

Annual PUBLIC AFFAIRS BUREAU Report

1998-99



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Highlights

The mission of the Public Affairs Bureau is to help the government in its ongoing dialogue with Albertans by providing quality, coordinated and cost-effective communications services.

Some of the Bureau's key accomplishments for the 1998-99 fiscal year include:

- a record high number of public involvement initiatives, including communications support to a number of summits held over the course of the year;
- the launch of Alberta Connects, a new resource for Albertans to share their opinions with government and ask for information;
- comprehensive communications support to government programs and services impacting Albertans and their communities, such as student health, youth learning and employment, consumer awareness, air quality and crime prevention;
- continued efforts to increase the number and scope of cooperative communications programs across ministries, including initiatives on children, housing, climate change and emergency response;
- the innovative use of new communications technologies, including the introduction of electronic commerce for Queen's Printer Bookstore customers; and
- ongoing efforts to deliver quality service and products to Albertans in the most cost-effective way possible, through initiatives like the Rules of Court materials produced cooperatively between the Bureau and Alberta Justice.

Organization Chart



Our clients are:

- Albertans receiving information from government;
- Queen's Printer Bookstore customers;
- RITE system users; and
- ministry clients using central Bureau and communications branch services.

The Bureau coordinated the purchase of more than **\$5.3 million** worth of advertising services and some **\$7.7 million** worth of print and graphic design services on behalf of government ministries in 1998-99.

Core human resource measures**A 1998 survey of PAB staff showed:**

- **91%** of PAB respondents agree they receive the support they need to develop knowledge and skills;
- **89%** agree they receive recognition for their contributions to business plan progress; and
- **87%** feel they receive training to become more competitive on the job market.

Operational Overview

The Public Affairs Bureau's spending for 1998-99 was \$19,000 below its authorized total of \$8.7 million. Bureau revenues exceeded the target of \$1.5 million by more than \$400,000.

The eight core businesses of the Public Affairs Bureau are to:

1. supply professionals to government ministries to develop and implement communications programs;
2. provide communications planning and consulting support to government;
3. coordinate government communications to and from Albertans on government initiatives, and during public emergencies;
4. provide specialized writing and editing services to government;
5. manage the Regional Information Telephone Enquiries (RITE) system, to give Albertans toll-free access to government;
6. publish and sell Alberta's laws and other government materials, and operate the Queen's Printer Bookstores in Edmonton and Calgary;
7. deliver information, including managing the government's use of information technology at the corporate level (e.g. the government's Internet Home Page, and the province-wide distribution of news releases) and technical support for major government news conferences and announcements; and
8. help government ministries purchase communications support services, including advertising, printing and graphic design.

- This year marked the development of the Bureau's first Human Resource Plan, which sets out objectives to ensure the organization's continued success and offers specific steps to help staff to develop their professional skills. The Plan also includes initiatives to enhance the productive and positive work environment that already exists in the Bureau. This environment is reflected in feedback from Bureau staff collected for the *Government of Alberta Core Human Resource Measures Project – 1998 Survey of Employees*. Bureau respondents to the survey rated their overall satisfaction with their work at 91 per cent, compared to the cross-government average of 78 per cent.
- The Bureau launched a number of training and development initiatives to continue building staff leadership skills and help interested non-management staff to prepare for management positions. The 1998 In-House Training Calendar included sessions to develop management skills across the organization, including *Face to Face Leadership* (developmental sessions for non-management staff); *From Performance Management to Performance Appraisal*; and a one-day Service Excellence Conference on leadership skills.

- Other training and development trends include increased efforts to help staff make the best use of the Internet as a research and communications tool and ongoing sessions to enhance the consulting skills of all staff. These courses were part of a comprehensive in-house training calendar covering 49 administrative, communications, technical and professional development sessions. Staff can also access an annual learning account to help enhance their overall professional skills.
- The Bureau continued to find ways to coordinate activities and share resources with other areas. An example can be found in the shared information technology services initiative between Executive Council and central Bureau offices. This reorganization and restaffing of IT services has enhanced service to Executive Council and the Bureau at a reduced cost.
- We are on track with plans to ensure that Bureau systems are not compromised by Year 2000 related problems. Specific steps completed in 1998-99 include: redevelopment of the print procurement system (PORTS), and the purchase, installation and testing of the Queen's Printer Bookstore point of sale and inventory systems. A thorough review of all applications and the upgrading of non-compliant software is nearing completion. All workstations have been tested and there are no issues pending.

1998-99 Key Activities

The Public Affairs Bureau met its business plan objectives for 1998-99 through a wide variety of projects and initiatives, including the following examples.

Goal 1

Make Government Information More Accessible to Albertans

Communications with Albertans – The Bureau assigns communications staff to ministries across government to help ensure the strategic planning, development and delivery of public information programs. Communications initiatives delivered in 1998-99 include:

- *Programs for children* - Bureau staff from a number of ministries came together to deliver new and expanded public communications programs surrounding services for Alberta's children, including: the new children's initiative; the student health initiative; legislation surrounding children involved in prostitution; and fetal alcohol syndrome prevention and treatment.
- *Jobs and lifelong learning* – Advanced Education and Career Development Communications helped to keep Albertans informed about a number of programs designed to help them prepare for changing workplace demands, including: Youth Connections, a youth learning and employment program; the Alberta Opportunities Bursary; the Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS); and information programs for job seekers on ACCESS Television.

Staff development

- **Some 80%** of Bureau staff took advantage of at least one training opportunity in 1998-99.
- We offered **49** internal training sessions to Bureau and ministry staff from across government.
- Bureau staff also participated in **48** different sessions offered through outside institutions.

We contributed to the goals set out in the cross-government Corporate Human Resource Strategy by providing ten developmental moves within government and with other organizations and offering seven student work experience and practicum placements.

Public involvement

In 1998, Bureau staff assisted in a variety of consultation initiatives, resulting in:

- some **770,000** calls to government information and comment telephone lines;
- **30,000** Albertans attending nearly **1,200** meetings, hearings and workshops; and
- more than **116,000** written and oral submissions in response to public consultation events and initiatives.

(1998 Public Consultation Report, Government of Alberta, May 12, 1999)

Alberta Connects

As of April 1999, Albertans had used the newly created Alberta Connects site to send some 600 comments and questions to their government.

Visit Alberta Connects at **www.albertaconnects.gov.ab.ca**. Albertans can also reach Alberta Connects toll-free from anywhere in the province by dialing **310-4455**.

Internet

Since October 1998, traffic on the Alberta Government Home Page has increased by **42%**.

The Alberta Government Home Page is located at **www.gov.ab.ca**.

- *Albertans and their communities* - Communications staff helped their client ministries to communicate about a wide range of services impacting Albertans and their communities, including: the Community Lottery Board Grant Program launch (Community Development); consumer awareness (Municipal Affairs); air quality information and awareness (Environmental Protection); traffic safety programs (Transportation and Utilities); and community safety and crime prevention strategies (Justice).
- *Electronic communications* - Bureau staff continued to respond to the increasing demand for information in electronic formats. Examples from the range of resources developed in 1998-99 include the Education Week website (Education Communications); the new *Munimall* information resource for Alberta Municipalities (Municipal Affairs Communications); and the Crime Prevention Week website (Justice Communications). The Bureau also added an electronic dimension to the production of this year's Premier's televised address by posting the address on the Internet in Real Audio/Video.

Public involvement - Communications staff assist their client ministries in a variety of public consultations across Alberta. This year, Bureau staff also provided planning, organizational and communications support to initiatives such as the April 1998 Gaming Summit, the January 1999 Justice Summit and the February 1999 Health Summit. This year, Treasury Communications also assisted in planning and communications for *Talk it Up, Talk it Out*, a survey that provided an overview of Alberta's financial position and asked Albertans about their priorities for the future. The survey received 80,000 responses making it the most successful of its kind ever conducted in Alberta.

Alberta Connects - February 1999 marked the introduction of Alberta Connects, an easy new way for Albertans to voice their opinions and ask for information about any government program, service or initiative. Alberta Connects includes a toll-free telephone line callers can use to ask for information and provide feedback as well as a website that allows Albertans to access information, send the government a comment or question and receive a reply by e-mail.

Alberta Government Home Page - The Government's Internet Home Page was redesigned in October 1998 to give Albertans up-front access to information. Improvements include: "What's Hot", which offers summaries of issues with links to more information; listings of recent news releases; and the new Alberta Connects feedback option described above. Staff in communications branches also continued to provide advice and counsel on the content and design of their ministry's web pages.

RITE Telephone System - RITE serves as Albertans' toll-free province-wide connection to the Alberta Government. In 1998-99, the total number of calls through the RITE system increased by 21 per cent, to 5.9 million up from the 4.8 million logged in 1997-98.

Depository Library Program – The Bureau works with government staff to ensure public access to government information through the Depository Library Program, which provides Alberta’s 310 public libraries free access to government publications. Libraries and Albertans unable to find documents they need can access the Bookstores database of government contacts and publications.

Y2K – Bureau staff provided support surrounding the Year 2000 issue, primarily in relation to the cross-sector group responsible for the Y2K Alberta initiative. Staff also supplied communications consultation to the Office of the Chief Information Officer and were involved in the first interim report on the status of provincial government mission critical systems. Communications staff have also assisted client ministries with their Y2K communications activities.

Goal 2

Provide Better Coordinated Communications across Government

The Bureau’s structure, with communications staff assigned throughout government, makes it easy for staff to work as teams in the coordination of cross-government communications. Following are a few examples from among the increasing number of cross-government initiatives and programs that took place in 1998-99.

Children’s Services – This year marked an increased focus on the coordination of services for Alberta’s children. This new coordinated approach called for close teamwork among communications staff assigned to the Children and Families Secretariat, Community Development, Education, Family and Social Services, Health and Justice. See Goal One for examples of specific program details.

Climate Change Roundtable – A number of ministries worked to organize the April 1999 Climate Change Roundtable. The communications team from Energy, Environmental Protection, Economic Development, Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs, Transportation and Utilities and the Government Communications Group worked to coordinate communications between government, stakeholders and special interest groups.

Budget 99’ – Treasury Communications continued to improve the cross-government communications process surrounding the Provincial Budget. Staff from across government worked with Treasury to ensure quick and convenient access to high quality communications and materials.

International Association for Volunteer Effort – Edmonton was host to the 1998 International Association for Volunteer Effort conference. Communications for the conference, which included participants from around the world, were coordinated by Community Development Communications in partnership with the Wild Rose Foundation and numerous stakeholder groups.

Access to information through ACN

The Alberta Communications Network (ACN) provides media and public access to Alberta government news releases. In 1998-99, ACN:

- provided access to more than **1,400** news releases and announcements;
- recorded **479,000** visits to its Internet Home Page, almost double last year’s **270,000**; and
- received more than **6,000** requests for news releases through its fax-on-demand service resulting in the fax distribution of close to **18,000** documents.

1998-99 cooperative initiatives

Affordable Housing and Homelessness Initiatives – Family and Social Services, Municipal Affairs, City of Edmonton.

Education Property Taxes – Education, Municipal Affairs, Treasury.

Family Violence Protection Act – Family and Social Services, Justice.

Human Rights Legislation – Community Development, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs, Justice.

Special Places – Environmental Protection, Energy, Community Development.

Team Alberta Mission to U.S.A. and Mexico – Economic Development, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs.

Senatorial selection process – In October 1998, Bureau staff managed communications surrounding Alberta’s first ever senatorial selection process, held in conjunction with municipal elections. The team included Municipal Affairs Communications and Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs Communications in conjunction with the Chief Electoral Office.

Emergency response communications – Volunteers from across government worked together with Environmental Protection, Transportation and Utilities and central Bureau staff to ensure that Albertans received effective and timely public communications during the May 1998 forest fires.

Goal 3

Improve the Efficiency of Communications across Government

1998-99 media buying

Using its Agency of Record for Media Buying, the Alberta Government purchased more than **\$2.3 million** worth of advertising in Alberta media. The program saved government departments almost \$280,000 in media buys and commissions in 1998-99.

Agency of Record for Media Buying – This is the second year the Bureau has used an Agency of Record for Media Buying to drive down costs associated with purchasing advertising in print and electronic media. This year, the Agency of Record negotiated an 18 per cent volume discount with the Alberta Weekly Newspapers Association on behalf of government, as well the elimination of charges for material sent over the Association’s electronic AUNET system.

Communication innovations - Bureau staff across government looked to new technologies to make communications operations more efficient. For example, Labour Communications developed an electronic daily newspaper clipping service that uses existing computer technology to give ministry staff timely and cost-effective access to media information. Other ministries are now looking at adopting the system. Bureau staff also worked to help client ministries make the best use of technology, including Economic Development Communications’ efforts to help develop new information management and sharing processes.

Bookstore audits – Queen’s Printer Bookstore operations underwent two audits in 1998-99 and has implemented the majority of recommendations resulting from both the financial and process review/systems audit. Changes made as a result of the audits will make Bookstore operations more efficient and effective and will allow staff to devote more time and effort to service delivery.

Annual report process improvements – In 1998, a group of communications staff from across government began working together with Alberta Treasury and the Office of the Auditor General to identify possible improvements to communications processes surrounding the preparation of annual reports.

Publication efficiencies – Queen’s Printer Bookstore worked with Alberta Justice to take over distribution of a number of materials, including Crime Prevention Program and Victims of Crime Program items. This new arrangement helps Alberta Justice distribute materials to Albertans in a more cost-effective way by tapping into the Bookstore’s existing distribution systems and resources. The Bookstore also worked

in partnership with Justice to develop products surrounding the Alberta Rules of Court, which results in a \$50,000 per year savings for Justice while the Bookstore's production costs are more than offset by revenues generated by the product.

Goal 4

Deliver Products and Services that Allow Us to Meet or Exceed Revenue Projections and Customer Needs*

**The wording and measures for this Goal have been adjusted from the wording in the corresponding business plan to better reflect changing client and customer needs.*

Electronic commerce - In July, 1998, the Bookstore added a full electronic commerce option to its website. QP On-line provides world-wide, 24 hour-a-day shopping access to the Bookstore's inventory. In addition to mail delivery, customers have the option of purchasing on-line by credit card and immediately downloading the majority of catalogue items directly to their computer. On-line shopping has seen monthly growth in usage and revenues since its introduction.

QP Source CD ROM - Queen's Printer Bookstore staff continued to make improvements to the legal resource, QP Source. Changes include upgrades to the search software and improvements to the CD ROM installation process. Customers also were given access to basic and advanced training sessions offered throughout the province and provided with product updates and information through a quarterly newsletter produced in conjunction with each QP Source product update.

QP Source Professional Internet - The subscription-based QP Source Professional Internet site grew to include several new databases and links to help users pinpoint the information they need. New additions include databases for Alberta Securities legislation, the Rules of Court, Annotated FOIP information, the QP Catalogue and the RITE Telephone Directory. The Bookstore also introduced multi-user access to help keep prices low and reduce customer maintenance.

Partnerships with the private sector - This year, the Bookstore began expanding its co-publishing initiatives to the private sector, resulting in a new range of value-added products for Albertans. Some of the new publications include the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (produced in conjunction with the TDG-WHMIS Compliance Centre), Firearms Safety Course Manuals (produced in partnership with the RCMP) and Annotated FOIP updates (produced with a private sector law firm).

Alberta is the only province in Canada to offer all Statutes and Regulations in a full range of regularly updated electronic formats. Alberta legislation posted on the QP Source Internet is updated weekly. Most other jurisdictions update on a semi-annual basis.

For information about Queen's Printer Bookstore products, call **(780) 427-4952** in Edmonton, **(403) 297-6251** in Calgary, or **310-0000** toll-free from anywhere in Alberta.

You can e-mail the Bookstore at: **qp@gov.ab.ca/**.

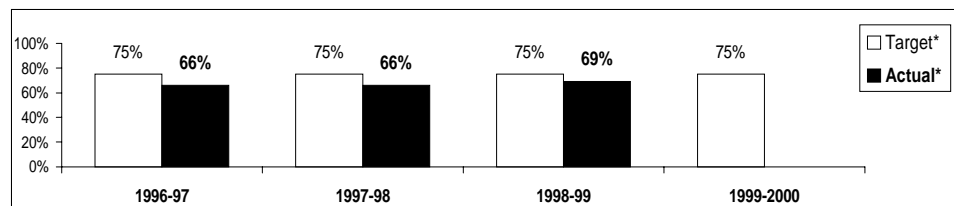
Demonstrations of *QP Source* Internet are available at: **qpsource.gov.ab.ca/**.

Public Affairs Bureau - Performance Measures

Public Satisfaction with Government Information

This measurement is related to the Bureau's goal of making government information more accessible. It rates Albertans' overall satisfaction level with the information they receive about government programs and services either directly from the government or through other sources.

* Represents the total of "Very" and "Somewhat" satisfied responses



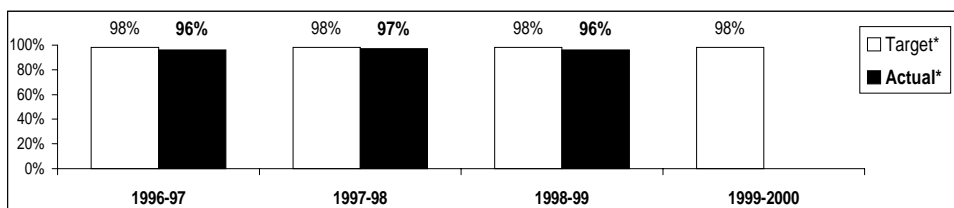
1998-99 results reflect telephone interviews with 1,000 adult Albertans conducted from March 20 - April 12, 1999. Respondents were randomly selected from across the province. The margin of error in a sample of this size is plus or minus 3.1% in 95 out of 100 samples. The survey was conducted by a private sector firm.

The 1998-99 result of 69% was less than the 1998-99 target of 75% but represented a 3% increase over the 1997-98 actual of 66%.

Public Satisfaction with RITE and QP Bookstores

This measurement relates to the goal of making government information more accessible. It rates the satisfaction levels of Albertans using the RITE Telephone System to access government and obtain information. It also measures how satisfied customers are with the services provided by the Queen's Printer Bookstore.

* Represents the total of "Very" and "Generally" satisfied responses



Queen's Printer Bookstore results were obtained through surveys mailed to every third client on the customer database. Of the 821 sent, 198 surveys were returned. The survey took place in April and May 1999. Wording on some questions was simplified from previous years to make the survey faster and easier for respondents. Questions were also added regarding new electronic products.

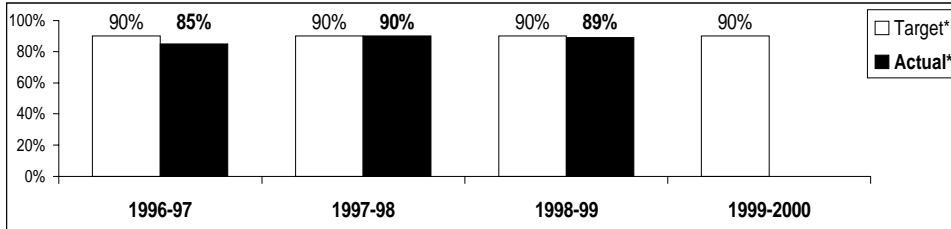
RITE results reflect the responses of 406 system users during telephone interviews conducted in April. Those surveyed were selected from a total respondent list of 713 names which was compiled in March and April when RITE users were asked if they would participate in a satisfaction survey.

The surveys were compiled internally by the Bureau. The figures shown reflect the averaged results of multiple questions. Results have also been averaged to give both groups' responses equal weight. "Doesn't Apply" and no response replies are not included in the calculation of results.

The 1998-99 rating of 96% is within 1% of the 1997-98 level of 97% and just below the 1998-99 target of 98%.

Government Client Satisfaction

This measurement is related to the goals of improving the coordination and efficiency of communications across government. It rates government client satisfaction levels with the communications services provided by the Bureau.



* Represents the total of "Very" and "Generally" satisfied responses

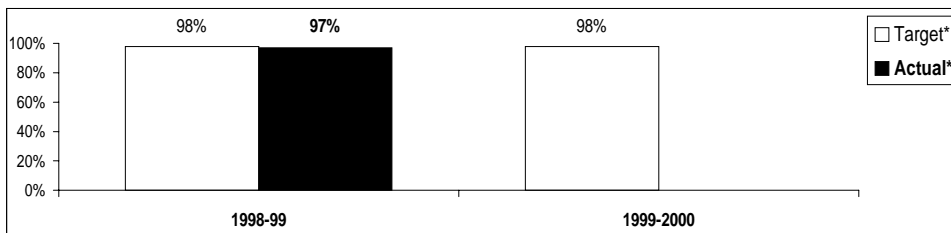
Communications Directors provided lists of departmental clients comprised of 128 executive committee members and 426 directors. Surveys were mailed to these clients. 82 executives and 217 directors responded to the surveys in April and May 1999. Wording on some questions was simplified from previous years to make the survey faster and easier for respondents.

The surveys were compiled internally by the Bureau. The figures shown reflect the averaged results of multiple questions. Results have also been averaged to give both executives' and directors' responses equal weight. "Doesn't Apply" and no response replies are not included in the calculation of results.

The 89% level of satisfaction for 1998-99 is within 1% of both the 1997-98 rating and the 1998-99 target of 90%.

Customer Satisfaction with Products

The Bureau is adding this new measure related to the Bureau's revised goal of delivering products and services that allow us to meet or exceed revenue projections and customer needs. It rates the satisfaction levels of Queen's Printer Bookstore customers with the products available.

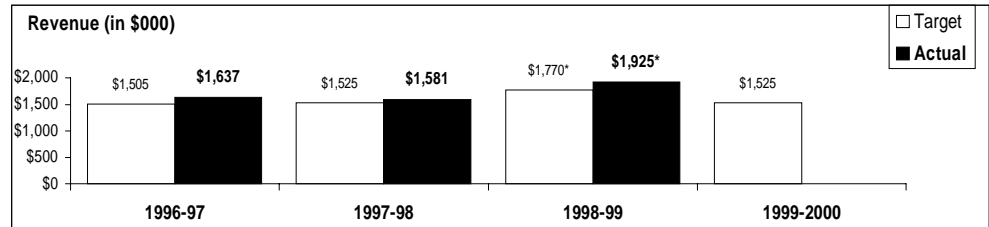


* Represents the total of "Very" and "Generally" satisfied responses

The results shown reflect the averaged responses to two specific questions regarding products on the survey of Queen's Printer Bookstore customers (see "Public Satisfaction with RITE and QP Bookstores" for methodology)

Maintaining Revenue

The Bureau is adding this new measure related to the Bureau's revised goal of delivering products and services that allow us to meet or exceed revenue projections and customer needs. It compares authorized revenue projections with the results actually achieved.



The Public Affairs Bureau generates revenue through the sale of legislation, government publications and other materials from the Queen's Printer Bookstores in Edmonton and Calgary. A small amount of revenue was also realized between 1996-97 and 1998-99 through chargebacks to agencies, boards and commissions for communications services provided by the Government Communications Group. These chargebacks will be discontinued in 1999-2000.

Actual revenue results are taken from the audited financial statements of Executive Council. The 1998-99 results of \$1.925 million represent an increase over both the 1997-98 actual of \$1.581 million and the 1998-99 target of \$1.770 million. Increases in both the revenue projections and actuals for 1998-99 are related to sales of the updated "Rules of Court".

Financial Results

| Branch | Authorized (\$000) | Actual (\$000) | Variance (\$000) |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Administrative Services | 1,080 | 1,078 | 2 |
| Communications Services | 4,285 | 4,283 | 2 |
| Communications Technologies | 466 | 464 | 2 |
| Queen's Printer Bookstores | 1,449 | 1,439 | 10 |
| Publishing Services | 617 | 616 | 1 |
| RITE System | 786 | 784 | 2 |
| Total spending | 8,683 | 8,664 | 19 |
| Total revenue | (1,770) | (1,925) | 155 |
| Net spending | 6,913 | 6,739 | 174 |

