

Public Works reworks

by Marlene Orton

One-stop shopping and client service might as well be slogans permeating Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC) these days. Like much of the business world beyond Parliament Hill, PWGSC has re-organized how it delivers procurement services aimed at boosting client service and building a more efficient means of ordering and delivering products and services.

A host of changes have been in the offing over the last two years or so as the department has evolved from its founding in 1993. A new Operations Branch was formally established November 12, 2002 integrating the components of three roamer branches. Operations is now responsible for delivering accommodation, real property, procurement, telecommunication and informatics, and shared services. Rod Monette was named Assistant Deputy Minister of the Operations Branch and Dan Ross, the Associate Assistant Deputy Minister of Operations.

Operations effectively carries out procurement and provides client service delivery through a number of Client Service Teams (CSTs) designed to focus on specific departments and agencies. Now a single operational unit looks after actual procurement in a one-stop shop setup. Need some new computer software at Health Canada? The Health Canada client service rep is the person who will tap into resources within Operations services. Not only can they look after the software acquisition, but they can take care of everything else from vaccines to storage equipment.

The re-organization also created the Acquisition Program Branch – one of three program branches. The others are Real Property and Telecommunications and Informatics. They will provide functional direction, develop policies, standards and service levels, and provide strategic advice and quality assurance. Glen Bailey was appointed Assistant Deputy Minister of the Acquisition Program Branch, mandated to work closely with Operations as well as with suppliers through Contracts Canada and other venues.

“We will be dealing with (industry) trade associations to discuss how to collaboratively implement policies and programs that would be both useful and effective for the Government of Canada,” Bailey said during the interview along with Ross. “What we’re trying to do is establish relationships with industry associations and to use those relationships to make sure that our procurement processes, specific to a particular area, are being dealt with at a policy and program level,” Bailey added. Whether it’s sitting down with the Information Technology Association of Canada or the Canadian Construction Association, the government would consider adopting new procurement processes depending on the complexity of the purchase.

The flip side is to bring a stronger focus on policy and program development, he added. That means improving professional development in procurement, developing e-purchasing in the Government of Canada marketplace and building greater flexibility into procurement processes as they become more complex.



“Complexity comes from a number of different factors ... from business transformation ... from introducing new technology ... from simply the size and scope of the project that we’re involved in,” Bailey said.

Coupled with that is a more concerted effort towards professional development of procurement staff. “Treasury Board and our two branches have been working a lot on how to develop a professional standard and certification for the procurement officer of the future, which recognizes they are in the knowledge management business. And that comes back to developing client service and strategies,” Bailey said.

Not surprisingly, informatics is the largest growing area in procurement. While Real

Property has always been a strong part of procurement, a major change was made in 1996-97, Ross said, with a focus on developing CSTs. “We will push out capacity to manage and develop contracts and programs with other departments on the informatics side,” he added. The department expects to increase the number of staff working in the IM/IT in CSTs from just a handful to over 100 nationally.

Re-organization of the procurement structure allows PWGSC to focus on other goals including:

- Centralizing and consolidating quality assurance, quality control and risk management.
- Strengthen broad business management planning along with pricing policies.

- Professional development in human resources by tracking career progression and training, assigning officers to CSTs or other jobs.

Professional development will also likely see some important changes, said Ross. Along with HR, it will get extra attention. The aim now, he said, is to provide dedicated management expertise and solid training, and empower well-trained procurement officers with appropriate contracting authority. The move will build upon the department’s current training in procurement. “You require everybody, no matter where you are, to go through the same quality assurance rigour, through the same centralized focus.”

The new regime follows 18 months of independent internal reviews of employees and a senior client survey to figure out how to improve service.

“This has been a great opportunity to listen to all our people, create an organization that is fast and effective and does things once and does things better,” Ross said. The current re-organization follows the amalgamation in 1993 of the former Department of Public Works, the former Department of Supply and Services, the Government Telecommunications Agency and the Translation Bureau. “A lot of integration didn’t take place then. There was still considerable vertical independence and, to some extent, a bit of a stove pipe organization with supply operations fairly independent from real property operations and independent from the then growing and developing informatics business. It was time to have a hard look at the fundamental structure of the organization,” Ross added.

The most recent changes resulted from several forces, he added including Treasury Board and deputy ministers. “We needed to generate more capacity to deliver common services – procurement IM/IT (Informatics), real property accommodation – to other departments and agencies to a greater extent than in the past. This is our core business. This is what PWGSC does on a professional basis.” *MM*

Marlene Orton is a freelance writer based in the Ottawa area.

