# THE FEDERAL REGIONAL COUNCILS AND HORIZONTAL GOVERNANCE

**A Report Prepared for the Regional Federal Councils and Treasury Board Secretariat**

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# INTRODUCTION

The complexity of contemporary social problems creates significant challenges for the administration and coordination of public interventions in many fields of activity. Many priority areas of government policy, ranging from drug addiction and population health, ecologically sustainable development and homelessness to regional socio-economic development, require the design and implementation of complex intervention strategies involving a multiplicity of government departments, different levels of government and even organizations from different sectors of society in order to be effective. However, past experience has shown that traditional bureaucratic structures, relying on an advanced division of labour, issue-specific departments and hierarchical (vertical) lines of authority and accountability, are making the coordination of these cross-cutting (horizontal) interventions difficult for contemporary administrations in most democratic countries. This situation is increasingly leading public administrations to examine how they can better deal with horizontal issues at the managerial and policy levels.

The objective of this study is to examine the evolving role that federal regional councils play in the management of horizontal issues in the Public Service of Canada. While federal councils have been in place for many years, they have become more institutionalized in the past few years and they are becoming more active across a range of managerial and policy initiatives in the regions. At the same time, as the Canadian government is seeking to promote more effective horizontal management in the formulation and delivery of public services, there seems to be growing expectations about the potential contribution of the federal councils on this front. How are the councils positioned to meet such expectations? What makes them effective forums for working horizontally in the public service? What are the key factors that either promote or hinder the effectiveness of federal regional councils?

This report explores these issues on the basis of a set of twenty interviews conducted with councils' chairpersons, executive directors, and Treasury Board Secretariat representatives. Representatives of all ten federal regional councils were included in the study. The semi-structured interviews were conducted mostly by phone between August 9 and September 15, 2000. All interviews were made on the promise of confidentiality and on a "not for direct attribution" basis. The author also benefited from the comments and suggestions of the members of the New Brunswick Federal Council following a presentation of the preliminary findings at one of their meetings. The report begins with a summary review of the councils' structure and an examination of the evolution of their role with regards to horizontal management. We then discuss the key factors that were identified as determinants of success as well as those seen as impediments to effective horizontal work. We conclude with a discussion of the future of councils and some of the challenges posed by their increasing level of activity.

**The federal regional councils and horizontal governance**

The federal regional councils were created about twenty years ago as forums to facilitate the sharing of information among senior federal managers in each province. While some councils emerged as a result of local initiatives to offer local senior managers an opportunity for networking and dialogue, most of them were created in an effort to improve the local coordination of regional economic development initiatives in the early 1980s. In all cases, however, the councils have progressively broadened the set of issues discussed at their table and extended their activities beyond questions of regional economic development. And they eventually outlived the regional development policy that had fostered their creation.

Today, the federal regional councils are generally composed of the most senior officials of all federal departments and agencies present in a province. Their membership varies from 23 members in Newfoundland to 44 members in Alberta. While membership is attributed *ex officio*, participation in the councils' work remains voluntary. Five of the councils are presided by a voluntary chairperson elected from the membership and rely on a system of rotation with mandates varying from one to three years. The other five councils are presided *ex officio* by the senior executive of regional economic development in the province. While Treasury Board Secretariat since 1997 has been providing the councils with a core budget that covers part of their operational costs, much of their budgets are composed of voluntary departmental contributions made by participating departments.

The role of federal regional councils has evolved considerably since their creation. While their primary function clearly remains the exchange of information and the development of personal relationships among senior regional managers, the recent evolution of the federal public service has led them to engage increasingly in more advanced forms of horizontal coordination. In particular, when the Public Service of Canada faced substantial cutbacks during the Program Review period, federal councils became privileged forums for developing and coordinating the provision of locally-shared support services in the regions. In fact, their successes on this front won them greater support from the Treasury Board Secretariat. Also in the 1990s, as public service renewal initiatives were launched, the federal councils were increasingly drawn into the coordination of human resources initiatives that cut across individual departments. Similarly, the councils have become invaluable sources of input about the local implementation of government-wide administrative policies and their views are now a regular item on the agenda of the Senior Management Committee of the Treasury Board Secretariat. In recent years, councils have played a growing role in the coordination of the communication efforts of the federal government in each province, attempting to provide both a single message to Canadians and acting as a unified interlocutor for some stakeholders.

In more recent years, as public administrations across the world have become more concerned with their relative failure to approach complex, multi-faceted social problems from an holistic viewpoint and to coordinate their interventions across departments, more people are turning to federal councils for assistance in dealing with the formulation and implementation of horizontal

policies. Recently, the federal councils have been asked to play important roles in the management of the government's national homelessness and urban aboriginal policies. Recognizing the importance of horizontal coordination of policy interventions, several councils have, themselves, decided to collaborate on complex policy files in their region, ranging from industrial and technology policies to environmental initiatives.

The continuum of functions, ranging from information-sharing and relationship-building to co-operation on internal managerial files and, finally, involvement in the coordination of horizontal policy initiatives, illustrates the multi-faceted nature of the horizontal role played by the federal regional councils across the country. The continuum illustrates both the evolution of most of the councils through time (moving from simple information-sharing to more complex functions) but also the diversity of the functions currently served by these institutions. It is also important to note that councils vary substantially from one province to another. Just as they differ in their level of institutionalization (more or less developed institutional practices, committee systems, etc.), they also vary in the degree of their involvement in complex policy files. And while there is consensus that councils perform very well at the lower end to middle range of the continuum, there is also consensus on the fact that their growing involvement in the higher end of the continuum raises a number of unresolved issues that must be addressed if councils are to engage more significantly in the coordination of complex policy files. But before discussing some of these issues in the next sections, we now turn to the factors that explain the councils' relative success in fostering horizontal collaboration.

**Factors enhancing the councils' effectiveness**

From the outset, many interviewees pointed out that, to some extent, federal regional councils contribute to more effective horizontal management simply by virtue of their existence. There is often no alternative institutionalized opportunities for senior managers and executives from different departments in a same region to meet and discuss issues of common interest. While one could hope that, even if the councils did not exist, managers and executives would nevertheless regularly get together across departments, there was widespread agreement that, by providing an impetus for regular meetings within a structured forum, the councils contributed significantly to the development of the closer personal relationships that greatly facilitate inter-organizational, professional collaboration. In this sense, the mere existence of the councils can be seen as a factor of success. Similarly, the creation of the secretariats was seen as a development that clearly facilitated the work of the councils over the past few years by providing a minimal infrastructure to support their operation. However, while it is worthwhile to point out these preconditions, they do not explain or warrant the councils' success.

During the interview process, we found a surprising level of consensus about the key determinants of the councils' success in horizontal work. In probing the underlying factors that lead to positive results, there was almost unanimous agreement that the primary determinants of success were more cultural than institutional in nature. Shared values and understanding of common problems and purpose were clearly considered at the heart of successful horizontal

governance. Leadership at several levels was also seen as an essential ingredient for the councils' achievements.

### *Shared values and a sense of community*

Federal regional councils are unique institutions because they rely on the voluntary contribution and personal dedication of their members. This voluntary nature of the members' work was repeatedly stressed as a key factor for understanding how they work as institutions of governance. The constructive engagement of members rests to a great extent on their sense that their time and commitment are important contributions for the achievement of objectives that are valued both by their community of peers and themselves. In sum, the collaboration and level of exchanges that are required for the successful advancement of horizontal initiatives and that are often successfully generated by the councils, seem to stem largely from a sense of community shared by council members. In this sense, while the voluntary nature of the councils' work is not *in itself* the source of successful horizontal collaboration, it was abundantly clear to most interviewees that the level of engagement and commitment for horizontal objectives generated by the councils' work derived from the members' personal belief in the value of these common objectives for their community. In the absence of formal hierarchical incentives, it is this voluntary personal commitment to shared values that drives collaboration.

When questioning the source of these shared values and this sense of community, a set of related answers was generally provided. Firstly, most interviewees agreed that the council members' commitment and engagement partly derived from their common regional perspective on issues. Common views on what national policies mean for their regions, and how the federal government is perceived locally as a result, help members to agree on shared regional objectives that transcend departmental mandates and get their commitment to collaborate even if the objectives fall only marginally within their mandate.

Similarly, many interviewees spoke of a common "front line" perspective on service delivery that is found in the regions, where regional employees are primarily concerned with the hands-on delivery of services and products. Because of their front-line responsibilities and experiences, they are both typically more focused on achieving results and more keenly aware of the practical difficulties created by vertical structures and their associated "silo mentality" for meeting the needs of citizens and clients. The combination of a focus on results and a practical awareness of the limitations created by vertical practices help to bring people together around horizontal initiatives.

Finally, several interviewees spoke about the need for professional camaraderie in the regions. As one interviewee put it, "It can be lonely at the top in the regions. Participating in Council allows you to share some experiences, get some advice and generally talk about your professional life with peers who go through similar things." The result is the development of personal relationships that greatly facilitate collaboration: managers know whom to call for help and, because of more developed personal relationships, it is easier to get other managers to

collaborate on common issues for which they assume leadership. Again, it is the sense of belonging to a regional professional community, which implies both the possibility of calling upon one's community for support *and* a sense of individual responsibility to reciprocate with support when called, that begets collaboration.

Having recognized the importance of shared values and community in fostering successful collaborative horizontal work among members, three points need to be made about the dynamics of the councils' development. Firstly, whether one wishes to stress the predominance of common regional views or the sharing of a professional situation in explaining the presence of shared values and a sense of community, there was also substantial agreement that the emergence of these properties had both endogenous and exogenous sources. In the minds of many interviewees, common regional views or a sense of professional community were already prevalent in members and the work of the councils only allowed their expression by providing a supportive environment. But others also stressed that, to a significant degree, the councils' activities themselves played an important role in fostering those common views and values. By fostering on-going dialogue on issues of common interest, the council meetings contributed significantly to shape "common narratives" about what was needed or valued from a regional standpoint. Similarly, by generating sustained interaction among members, the councils' work also develops interpersonal trust and builds personal relationships that significantly strengthen the members' sense of professional community. In other words, the councils both tap into pre-existing values and understandings *and* actively contribute to their generation.

Secondly, while members are genuinely committed to common objectives and collective results, there is also a general recognition that participating in the councils' work brings a number of individual benefits that contribute to bringing people to the table. Many interviewees pointed out that, by coming to their council's meetings, they were having a privileged access to some information about government operations that they would not receive elsewhere, such as details about the operations of other departments or a privileged dialogue with central agencies' representatives (including the Clerk of the Privy Council) making presentations to the councils. In addition to the personal relationships developed with colleagues, having access to this information can make a council member more effective in her/his job. In this perspective, private ends are also well served by working for a collective purpose. Moreover, some interviewees agreed that, in participating in council and taking the lead on some collective projects, some members are motivated by raising their profile amongst their peers and consequently potentially advancing their career.

Finally, it was frequently pointed out that, because they rely on the voluntary commitment and engagement of members, the high level of local autonomy benefiting federal regional councils looms large in their success. The fact that councils set their own priorities ensures that these are relevant and speak convincingly to their own members. Serving regional priorities that members identified themselves (and that are often seen as neglected by national initiatives) contributes significantly to ensure buy-in and commitment. In this context, several interviewees feared that, if councils were to become more centrally-directed forums for coordinating the implementation of

national horizontal policies in the regions, some of the commitment and buy-in at the root of their effectiveness might be lost. We return to this point in the last section of this report.

*Leadership*

In addition to shared values, objectives and a sense of community, leadership was widely identified as a key requisite for success. Firstly, there was widespread agreement that the main central agencies' support over the last four years has been a significant factor contributing to the success of councils. In particular, the visible and continued support of the current and previous Clerk of the Privy Council as well as the support and encouragement provided by the previous Secretary of the Treasury Board Secretariat were often cited as important and positive contributions. Visible and consistent high-level support contributed to enhancing the credibility of councils, encouraged members' participation by recognizing the value of horizontal work, and helped the councils secure the co-operation of other managers in the Public Service of Canada. The Treasury Board Secretariat's organizational assistance, in the form of core operating budgets, a national coordinator and TBS representatives on each council, was also seen as an important contribution.

An even more important factor of success is the exercise of leadership at the council level. Many interviewees argued that an effective chairperson was one of the key elements of success. The ability to persuade and motivate members in the absence of formal authority and vertical incentives and to rally people around common objectives were seen as important leadership competencies. Some interviewees pointed out that horizontal leadership tends to call upon skills and aptitudes that differ from leadership in a traditional hierarchical setting. Some executives are better than others at mastering those skills and competencies but, in most cases, it can take some experience in working horizontally to develop such competencies. In this context, sufficiently lengthy "terms of office" for chairpersons or more extensive experience in horizontal work by members were often seen as contributing to greater effectiveness.

On this last point, many interviewees stressed that it was generally necessary for a number of council members to assume positions of leadership on specific files and initiatives. This form of "distributed leadership" proved to be essential for councils to handle a larger set of horizontal files and to maintain a clear sense that the councils' work responds to the members' own needs and priorities. As such, leadership should not be incumbent only on the chairperson and should be shared widely among the membership. Some councils have even formalized this requirement and decided to take on a file only when one member will commit to act as a "champion" for the initiative and two other members will agree to support him.

**Factors hindering the councils' effectiveness**

While we found a widely shared sentiment that, in general, federal regional councils were effective in their work, the study nevertheless identified a number of factors that can hinder their performance and make their work more difficult. The prevalent organizational culture still leads

many people to refrain from engaging in collaborative work beyond the organizational boundaries of their department. Narrowly construed loyalty for your own department and minister can be seen by some people as incompatible with engaging in horizontal work, especially when it means sharing credit for accomplishments contributing to your mandate or engaging resources to contribute to a horizontal initiative that is not perceived as central to your responsibilities. The prevalent framework of accountability tends to reinforce these attitudes by associating performance evaluations and the rendering of accounts with narrowly-defined departmental objectives and responsibilities. Councils were also generally short of organizational resources and, sometimes, administrative rules developed to serve an hierarchical, vertical structure created operational difficulties for sharing resources in the pursuit of collective objectives.

Among these factors, the lack of adequate resources was clearly perceived as the most significant problem in the short term, especially as councils get involved more extensively in a growing number of files. There was almost unanimous agreement among interviewees that the current core funding had become insufficient to adequately support the operational requirements of the councils and tended to impair their capacity for action. The strains placed by inadequate resources on the councils' work were feared on a number of fronts.

Firstly, many interviewees argued that greater core funding was essential mainly to support the continuing engagement of voluntary members. The voluntary nature of the councils' work means that members must contribute to these horizontal endeavours after they meet the demands of their formal positions. In other words, council members' engagement in horizontal projects results in a "double burden," which can place some strain on people's time and personal resources. In the absence of sufficient support by the councils' secretariats, it could become impossible to dedicate enough time and effort to manage some initiatives effectively. More importantly, many interviewees spoke about the dangers of burnout and disengagement facing some members. Under pressure to meet unreasonable expectations without adequate support, some voluntary members may simply decide to withdraw from council activities or refuse to assume the leadership of specific projects. Some chairpersons believed that, without more core funding, councils would have to scale back their activities and return to a more limited information-sharing function.

In discussing the lack of resources, other interviewees argued that the insufficient core funding often meant that the time and energy of the existing secretariats were not always used efficiently. Forced to operate under duress, the personnel of the secretariats was thought to spend unreasonable amounts of time dealing with unnecessary complications. Different examples were provided as illustrations. Some people talked about the inordinate amount of energy sometimes spent looking for funds to cover basic operational needs, such as seeking "bridge financing" from activities to cover core operational expenses or constantly having to juggle budgets to meet obligations until all the departmental contributions come in. Other interviewees talked about the difficulties created by having to rely on in-kind departmental contributions for some essential operational infrastructure, such as a photocopier, a fax machine or communications software. In

some cases, staff end up spending a lot of time dealing with the difficulties of sharing such resources, ranging from the mundane (e.g., constantly going to other departments' offices to fax or photocopy) to the more complex (e.g., dealing with different administrative rules and practices). In all cases, it was felt that more stable and substantial core funding to cover operational needs would free the secretariats to focus on more value-added work.

Finally, many interviewees considered that the current core funding was insufficiently generous and stable to allow for adequate long-term planning, consequently hindering the strategic capacity of the councils. Similarly, several people argued that more core funding was required to provide councils with a minimal autonomous research capacity. Such capacity was considered important to support all aspects of their work but it was seen as particularly necessary to provide timely, high-quality regional input into the national policy-making process.

While the question of resources was clearly considered essential by a majority of interviewees, this concern must be qualified by two points. Firstly, despite calls for greater centralized core funding, there was almost unanimous agreement that departmental contributions for specific projects were essential to ensure departmental buy-in. Very few interviewees argued for centralized project funding. The commitment of departmental resources was seen as reflecting members' own commitment to common horizontal projects and these contributions also ensured that members would remain more actively involved in these initiatives.

Secondly, there were also significant concerns associated with the central provision of more extensive core funding. Many interviewees feared that accepting greater funding by central agencies could result in a loss of local autonomy. "With more money would come more expectations, more specific demands and the need for greater accountability from the councils to the centre. It is inevitable, argued one interviewee. Moreover, if greater control from the centre resulted in a skewing of local priorities, councils would run the risk of becoming less relevant to their members and a disengagement of volunteers could ensue. In fact, more generally, some people were concerned that if secretariats took on too much, members would come to see the management of projects as the secretariats' responsibilities and reduce their engagement accordingly. Some people even feared that, by taking on more of the work, greater administrative support could also mean less opportunities for members to develop the kind of close working relationships traditionally resulting from collaboration on projects.

Interviewees embraced these concerns to varying degrees. For a few interviewees, these dangers were significant enough to justify advocating that councils scale down their activities instead of accepting more resources. Conversely, a few people considered these concerns to be clearly overstated and argued that councils could easily preserve substantial autonomy despite more centralized funding. Most people, however, seemed to believe that, while the loss of some autonomy was a risk, it was one worth running in order to improve the capacity of councils and provide better support for volunteers.

Among other impediments to successful horizontal work by councils, some members deplored that smaller provinces often had to rely on a very limited pool of senior executives, especially in the aftermath of the Program Review exercises. A smaller pool of senior executives was thought to hinder the work of these councils in a number of ways. Fewer people at the table meant that a greater burden was shouldered by members, compounding the impact of inadequate administrative resources. More importantly, some people talked about a lack of leadership on specific files because one could no longer find available members to take the lead. Since managers at lower-levels of their department's hierarchy typically have less authority and discretion to commit budgetary resources, councils with a higher proportion of these members can have more difficulties gathering sufficient resources to implement horizontal initiatives in their region. Similarly, the regional offices of some departments are often too small to be able to make substantial contributions.

From a leadership and accountability perspective, many interviewees also stressed that the substantive and favourable support provided by the heads of central agencies and the deputy ministers' community was not as forthcoming at the assistant deputy minister and director general levels in departmental headquarters. "The message does not appear to be trickling down," argued one interviewee. "It is at these levels that you find the kings of the 'silo mentality'," argued another. While some interviewees acknowledged that progress was being made, many executives still appear to be reluctant either to accommodate council members donating their time to horizontal work or to support the strategies and approaches coming out of the councils' work. At a workplace level, this can mean a refusal to acknowledge contributions to horizontal initiatives at the time of performance assessment or even a critical attitude towards members taking some "time away from departmental work" to attend council meetings. At the policy level, it can result in a resistance to support collaboration in horizontal approaches to issues when it will mean having to share credit with other departments or compromising on departmental preferences.

Finally, an additional category of impediments raised by interviewees concerned the difficulties created by existing administrative rules and procedures. Existing managerial frameworks for financial, human resources or equipment management were designed to serve the traditional vertical structures and practices and, consequently, do not facilitate horizontal collaboration. The result is that council secretariats can spend considerable time and energy findings ways to serve horizontal projects while respecting the prevalent administrative rules for accountability.

These difficulties can range from dealing with multiple and different rules for financial management practices to the complexities of effectively sharing information when each department has different information management systems. The impacts of these difficulties also varied from making it more difficult to get at a clear overall picture of what departments were doing on a specific policy file to spending inordinate amounts of time tracking small sums of money contributed for a limited training activity. While there was a clear consensus that the current administrative frameworks could be modified to make collaboration easier, there was also a surprising level of agreement that these difficulties were minor hindrances, complicating

the work of the councils rather than creating serious obstacles. "Once the commitment of people is there, we can always find ways to make it work at the administrative level," was a common opinion. Making some reforms to facilitate sharing resources was nevertheless advocated by many interviewees, ranging from minor administrative changes to facilitate the transfer of funds across departmental budgets to significant legal changes to allow departments in the regions to create "temporary horizontal agencies" to manage specific horizontal initiatives.

**The federal regional councils at the crossroad**

Throughout the interview process, the greatest source of both enthusiasm and apprehension was related to a widely shared sentiment that the federal councils increasingly find themselves at a crossroad: amidst increasing expectations about their direct involvement and leadership in national horizontal files, many interviewees are wondering whether councils are adequately positioned to meet these expectations and whether doing so might not cause them to lose some of the features that have been at the root of their success. In particular, the sense that councils will be facing greater demands in the years to come has brought more attention to some unresolved tensions resulting from the councils' unusual position within the Public Service of Canada. Two key issues are considered particularly important: the relation of the councils to the prevalent vertical accountability framework and the bureaucratization of the councils' organizational structure.

The issue of bureaucratization is intimately linked to the need for greater operational resources but the issue clearly goes beyond funding. In order to properly manage some substantive horizontal policy files, many people thought that some formalization of the councils' role in the federal public service could be required. If councils became primary forums for the coordination of policy files, there might be, for example, the need or desire to attribute them some formal legal authority. To deal with growing formal responsibilities, council chairs might become permanent executive positions. If they became more important instruments of national policy-making and implementation, they would also have to be more fully linked to the work of central agencies (and consequently losing some local autonomy and the ability to set their own priorities). The end result, many interviewees feared, would be to turn the federal councils into "regional quasi-central agencies" or, at minimum, to bureaucratize their operations to the detriment of their current volunteer, autonomous, informal and flexible character. Given that most interviewees attributed a good part of the councils' success to the engagement and the dedication to collaboration that was seen to result from the voluntary commitment of members to shared values and objectives, such excessive bureaucratization was generally seen as threatening the effectiveness of the councils.

As a result of these concerns, there are some apprehensions about the appropriate ways to provide councils with the tools to further horizontal coordination without significantly affecting the factors that underpin their success. Despite the existence of a variety of views on the subject, there seems to be consensus on two issues. Firstly, if greater involvement by councils in government-wide files is to be expected in the future, there will be a need for greater core

resources to support the efforts of volunteer members. Secondly, the voluntary nature of the contributions of members and departments will also remain essential to ensure buy-in and active collaboration. And since the voluntary nature of the councils is an essential dimension of their success, there is a real danger in excessive formalization resulting in a loss of effectiveness and, consequently, there are real limits on the expectations that should be placed on them as instruments of horizontal management.

The second important issue that was raised by most interviewees with regards to the councils' growing involvement in horizontal policy files is the impact of the current accountability framework. The prevalent framework, resting on the constitutional doctrine of ministerial responsibility, establishes clear hierarchical lines of accountability, going from public servants to Parliament through government ministers, for the exercise of public authority and the use of public funds. This time-honoured framework, with strong constitutional foundations, tends to structure much of the public service's operations. Unfortunately, this accountability framework does not lend itself easily to working horizontally across departments and even provides counterproductive incentives in this regard. In practice, public managers must account for the use of their budgets and employees for fulfilling the mandate of their department. Performance evaluations for executives and employees also tend to be narrowly tied to departmental objectives and mandates. More importantly, ministers are individually called upon in Parliament to account for the use of resources attributed to their department and for generally bearing responsibility for the actions and performance of their department. Sharing responsibility for horizontal initiatives, and sharing departmental resources to jointly pursue common objectives tends to blur these traditional lines of accountability. For example, who will be held formally accountable for a shared horizontal initiative that fails? Should public managers or ministers be held accountable for initiatives that they do not fully control if management is shared with other departments?

As a result of these uncertainties, horizontal initiatives can raise problems of democratic accountability and go against deeply embedded incentives for public managers. While these problems can be considered to be minor with regard to relatively simple and limited initiatives (such as the provision of shared internal services), they can become acutely important when managers are asked to commit resources and take responsibility for complex, high-profile horizontal policy initiatives. As expectations appear to be increasing for councils to get involved in such complex policy files (in the areas of homelessness, sustainable development, or Aboriginal affairs, for example), members of the federal regional councils feel a growing unease about the uncertainty of the current accountability rules surrounding horizontal management. There was widespread agreement among interviewees that questions of accountability will need to be addressed in the years to come.

However, while there was unanimous agreement on the fact that these situations present unresolved accountability problems, there was no clear consensus on how to approach the accountability problem. Some interviewees felt that accountability problems were so significant that they should lead federal councils to avoid any further involvement in the horizontal

management of complex policies and programs. In particular, council members should refuse to assume responsibility and formal leadership for horizontal policies or programs. Other interviewees were positively enthusiastic about the growing attention given to horizontal approaches in dealing with the complex socio-economic problems facing Canadians. In their minds, the benefits potentially accruing from these approaches should lead us to experiment with them without waiting for a definitive administrative and constitutional resolution to the accountability conundrum. While the difficulties should be acknowledged and more effort and ingenuity should be spent looking for adapted solutions, the problems should not deter the public service from moving forward.

In general, with few exceptions, interviewees also felt that the Public Service of Canada should avoid working on the creation of an entirely new accountability framework for horizontal initiatives and focus instead on how the councils' work could best be reconciled with the existing framework of vertical accountability. In this perspective, many interviewees stressed the need for continuing to rely on a lead department for each government-wide policy initiative. Councils were most often presented as important forums for supporting lead departments, generating a shared vision, ensuring coordination across organizations, and even getting local agreement on the most efficient way to allocate resources relating to a policy initiative. But there was less enthusiastic support for making federal councils assume formal leadership of policy files in the regions. In sum, while the councils constitute essential vehicles for the management of horizontal files, entrusting them with the formal responsibility to lead a file was not seen to be necessarily the best way to proceed. The focus should be on enhancing their capacity to provide support and act as a forum for the development of horizontal leadership.

**Conclusion**

Overall, it should be understood that the councils' effectiveness is seen to rely essentially on their unique capacity to generate the commitment and voluntary engagement of their members. Any effort to replicate the councils' experience and to introduce changes to enhance their role in Canadian governance must be respectful of their unique nature. This definitive conclusion seems to suggest that, to preserve their effectiveness as forums facilitating horizontal governance, any reforms or expectations about the councils' future contribution to government-wide policy-making and operation must also ensure that control over local autonomy and voluntary engagement are not adversely affected. As a result, while providing councils with sufficient capacity to voluntarily engage more extensively in complex and sustained efforts of horizontal governance, lead departments and central agencies should continue to rely on persuasion to gain the councils' involvement in specific files. When such voluntary adhesion is gained, targeted and adapted measures to deal with problems of operation and accountability should be favoured over universal, undifferentiated approaches. When persuasion fails to win some councils' voluntary engagement, the Public Service of Canada should respect local priorities and still recognize that councils are important on-going generators of productive inter-organizational personal relationships and information flows that are essential determinants of organizational effectiveness.