



Veterans Affairs
Canada

Anciens Combattants
Canada

VETERANS AFFAIRS CANADA
FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

HUMAN RESOURCES
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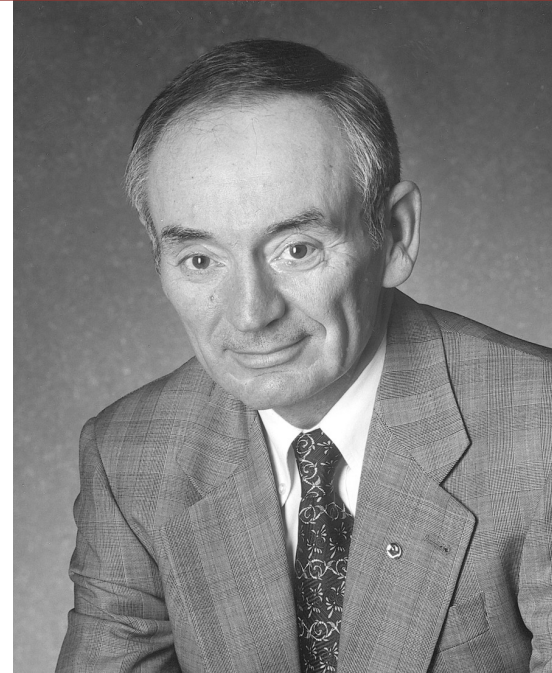
DEPUTY MINISTER'S MESSAGE

It is my pleasure to introduce the Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) Human Resources Strategic Plan for the period 2002-2007. The Human Resources Strategic Plan has been structured so that it is closely aligned with the strategic objectives and direction of the Department, as outlined in VAC's Five-Year Strategic Plan.

The extensive background work and wide consultations which have formed the basis of the VAC planning process have identified a clear need for better human resource planning. This plan has been designed to assist VAC in handling the human resource management changes which it will experience over the next decade. It is important to ensure that we, as an organization, have the right people in the right place at the right time to uphold our pledge of quality service to clients.

The initiatives and issues that are addressed in this plan deal with the important human resource issues that are facing Veterans Affairs Canada, such as staff retention and recruitment; learning and development opportunities; the need for greater diversity in the workplace; and assistance for employees in managing stress and balancing workloads. As a complement to VAC's Five-Year Strategic Plan, the HR plan will support the Department in realizing its corporate objectives and related strategic priorities.

My vision is for VAC to become an organization that is committed to continuous learning for all employees; that has a supportive work environment that is caring, sharing, open and adaptive; and that clearly values both individual contributions, as well as excellence in teamwork. Such an organization will also actively recognize meaningful contributions and provide support for individual career development.



While the Department has been making many inroads in these areas, as you know there is still much work to be done. VAC needs to become such an organization as described if we are to continue to meet the increasingly more complex needs of our clients.

I would like to thank all of the staff who have participated in one way or another in the preparation of VAC's Human Resources Strategic Plan. This five-year plan will provide the framework within which the Department can achieve its objectives.



Larry Murray
Deputy Minister
Veterans Affairs Canada

INTRODUCTION

*VAC will not be able to realise its corporate objectives and related strategic priorities without a credible Strategic Human Resources Plan that addresses important issues such as staff retention and recruitment, learning and development opportunities, the need for greater diversity in the workplace, assistance for employees through the transition, employee counselling, and effective ways of managing stress and balancing workloads. It will also be incumbent on the Department to support government-wide strategic objectives related to Public Service renewal and to Classification Reform and to ensure that its own human resources capacity is adjusted to meet the challenges ahead.*¹

This Human Resources Plan draws on information and feedback gathered over the past three years from a variety of sources, including the following:

- discussions that have taken place at the Human Resources Management Committee meetings;
- consultations with employees and union representatives;
- the results and ensuing actions taken in response to the 1999 Public Service Employee Survey;
- the Management Practices and Human Resource Management Capacity Checks that were conducted in 2000; and
- consultations that have taken place with the senior managers responsible for the fulfilment of the strategic priorities included in the Departmental Five-Year Strategic Plan.

In order to see more easily the linkages between departmental human resource planning and the departmental strategic priorities, this plan follows the format of the Departmental Five-Year Strategic Plan.

1. *Veterans Affairs Canada Five-Year Strategic Plan 2001-2006*

1. OUR HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT MANDATE

The Speech from the Throne of January 30, 2001 included the following statement: “Canada must have a public service distinguished by excellence and equipped with the skills for a knowledge economy and society. The Government will seek bright, motivated young women and men to accept the challenge of serving their country in the federal public service. The Government is committed to the reforms needed for the Public Service of Canada to continue evolving and adapting. These reforms will ensure that the Public Service is innovative, dynamic and reflective of the diversity of the country - able to attract and develop the talent needed to serve Canadians in the 21st century”. At Veterans Affairs Canada, we are committed to achieving these goals set out in the Speech from the Throne.

The Veterans Affairs Canada Five-Year Strategic Plan for 2001-2006 outlines strategic objectives and priorities that set a course for VAC to confirm the Department’s relevancy, enhance the integrity of its programs and make for a vibrant, challenging workplace. The Plan identifies two objectives: Integrity of our Programs and Service Improvement, and Organizational Effectiveness, along with ten priorities for action. Fulfilment of these objectives and priorities is dependent upon the people who work for VAC and the steps that are taken to engage, retain and develop their talents and prepare for the demographic challenges of the future.

2. OUR HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT VISION AND VALUES

Our Human Resource Management Vision and Values are guided by the overarching vision and values stated in the Departmental Strategic Plan. They are as follows:

OUR VISION

To provide exemplary service which honours the sacrifice and achievement of our veterans and clients.

OUR VALUES AND ETHICS

At Veterans Affairs Canada we value our clients' contributions to the development of Canada as a nation and honour the sacrifices they have made in the defence of freedom and the pursuit of world peace. In expressing Canada's gratitude to them, we strive to exemplify the high principles which they have defended.

Integrity

We act with honesty and fairness and always strive to do the right thing.

Respect

We treat everyone with respect. We recognize the dignity that is inherent in all people and celebrate the strength that comes from the diversity of people and ideas.

Service

We take pride in our role as public servants and are dedicated to service excellence. We are committed to responsive, quality service, delivered with timeliness, courtesy and fairness.

Accountability

We are accountable and responsible for our actions and accept the consequences of our decisions.

Teamwork

We value teamwork, and promote the principles of partnership, consultation and open communication.

Balance

We encourage the achievement of a healthy balance in the working and personal lives of employees, believing that this contributes to the vitality of individuals, our organization and our communities.

3. ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

The Public Service has to function in an increasingly complex world. Its operations are subject to a variety of external pressures that dictate how it must deliver its services. The introduction of evolving technology, such as the Client Service Delivery Network, continues to present learning and adaptation challenges to everyone. The Public Service is also forced to compete for talent in an open market at a time when workforces are becoming more diverse, with non-traditional expectations. Public servants, like employees in other sectors, have new ideas about how they should be managed and how they do their work. The overall work culture is changing.

In his Seventh Annual Report to the Prime Minister on the Public Service of Canada, the Clerk of the Privy Council stated the following: “We need to create an environment where all public servants are excited about their work and look forward each day to serving Canadians. We need to attract and retain Canada’s best and brightest minds to ensure the best policy advice. We must motivate a whole generation of promising new graduates to consider a career in the Public Service. We must provide all employees with the opportunities and the support they need to develop and learn. We must become more of a learning organization, focused on continuous improvement”.

Research in the public and private sectors in Canada shows that prospective employees have their own suitability checklist for potential employers. They seek out workplaces where they can balance their professional and personal lives, be treated with respect and fairness, and find work which is intrinsically rewarding, interesting and challenging.

Employees of today expect to participate in decision making and to have a degree of autonomy, control and influence over their environment. The results of a recent study conducted by the Association of Professional Executives of the Public Service of Canada (APEX) indicated that the Public Service’s capacity to retain people is dependent on our ability to make work meaningful and challenging, and to foster a climate for professional learning and growth.

Another environmental factor being experienced specifically by our employees is the psychological impact of providing service to aging veterans. The workplace pressures created by frequent contact with dying veterans has negatively affected the workplace environment of many employees. There is also a newer, younger base of Canadian Forces clients who have materially different expectations that are also adding to the day-to-day pressures of employees.

In April 2001, the Prime Minister announced the formation of a Task Force on Modernizing Human Resource Management. The mandate of the Task Force is to recommend a modern policy, legislative and institutional framework for the management of human resources in the twenty-first century to enable the public service to attract, retain and develop the talent needed to serve Canadians. Prior to the establishment of the Task Force, considerable work had been completed in pursuit of classification reform.

4. IMPORTANT ISSUES FOR VETERANS AFFAIRS CANADA

To better serve Canadian Forces veterans and ensure the relevance of VAC programming and service delivery over the longer term, the Department is adjusting its services available to clients. Given that the numbers of war veterans is decreasing more rapidly than the growth in Canadian Forces veterans, the Department needs to undertake training, organizational and other initiatives to begin to accommodate this change.

A number of activities are currently underway. If funding is approved, the Integrated Services for Seniors and Veterans program will be expanded, allowing the Department to work in partnership with other federal and provincial departments, as well as municipal governments to deliver services to common clients in a more integrated fashion.

A re-engineering of business practices is also underway to look at more effective ways to deliver services and to take full advantage of the Client Service Delivery Network.

In looking at the people who are responsible for the overall delivery of services in the Portfolio, approximately 28% of employees are 50 years of age or older. In the Executive Category, 49% of employees were 50 years or older as of March 31, 2001. Of particular concern is the fact that the EX feeder groups have similar age and retirement eligibility profiles. These demographics are similar to the rest of the Public Service. There is a real need to attract and identify candidates with the highest potential for current and longer term needs, as well as those who reflect the ever-growing diversity of Canadians. There is also a real need to retain managers and professionals.

Bilingual capacity in the Department is also a factor that requires continued care. Across the country, there is a need to ensure the capacity to provide service to clients in the official language of their choice. In Charlottetown, as the national headquarters of Veterans Affairs Canada, there is the need to have enough sufficiently bilingual staff at the operational level to work with our Francophone staff nationally.

5. OUR FUTURE HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

As observed in the Departmental Five-Year Strategic Plan, VAC will continue, over the next five years, to have a full slate of activities fulfilling its responsibilities to war veterans, Canadian Forces veterans and other clients. Clients will continue to require services in large numbers up to the end of 2007, by which time they will have decreased by about 10.6 per cent.

We can forecast, even following this decline, that workload will not decrease for VAC employees. Throughout the coming years, many of our war veterans will require more attentive health care services and more personalized face-to-face assistance from VAC staff due to advancing age.

Others, especially Canadian Forces veterans, will be seeking improved services to allow them to better access programs and services.

As our own workforce continues to age, it is imperative to ensure that a thoughtful approach is undertaken to allow those existing employees nearing retirement to continue to make their essential contribution right to the end of their public service career. It will also be essential to introduce and support mechanisms that will allow for the transfer of knowledge and experience to newly recruited public servants.

A careful balance between supporting and valuing existing employees and recruiting and developing the employees for the future will be required.

6. OUR STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCE OBJECTIVES

In accepting the challenging work that lies before it over the next five years, VAC will have to be very mindful of its most valuable resource, its staff. They face a decade that will feature changing programs and evolving client needs, the need to master new tasks, technologies and responsibilities, and turnovers in our workforce as many public servants retire. VAC will have to plan ahead to address the many human resource concerns that these changes generate. Particular attention will have to be paid to staff retention and recruitment; learning and development opportunities for employees; assisting employees through periods of transition; ensuring greater diversity in the workplace; and fostering effective ways of managing stress and balancing workloads. Inevitably, the Department will also have to focus energy and attention on advancing work on Classification Reform and ensuring adequate human resources capacity, to support its human resources strategic objectives.²

Our strategic human resource objective is to retain, recruit and develop motivated Veterans Affairs Canada staff sufficient to support the integrity of departmental programs, improve services and ensure organizational effectiveness. Achieving this requires that programs be adequately resourced with people having the necessary skills, abilities and knowledge to fulfill their responsibilities. This, in turn, assumes workplace well-being, inclusive of continuous learning, professional fulfilment, opportunity for advancement and a balance between work life and private life.

2. *Veterans Affairs Canada Five-Year Strategic Plan 2001-2006*

7. OUR STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCE PRIORITIES

Over the next five years, the face of the Department will need to change to reflect the Canadian population, drawing upon the richness of thought and ideas that diversity offers. All employees will need to be treated with the same respect and attention that is expected of the service they provide to clients.

The opportunities potentially presented by Human Resource Management Modernization may represent a turning point in the Public Service. The manner in which these reforms are embraced will play a critical role in the future operations of the Department. In particular, the opportunities presented by a modernized staff relations regime and continued close collaboration with unions may be significant in assisting VAC to become a workplace of choice.

PRIORITY 1 - RECRUITMENT AND HUMAN RESOURCE ALLOCATION IN SUPPORT OF DEPARTMENTAL OPERATIONAL PRIORITIES

In order to deliver services in a changing environment, particular attention will have to be paid to a number of issues, including:

- classification of positions;
- staff retention and recruitment;
- bilingualism;
- assisting employees through periods of transition in response to evolving client and staff demographics;
- ensuring greater diversity in the workplace; and
- fostering effective ways of managing stress and balancing workloads.

The Department will also have to focus energy and attention on ensuring adequate human resources advisory capacity to support its human resources strategic objectives.

Efforts to support workplace well-being could play an integral role in retaining and attracting skilled and healthy employees who will be at the centre of the Department's transition in response to demographic trends. Based on data available for similar organizations, it is likely that certain types of absences may be contributing to lost productivity. In turn, improved attendance frequently is reflective of an organization's success in implementing health promotion and wellness initiatives, family friendly workplace policies and workplace relationships skills training.

PRIORITY 2 - LEARNING ORGANIZATION

The Department has recognized that, in the knowledge age, the most important investment an organization can make is in its people. It is with this in mind that the Department has undertaken a commitment to become a Learning Organization dedicated to the ongoing learning of our employees.

A learning organization is an organization committed to ongoing learning for all employees. It is an organization that has a culture that is caring, sharing, open, adaptive and clearly values both the individual contribution to the whole and excellence in teamwork. It is an organization that actively recognizes meaningful contributions and desired behaviour and provides support for career development. It is also characterized by a supportive work environment at all levels.

The Department already has many of these attributes, but also has some distance to go. VAC needs to be an organization as described if we are to continue to meet the increasingly more complex needs of our clients in an environment of continuous change.

PRIORITY 3 - MODERNIZATION OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

The modernization of human resource management practices should, in the longer term, offer substantial improvements to the processes and procedures associated with human resource management. In the shorter term, this undertaking requires an active involvement of the Department in Central Agency reviews, with the aim of taking every opportunity to ensure that the interests of the Department are taken into consideration. Once modernization has been further described by the Modernization Task Force, the Department must take action to ensure that the human resource community and managers throughout the Department are prepared for the ensuing changes. The key questions that are being considered in this exercise are the following:

- What should be the four or five key values for the new human resource management regime?
- What safeguards are needed to ensure adherence to key values?
- How can we simplify the staffing system so that it is faster, more affordable, more flexible and responsive to diversity?
- In this new system, what should be the roles and responsibilities of central agencies, deputy heads, employees and unions?
- What changes are required to make the recourse system fair, fast and affordable?
- In the new recourse system, what should be the roles and responsibilities of central agencies, deputy heads, managers, employees and unions?
- What are the essential attributes of a labour relations model that will foster a more cooperative management relationship?
- Within this labour relations model, what should be the roles and responsibilities of central agencies, deputy heads, unions and the National Joint Council?

8. CONCLUSION

VAC's Strategic Human Resources Plan is a framework for the strategic management of human resources for the next five years. Implementation plans for the priorities described will be prepared by the offices of primary interest.

For our clients, the plan offers an approach to ensure that appropriate knowledgeable people are on staff to ensure that programs and services are delivered as they should.

For managers, it provides a focus for their human resource management activities to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities.

For our employees, it provides evidence of VAC's commitment to their continuous learning and well-being.

For our union colleagues, the plan reinforces the Department's desire to continue to build an even closer relationship, especially in the context of human resource management modernization.

For prospective and future employees, the priorities presented in this document can be used to demonstrate VAC's commitment to becoming an employer of choice, for Canadians of all backgrounds and abilities.

In the next five years a great deal will have changed in the human resource management regime. It will be essential that the Department position itself as a place where people are continually learning and developing and continue to want to work.

This five-year plan provides the framework within which the Department can achieve these objectives.

I M P L E M E N T A T I O N P L A N S

The implementation plans for the priorities described in the Human Resources Five-Year Strategic Plan will be the responsibility of the designated office of primary interest (OPI).

Copies of the implementation plans may be obtained through the Human Resources Division at the following address:

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