Guidelines for a Parliamentary Research Service

Sonia L’Heureux
Parliamentary Librarian
Library of Parliament of Canada

August 2014
Why is the Section pursuing this project?

• Evolution in support requested from parliamentary administrations
  • Information is easier to access
  • Parliamentarians want concise analysis 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
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