

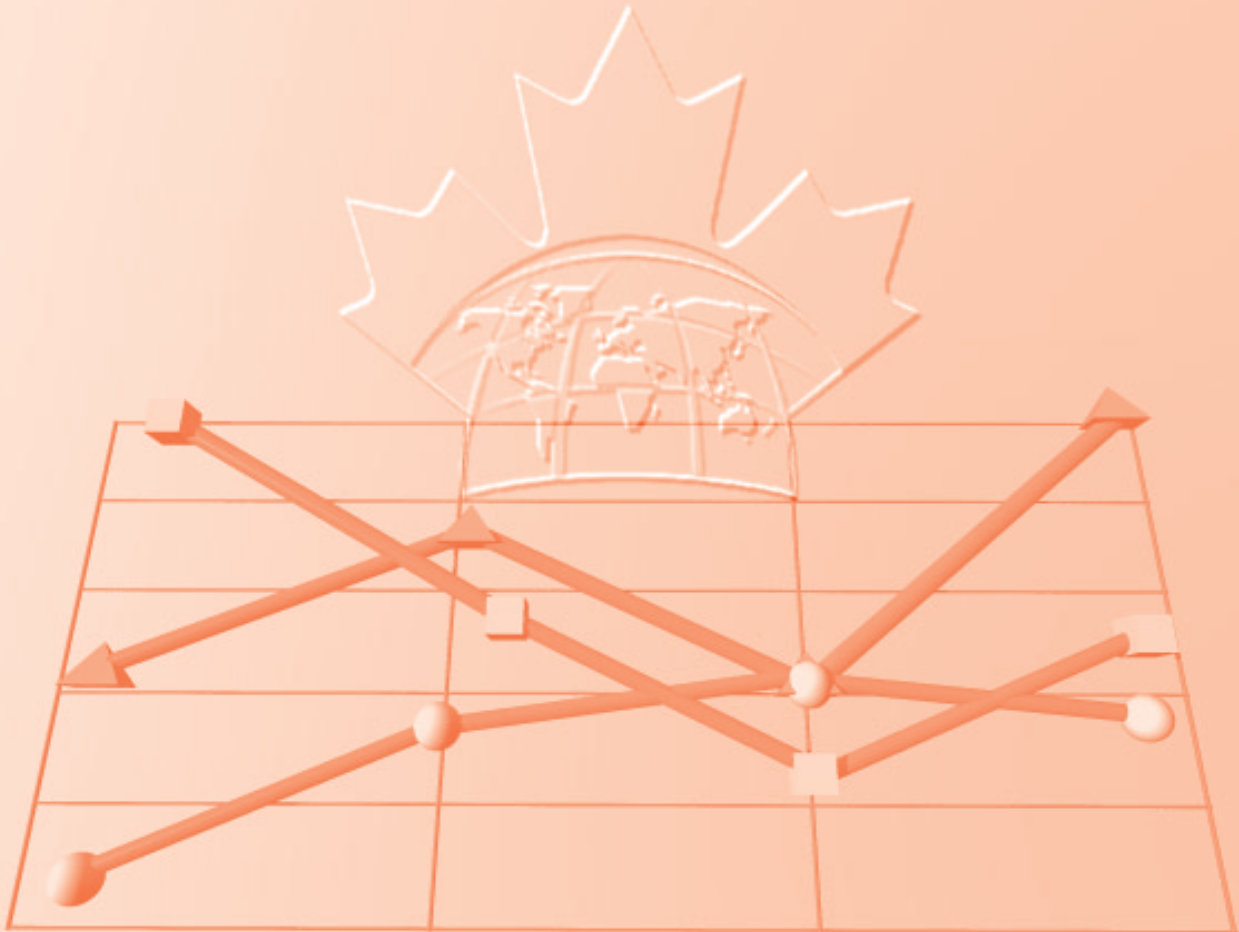


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- Executive Summary -
Operational Review of the
Citizenship Processing Centre
- Sydney -
May 1999

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- Executive Summary -
Operational Review of the
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Sydney

Final Report
May, 1999

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

This report presents an operational review of the Citizenship Processing Centre (CPC) Sydney focusing on the management of production, processes, and resources; the adequacy of processing tools, including the Citizenship Registration System (CRS); internal and external communications; and internal and external roles and relationships, and the organization of CPC resources. The objectives of this project were to assess efficiency and effectiveness of the operation in Sydney, including fee handling and document control, and to identify recommendations to improve processes, address problems, and overcome identified weaknesses.

In 1983, as part of the federal government's initiative to decentralize services, CPC Sydney was established as a data entry and certificate preparation centre. In July 1996, as a result of Citizenship and Immigration's business process re-engineering exercise, Sydney was given full responsibility for application screening, perfecting, and processing for grant applications received directly by mail from clients. The CPC processes grant, proof, and search applications and produces citizenship certificates for grants and proofs and record/no record letters for searches. Grant processing is the main business line.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used for the operational review included document review, interviews, an employee survey, process mapping, the identification of best practices in other organizations, and a statistical review. In person and telephone interviews were conducted with representatives of the Departmental Delivery Network Branch (DDN), Integration Branch, Case Management, Information Management and Technologies Branch (IMTB), local citizenship offices, call centres, citizen judges, and the RCMP. A two-week site visit in Sydney, in mid-October 1998, was used to conduct interviews, administer an employee survey, observe and map processes, and gather statistical data. Three organizations were consulted to identify "best" practices related to mail-in processing and to identify models for handling the policy role in case review, organizing policy resources, and managing the policy-operational continuum. The information gathered through the various methodologies has been analyzed and synthesized and is presented in detail in the nine chapters that comprise the final report. The executive summary provides an overview of the main findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

FINDINGS

Although the review of CPC Sydney confirmed problems in managing the processes and production as indicated by recurring backlogs and increasing cycle times, it also identified positive developments. Progress has been made in providing CRS data and reports that will provide valuable inputs into planning and management. Some of the CPC teams have gained experience in the use of process management techniques, goal setting, and monitoring and feedback of results to increase production. Monitoring and managing individual output has recently been facilitated through CRS generated reports, employee assessments, and the setting of formal individual output targets. Increased stability in the team leader positions, through decreased reliance on acting staff, should improve team management and allow more active involvement of team leaders in managing production across the CPC.

Inputs, Backlogs, Outputs, Cycle Time

Patterns in the intake, backlogs, and outputs of grants, proofs, and searches provide useful data for resource management. Our review of input data over about a two-year period indicate that grant intake is cyclical, with the highest intake in the fourth quarter of the fiscal year; proof intake has been increasing; and searches have been decreasing. Backlogs, measured in terms of long waiting times and inventories, have been identified at almost every stage in the CPC process and are of concern because of their potential impact on service standards and resources as the bulge of backlogged files works its way through the entire process. The CPC's average monthly grant output is not sufficient to keep even with the current intake. Backlogs prior to entry in the CRS for cost recovery are especially problematic because files are not electronically tracked, cannot be easily located, and no information is available for clients. Our analysis of grants mailed to the courts indicates that while individual courts experience some variability in the files received from CPC Sydney, overall the CPC actually smooths out the output to the courts in relation to the variability of the input received by the CPC. An analysis of cycle time for citizenship processing, from mail receipt to when the oath is taken, indicates that the time spent in each of the major processing segments, Sydney, clearances, and the courts is roughly the same. Overall cycle time, which has averaged 300 days during the period May 1997 to November 1998, has been increasing in both the Sydney and the local courts segments, and reached 365 days in November 1998. Moreover, the impact of the file backlog in Sydney can be expected to further increase cycle time by another 100 days. Individual productivity in the CPC is problematic in terms of the variation in individual output and the extent of non-productive time.

The CPC Processes

From a process design perspective, there is a requirement for the mail room to begin tracking applications electronically from initial receipt in order to improve information and increase the transparency of CPC operations. This could be done by using bar-coded applications. There is also a need to capture the maximum amount of client data on CRS at the earliest possible time by moving the “create client” step from the processing teams to be done in the mail room at cost recovery in order to provide better client data at an earlier time to partners. Our review of the processing of receipts has determined that the CPC has not been in compliance with the Treasury Board’s policy on Controllershship, regarding depositing funds received. Applications and fees were kept together for too long before cost recovery, and the security procedures for safeguarding public funds were not sufficient. Changes in the mail room sorting criteria could also improve the mail room process. Other opportunities for process design improvements include increasing the level of application screening done in the mail room; combining the proof and search processes; making increased use of clerical staff to handle some of the activities currently performed by agents; setting up a production unit for centralized handling of certificate production and record/no record letters; and streamlining the internal e-mail referral process. The security of numbered documents, certificates and record letters, could be improved by restricting the supplies available, and conducting regular inventory checks and reconciliations of the documents used.

CPC Tools

The CRS has been a factor in contributing to processing inefficiency and ineffectiveness because of performance and stability problems prior to October 1997, and currently because of slow response time, incomplete modules and functions, the number of screens, and inaccurate and incomplete data transfer from screen to screen. Waiting time for CRS has been estimated to cost from half to one day of processing time per agent per week. Responsiveness problems have also been identified in relation to SAP. Although the situation is improving, management information has not been readily available. The certificate production equipment is inadequate for volume processing and results in inefficiency. Procedures manuals are not up to date; staff find procedures unclear; and there is evidence of inconsistent and inaccurate application of procedures.

Management, Planning, and Monitoring

The CPC has not developed a formal strategic or business plan since 1995. Planning, production, and priority setting appears to be driven by specific problems or crises situations such as backlogs, increasing cycle times, and falling service standards. There is a requirement to

increased performance monitoring and data analysis in order to improve planning, process management, and develop strategies to respond to problem situations.

The CPC should consistently monitor input, outputs, and service standards. It should also monitor cycle times, inventories, and waiting times for key steps (i.e., potential backlog points) in the process, and set thresholds which can be used to trigger corrective action. Individual components of the process must be managed with regard to their impact on the overall process.

Quality control currently focuses on the appearance of the citizenship certificate. An internal quality control/assurance process is required to assess the quality of processing and data entry and to respond to the findings from the national Quality Assurance Program.

Processes need to be managed from a CPC perspective rather than an individual or team perspective. This change will require the CPC to adopt, across the organization, process management techniques and practices observed in the best practice organizations and individual teams, such as increased batching of activities; rotation of agents through batched activities; processing of routine before non-routine files; and increased use of clerical staff for more routine tasks. Experiments in the two grant teams indicate that by systematically adopting these process management techniques, agents can increase their production to 100 completed applications/week.

Resource planning must be improved in order to reduce the disruption of frequent staff changes, the dependence on casual staff, and to ensure there are adequate resources to meet processing requirements in the mail room, processing teams, and file retirement. Chronic understaffing has been a problem in the mail room and has contributed to backlogs. There appears to be a requirement for additional training directly related to processing in order to assist staff to meet production goals, while producing a quality product.

Communications

There is not a well-defined process within CPC Sydney for sharing information with team leaders and staff and for considering and responding to staff inputs resulting in dissatisfaction among staff with communications from management. With respect to external communications, partners and stakeholders have identified three main problems that have led to dissatisfaction with communications from CPC Sydney: there is no clear protocol for communication and problem resolution with the CPC, resulting in communication being concentrated at the management level; responses from CPC Sydney to partners/stakeholders are untimely; and CPC Sydney has failed to communicate with partners/stakeholders on issues that impact on the partner's operation.

Roles and Relationships

Some of the roles and accountabilities between Sydney and its partners and stakeholders, notably local office, Integration Branch, and Case Management Branch require clarification and the development of accountability mechanisms. Furthermore, this lack of clarity has had a negative impact on relationships. With respect to Sydney and the local offices, disagreement has been around procedural issues, responsibility for certain tasks and errors, and CRS data entry. The degree of dependency between Sydney and Integration Branch with respect to the application of policy by Sydney and the impact of policy decisions on Sydney's operation suggests the need for better coordination and cooperation. Sydney's responsiveness and timeliness with respect to requests by Case Management Branch have been noted as an area of concern, as well as Sydney's capacity to take on some of the Branch's work, as suggested in a proposal put forward by the program support team.

The Citizenship Management Committee (CMC) appears to have evolved from a body with a strategic and policy intent to one which has an operational focus. Moreover, the role of DDN and CMC in providing direction to Sydney have become unclear and should be reviewed.

There is evidence that some CPC roles and responsibilities require clarification. The program support team is struggling to define a role internal to Sydney and with the other parts of the department, notably, Integration Branch and Case Management. Team leaders' roles and responsibilities, with respect to production management, need to be clearly defined and the roles and responsibilities assigned the Manager, Operations appear too broad. Moreover, a number of functions including planning, performance monitoring, quality monitoring, and communications require more emphasis in terms of the assignment of roles, responsibilities, and resources. The current organizational structure contributes to many of the identified problems by organizing most of the resources and the majority of the operational functions under a single manager, and does not define, or adequately allocate staff to, a performance monitoring and planning function.

The relationship between CPC management and staff has been strained by factors such as lack of communication between management and staff; inadequate information flow related to planning, targets, and goals; and management's perceived lack of receptiveness to staff inputs.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The intent in this section of the executive summary is to summarize the key conclusions and recommendations. The detailed conclusions and recommendations are presented in the main report.

CPC Processes

From a process design perspective there are opportunities to make adjustments to all the processes reviewed in order to improve internal movement, tracking, and processing of mail and files and increase the availability of information, across the citizenship delivery network and to clients.

Recommended changes include revising the mail sorting criteria; increasing the extent of the application pre-screening carried out in the mail room; using bar-coded applications to track mail for initial receipt; improving the inventory control and security of key documents; and streamlining the internal process for handling referrals from the call centre. Two of the most significant recommendations are to:

- move the CRS “create application” step from the processing teams to the mail room to be done at the “cost recovery” step, thus maximizing the client-specific data available electronically throughout the department; and
- centralize all certificate perfection and production, as well as the production of record/no record letters and maintenance of search data, to a single production unit serving all the processing teams.

CPC Tools

The CPC tools do not adequately support processing and have contributed to processing inefficiency and ineffectiveness. A number of the recommendations outlined in the report relate to the requirement for up-to-date processing manuals and clearly documented, consistently applied policies and procedures. It is also recommended that:

- improvements to the CRS be undertaken as soon as possible; and
- the CPC be provided with modern certificate production equipment.

Management, Planning, and Monitoring

There are opportunities for the CPC to increase its monitoring, analysis, and planning activities; to increase its use of information in planning and managing operations, individual, team and overall CPC performance, and human resource requirements; and to increase the extent to which processes are managed from a CPC perspective, rather than a team or individual perspective. While the main report contains detailed recommendations related to management, planning, and monitoring, the main recommendations are summarized as follows:

It is recommended the CPC:

- develop a performance monitoring system:
 - monitoring and analyzing internal performance data (inputs, outputs, cycle time, backlogs, inventories);
 - establishing internal goals and targets for major step in the production process in order to identify as early as possible potential problems, opportunities, and to develop action plans;
 - monitoring internal quality, accuracy, and completeness of CRS data and physical files;
- implement a formalized planning function:
 - developing a strategic plan; operational plans, and resource plans using and analyzing data gathered through performance monitoring;
- manage processes from a CPC perspective;
 - more actively manage individual, team, and CPC performance by setting goals for each level, monitoring performance, providing feedback, and taking corrective action;
 - implement standardized volume processing techniques across all the teams including increased use of batch processing; rotation of agents through batched activities; and balancing the ratio for processing complete applications and non-complete applications;
- ensure functions are adequately resourced; and
- increase training for service delivery agents with respect to legislation, policy, procedures, and techniques for names searches, micro searches, and CRS use.

Communication

The processes required to support internal communication and to facilitate effective and efficient communication between the CPC and their partners and stakeholders need to be revamped.

It is recommended the CPC:

- build the internal communication process and strategy around supervisors/team leaders; and
- develop a protocol for communication with partners and stakeholders that facilitates communication and problem resolution with service delivery agents, team leaders, and program support officers and empowers CPC staff to resolve problems at the appropriate levels.

Roles and Relationships

The review has identified opportunities to strengthen the working relationships and to improve the level of coordination and cooperation between CPC Sydney and its partners and stakeholders. Within CPC Sydney there is the potential to strengthen certain functions and improve management-staff relationships by ensuring roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and resources assigned.

It is recommended:

- the roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities between Sydney and the local offices, Integration Branch, and Case Management Branch be clarified;
- the department clarify the role of DDN and CMC in providing direction and guidance to CPC Sydney;
- the roles of the Manager, Operations, program support team, and team leaders be revised; and
- the CPC organization structure be changed to better support processing and reflect roles and responsibilities by establishing the following functions:
 - core processing responsible for assessing and processing grants, proofs, and searches;
 - processing support responsible for the mail room, cost recovery, file retirement, and certificate production;
 - business planning responsible for monitoring production and quality, data analysis, and planning; and
 - corporate support responsible for informatics, human resources, finance and administration, and continuous learning.

Management Response: Director General of Departmental Delivery Network

We thank the Corporate Review Unit for this very thorough and thoughtful review of the CPC Sydney over the past months. As this is the first-ever review of the operation since its inception in 1983, the review allows us to reflect not only on how far we have come in terms of change, but to focus on where we should now go to improve the operation and the citizenship process as a whole.

As Corporate Review provided an interim report in late 1998, the CPC has already implemented many of the very practical suggestions in that report; other issues have been overcome by the advent of the Handling of Public Monies (HPM) which has reduced exposure in the area of fee collection.

Over the next months I will work closely with the CPC Director and his team to study the recommendations of the review and implement as quickly as possible those which are 'quick fixes' and develop strategies for those that require significant resources and/or program changes. Clearly we will need the support of regional and headquarters partners and stakeholders to address broader items such as roles, relationships and communications.

This work will likely occur against the backdrop of new Citizenship legislation, and we can certainly expect substantial alterations to tools and processes in connection with the new Act. The report is therefore very timely, allowing us to roll the review changes into those which will be driven by new legislation.

