Guidelines for a Parliamentary Research Service

Sonia L'Heureux

Parliamentary Librarian
Library of Parliament of Canada

LIBRARY *of* PARLIAMENT
BIBLIOTHÈQUE *du* PARLEMENT

August 2014

Why is the Section pursuing this project?

- Evolution in support requested from parliamentary administrations

  - Information is easier to access
  - Parliamentarians want concise <u>analysis</u> of what the information means
    - Politically, legislatively, economically, locally, etc.
    - Within the parliamentary context

- Keen interest in knowing how to develop a Parliamentary Research Service

  - Section pre-conferences
  - Parliamentary delegation visits to established parliamentary research services
  - Requests/projects within major parliamentary development programs
    (e.g., IPU, APF, World Bank Institute, etc.)

- Standing Committee agreed to share its expertise in this domain

What will be the end product?

- Publication
  - About 40 pages
  - Checklist of key guidelines

- Not a "recipe"
  - Highlight key considerations to take into account
  - Must be adapted to each parliament's culture, traditions, history

- Informed by experience of managers of parliamentary research services
  - Small, medium and large parliamentary research services
  - Different parliamentary traditions

- Not about reference work provided by libraries

Who is on the Working Group?

- Adolfo Furtado – Brazil & ENPLAC
- Lillian Gassie – United States
- Dianne Heriot – Australia
- Junko Hirose – Japan
- Sonia L'Heureux – Canada (Chair)
- John Bagonza Mugabi – Uganda
- Alfonso Perez – Chile
- Andy Richardson – IPU
- John Pullinger / Bryn Morgan – United Kingdom
- Siiri Sillajoe – Estonia & ECPRD
- Jarle Skjorestad – Norway
- Raissa Teodori – Italy & IFLA Section Chair

Why a Parliamentary Research Service?

- Parliamentarians are not experts in all topics – they want to:
  - Access a safe place to ask basic and complex questions
  - Know who are the stakeholders and what are they saying
  - Talk to an "expert" who can analyze all the angles of public policy issues
  - Obtain a second opinion/assessment on the information provided by the Executive/Government

- Customized analysis
  - Devoid of lobbying
  - Considering parliamentary context

Considerations

- Enabling Authorities and Governance

- Values and Operating Principles

- Range of Potential Services

- Quality Control

- Resources Required

- Useful Partnerships

- Reporting to Parliament

- Key Lessons

Considerations – Enabling Authorities and Governance

- Multi-party consensus
  - Role of parliament is to hold government to account
  - Need for analytical capacity available to all parliamentarians
  - Parliamentary research service must be independent of the Executive branch of government

- Enabling authorities – approaches include:
  - Legislated mandate
  - Motions from multi-party entities – e.g., from the Chamber/Assembly or a committee/commission

- Governance model
  - Integrated with the parliamentary library
  - Separate entity for each chamber
  - Integrated with procedural services
  - Single research service supporting both chambers in a bicameral parliament

Considerations – Values and Operating Principles

- Values
  - Impartiality
  - Professionalism and respect
  - Confidentiality of interactions
  - Use of reputable information
  - Respect of copyright and licensing rights

- Scope of services available
  - On-demand vs. proactive research products
  - Who can access the services
  - What is excluded

- Service standards
  - Confidentiality provisions
  - Deadlines
  - Formats of products
  - Language requirements

Explore the concept of a *Service Charter*

Considerations – Range of Potential Services

- Customized short written analysis
- In-person oral briefings
- Fact sheets – e.g., introduction to issues using facts
- Summaries/concise analyses of proposed legislation (available in time for debate)
- Legislative drafting
- Background studies and expert opinions
- Information packages for specific parliamentary meetings (e.g., parliamentary committees and associations, meetings of international organizations)
- Geospatial Information System (GIS) products, statistical profiles and mapping services
- Training and seminars, learning materials (e.g., toolkits)

Service offering will vary based on resources available

Considerations – Quality Control

- Review product quality before submitting to clients
  - Identify who is responsible
  - Use checklist
  - Staff training of good practices

- Failures in meeting expectations will occur – be ready
  - To defend your analysis
  - To adjust if corrections are warranted

Small percentage of failures can generate crises of confidence

Considerations – Resources Required

- HR
  - Initially – lawyers and economists
  - Over time
    - Experts in international affairs, social science, political science, resources management, public administration, engineering, environmental studies, etc.
    - Balance ratio of generalists vs. specialists

- Access to a collection
  - Highly specialized industry or academic material
  - Historical data with long-term cycles
  - Non-expert materials
  - Ongoing need for librarians to:
    - Be aware of research needs
    - Inform researchers of new material available
  - Informal networks to access information

- Electronic client requests and records management

Considerations – Useful Partnerships

- Parliamentary Libraries

- Agents of parliament and special agencies – while respecting mandates and confidentiality provisions
  - Auditor general
  - Parliamentary budget officer
  - Information commissioner
  - Statistical agency

- Other research services
  - Within the parliamentary environment
  - In academia and civil society

- Corporate support
  - Information technology
  - Editing and graphic design
  - Communications experts

Considerations – Reporting to Parliament

- Annual report

- Presentations to parliamentary committees

- Informal meetings with leaders of parliamentary caucuses

- Report on feedback received

Considerations – Key Lessons

- Human interaction is essential

- Establish contact very soon after a request is submitted

- Balance researchers' proximity to parliamentarians vs. research tools

- Materials must be focused on facts, properly sourced and void of political advice

- Employee skills must be kept up to date

- Important to act on feedback … and be seen to do so

- All staff must be on the same page

Key Milestones

August 2014 – Draft reviewed by Working Group

December 2014 – Final edited draft

August 2015 – Launch at IFLA meeting in South Africa

Languages
- Original draft in English
- Canada committed to translate into French
- Volunteers for other languages are welcomed

Additional Information

IFLA
Library and Research Services for Parliaments Section
http://www.ifla.org/services-for-parliaments

Sonia L'Heureux
Parliamentary Librarian
Library of Parliament of Canada

LIBRARY of PARLIAMENT
BIBLIOTHÈQUE du PARLEMENT