COMMUNICATIONS ALBERTA

PUBLIC AFFAIRS BUREAU REVIEW COMMITTEE REPORT

SEPTEMBER 2005

DRAFT August 29, 2005 – NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Create greater strategic capacity in the operations of the Government of Alberta.**
   Restructure the Public Affairs Bureau, to be known as Communications Alberta. Make issues identification and environmental scanning an explicit part of Communications Alberta's mandate and assign it responsibility for actively demonstrating a culture of communications within departments and across government.
   a. Communications Alberta should be headed by a Deputy Minister, [redacted] In recognition of the strategic importance of Communications Alberta and its role in supporting government decision-making, the Deputy Minister Communications Alberta should report to the Deputy Minister Executive Council and the Executive Director of the Office of the Premier. The deputy minister would be appointed by the Premier and on the senior officials list. The Deputy Minister Communications Alberta should be an individual with a strong grasp of the political landscape in both Alberta and the rest of Canada, as well as strategic and communications expertise.
   b. Designate six senior positions within the current PAB as executive directors reporting to the Deputy Minister, Communications Alberta. Each would be responsible for a group of departments that corresponds to the current Standing Policy Committees (SPC) and would coordinate and review emerging and existing policy and programs from a strategic and communications perspective. They would work closely with their respective SPC and with Communications Directors from the departments within that SPC's mandate.
   c. Communications Alberta should encompass those government-wide services currently provided by the PAB that are advisory and consultative in nature, including a renewed emphasis on providing expert advice in advertising, printing, graphic design and web-based communications. An assistant deputy minister position should be created with responsibility for these government-wide communications consulting services, as well as communications training and development and research.
   d. Services currently managed by the PAB which are transactional rather than strategic in nature should become part of the responsibility of Alberta Government Services, including the Queen's Printer and Service Alberta.

An organizational chart has been provided in Appendix One.

2. **Increase transparency and understanding of the role of communications in government.**
   Develop a written and publicly available policy around communications that clearly lays out the communications functions and responsibilities of Communications Alberta, Ministers and ministerial staff, and departmental communications branches.

3. **Build a stronger and more pervasive culture of communications within government.**
   a. Transfer responsibility for maintaining a strong communications branch, including responsibility for hiring personnel, to individual departments.
      i. Communicating with stakeholders and members of the public is an important part of a department's responsibility and each department needs to ensure that sufficient resources are devoted to it –both time and money. This communications responsibility encompasses both strategic and program communications and should be part of the management performance measures.
   b. Maintain the matrix reporting structure currently guiding communications directors while revising it to reflect the new structure. Currently communications directors report to their minister, deputy minister and the Public Affairs Bureau. The lines of accountability now should include a direct report to the departmental deputy minister, a strong relationship with their minister and open lines of communication and cooperative relationship with the designated executive director within Communications Alberta.
   c. Transfer the current budget dollars spent by the Public Affairs Bureau on seconded staff to the respective departments and recommend that departments look at further bolstering their communications budgets to reflect the expanded roles and responsibilities envisioned in this report.
   d. Make internal communications part of the communications function within departments.
   e. Establish a Premier's Award for Communications Excellence to help further the goal of creating a culture of communications.

4. **Bolster the communications capacity within ministerial offices and Government Members Services.**
   It's critical that ministerial staff have the capacity to address communications issues and can assess the strength of the communications advice that they are receiving. In addition, individual MLAs also need communications support in recognition of their role in communicating with their constituents. This can be addressed by taking steps to provide further support to ministerial and government member services, including media relations and spokesperson training. While outside the mandate of this committee, increases to the legislative budgets of all caucuses are believed to be appropriate, in recognition of their communications responsibilities to the public, whether as government members or members of the opposition.