly.

Several HR advisors participating in the focus group stated that, while they felt that they had a fairly good understanding of the objectives of PA, they would benefit from a “refresher” on the various aspects, as well as its objectives. A few individual HR advisors noted that they had organized training directly with their regional PA advisor, while others were unaware that this could be arranged.

In terms of training to be provided to HR staff, PA advisors noted with frustration that HR advisors are the ones who should be attending information and training sessions, but that HR assistants are typically sent in their place. Program staff identified a need for training delivered directly to HR advisors. PA advisors suggested that a training package, which PA advisors could deliver to HR staff, would be useful. Additionally, some suggested on-line tutorials for HR advisors (or a DVD or Web presentation) to help them reach staff outside central locations (e.g. outside the Greater Toronto Area in Ontario). They identified a need for one tutorial for new HR staff and another for more experienced staff in need of a refresher. Finally, they also suggested partnering with the Canada School of Public Service to provide course content for new staffing specialists and for hiring managers. This would make PA a mandatory component of HR training (e.g. courses P801 and P802). In terms of improving communication, one PA advisor also suggested that a centralized general inquiry line (for priorities and for organizations) might be helpful.

Based on interviews with PSC staff and management, training provided to PA advisors is largely informal. Interview respondents noted that many advisors are new to the program as a result of turnover. They also reported that there is no formal training program in place for new advisors, and PA advisors generally have less access to expertise than they did previously, given that PA is being delivered in a decentralized fashion.

(Under the current configuration, a policy analyst within Staffing Operational Support in the Staffing and Assessment Services Branch (SASB) acts as the liaison between SASB and the Policy Branch.) The direct managers of PA advisors do not necessarily have experience or expertise in the PA process. As mentioned previously, HR advisors participating in focus groups reported inconsistency from one advisor to the next and from one region to the next in getting answers — which points to potential lack of even knowledge and bench strength across the program. Furthermore, some staff and management respondents expressed concerns about mistakes being made or steps missed in entering information as a result of a lack of training or experience within the program. These respondents described an increasing number of errors in the system and identified a need for stronger oversight and a consultation/expertise role.

PA advisors participating in the focus group agreed that there is a need for an official training program for new PA advisors, and noted that this need has already been identified and discussed in past meetings. They suggested an on-line package that would walk new advisors through PA and direct them to additional resources. They also cautioned, however, that written or on-line training alone are insufficient, and that practical, on-the-job experience and mentoring is needed in this position. They strongly suggested a period of mentoring for new advisors.

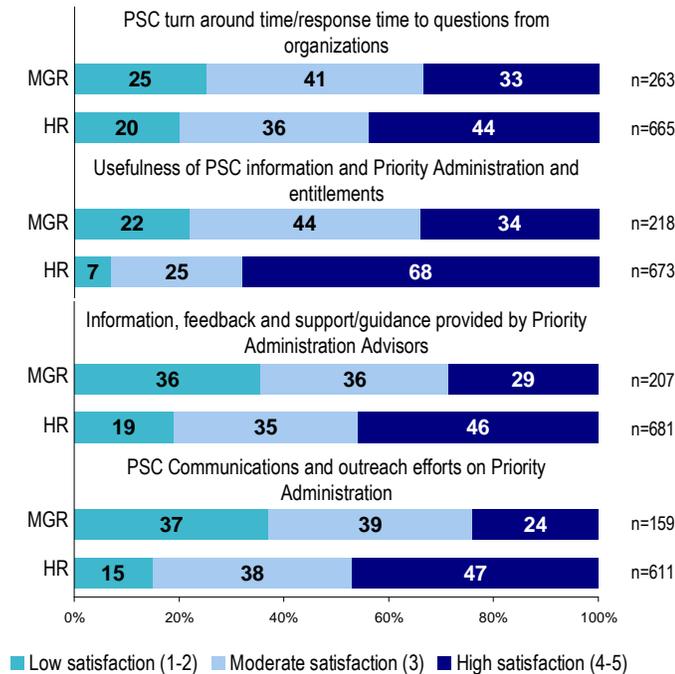
In addition to training, PA advisors suggested additional supports or tools for PA staff. They noted that, while interpretations or past decisions can be accessed through RDIMS, it is often a long e-mail trail rather than a concise decision that can be found, and there is often no way of knowing whether the information remains current. They suggested that access to a list of current interpretations within their intranet or Web site would be very helpful. They also suggested providing a place for a “blog” or space to share questions and comments among advisors. This would also contribute to building a greater team environment.

c) Outreach/communications and support

Survey evidence indicates significant room for improvement in terms of outreach, communications and support for the program. Overall, just under half of HR professionals (47%) and only one in four hiring managers (24%) indicated satisfaction with PSC communications and outreach efforts on PA (such as letters to heads of HR). In fact, 37% of hiring managers indicated low levels of satisfaction. Results are very similar for the information, feedback and support/guidance provided by PA advisors. The same proportion of HR professionals and slightly more hiring managers (33%) are satisfied with PSC turnaround time / response time to questions from organizations. In this case, however, fewer hiring managers are not satisfied (although one in four did provide a low rating). Again, just under half of HR professionals and three in ten hiring managers indicated satisfaction with the support or assistance they received in using PIMS. Considerably more positively, almost seven in ten HR professionals (68%) said that they are satisfied with the usefulness of PSC information on PA and entitlements. This is lower among hiring managers, at 34%.

Outreach and Information

“What is your level of satisfaction with the following elements of PA?”



HR advisors participating in the focus group noted that most hiring managers tend to perceive the PA Program as an obstacle to be surmounted during the staffing process. They do not understand the importance of obtaining a clearance, or the role that PA plays within the public service; it is simply seen as compounding their frustration with staffing generally. Several HR advisors noted that they do their best to explain the rationale for the program, but that this information might best come from the PSC, which has more knowledge about the program and is in a better position to communicate this information. Focus group participants suggested that it would be ideal if an information package were prepared by the PSC to be delivered by HR advisors within their organizations. This would ensure that the information is accurate, but that hiring managers obtain the information directly from their HR advisors, whom they know and with whom they work. They suggested that there is a great deal of added value in obtaining information “face to face” and that information or documentation simply circulated to managers by the PSC would not be effective. Some also suggested that an on-line training session be made available to hiring managers and/or HR staff. These results suggest a need to train managers in organizations through the organizational HR community.

PSC staff and management interviewed similarly identified a need for improved communications and outreach to increase their understanding of roles, responsibilities and the PA process among hiring organizations.

d) Support and communications to priority persons

According to survey results, priority persons do not feel well supported by their home organizations. In fact, only 15% were positive in the survey about their home organizations in this regard, while six in ten (64%) were negative, providing a rating of only one or two on the scale. Those respondents with the longest involvement with the program (i.e. with first entitlements dating back to 2008) were the most negative about the support provided by their home organizations (with 78% providing a negative rating). There is a fundamental difference in support experienced among different priority groups of employees. Those declared surplus more often reported receiving support than others (i.e. 24% provided a positive rating and only 46% provided a negative rating). Spousal relocation priorities were the most negative about their support from the home organization (with only 12% providing a positive rating and fully 72% saying that they received very little support).

Table 3.7: Home organization support of priority persons

To what extent did your home organization assist you in your job search? (n=627)

	First priority entitlement			First priority type				
	Dec. 2008 or earlier	Jan. 2009-Mar. 2010	Apr. 2010-present	Relocation	Leave of absence	CF/RCMP med. released	Surplus empl., lay-off	Other
Low (1-2)	78%	60%	57%	72%	73%	59%	46%	71%
High (4-5)	8%	18%	19%	12%	13%	17%	24%	6%

From results of the survey with priority persons, it also seems that priority persons lack fundamental information about the program and priority entitlements. Only one in four survey respondents said that information about priority entitlements was available, rating it as four or five on the scale. Almost half (47%) rated the availability of this information as low (rating it one or two on the scale). More recent additions to the program typically rated the availability of information more positively, although even among those whose first entitlement was since April 2010, only one in three rated it as high.

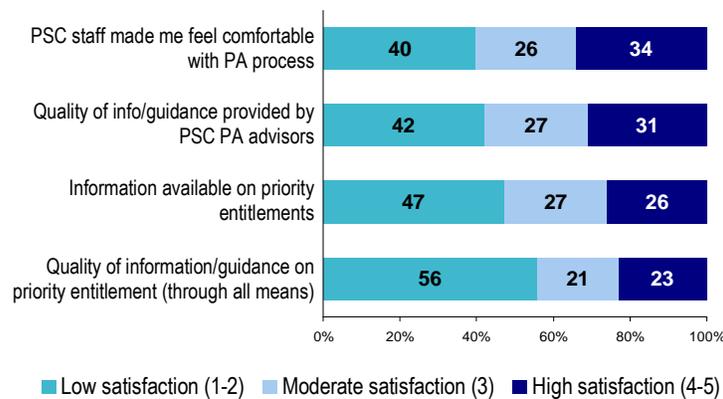
The quality of information and guidance provided by PA advisors was also not rated particularly high. Fewer than one in three were satisfied (31%), compared with four in ten who were not. The quality of information and guidance received from the home organizations was rated even lower. Fewer than one in four (22%) rated themselves as satisfied with the support from their home organization, while more than half (56%) indicated low satisfaction, providing a rating of only one or two on the scale.

Across all items, those in the system the longest (with a first entitlement prior to December 2008) were the least positive, while those who rated their support from their home organization, and those referred by the PSC, were more apt to be positive in their assessment (compared to those who self-referred).

So, although results are not particularly positive overall, survey evidence indicates that support and contact with home organizations and the PSC make a large difference in whether or not priority persons have the information they need to participate fully and intelligently in the program. Perhaps to substantiate this, it is priority respondents placed as a result of their participation in the program who were the most positive about the availability and quality of information and support that they received from the PSC and their home organizations.

Availability and Quality of Information and Guidance

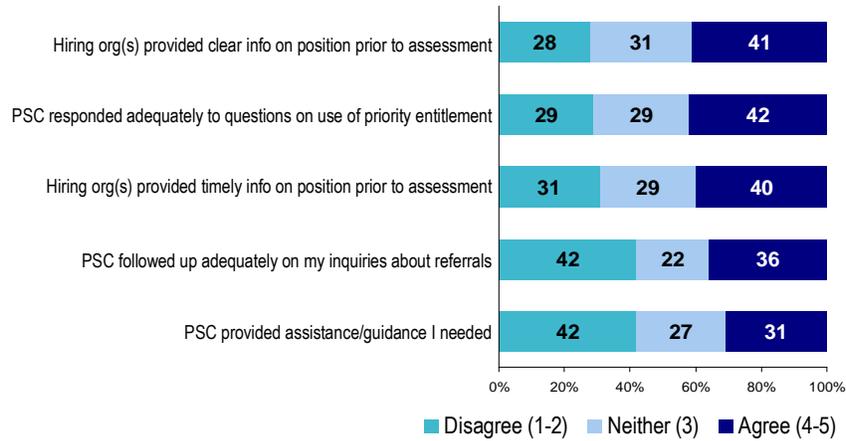
“What is your satisfaction level with the following elements of PA?”
[Priority Persons]



In addition, just over half of priority persons who responded to the survey said that the hiring organization provided them with information about the position being staffed or the means of assessment. Four in ten agreed that they were given clear or timely information about the position prior to assessment, or that the PSC responded adequately to questions about use of priority entitlement. In each, case between two in ten and three in ten disagreed. Only one third agreed that the PSC followed up on inquiries about referrals, and even fewer (31%) agree that they were provided with the assistance and guidance that they felt they needed. In these cases, 42% of priority respondents disagreed.

Availability and Quality of Information on Referrals, Processes and PA

“To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following?” [Priority Persons]



 EKOS Research Associates Inc.

n=354-411

PA Evaluation 2010

Key findings: *Based on the focus groups and interviews, the roles and responsibilities of the hiring organization, the PSC and the home organization are not clearly understood. Hiring managers are not always clear about their responsibilities or the correct functioning of the PA process. Home organizations also appear unclear in some cases regarding their responsibility for priorities once they are registered. This lack of clarity compromises the support that priorities receive and increases the burden on PA advisors (when home organizations do not fulfil their responsibilities).*

Only half of the HR professionals surveyed received any training on PA or PIMS. While HR professionals generally rate their knowledge of PA as strong, HR advisors participating in the focus group identify a need for refresher training. PA advisors suggested that training packages be developed by the PSC for delivery by PA advisors. These could be developed as on-line tutorials for HR advisors. Partnering with the Canada School of Public Service to provide course content pertinent to PA was also suggested. Instituting an HR PA specialist within organizations (such as currently exists within the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade) was also outlined as a measure that would improve expertise within organizations.

Current training of PA advisors is described as largely informal. PSC staff and management identified a need for more formal training to ensure consistent delivery of PA and to reduce errors within the system. Not surprisingly, given the lack of clear understanding of roles and limited training, evidence points to room for improvement in terms of communication, outreach and support from the PA Program. In addition to formalized training, PA advisors suggested mentoring and access to current interpretations / past decisions as additional tools.

Priority persons do not typically feel well supported by their home organizations, although there is a fundamental difference in support experienced among different priority groups of employees. Priority persons surveyed also pointed to a lack of fundamental information about the program and priority entitlements. That said, survey evidence also highlighted that support and contact with home organizations and the PSC make a large difference in whether or not priority persons have the information they need to participate fully and intelligently in the program.

3.6 MONITORING AND DATA QUALITY CONTROL

At the present time, the primary tool available for monitoring purposes is PIMS and the data reports produced by this system. A wide variety of reports can be produced by PIMS on time lags between referrals and feedback from organizations, priorities within the system, expiration of entitlements, appointments made, etc. Monitoring reports are regularly produced and shared. While the system can provide extensive data on activities, it cannot assess the quality of information placed in the system or the accuracy of referrals made as a result of this.

According to the documentation, monitoring the validity of individual entitlements and organizational respect for them is the responsibility of the PSC. PSC staff and management participating in interviews and the focus group identified weaknesses in current monitoring systems and procedures. They discussed a need for monitoring that would track and assess:

- Accuracy of information captured about the priority person;
- Accuracy of coding in the priority person's file;
- Appropriateness of referrals; and
- Assessment of referrals by hiring organizations.

First, PA advisors noted that the data captured about priority persons is not always accurate. The inaccurate coding of skills, etc., weakens the quality of referrals to which the priority person is then subject. In addition to coding, the registering of a priority also requires a home organization to confirm that no labour relations or performance issues exist with the employee. As noted, there is some belief, particularly among hiring managers, that priority persons are "poor employees" and that PA is a "dumping ground" for poor performers and problem employees. While most HR advisors and PA advisors participating in focus groups believed that PA is rarely used improperly in this manner, many also said that some cases have been known to occur, which taints the overall image or perceptions of the program. PA advisors participating in the focus group also noted that an HR assistant may also complete this section in a *pro forma* manner without any real knowledge of whether or not an issue exists, may not understand what they are checking and may not have explored the issue with the hiring manager. Some agreed that it would be productive to have home organizations conduct due diligence on this matter by requiring that the manager sign off on this personally.

In addition to the accuracy of data entered about priority persons, a concern was expressed regarding the accuracy of data entry by hiring organizations relative to processes undertaken. Two long-time PSC employees interviewed noted that files that they have reviewed have errors of one type or another, including improper coding on PIMS and missed steps, ultimately resulting in more work. At least one observed that many requests are cancelled because they are not correct and need to be sent back and fixed.

In terms of the monitoring of home and hiring organizations, PA advisors in the focus group suggested that “we let them off too easy.” They noted that there are measures presently in the system that can be used to monitor hiring organizations (e.g. time between referral and feedback) but that organizations are not held accountable. The PSC expects assessments of priority persons to be conducted within 60 days of a referral, and monitors how long assessments take. Delays may result in the PSC cancelling a request and requiring that a new one be submitted.

PA advisors further noted, in interviews and in the focus group, that PA is sometimes misused by organizations. They described situations of hiring organizations seeking a clearance one day before they plan to fill the position; cancelling a process once priorities are identified; holding on to a clearance for several months after obtaining it; or using a clearance for more than one position. They suggested that hiring organizations could be made to report back to the PSC on when and whether a clearance is used. However, this would increase their reporting burden. It may be preferable to identify this as a potential audit compliance criterion.

They also pointed to an unevenness of issues or abuses across organizations. The suggestion was that specific organizations should be monitored and held to account with greater scrutiny (if their past record points to the need for this). A senior official (external to the PSC) interviewed also noted the importance of holding home organizations accountable for placing their own priorities. This respondent suggested that organizations should be challenged to “take care of their own.” Where a home organization avoids taking their priority person (suggesting performance issues), this priority should be removed from the system.

Finally, according to some interview respondents, another layer of tracking needed is monitoring to ensure that hiring organizations are accurately assessing referrals. An example of this would be the investigation of hiring managers who are consistently rejecting priority persons; they would be asked to substantiate their decisions.

For a minority of PSC staff and management interviewed, weaknesses in monitoring are partly a workload issue. In the words of one respondent, PA staff (often with less experience and under pressure from hiring staff) are too “busy doing the day to day stuff.... the question is can we do the monitoring plus the dealing with priority requests, plus meet priority persons, then deal with the managers and do it all effectively?” It was suggested that there needs to be a staff member dedicated to monitoring, and also a quality control function or random audit of information entered into PIMS.

While monthly reports are made available through PIMS, PA advisors participating in the focus group also noted that monitoring of their own work is limited, as there is minimal expertise among managers and

supervisors. They suggested a system of peer review among advisors (e.g. exchange a random selection of files throughout the year) as one possibility, which may be less threatening or intimidating (and which has been identified as working in the pay and benefits sector). They noted that there could be periodic shifts in partners. That said, one advisor cautioned that the current lack of consistency among advisors may be a barrier to this approach (although it could also conversely serve to increase consistency). Another suggested that advisors be brought together for a working session to increase consistency.

PA advisors participating in the focus group also indicated support for the addition of PA indicators in the Staffing Management Accountability Framework and Departmental Staffing Accountability Report process, which could include assessment quality and time, appropriate use of clearances and cancellation rate after referrals. Additional performance indicators stemming from the PSC's monthly reports could include average time for registering a priority after entitlement is initiated.

Key findings: *PSC staff and management participating in interviews and the focus group identified significant weaknesses in current monitoring systems and procedures, and a need for increased monitoring of both home and hiring organizations in terms of program abuse and accuracy of data entry and coding. PA advisors also identified a need to increase monitoring and consistency of their own work, potentially through a peer review process.*

3.7 CURRENT GOVERNANCE AND TRANSITION

The impact of the January 2009 shift in the administration of the PA Program from Policy to SASB, and the current governance of the program, was explored with internal PSC interview respondents and in the focus group with PA advisors.

There is no consensus on whether the transition was well-managed. Some viewed the transition as “problematic,” that is, not well planned or rolled out at the time of the transition, while others believed that it was smooth. Those who expressed concern with the transition pointed, in particular, to a lack of communication or planning and little advance communication, and identified an ongoing need to address these concerns.

A larger number of PSC staff and management interviewed (close to half) identified some concerns with the current governance structure and the impact of the move to SASB (regardless of whether they believe the move to be appropriate or not). The move to SASB was seen by some to have isolated PA advisors, particularly those in the regions, into groups of one and two and created “silos” where PA advisors are working independently for different “bosses” rather than collectively as a team. This is seen to have negatively affected communication, information sharing and support across advisors. Turnover within the program, resulting in loss of expertise and corporate memory, and having PA advisors report to managers with no substantive background in priority entitlement are both seen to be exacerbating the situation. As well, several noted that training provided to PA advisors is largely informal, and pointed to a need for additional formalized training and support to ensure consistent delivery, given recent turnover and the shift

in administration to SASB. Some pointed out that operational managers are responsible for a much broader array of staffing and assessment services, meeting the broader HR needs of organizations, within which PA is only one area. Some felt that PA is a complex program that requires a more detailed and specialized expertise than can be supported by the current managerial structure (in terms of content expertise).

A small number of PSC interview respondents expressed concern that some of the improvements the PA team had worked towards in terms of PA delivery may be lost in the shift in administration. One respondent suggested that the program needs to “continue efforts to build a community of PA advisors to ensure consistent service and to maximize lessons learned.”

PA advisors participating in focus groups felt that, apart from supervision, access to content expertise and support to PA advisors is a general weakness under the current governance structure. Several noted that, when they encounter a difficulty or have a question, they must go through several layers to get their questions answered, which results in delays and additional investment of time. PA advisors noted that it does not matter where the expertise is located (Policy Branch or SASB), but it is critical that the necessary expertise is readily available to provide answers quickly and consistently. In the absence of a qualified resource person, some advisors described that they send e-mails to their colleagues to seek advice, although, as already outlined, there is inconsistency of approach across the PA staff. Some advisors expressed a desire to return to being one “team” under one manager.

Key findings: *There is a strong divide in opinion among PSC management and staff interviewed as to the impact of the shift in administration from Policy to SASB in January 2009, and about the success of the transition process. Some feel that having the PA Program housed within SASB creates a potential position of conflict (between the desire to satisfy hiring managers within a cost recovery environment and protecting the rights of priority persons) that needs to be addressed as part of the transition.*

Some also identified concerns to address within the current governance structure and administrative environment, including a need to build a stronger team environment in PA delivery, increase support and communication to and among PA team members and increase access to expertise and formal training, to ensure consistent delivery.

4. OUTCOMES/SUCCESS

Outcomes or success of Priority Administration (PA) Program was explored through the on-line surveys as well as through key informant interviews and program data. Issues explored include the number of priority persons referred, assessed and hired; the perceived access that PA provides to qualified priority persons; the ability of organizations to place priorities; and the contribution of PA to fairness, transparency and merit-based appointments. Overall satisfaction with the PA process is also explored under the topic of outcomes, as well as perceived strengths and weaknesses of the program.

4.1 NUMBER ASSESSED, REFERRED AND HIRED ANNUALLY

a) Overall placement rate

Overall placement rate within the program is a key measure of its success. Based on system data provided by the PA Program, the effective placement rate for priority persons has fluctuated between 56% and 64% between 2006-2007 and 2009-2010. This placement rate has been calculated based on closed files (removing active cases from consideration for accuracy).

Table 4.1: Priority administration statistics by fiscal year: 2006-2007 to 2009-2010

	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	TOTALS
Number of entitlements registered	1 240	1 364	1 250	1 645	5 499
Number appointed	724	717	645	712	2 798
Placement rate based on closed files (# appointed / # registered-active cases)	60%	56%	58%	64%*	59%
Number expired**	225	228	202	120	775
Number remaining active to date	32	74	137	531	774

Source: Priority Information Management System (PIMS). Report run January 6, 2011

Other removals not indicated above include resignation/retirement, death, update to priority type and entitlement rescinded by the organization.

*Results for 2009-2010 should be interpreted with caution, as the number of active files is high and could influence the final placement rate once files are closed.

** Note: Employees with priority entitlement who are priority-appointed at a lower level receive a further priority entitlement of one year to be reintegrated back to their former substantive group/level or its equivalent. Expiration of the reintegration priority entitlement does not affect their initial indeterminate appointment.

While 63% of priority persons responding to the survey indicated that they have participated in an appointment process as a priority person, only 43% of those have been successfully placed to date (note, however, that this does not take into account the number of respondents who are active priority persons). Considering all priority persons in the survey, this is 27% of all priority persons in the sample (including those responding to the survey but never referred).

Priority persons responding to the survey were asked to indicate their current status and to indicate what ended their entitlement, if they are no longer a priority. Half of the survey respondents continue to be priority persons (52%), while 23% indicated that their entitlement ended with an indeterminate appointment and, for 12%, it ended when their priority period expired. A further 4% resigned, and smaller numbers cite other reasons for the end of their entitlement.

Those appointed indeterminately during the priority entitlement period were asked to indicate what led to their appointment. A total of 42% identified Public Service Commission (PSC) referral as the source of their appointment, and 33% identified self-referral. Another 8% cited their own contacts or network as the source of employment, 3% returned to their home organization or position, 3% responded to an advertised appointment process and 3% accepted a term position that resulted in an indeterminate position. The remaining 7% cited a variety of methods. It is unclear, however, whether they used their priority entitlement when participating to these processes.

As a measure of quality of the placement, half of those placed described a job at their original substantive level or equivalent (51%). Among priorities with a surplus entitlement, this was 60%. Another 8% were placed into a higher level. That said, 41% were placed into a lower level. Persons who were placed after March 2010 were considerably more likely to get a job at the same level (70%) than those placed in the previous years. Again, cases referred by the PSC were considerably more apt to be placed at their own level (67%), compared with those who referred themselves (45%). Those who self-referred were more likely to be placed at a higher level (17%).

When human resources (HR) professionals and hiring managers were asked to rate the job performance of priority persons they had hired, half of HR professionals and four in ten hiring managers (43%) indicated that they were satisfied. Some 28% of hiring managers and 38% of HR professionals indicated moderate satisfaction. That said, 28% of hiring managers said that they were not very satisfied, although only 11% of HR professionals said the same.

Results of the survey of hiring managers indicate that 53% of those managers who have assessed a person or persons with priority entitlement (e.g. screened their CV or interviewed them) had at least one assessment that resulted in a priority person being found qualified, and 41% of those resulted in the hiring of a priority person.

b) Placement rates by priority category, region, sex and language

Based on system data provided by the PA Program, the placement rate appears to vary significantly by priority category. The placement rate is highest for Canadian Forces (CF) and Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) medically released personnel (at 82%), followed by surplus employees (72%) and leave of absence (60%).

Table 4.2: Priority administration statistics by category: 2006-2007 to 2009-2010

Priority type	Number registered (2006-2007 - 2009-2010)	Number of active cases (2006-2007 - 2009-2010)	Number appointed (2006-2007 - 2009-2010)	Placement rate (%)*
Leave of absence	1 030	228	482	60%
Lay-off	40	2	6	16%
Surplus	1 037	131	651	72%
Reinstatement	434	14	112	27%
Relocation of spouse	1 705	214	760	51%
Employee became disabled	204	37	58	35%
CF/RCMP medically released	1 013	149	706	82%
Governor General exempt staff	2	0	0	0%
Minister's staff**	34	0	23	68%
Total	5 499	775	2 798	59%

Source: PIMS. Report run January 6, 2011

* Placement rate: Number appointed / (Number registered-Number of active cases)

** Priority type no longer exists

Showing a different result, however, priority persons responding to the survey who were declared surplus or laid-off reported the lowest placement rate (67% had not been placed), while relocation priority respondents had the highest placement rate based only on the survey (51% had been placed).

A large proportion of priority appointments are within a few specific public service classifications. These include the classifications CR (23% of appointments in 2009-2010), PM (10% of appointments in 2009-2010) and EC (4% of appointments in 2009-2010). All other classifications represent less than 3% of appointments annually. The vast majority of priority appointments are made for women and Anglophones. The analysis demonstrates that the linguistic profile in terms of first official language of priority persons appointed is representative of both priority persons registered in the system and of the Canadian population. In terms of gender, the profile of appointees is also well aligned to the priority population and is getting closer to the Canadian population distribution. One reason that could explain the predominance of women is

that they constitute a large proportion of leave of absence and relocation of spouse priority types, two of the most common priority entitlements.

Table 4.3: Priority appointments by year by gender and language

Profile	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
Linguistic profile:					
Bilingual (screened or tested)	42%	45%	45%	43%	45%
English only	57%	54%	54%	56%	54%
French only	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
First Official Language:					
English	72%	70%	70%	71%	71%
French	28%	30%	30%	29%	29%
Gender:					
Women	71%	63%	64%	63%	58%
Men	29%	37%	36%	37%	42%

Geographically, most priority appointments are made in the larger regions: the National Capital Region (NCR) and the Ontario and Quebec regions. Appointments in the NCR have fluctuated between 18% and 32% of all appointments annually between 2005-2006 and 2009-2010. Appointments in the Ontario region have represented between 14% and 21% of all priority appointments annually.

Table 4.4: Distribution of priority appointments by province or residence by year

Region	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	TOTAL
British Columbia	12%	9%	11%	10%	14%	11%
Alberta	12%	10%	11%	9%	7%	10%
Saskatchewan	4%	2%	2%	4%	7%	3%
Manitoba	3%	5%	5%	1%	0%	5%
Ontario	18%	16%	21%	19%	14%	18%
NCR	25%	32%	18%	23%	32%	26%
Quebec	10%	13%	15%	12%	10%	12%
New Brunswick	4%	5%	5%	6%	6%	5%
Nova Scotia	8%	6%	8%	9%	5%	7%
Newfoundland	2%	2%	3%	2%	1%	2%
Prince Edward Island	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Nunavut	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Yukon	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: PIMS. Report run July 28, 2010

Additionally, it can be noted that there are 1 623 active priority persons as of February 24, 2011. Geographically, most priority persons reside in the larger regions: NCR, Ontario and Quebec. The percentage of active priority persons in the NCR has decreased from 23% in 2006-2007 to 16% in 2010-2011. Over the same period, in Ontario (excluding the NCR), the proportion of priority persons has increased from 11% to 16%. In Quebec, the percentage has fluctuated between 11% and 16%. In the Atlantic region and the territories, the proportion of priority persons has remained relatively stable. It is interesting to note a 4% decrease in British Columbia in 2010-2011 and a slight increase of priority persons residing outside Canada.

Table 4.5: Number and percentage of active priority persons by province of residence at close of fiscal year (at March 31)

Location	2006-2007		2007-2008		2008-2009		2009-2010		2010-2011 (snapshot February 24, 2011)	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
British Columbia	178	16%	184	15%	186	15%	253	16%	187	12%
Alberta	158	14%	137	11%	126	10%	150	10%	172	11%
Saskatchewan	40	3%	35	3%	29	2%	74	5%	69	4%
Manitoba	42	4%	52	4%	55	5%	128	8%	93	6%
Ontario (excl. NCR)	124	11%	159	13%	157	13%	154	10%	254	16%
NCR	258	23%	220	18%	217	18%	267	17%	263	16%
Quebec (excl. NCR)	174	15%	193	16%	179	15%	166	11%	216	13%
New Brunswick	52	5%	60	5%	65	5%	98	6%	84	5%
Nova Scotia	53	5%	83	7%	92	8%	101	7%	110	7%
Newfoundland	23	2%	26	2%	25	2%	41	3%	37	2%
Prince Edward Island	9	1%	8	1%	11	1%	9	1%	15	1%
Northwest Territories	6	0%	10	1%	10	1%	11	1%	11	1%
Nunavut	5	0%	4	0%	3	0%	6	0%	4	0%
Yukon	6	0%	5	0%	5	0%	6	0%	9	0%
Outside Canada	14	1%	45	4%	60	5%	82	5%	99	6%
Total	1 142	100%	1 221	100%	1 220	100%	1 546	100%	1 623	100%

Source: PIMS and previous annual reports

c) Satisfaction and perceived contribution of the Priority Administration Program

Other outcomes measures indicative of program performance are the organizations' ability to place priority persons in jobs and to assist priority persons in doing so in an effective and timely fashion. As with other measures, results are fairly tepid with regard to ability to place priority persons. One third of hiring managers surveyed expressed a high level of satisfaction with the ability of their organization to place priority persons in jobs. HR professionals were marginally more positive (43% expressed satisfaction). Another 44% of each group said that they were moderately satisfied. Just over one in five (22%) of hiring managers and 13% of HR professionals said that they were not very satisfied. Satisfaction is lower in the NCR, but higher among those with greater knowledge of the PA process.

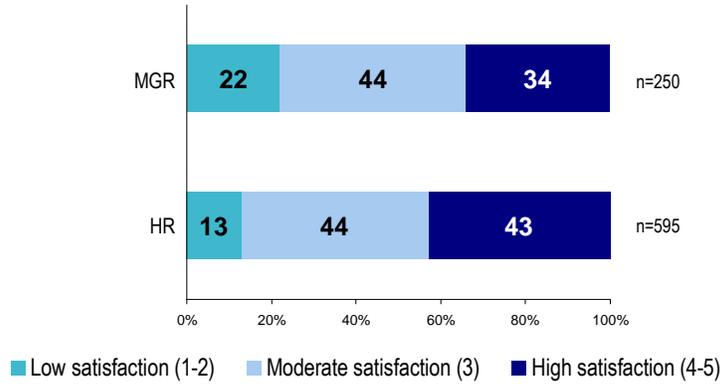
Both hiring managers and HR professionals are more positive in terms of the programs' effectiveness at assisting priority persons to find employment. Almost six in ten (58%) HR professionals and half (47%) of hiring managers said that they are satisfied. Another 31% to 37% said that they were moderately satisfied. Only 11% to 16% rated their satisfaction as low. Priority persons, by contrast, were not as positive. In this case, one in four said that they are satisfied. The same proportion is moderately satisfied. Half, however, said that they were not satisfied.

Hiring managers and HR professionals are somewhat less positive about the PA process contributing to the effective and timely placement of priority persons. Fewer than one in four hiring managers viewed the PA process to be highly effective (23%), although the number is higher among HR professionals (42%). Almost half of hiring managers rated their satisfaction as moderate. Another three in ten said that they were not satisfied. Among HR professionals, a similar proportion were moderately satisfied; however, fewer rated their satisfaction as low. Priority persons were clearer in their responses. Half indicated low satisfaction. Another one in four are moderately satisfied and one in four are satisfied.

In terms of interview respondents, two mentioned that the PSC could explore the possibility of opening the PA Program to organizations that do not fall under the *Public Service Employment Act* (PSEA) for increased potential for placement. One respondent indicated that there is an increase in the number of ill, injured or disabled employees; these otherwise competent employees are not necessarily well supported upon their return to work, which compromises their reintegration or their ability to be placed as priority persons.

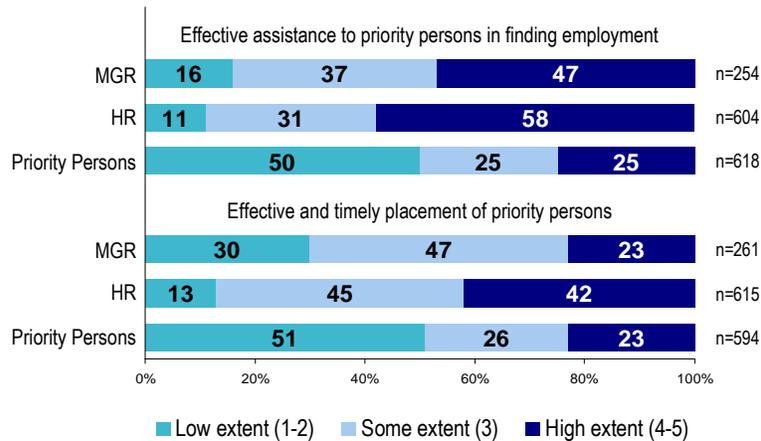
Satisfaction with Placement

“What is your satisfaction with the ability of your organization to place priority persons in jobs?”



PA Contribution to Placement

“To what extent do you feel that the Priority Administration process contributes to each of the following”



Perceived effectiveness of the process is higher among priority persons who received greater assistance with their job search and among those successfully placed.

Several senior officials interviewed (external to the PSC) suggested that their ability to place priority persons could be improved by providing hiring managers with direct access to the pool of priority persons to enable them to search for a potential candidate without submitting a formal request. They suggested that, if the PA system could be treated as an inventory or bank of qualified employees and marketed as such by the PSC, managers may be more apt to use it proactively rather than as an avoidance or impediment to staffing.

Key findings: *The placement rate of priority persons has averaged 60% over the past four fiscal years. While this only represents a subset of priority persons, 40% of those surveyed have successfully been placed to date, although many survey respondents continue their priority entitlement.*

Based on system data provided by the PA Program, the placement rate appears to vary significantly by priority category, and is highest for CF and RCMP medically released personnel, followed by surplus employees and leaves of absence. As well, a large proportion of priority appointments are made within a few specific public service classifications, including CR, PM and EC. The vast majority of priority appointments involve women. Geographically, most appointments are made in the NCR and the Ontario and Quebec regions.

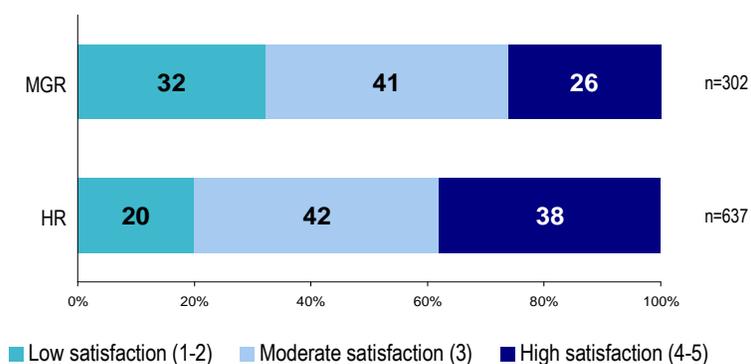
The overall effectiveness or success of PA in placing priority persons in jobs is not rated highly by priority persons or hiring managers, although HR professionals are somewhat more positive.

4.2 PERCEIVED ACCESS TO QUALIFIED CANDIDATES

Satisfaction with perceived access to potentially qualified candidates as a result of PA is another key indicator of program success. In this case, however, satisfaction is only moderate, and is much lower among hiring managers than among HR professionals. Only 26% of hiring managers expressed a high level of satisfaction with their access to qualified persons resulting from PA. This is higher among HR professionals, at 38%. One third (32%) of hiring managers expressed low satisfaction, as did one in five HR professionals. It is important to note, however, that this question combines the notions of accessibility and qualification. As described in the last chapter, other evidence points strongly to the quality of the fit as the likely driver of this result. Therefore, it may not be an issue of the quality of candidates at large, but rather the alignment of candidates' profiles with position requirements.

Access to Qualified Pool

“What is your level of satisfaction with the access to potentially qualified priority persons?”



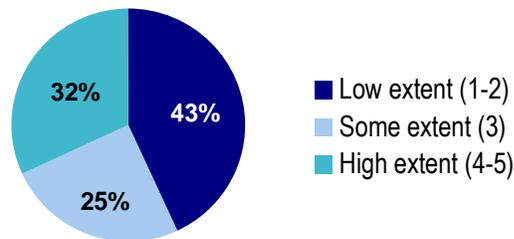
Neither the interviews with PSC staff and management nor the focus groups with HR advisors identified significant issues with the quality of priority persons available. There were comments, however, about the perceptions of at least some hiring managers who see the PA Program as a “dumping ground” for problem employees. HR advisors themselves conceded that the program may have occasionally been used this way in the past (e.g. during work force readjustment in the 1990s) but, by and large, they believe that this is no longer true. It should be noted, however, that several HR advisors and some PSC interview respondents acknowledged that there are occasional instances where an individual fails on personal suitability in processes over and over again (suggesting a labour relations issue). HR advisors identify a role for the PSC to assist in these situations. Senior officials interviewed (external to the PSC) also emphasized the importance of this issue being addressed to ensure that there is no stigma attached to priority persons. One noted that it is vital to introduce measures to prevent managers from placing employees with performance issues into the PA system, as “all it takes is one bad apple” to damage the reputation of the program.

One hiring manager interviewed noted that the lack of interest in considering priority persons is exacerbated by the fact that hiring managers may have already done a lot of work to develop a potential pool of candidates for a position, or may have their eye on promoting a deserving staff member internally, and are reluctant to consider a priority in that situation. The same hiring manager noted that there are situations where there are no existing candidates, and it would be positive to have a pool of priority persons that a hiring manager or HR advisor could peruse for a suitable candidate even if a staffing action has not been initiated. Finally, this manager suggested that the opportunities or chances for employment of priority persons could be improved by assessing them for inclusion within pools that organizations have created.

Looking at the issue from the perspective of priority persons, only three in ten priority persons perceived the process as providing them with a high level of access to jobs (at their group or level). Another 25% said that they were provided with some access. Four in ten perceived the process as providing limited access. As might be expected, those who have been in the system longer, as well as those who were not placed, were much more negative in their ratings (with over half providing a low rating on access to jobs). Among those in the system only for the last ten months, as well as among those priorities who were placed, results are more positive, with four to five in ten saying that they were provided with good access to jobs. Similarly, those who reported assistance from their home organization, as well as those referred by the PSC, were also more positive

Access to Jobs

“You were provided with access to jobs in your group and level or the equivalent.” [Priority Persons]



Key findings: Satisfaction with access to potentially qualified candidates as a result of PA is only moderate, and is much lower among hiring managers than among HR professionals. Priority persons are similarly unconvinced that the program offers them significant access to good jobs, although those who have not been in the system as long, as well as those who were placed as a result of their entitlement, are more positive. Evidence collected throughout the evaluation strongly points to the quality or fit between positions and candidates (rather than the skills and qualifications of candidates themselves) as the driver of this result. The overall quality of candidates is generally assessed positively, although the need to ensure that candidates with labour relations issues are not inappropriately placed into the PA system is underscored.

4.3 FAIRNESS, TRANSPARENCY AND MERIT-BASED APPOINTMENTS

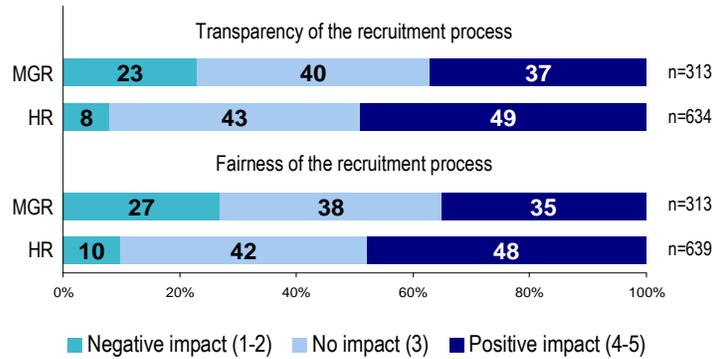
Opinions coming from all groups of key informants were mixed on the subject of whether the PA process is fair to priority persons, is transparent and leads to merit-based appointment decisions and key outcome indicators of program performance. A few remarked that the system works well, with some qualifiers, including that priority persons prepare effectively and do not assume that the PSC will do their work for them and “find them a job,” as several informants put it. There were concerns raised about some managers tailoring their criteria or “playing games” such as cancelling an appointment process when they were unable to get a clearance (15% cancellation rate following the identification of referrals). Concerns regarding transparency included a lack of sufficient explanation to priority persons about the process, leading to misunderstandings regarding their rights and responsibilities.

Priority persons responding to the survey expressed concerns about transparency and fairness in their final remarks (at the end of the questionnaire). The vast majority either called for more transparency (not knowing about certain job opportunities or wanting to meet their representative in person), or described negative experiences with PA or the public service hiring process overall, often pointing to a (perceived) lack of fairness. For example, several people expressed a great deal of frustration with continually going through interviews, screening and receiving rejection notices with no explanation or seeing new people hired when they were told that an organization was not hiring anyone. A priority person said in an interview that, on many occasions, they walked into an interview without knowing at all what to expect, giving them the impression that the whole process is quite insulated. In some cases, this same priority person said, it was clear to them during the interview that they would be screened out.

Survey results also indicated mixed experiences and generally tepid results regarding transparency and fairness. When asked to rate the fairness of the recruitment process, 35% of hiring managers indicated that the program has a positive impact. This is higher among HR professionals, where almost half (48%) saw the impact as positive. It is noteworthy that more than one in four (27%) hiring managers said that the impact is negative (and four in ten said that the program has no impact either way).

Impact of PA on Fairness and Transparency

“What is the impact on the following...?”

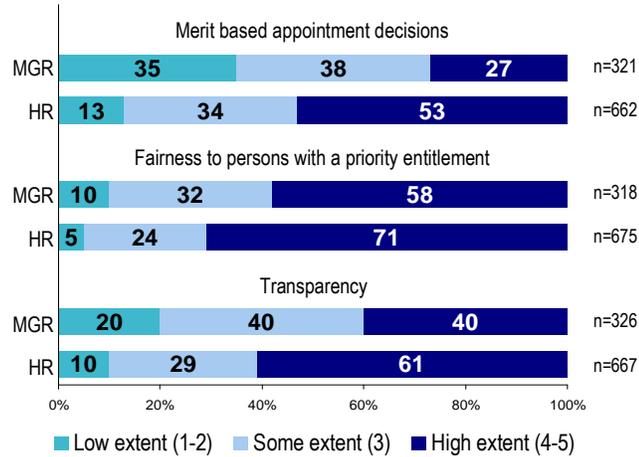


The program is also seen as contributing positively to transparency, according to half of HR professionals; however, again, only 37% of hiring managers rate the program’s contribution highly.

The program is also given reasonably high marks for its contribution to merit-based appointments, according to 53% of HR professionals. Hiring managers, on the other hand, were less positive, with only one in four (27%) saying the same. In fact, there are more hiring managers rating the program’s contribution to merit-based appointments as low (35%) than those providing a high rating.

Fairness and Transparency

“To what extent does PA contribute to the following?”



PA Evaluation 2010

Priority persons gave a low rating to PA’s fairness to persons with a priority entitlement. In fact, only one in three (29%) rated the program positively in this regard, while 49% described the program’s fairness as low. A majority (54%) also gave the program low marks for transparency. When asked to rate the degree to which PA contributes to merit-based appointment decisions, responses were similarly mixed, with four in ten (41%) putting its contribution as low, and fewer providing high ratings (31%).

The perceived contribution that the program makes to fairness increases with the recency of the priority entitlement (60% of those who received their entitlement prior to December 2008 perceive the process as low in fairness, compared to 34% of priority persons from 2010-2011). Those who received assistance with the job search, CF or RCMP medically released individuals, those who were successfully placed and those who were referred by the PSC are all more apt to perceive the program's contribution to fairness in a positive way. Those who received assistance, or who were placed, and individuals who were referred by the PSC are also more inclined to view the process as transparent and contributing to merit-based decisions.

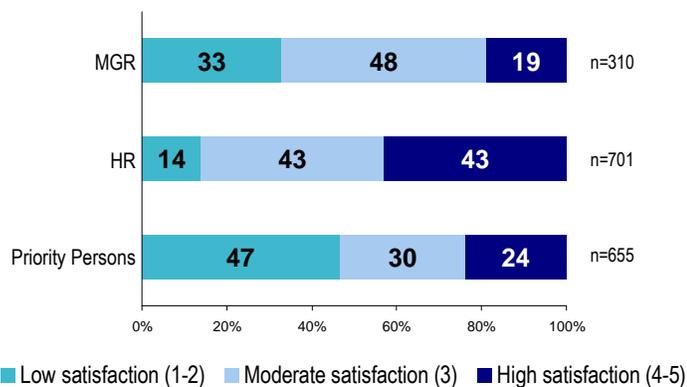
Key findings: *Opinions coming from hiring managers, HR professionals, priority persons and interview respondents were mixed on whether the PA process is fair to priority persons, is transparent and leads to merit-based appointment decisions. Priority persons expressed the greatest concerns with transparency and fairness, including concerns with lack of feedback, receiving insufficient information to prepare for a process and lack of access to support.*

4.4 OVERALL PROGRAM SATISFACTION

A key measure of program outcome is the satisfaction of stakeholders with their program experience. Survey results indicate low satisfaction with the PA Program, highlighted by the fact that 47% of priority persons surveyed indicated that they were not satisfied with the process; only 24% were satisfied. Another 30% indicated moderate satisfaction. Results are similarly low among others. Fewer than two in ten hiring managers express a high level of satisfaction with the process overall (19%), and one in three indicated low satisfaction. Results are more positive among HR professionals, where more than four in ten (43%) indicated satisfaction with the process. In the case of the HR community, relatively few indicated low satisfaction (at 14%)

Satisfaction with Overall Priority Administration Process

“How satisfied are you with the overall PA process?”



PA Evaluation 2010

Satisfaction is higher among hiring managers and HR professionals, in the Ontario region and among those with higher knowledge of the PA process and those who have received training.

The frustration of hiring managers is also reflected in the half of hiring managers and HR professionals in the survey who perceive the PA Program as having a negative impact on the satisfaction of hiring managers with the recruitment process. In fact, only two in ten perceive PA as having a positive impact on satisfaction (20% and 22% of hiring managers and HR professionals, respectively).

Among priority persons, only one in four expressed high satisfaction with their overall experience with the program. The same proportion expressed moderate satisfaction. Half, however, said that they were not very satisfied.

One in three priority persons felt that PA is a useful mechanism for finding employment to a great extent. One quarter felt that it is useful to some extent, and 41% did not find the mechanism useful in finding employment.

Program experience and perceptions (i.e. satisfaction with the process and their overall experience, and views in the utility of PA as a mechanism for finding employment) were more positive among those who obtained their priority entitlement most recently (in 2010-2011), priority persons who received greater assistance with the job search, those successfully placed through PA and those referred by the PSC.

Key findings: *The experiences of priority persons and hiring managers with PA highlight only modest satisfaction with the process. Few hiring managers and HR professionals perceive PA as having a positive impact on satisfaction with recruitment generally. Many priority persons do not evaluate their experience highly, and only a third consider PA to be an effective mechanism for obtaining employment.*

4.5 SUGGESTED BENEFITS, WEAKNESSES AND IMPROVEMENTS

a) Greatest benefits

When asked to describe the greatest benefits of PA or PIMS specifically, most pointed to either the opportunity that the program presents, making qualified people more available, providing job security and/or opportunities. Other popular responses were that it helps people who find themselves jobless through no fault of their own, and that it makes the hiring process more efficient. Other responses expressed more than once include the following:

- It makes relocation easier;
- It is transparent and fair; and
- It has technical advantages (e.g. it is done electronically).

b) Greatest weaknesses

Key weaknesses of the program included the following:

- Timing of processes (with many commenting that it is too slow);
- Priority persons are not always a good fit;
- The process is unfair (e.g. priority persons are expected to be chosen over more qualified candidates), although it should be noted that, according to the PSEA, a person is qualified if they meet the essential qualifications;

- The process is not transparent or well-communicated; and
- The process is perceived to be potentially subject to some abuse (e.g. managers using PA to rid themselves of problem employees).

When asked whether there are factors that make PA or PIMS difficult to use, just under half (42%) of the respondents agreed that there are. Difficulties commonly described include the following:

- Process is time-consuming or onerous;
- System is not user-friendly (e.g. not possible to go back in and change records, too many fields, not enough character space);
- Problems following up with priority persons (e.g. inaccurate contact information);
- Inappropriate referrals;
- Problems with the categories and criteria (e.g. too many, none that fit);
- Lack of information about priority persons; and
- Lack of understanding regarding how to use the system (e.g. lack of training, need for a tutorial).

c) Implications for changes/ improvements

Although almost half of HR advisors and hiring managers (and even more HR assistants) were unsure about whether the priority administration process could be improved or expedited without compromising priority persons' entitlements, nonetheless, another four in ten (43% to 46%) believed that there are ways this could be accomplished. Additionally, nearly two thirds (62%) of priority persons surveyed saw the potential for improvement, although 7% did not and 27% said they did not know. When given the opportunity to provide suggestions at the end of the survey, most either called for more transparency (not knowing about certain job opportunities, wanting to meet their PA representative in person, etc.), or described negative experiences with PA or the public service hiring process overall. For example, several priorities expressed a great deal of frustration with continually going through interviews, screening and receiving rejection notices with no explanation or seeing new people hired when they were told that an organization was not hiring anyone. A few priorities made requests for additional services (such as language training) or improvements to the service (such as offering services to spouses relocated outside Canada).

5. EFFICIENCY AND ECONOMY

Key questions to be examined by the evaluation include the cost-effectiveness and efficiency of the Priority Administration (PA) Program, as well as potential alternative approaches available. This issue was examined through key informant interviews and through the document review. A limited amount of information is available on the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the program, limiting the analysis that could be performed for the purposes of this report.

5.1 EFFICIENCY AND COST-EFFECTIVENESS

The issue of cost-effectiveness was explored in interviews with Public Service Commission (PSC) staff and management. Interview respondents noted that the program responds to legislated requirements and is, therefore, mandatory. A few interview respondents noted that efficiency and effectiveness could be improved by increasing awareness, understanding and use of the program across hiring organizations. Another noted that improved accuracy in referrals or screening may improve efficiency. In terms of alternatives, one interview respondent suggested having the program be entirely system driven (such as the Public Service Resourcing System), or an inventory where priorities can be registered and hiring managers can look for priority persons.

In terms of cost-effectiveness, one potential concern is the priority clearance request cancellation rate. A not insignificant number of requests for clearances are cancelled when priority persons are identified and referred to the process. Since 2006-2007, 15% to 16% of processes for term and indeterminate positions were cancelled annually following identification of referrals (e.g. 2 322 of 15 376 requests made in 2009-2010 were cancelled). In addition to raising concerns related to staffing values, there is a financial impact associated with the effort of inputting information into the Priority Information Management System (PIMS), searching for priority persons and the referral assessment process.

Cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness can also be assessed by comparing program costs to generated activities, outputs and outcomes over time or to the costs of other alternatives with similar objectives. Given that other program costs were not readily available and that other jurisdictions initiatives focus on employees declared surplus and laid-off only, the evaluation team compared ratios by fiscal year within the PA Program. As noted in Chapter 1, total budgeted program resources for the last four fiscal years ranged from \$1,50 M (in 2008-2009) (and actual expenditures of \$1.3 million); to \$1,94 M (in 2010-2011) (and actual expenditures of \$1.83 million). This includes both salary and non-salary as well as Policy Branch and Staffing and Assessment Services Branch budgets).

Each clearance request that generates an auto-clearance number requires that a PA advisor review the request to ensure that no priority person meets the position profile. As for indeterminate position requests for which priority persons are identified, PA advisors need to conduct screening prior to referring priority

persons. Hiring organizations are responsible for screening priority persons referred to term positions. For the past four fiscal years, the average cost per request was \$37.

Table 5.1: Cost per request received by year

Fiscal year	Actuals (salary and non-salary)	Number of clearance requests	Cost per request
2006-2007	\$1,657,107	35 418	\$47
2007-2008	\$1,617,909	41 951	\$39
2008-2009	\$1,323,180	47 580	\$28
2009-2010	\$1,632,802	42 730	\$38

The cost per referral has been decreasing since 2006-2007, from \$93 to \$57 in 2008-2009, for an average cost of \$74 per referral over the past four years. There was a \$12 per referral increase in 2009-2010 due to a \$300,000 increase in expenditures. However, this ratio by itself does not provide an indication of the extent to which referrals were aligned to position requirements (essential qualifications).

Table 5.2: Cost per referral by year

Fiscal year	Actuals (salary and non-salary)	Number of referrals	Cost per referral
2006-2007	\$1,657,107	17 824	\$93
2007-2008	\$1,617,909	19 619	\$82
2008-2009	\$1,323,180	23 135	\$57
2009-2010	\$1,632,802	23 716	\$69

The number of priority persons registered by fiscal year can give an indication of the number of files PA advisors have to manage on an annual basis. For instance, in 2009-2010, some 1 645 new cases were registered in PIMS, which represents a 32% increase over the previous year. This excludes cases carried over from one year to the next. Considering that there are 18 advisors in the PSC's seven regional offices, this averages out to 91 files per advisor. Focus group participants indicated that it is difficult to estimate a level of effort per file, as all files are different and require varying levels of assistance. It would appear, however, that the medically released category is the most complex and time consuming category. Since the budget is relatively stable and registrations are increasing, the cost per priority person has decreased consistently over the past four fiscal years, for an average cost of \$1,133.

Table 5.3: Cost per priority person registered by year

Fiscal year	Actuals (salary and non-salary)	Number of priority persons registered by FY*	Cost per priority person
2006-2007	\$1,657,107	1 240	\$1,336
2007-2008	\$1,617,909	1 364	\$1,186
2008-2009	\$1,323,180	1 250	\$1,059
2009-2010	\$1,632,802	1 645	\$993

* This excludes carry-overs.

Again, given that expenditures have decreased slightly between 2006-2007 and 2008-2009 and increased again in 2009-2010, while the number of appointments to indeterminate positions is following an upward trend (4% increase in 2009-2010), the cost per indeterminate placement went down by 25% between 2006-2007 and 2008-2009 and increased again to \$2,206 per indeterminate placement. The average cost over the past four years was \$2,182. These costs, however, do not take into account organizational assessment and system costs. If these were known and included in total costs, the ratio would reflect a true cost per placement.

Table 5.4: Cost per placement by year

Fiscal year	Actuals (salary and non-salary)	Number of priority persons appointed to indeterminate positions*	Cost per indeterminate placement
2006-2007	\$1,657,107	672	\$2,466
2007-2008	\$1,617,909	732	\$2,210
2008-2009	\$1,323,180	711	\$1,861
2009-2010	\$1,632,802	740	\$2,206

* This excludes appointments to term positions.

Key findings: Some interview respondents suggest that efficiency and effectiveness could be improved by increasing understanding of the program, ensuring appropriate use, improving accuracy in referrals or creating an inventory of priority persons that can be directly accessed by hiring managers.

The average cost per request received by the PA Program (based on program costs divided by number of clearance requests) over the past four fiscal years was \$37. The cost per referral made was \$69 in 2009-2010. The cost per referral decreased from \$93 in 2006-2007 to \$57 in 2008-2009. The average cost per referral for the review period was \$74. Furthermore, in 2009-2010, a total of 1 645 new cases were registered in PIMS, which translates to 91 files per PA advisor. Finally, the cost per indeterminate placement (for the PSC, excluding costs for assessment by hiring organizations) was \$2,206 in 2009-2010, for an average of \$2,182 over the past four years.

However, these ratios do not provide an indication of the extent to which referrals were aligned to position requirements (essential qualifications).

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Priority Administration (PA) Program is seen as highly relevant and is very likely to become even more critical in coming months, when an expected work force adjustment takes place across the federal public service and places potentially thousands of public servants into surplus positions. This contraction of the federal public service will mean a significant increase in the number of priorities in the program, against a backdrop of less hiring and fewer job postings, placing significant pressures on the PA Program. This presents the program with an urgent problem, given that much of the qualitative and quantitative evidence from this evaluation suggests that it is not functioning as well as it could under the current conditions and would be considerably more taxed by the impending changes to the staffing activity level.

Study findings point to a program that, at its core, is well-established and reasonably structured. There are also processes, procedures and tools in place to enter priorities into the system and make referrals to appropriate jobs. Nonetheless, this evaluation highlighted modest levels of satisfaction across all stakeholder groups involved with the program, from both qualitative and quantitative evidence collected in the study. Much of the concern points to one (or more) of three fundamental and interrelated elements: 1) lack of information and training needed to operate optimally in the program, including insufficient clarity about /understanding of roles and responsibilities among all stakeholder groups; 2) lack of accountability and monitoring to enforce accountability; and 3) less than optimal/strategic organization and use of program expertise and tools. A discussion of each follows.

a) Information – Training and outreach

Both qualitative and quantitative evidence from a range of sources indicate that most program stakeholder groups lack a clear and detailed understanding of their own role and responsibilities, the responsibilities of others in the program and the interplay between them. Public Service Commission (PSC) staff indicated that home organizations are not clear on their role in informing and supporting their priorities (who are still their own employees). HR advisors also indicated in focus groups that there is confusion about who is responsible for doing what (e.g. what the home organization should be doing versus the PSC in terms of counselling and supporting priorities). Priorities also rated themselves as not having the support of home organizations or the information that they needed to participate fully in the program.

Related to information about roles and responsibilities, study evidence highlighted a strong need for orientation, training sessions and reference materials for human resources (HR) advisors and assistants, as well as for hiring managers and priority persons. These sessions and materials/tools are needed to support stakeholders operating in the program in an environment where employee turnover is high; PA is only one of many areas that advisors and managers must be familiar with, and, in the case of hiring managers, or small organizations in general, use of the PA Program may be infrequent. In terms of organizations, one approach

would be to provide HR staff with training sessions and on-line reference materials and tools, or to designate a single advisor in each organization to become the expert and trainer of others. Many advisors consulted in the study said that they did not receive training related to administration of the PA Program. A major component of this type of information or training package needs to be how to get answers to questions (who to go to under what conditions/situations) and what everyone should expect (e.g. required information, coding specifications, method of providing assessment feedback and recourse procedures). Having key HR representatives in organizations who are better trained and equipped to counsel and support hiring managers and priorities would ultimately reduce the workload of PA advisors and reduce the number of referrals, and at the same time increase the quality of the match of referrals. This would result in less work and frustration for everyone concerned in placing priorities.

To the extent that training sessions/workshops and networks are put in place for organizations, it is the HR advisors who should be the primary beneficiary. Therefore, it is the HR advisor who should attend these sessions. One consideration would be the need to develop training sessions/workshops that are conducted in each organization (i.e. taken to the organizations individually) so that attendance, particularly among HR advisors, is high. Making the sessions mandatory may also be a consideration.

HR advisors in each organization also need training and reference materials and packages that they can use in their roles as support and counsellors to priorities and to hiring managers. These could be general information packages that clearly lay out the steps and procedures with time lines and information about what to expect (and what each player's role and responsibilities are, as already outlined). Again, these information materials could go a long way toward preparing priorities and hiring managers in the procedures of the program and their own responsibilities, resulting in better referral matches.

One particular area where information and training should occur is in the post-referral process. This includes providing all players with a good understanding of the assessment phase and what to expect (detailed, written feedback on the assessment and why the priority is not the right fit for the job, if applicable), and when to expect it. They should also clearly understand how the feedback might be used to make adjustments in either the coding of the case or better preparation of the priority person (e.g. search, CV or conduct in the interview). A clear understanding is also required for all involved in the recourse process, including how to challenge an assessment, when and with whom.

b) Organization of expertise and tools

Related to training, but also to the organization of the program expertise, another clear area for the development of training is internally within the PSC among PA managers, advisors and assistants. In interviews conducted for the study, many PA staff pointed to the current knowledge and expertise of PA advisors as a weakness that must be addressed. New staff and high turnover (related to the transition, but also to natural turnover such as retirement), along with the new governance structure that has PA officers isolated in smaller units across seven regions, means that experience with the administration of this complex program is more fragmented in some areas than it was previously. Several interviewees pointed to

a lack of experience; of knowing the ins and outs of the program and Priority Information Management System (PIMS); as well as in the judgement required to code and refer priorities and review post-referral assessment feedback. Both PA advisors and HR advisors pointed to inconsistency of judgments and methods of administering the program from PA advisor to PA advisor. Several PA representatives also indicated that no formalized training (courses, materials, on-line tools, mentoring program) exists to train new PA advisors and assistants, making it difficult to build new capacity quickly. Added to this is a staff that report themselves to be overloaded with casework and administrative duties, taxing their ability to oversee and train new advisors.

The change in internal reporting structure of the PA Program within the PSC — reporting to distinct regional managers as opposed to one PA manager — has resulted in PA advisors and assistants working in seven independent offices, as was the case with the former configuration, but with diminished ability to communicate, share information and best practices, build capacity among new program staff and share workload. The change has resulted in a more convoluted and less direct pathway to accessing expertise about the program. On tougher cases, this has resulted in more resources being expended and additional delays to obtain expert decisions, a particular problem among new staff.

There is likely a need to examine ways of bringing PA advisors together, working more as a team in order to complete the transition and allow the program to build capacity quickly and effectively. Changes should enable PA advisors to work more effectively together, mentoring new staff and sharing ideas about judgements and decisions, thereby increasing both the capacity and consistency of the team overall and allowing them a way to optimize their overall workload. Making access to required expertise more straightforward and easier will also make a valuable contribution. Although PA advisors are separated into small groups, changes can be made to bridge the gap through systems and working processes without making changes to where advisors are located, which was designed to place them closer to their clients in their own respective regions.

The current structure also seems relatively flat, with very experienced advisors working with new staff, as front-line case workers. A useful deployment of seasoned officers might more effectively utilize their expertise to build capacity inside or outside the PSC. Senior officers' time may be well spent overseeing (e.g. training, mentoring and monitoring) newer team members and developing training materials for PA advisors, HR managers and priority persons. This cohort might also contribute to train the trainer initiatives that spread the expertise in strategically concentrated ways in each organization.

If one “champion” or “expert” were cultivated in each department and agency (with the exception of micro-organizations), all other HR advisors could rely on this individual. This one source could also be responsible for ensuring at the organizational level that they are clear on, and covering all of their responsibilities for, priority persons and that they have the best support materials to distribute to and inform hiring managers and priority persons, as well as original managers. This type of organization would also make the structure for accountability easier to manage (see next section).

Lastly, the backbone of the PA Program is PIMS, which provides an excellent opportunity to build in additional fields/requirements and feedback loops to ensure that information about roles and responsibilities and procedures is available, and that the right information can be captured about priorities, jobs posted, referrals and post-referrals assessment and recourse. It can also be used to ensure that this information is available to stakeholders, who should get it and that they receive it in a timely fashion. Fields can be added or made mandatory, and distribution requirements can be imposed to make sure that everyone who needs to see the information gets it. For example, PIMS can be used to send priority persons information about positions, pointing to areas where they can tailor their response. PIMS can automatically send the invitation to priorities when they could be referred for a job (enabling them to participate in judging the fit for themselves and allowing them time to better prepare themselves and their submission to respond). Ultimately, PIMS can be used to increase the quality of match between referrals and jobs, as well as the quality of fit of the submission, and also increase the transparency and sense of fairness for priorities. Once these fields and procedures are in place, accountability for not fulfilling responsibilities will be clearer and easier to manage.

c) Lack of monitoring and accountability is a huge gap in the program

Results point to a fundamental gap in the level of monitoring and accountability built into the program. This accountability begins with all stakeholders having a clear understanding of their own roles. Related to this is adequate support, information, training and tools to be able to do the work. Once these are in place, however, there is a need for systematic monitoring of whether or not stakeholders are adequately fulfilling their own responsibilities, and to what level (e.g. turnaround time, quality of coding, quality of counselling and support provided in the case of home organizations, quality of involvement and judgements). Further, there is a need for clear accountability with regard to fulfilling responsibilities. This might include, for example, sign-off by managers and senior HR advisors on behalf of the organization that the quality of the priority person is not sub-standard, and that counselling of the priorities has been undertaken. Among hiring managers, sign-off could incorporate a statement that they have adequately and accurately described the job being offered, and that they have assessed priority persons reasonably.

Internally, greater quality control frameworks need to be implemented, particularly with newer employees, but also to ensure consistency of work across the program. There is also a need for accountability built into the system for appropriateness/accuracy of referrals. This includes assessing the level of match in skills, but also taking into account the interest of the priority person and ensuring that the priority person is party to this decision and has opportunity to tailor their response (and generally prepare themselves adequately). This would also include some element of responsibility among PA advisors for the number of referrals, ensuring that hiring managers are not sent long lists of priority persons unless under exceptional circumstances or when it is truly warranted. PA advisors who routinely send too many referrals, prefer to err on the side of “better safe than sorry” and/or send referrals that are not well matched to the position, should be given further training (e.g. paired with more senior advisors for further mentoring). PA advisors should be given greater responsibility for ensuring that an appropriate number and quality of referrals are made, and should rely on greater participation from the priority persons to do this. In turn, priority persons need to be given

greater responsibility for actively assisting in their own marketing, but also in appropriateness of referring them. If priorities are consistently being referred, or referring themselves, for positions for which they are later assessed to be inappropriate, they could be asked to undergo further counselling with the PSC and both the home organization and PA advisors could be involved in making corrections. Related to this, involvement of the priority persons in the decision of whether or not to be referred for a particular job enables priorities to have a greater choice in the decision.

Hiring organizations could also be given clear accountability for posting jobs and assessing priority persons in good faith and in a timely manner. They could also be given clearer responsibility for providing adequate feedback to all parties involved and providing adequate detail on how priority persons were assessed and why they did not meet the assessment criteria.

d) Final recommendations

1. Roles and responsibilities:

- 1.1 Better define roles and responsibilities (descriptions of the roles of home organizations, the PSC, hiring managers, HR advisors and priority persons) in the *Guide on Priority Administration*.
- 1.2 Create an information package for priority persons that could be provided to them by the home organization to explain the PA Program, the process, their role, the role of the home organization and the role of the PSC.
- 1.3 Formally request that organizations designate an organizational priority administration contact to institute a more centralized system of expertise and information (i.e. one designated HR advisor) in organizations who would develop an expertise in PA to address issues at the organizational and/or regional level.
- 1.4 The PSC should consider a range of strategies and tools to increase learning for organizations.

2. Governance and process management:

- 2.1 While keeping the overall governance structure as it is (i.e. PA advisors reporting to regional managers of operations), the PA Program should create and support a team approach where PA advisors work together to share the workload, training/oversight and mentoring function, and share in best practices, judgments and decisions.
- 2.2 Map out current priority administration processes in order to find efficiencies and standardize amended processes across regions.

- 2.3 Assign PA advisors strategically according to their level of expertise, utilizing the most experienced members to train and mentor less experienced PA advisors, monitor and develop training and communications material to build capacity and check on quality.
 - 2.4 Ensure quick and easy access to expertise that can provide consistent and accurate answers to questions or issues encountered by PA advisors. Provide additional support or tools for PA staff such as effective access to interpretations or past decisions.
 - 2.5 Review current recourse mechanisms for priority persons.
- 3. Training and support for PA advisors and managers of operations:**
- 3.1 Develop formal training for PA advisors, which could include an on-line training component in addition to practical on-the-job experience elements (e.g. mentoring). Ensure that new PA advisors have extensive knowledge of the *Public Service Employment Act* and the *Public Service Employment Regulations* and are familiar with classification, labour relations, staffing and assessment so that they can provide meaningful advice to priority persons and HR advisors and play a more effective challenge function.
 - 3.2 Develop a training module or reference guide for managers of operations in order to better equip them for supervising PA advisors.
- 4. Referrals:**
- 4.1 Consider treating priority persons as candidates by increasing the level of transparency and enlarging their involvement/responsibility for judging appropriateness of the referral fit (e.g. notify them when they are referred so that they may obtain the statement of merit/job criteria and be able to ascertain their own qualifications and/or interest in the position, and allow them time to tailor their CV, making it the role of the priority to declare interest in the job prior to referral).
 - 4.2 Review and update skill codes to ensure that they remain relevant and are accurately coded in all organizations.
 - 4.3 Increase accountability of priority persons by allowing them the flexibility to decide whether or not they are a suitable candidate for a position, providing clear and written rationalization if they decide that the fit is not right. The PSC should also assess the feasibility of implementing standard procedures aimed at priority persons (e.g. number of days for the priority person to reply to the hiring organization). Priority information could be reviewed in PIMS to ensure that no adjustments are required. PA advisors could also review historic data to assess situations where priority persons are referred repeatedly without results (inappropriate coding, self-

elimination, reference checks issues, etc.). In cases where issues are identified, the home organization should be informed.

5. System enhancements:

- 5.1 PIMS should be amended to allow for additional communication features such as automatic replies when priority persons are registered in the system and to inform them of employment opportunities to gauge their interest before referring them to hiring organizations.
- 5.2 The system should also be adapted to allow for more detailed information on cases that can be shared within PA (among PA advisors), to promote quality judgements, save time and increase consistency of judgements among PA advisors.

6. Accountability and monitoring:

- 6.1 Implement a quality assurance function responsible for reviewing data quality, including the accuracy of coding and advice provided.
- 6.2 An accountability framework is also necessary to distil the essential parts of the process and responsible parties, with associated performance indicators that can be used to assess how well each party is fulfilling its obligations in the program. Clear description of roles, indicators, targets and consequences would be stipulated in the framework and communicated broadly to all stakeholders.
- 6.3 Improvements are suggested on the degree of monitoring on multiple levels:
 - ◇ Of PA advisors: Increase quality and consistency of coding and judgements across Canada, possibly through a peer review approach or through policy.
 - ◇ Of home organizations: Ensure that managers personally sign off to indicate that there are no performance issues. Ensure that home organizations take responsibility for informing, counselling and supporting priorities at the start and throughout the process (including, for example, reviewing post-referral assessments and becoming involved in any challenges / recourse actions).
 - ◇ Of hiring organizations: Monitor/audit use of clearances provided and introduce performance indicators and accountability measures to ensure that all organizations and managers are playing by the same rules. Ensure that all required information (e.g. post-referral assessment information) is provided in an adequate and timely fashion.
 - ◇ Of priority persons: Ensure that they are provided with information about possible referrals and given an opportunity to decide on the appropriateness of the match. PIMS to be updated as required to ensure the accuracy of the information.

- ◇ Consider adding a priority administration composite indicator to the Staffing Management Accountability Framework.

7. **“Rebranding” PA:**

- 7.1 Once a number of the issues found in this study have been addressed (e.g. accountability for quality of referrals, greater involvement of priorities in referral and accountability for home organizations granting entitlement appropriately), efforts should be made to “rebrand” the PA Program.
- 7.2 A communication strategy could be developed to “rebrand” the program and communicate new program/improvements to organizations.

ANNEX A: ALTERNATIVES

Another issue identified for the evaluation concerns alternative approaches and how the Priority Administration (PA) Program of the Public Service Commission (PSC) compares to other priority administration programs nationally and internationally. In terms of alternatives, information is available that demonstrates the use of priority administration in other jurisdictions nationally and internationally; the application of priority administration within work force adjustment (WFA) activities; and potential activities that the PSC could undertake to support new work force adjustment activities that may take place in the future. One key difference with the Canadian Priority Administration system and other systems is that, in the federal public service, there are nine types of priority entitlements while other systems mainly deal with work force adjustments that represent two of the nine types (surplus employees and lay-off).

a) Priority administration nationally and internationally

There are examples of similar approaches taken by governments internationally, as well as provincially/territorially within Canada. Examples include:

- **United States:** In 1995, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) in the United States federal government issued regulations requiring agencies to provide career transition assistance to employees affected by downsizing or restructuring. Agencies must give selection priority to their surplus employees who apply for vacancies in their local commuting area. Agencies must notify surplus or displaced employees when they plan to fill these jobs. With a few exceptions, the agency must select those who apply and are eligible and well qualified before any other candidate. Each agency must also maintain a Reemployment Priority List (RPL) for each local commuting area, where it separates employees by reduction in force. Employees can register for the RPL as soon as they receive a separation notice. The OPM also changed the way in which displaced Federal workers receive priority for jobs in other agencies. The priority status of displaced workers expires when they are actually laid off, or when they decline a directed reassignment or transfer.
- **Queensland, Australia¹²:** All permanent government employees becoming surplus as a result of organizational change or service delivery reform are given priority in staffing. These employees are given priority for six months at their existing substantive level or, if agreed, at a lower classification level. They are considered via a suitability assessment prior to the consideration of any other candidates. The suitability assessment is to determine whether the employee has the minimum skills to perform the requirements of the role to a satisfactory level, if provided with reasonable retraining. Priority employees are assigned to a case manager who will support them in the deployment process.

¹² Human Resources Policy. Surplus Employees and Priority Placement Employees. Queensland Government. HR Policy B36. January 2010.

- **Alberta:** A surplus employee is a permanent employee who has been notified of position abolishment verbally but not in writing. The status of the employee shifts from surplus to abolished once written notification is given. Organizations are encouraged to place surplus employees in another position, where possible, to avoid serving position abolishment notices. When a position becomes available and requires recruitment, organizations must check the position abolishment inventory. If no employees have a right to the vacancy, organizations are encouraged to review the surplus employee inventory. A surplus employee appointed to a lower-level position is considered to have accepted a demotion, and no further consideration needs to be extended. The employing organization must give an employee at least 90 days' notice prior to written notice that their position is to be abolished. Employees whose positions are formally abolished have priority entitlement in competitions for 180 days.
- **Northwest Territories:** Territorial Public Service employees terminated due to lay-off or the transfer of their position to another community are given priority for staffing over other candidates for vacant positions within the Territorial Public Service. A Staffing Priority List is maintained of affected individuals.

b) Comparison of priority administration in the context of work force adjustment

In discussing alternatives, it is also possible to examine approaches taken to support WFA activities in Canada and internationally. This is timely, given an expected wave of such activity in the near future.

International comparison

In 1997, the PSC completed a comparison of WFA activities and approaches in Canada to those taken in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.¹³ The United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia experienced major reforms of their respective public services during the 1980s and 1990s. These reforms led to considerable reductions in the size of the public service. These three countries reduced the size of their respective public services considerably, the UK by 28%, New Zealand by 60% and Australia by 17%. In order to facilitate the transition, new infrastructures introduced included the use of various early retirement incentives and outplacement services to assist employees, as needed, in relocating within the public or private sectors. All three countries introduced concrete programs and mechanisms to assist affected employees throughout this difficult transitional period.

In the United Kingdom, ministries are responsible for personnel administration. They were, therefore, accountable for negotiating and implementing redeployment or counselling services to assist affected employees in finding other employment. Those who were declared redundant, whether voluntarily or not,

¹³ Work Force Adjustment. A Comparison of the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia. February 1997, External Audit and Review Directorate, Recourse and Review Branch, PSC.

were eligible for early retirement under the terms of the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme. The Treasury had no direct control over the application of the guidelines where layoffs were concerned, provided that the ministries adhered to the master document, "Redundancy: Principles and Procedures."

In 1986, after negotiation with the unions, New Zealand's infrastructure included a directive and procedures issued by the State Services Commission. The government—labour agreement called for the following options for supernumerary employees: attrition, early retirement, leave without pay, retraining, redeployment and voluntary severance. Early retirement applied to employees aged 50 who had a minimum of 10 years' service, while voluntary departures applied to employees who reached an agreement with their general administrator to leave the public service with a predetermined separation allowance. This agreement set out the support services available to affected employees, such as redeployment measures, conditions for access to early retirement and the financial arrangements for voluntary departure. With the 1988 *State Sector Act*, New Zealand ministries all have the authority to administer their personnel, including downsizing. The State Services Commission does, however, offer consultant services and training to managers and employees involved in downsizing.

In Australia, the 1986 *Public Service Legislation Act* makes "voluntary retrenchment" one of the options offered within the downsizing process. This option offers to employees who are either declared redundant or volunteer a departure incentive program, which includes separation pay, a lump sum, cash payment for annual and sick leave credits for long-service employees and pension arrangements. The Act provides more detail on the other options: attrition, redeployment and retraining. It also gives all of the administrative steps to be taken and the services available to redundant employees, such as job search support outside the public service sector, assistance to improve interview and CV preparation skills and the services of financial experts. The Australian ministries are responsible for implementing staff reductions. The ministries must, however, inform the Public Service Commission of all situations in which they make use of downsizing. In 1994, the Australian government inaugurated a national three-year program, the APS Labour Market Adjustment Program, to manage the redeployment of supernumerary personnel.

The Public Service Commission and work force adjustment in the 1990s

In February 1995, the federal government of Canada announced that, subsequent to a program review, expenditures for federal public service programs would be reduced over three years (from April 1, 1995, to March 31, 1998). The purpose of this review was to reduce the size of the federal public service by approximately 45 000 positions. The PSC was working under different parameters when it took on additional functions during the program review. Staffing systems were highly centralized and all organizations were impacted similarly and at the same time. Within this context, the PSC played a pivotal role in placing both priority persons and affected employees. Activities and roles included:

- ***Career Transition Services:*** During 1995-1996, the PSC continued to offer tailored services to complement those provided by organizations. This included regional resource centers providing access to information on job opportunities, a wide variety of self-directed career planning instruments, information on starting a business, assessment services such as

aptitude or language testing, analysis of the local public service market data, workshops and symposia on work force adjustment and career transition issues and links to other employers in various centers across Canada. In addition, the PSC provided access to career and psychological counselling for executives and non-executives of the public service and provided workshops dealing with career management and stress management, as well as special "Care for the Caregivers" workshops for human resource specialists. The PSC undertook several other initiatives during 1995-1996 to support employees through work force adjustment, tailored to meet regional needs.

- **Joint Adjustment Committees:** An agreement was signed by bargaining agents, the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat and organizations in May 1995 that established the mandate and membership of the National Joint Adjustment Steering Committee (NJASC) and the mandate of 11 regional and 13 local Joint Adjustment Committees.
- **Alternation process:** On behalf of and in conjunction with the NJASC, the PSC drafted roles and responsibilities for the Alternate Exchange Program. The Alternate Exchange Program allowed affected employees (who had not yet been declared surplus) to continue working in the public service by switching or "alternating" jobs with another employee who wanted to leave the public service — where such a switch was operationally feasible.

Today, deputy heads work in a highly delegated model, and the role of the central agencies has become one of guidance and support, rather than of dictation and control. Having the PSC take on many of the employer-related responsibilities it assumed in the 1990s would be counter to the current model. That being said, significant WFA activity at the public service-wide level can only be effectively managed within the current climate if there is effective and consistent application of the legislation and policies across organizations, coherent and timely communication to all stakeholders and a systematic means of ensuring that employees are treated fairly and transparently.

Legally, the PSC is responsible for ensuring that priority persons are provided with the opportunity to be appointed ahead of all others, if qualified. There is the potential for a real or perceived conflict of interest if the PSC takes on the placement of affected employees by referring these persons through the Priority Information Management System.

ANNEX B: INTERVIEWEES

Public Service Commission (17)

Director General, Delegation and Accountability Directorate (DAD), Policy Branch

Director General, Public Service Staffing Modernization Project, Staffing and Assessment Services Branch (SASB)

Director General, National Client Services Directorate (NCSB), SASB

Director General, Investigations Directorate, Legal Affairs Branch

Director, Delegation and Reporting, DAD, Policy Branch

Director, Staffing Operational Support Division, NCSB, SASB

Regional Director, Atlantic Region Division, Operations Directorate, SASB

Acting Manager (1) and Managers of Operations (2), SASB

Priority Administration Manager, National Capital and Eastern Ontario Region

Policy Analyst, Staffing Operational Support Division, Operations Directorate, SASB

Analyst, Priority Administration, DAD, Policy Branch

Priority Administration Advisors (4), NCSB and Operations Directorate, SASB

External Stakeholders (20)

Associate Deputy Minister, Human Resources Branch, Public Works and Government Services Canada

Director General, Human Resources and Workplace Management, Canadian Heritage

Acting Director General, Client Services, Human Resources Branch, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

Senior Director, Staffing and Recruitment, Human Resources Branch, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

Executive Director, Human Resources Council, Treasury Board of Canada

Executive Director, Strategic Policy, Priorities and Planning, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (TBS)

Executive Director, Labour Relations, Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer (OCHRO), TBS

Senior Director, Insurance Benefits Program Group, Pensions and Benefits Sector, OCHRO, TBS

Senior Policy Analyst, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat Workforce Adjustment Policy, TBS

Representative from the Public Service Alliance of Canada

Representative from the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada

Priority persons (4)

Hiring managers (4)

HR advisor