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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Communications Branch sets communications objectives, and develops and implements strategic communications plans for the Department of Justice. It also advises the Minister and the Department on communications issues, provides coordination and functional advice for satellite communications offices, and assists sectors in planning and implementing their communications projects by providing expert services and advice. The Branch is further responsible for providing the Minister's Office with communications services, for liaison with the news media, for external communications, and for liaison with other federal and provincial departments.

This audit reviewed and assessed the Communications Branch in the following key areas: the Branch's management framework; the effectiveness of linkages with the Minister's Office, the Deputy Minister's Office, staff of the Department of Justice, regional communications advisors, and program (or satellite) communications advisors; the level of service provided to the Minister's Office, the Deputy Minister's Office, and departmental clients; and the level of functional direction provided to regional and program offices. The fieldwork was conducted between November 2002 and January 2003.

The context in which the audit was conducted influenced the areas of inquiry. A 2001 Branch reorganization created teams of strategic communications advisors to act as single points of contact for program clients. This reorganization also assigned to a senior Branch manager functional responsibility for communicators in program offices outside the Branch. It further created a network of regional communications advisors reporting to regional directors and assigned to a senior Branch manager responsibility for providing functional direction to these communicators.

Overall, the audit team concluded the Branch is managed effectively. Most significantly, the 2001 reorganization has succeeded in better meeting the needs of the programs while maintaining a high quality of service to the Minister and Deputy Minister.

The Management Framework

The audit surfaced a number of issues related to the Branch's management framework, namely the policies, practices, and procedures relating to planning, organizing, controlling, leading and communicating, and human, financial, and materiel resources.

Interviewees identified several perceived gaps in Branch policies and procedures. The audit team recommends that priority be given to developing policies governing regional communications, and Internet and electronic communications.

The primary planning issue is the need to update the Department's Strategic Communications Plan, which the audit team believes should be done on an annual basis as part of the Department's strategic planning process.

The creation of teams of strategic communications advisors, although highly successful from the point of view of service to clients, has not been free of start-up challenges within the Branch. As a result of the Branch's reorganization and the ensuing revision or refinement of roles and responsibilities, some tensions, particularly around divisional processes and information sharing, have arisen among staff. Branch management has been taking steps to deal with these tensions and should continue their efforts in this regard.

As with some other federal departments, the Department of Justice has a substantial number of communicators who report directly to program managers and are not part of the Communications Branch. This reporting structure can create problems if these communicators attempt to deal directly with the Minister's Office on communications matters, contradict key departmental positions in their messaging, or unknowingly contravene government communications policy requirements. The Department moved to mitigate this situation by establishing a functional reporting relationship between these satellite operations and the Communications Branch. This arrangement appears to be working quite well, although the audit team heard in interviews several suggestions for further enhancements.

The Branch is responsible for ensuring compliance with the Department's visual identity guidelines, and the audit team obtained evidence that the Branch takes this responsibility seriously. Nevertheless, more attention to compliance in the area of electronic communications products, where post-production changes are easier to implement than in printed products, would be worthwhile.

The Communications Branch is not entirely systematic in evaluating communications products and activities—a weakness it shares with communications branches in many other departments. Within the Department of Justice resource constraints are one reason for this problem. An annual evaluation plan would allow the Branch to identify and evaluate significant communications initiatives. However, the cost implications of carrying out evaluations would need to be considered given the Branch’s existing budget constraints.

The Branch has instituted a range of internal communications mechanisms to meet the varying needs of Branch, satellite, and regional communicators. The group least well served is the electronic communications team. Based in another building several blocks from headquarters, it deserves more focused attention on its internal communications requirements.

Human resources management practices in the Branch appear to be appropriately flexible, and the Branch has succeeded in retaining key executives. At more junior levels, however, an opportunity may exist to introduce a developmental program to improve the recruitment and retention of good employees.

The audit team was told by people both inside and outside the Communications Branch that the Branch lacks adequate financial resources. Although the Department spends substantially more on communications than the amount of the Branch budget, much of the spending is under the control of program areas. At the time of the audit, the Branch was awaiting the results of a study on total departmental communications spending. This study represents one step in an ongoing effort to make a case for increased Branch funding.

The audit team found good control over the Branch’s finances from a budgeting, updating, and review perspective. The team reviewed invoices, contracts, and requisitions and found good records in place. However, the administration of some Branch credit cards lacks proper separation of responsibilities. One individual can purchase, commit, and authorize payment (section 34, *Financial Administration Act*) without anyone in a supervisory capacity reviewing the information prior to payment by the Department of Justice Finance. This situation should be addressed.

Regarding the management of materiel resources, the Branch lacks an on-hand inventory of assets as well as procedures to control assets when they are loaned out.

Communication Linkages

The audit team was impressed with the high marks accorded the Communications Branch for its linkages with virtually all external stakeholders, including the Minister's Office, the Deputy Minister's Office, program clients, regional offices, the Privy Council Office, and other departments and agencies. The only significant critical note was sounded by the Privy Council Office, which indicated the Branch's lack of resources prevented it from contributing to corporate initiatives such as polling or service guides.

Level of Service

The Communications Branch's key clients are largely satisfied with the level of service the Branch provides. The Minister's Office says its confidence in the Communications Branch is very high, while the DM's Office says the Branch is a key player in accomplishing what the DM wants to achieve. Program managers were highly complimentary about the quality of service they receive.

This level of satisfaction is significant in that it demonstrates that the objectives of the 2001 reorganization—to better meet the needs of the programs and to maintain the quality of service to the Minister and Deputy Minister—are being met.

Functional Direction to Regional Offices

Communications Branch executives, regional managers, and regional communicators are all having to adjust to two of the significant changes resulting from the 2001 reorganization—the creation of the network of regional communications advisors and the Communications Branch's responsibility for providing them with functional direction.

The Branch has room for improvement in providing functional direction. Although numerous mechanisms exist for communication between the Branch and the regions, the results are mixed, according to comments received during interviews with regional managers and communicators. A more proactive approach to providing functional guidance might produce better results.

The management response to the recommendations contained in this report was provided by the Associate Director General, Communications Branch, on August 14, 2003.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Communications Branch sets communications objectives for the Department of Justice. It develops and implements strategic communications plans for the Department's legislative initiatives, major court cases, and programs and policies. It advises the Minister and the Department on communications issues and provides coordination and functional advice for satellite communications offices such as those with the Family and Children and Youth Section, the National Crime Prevention Centre, the Youth Justice Policy Section, and the Victims of Crime program. It assists sectors in planning and implementing their communications projects and provides expert services and advice in such areas as promotion and publishing. The Branch is responsible for providing the Minister's Office with communications services, for liaison with the news media, for external communications such as news releases, speeches, exhibits and departmental advertising campaigns, and for liaison with other federal and provincial departments. The Branch also manages the departmental Web site as well as a public inquiry centre.¹

1.1 Organizational Structure

According to its organization chart dated September 20, 2002, the Communications Branch of the Department of Justice has 48 full-time equivalents (FTEs) headed by a Director General, who reports to the Deputy Minister. The Branch executive includes an Associate DG, a Director of Public Affairs and Outreach, and a Director of Client Services. The 48 FTEs, seven of them vacant as of the date of the organization chart, include 37 managers and communicators and seven support staff.

The Branch was reorganized in 2001. A primary feature of this reorganization was the creation of teams of strategic communications advisors (CAs) within the Client Services Division to act as single points of contact for program clients. The satellite communications advisors (i.e., communicators who work in, report to, and are paid by a particular program rather than the

¹ This text from InfoSource http://infosource.gc.ca/Info_1/JUS_OR-e.html.

Communications Branch) are attached to five program areas. Both satellite and client service advisors work with their clients to develop communications plans and to identify the need for communications support. The CAs then work with other Branch communicators to deliver communications products and services such as media relations and publication production. This structure was discussed at length within the Branch before it was implemented.

The 2001 reorganization further created a network of regional communicators working in each of five departmental regions and reporting to regional directors. Although there are now six regions under regional directors—Atlantic, Quebec, Ontario, Prairie, B.C., and Northern—only five were established at the time of the 2001 reorganization. The Northern Region was not created until later and does not have its own dedicated communicator on site. Instead the Regional Director must go to the communicator in either BC or Prairie Region for assistance.

Another feature of this reorganization was that it formalized a relationship between the Communications Branch and the satellite communications advisors, and initiated a similar relationship with the newly created network of regional communicators. A senior Branch manager now has functional responsibility for the satellite communications advisors in program offices. Also they are now invited to Communications Branch Management meetings and any meeting open to communicators within the Branch. This was not the case before the formalization of the relationship. In addition, another senior Branch manager is responsible for functional direction to the regional communicators.

The 2001 reorganization included a distribution of executive responsibilities as follows²:

- Associate Director General: electronic communications as well as coordinating and directing the satellite program communications offices.
- Director Client Services: planning, advice, environmental analysis and producing communications material to individual clients in sectors and branches across the Department through three teams, each headed up by a team leader.
- Director Public Affairs and Outreach: regional communications as well as outreach and media relations.

A 2001 study prepared for the Privy Council Office (PCO) identified a total of approximately 34 communications positions outside the Communications Branch.

² As described in *Memo to Deputy Minister re Communications Branch Reorganization*, March 23, 2001.

1.2 Audit Objectives

This audit examines the Branch's management practices, its communication linkages with and level of service to key clients, as well as its provision of functional direction to communicators outside the Branch.

The objectives of this audit were to review and assess:

- the management framework (policies, practices, and procedures relating to planning, organizing, controlling, leading and communicating, and the management of human, financial, and materiel resources);
- the effectiveness of linkages between the Communications Branch and the Minister's Office, the Deputy Minister's Office, staff of the Department of Justice, and regional communicators and program communications advisors;
- the level of service provided to the Minister's Office, the Deputy Minister's Office, and departmental clients;
- the level of functional direction provided to regional and program offices.

The audit also considered whether:

- roles and responsibilities of communications staff at headquarters (including program communications advisors) and in regional offices are properly defined,
- the Communications Branch is addressing the Department's need to have a consistent visual image both internally and externally,
- the Communications Branch is performing effectively interdepartmentally and has developed quality linkages with the PCO and other departments.

1.3 Audit Scope and Methodology

The scope of the audit included all activities and operations of the Communications Branch at headquarters and the linkages with regional communicators and satellite communications advisors (reporting to program managers).

The fieldwork for this audit was carried out from November 2002 to January 2003.

Information for this audit was obtained through the following methods:

- review of relevant documentation concerning the operation of the Communications Branch;
- review and analysis of budget information;
- interviews and focus groups with Branch management, communicators, and administrative staff;
- interviews with representatives of the Minister's Office and the Deputy Minister's Office; interviews with Department of Justice program managers and satellite communications advisors;
- interviews by telephone with Department of Justice senior regional directors and regional communicators;
- interview by telephone with a senior manager in the Communications and Consultation Secretariat, Privy Council Office.

2. DETAILED AUDIT FINDINGS

2.1 The Management Framework

Policies

A new *Communications Policy of the Government of Canada* came into effect April 1, 2002. Our review of Communications Branch policy documents together with interviews of officials within and outside the Branch indicate that the Department is largely in compliance with the requirements of this policy with two exceptions—the requirements for planning and evaluation, and for Internet and electronic communications. (Planning and evaluation requirements are addressed in the respective sections later in this report.)

Branch senior management indicate the new policy did not require major readjustment at the Department of Justice, as the Department provided significant input into its development at early stages. But Branch employees expressed concern about their ability, given limited resources, to adequately monitor the Department's compliance with the Communications Policy's requirements for Internet and electronic communications. (Limited resources are further discussed in the following sections of this report: Evaluation, Communications Linkages, and Level of Service Provided to the Minister's Office, the Deputy Minister's Office, and to Departmental Clients.)

The largest impact of the new policy was that the Branch's role in electronic communications increased, since Policy Requirement 18 sets out the need to have an institution's Web sites, sub-sites, and portals reviewed regularly by the head of communications, or his or her designate, who oversees and advises on Web content and design.

The Communications Policy was also an incentive both for the creation of the network of regional communicators and for the development efforts by the Branch toward an internal communications framework. This is in keeping with Policy Requirement 15, which requires institutions to ensure that regional operations have the resources needed to carry out the requirements of the policy and to effectively manage the communications function.

The Communications Branch has developed or is in the course of developing departmental policies and procedures in several key areas:

- The document *Communications Issues in Litigation: A Policy Paper* has reportedly helped litigators better handle communications in high profile cases and is now being revised to provide guidance to lawyers across the Department.
- The document *Communication Policy with the Public and Media* is in draft form and remains under development.
- Through JusNet, the Branch provides departmental employees with procedures on publishing to the Internet and Intranet, communications planning, print publishing, media enquiries, and promotions/exhibits.
- The Branch has documents detailing the *Minister's Speech Process* and the *Deputy and Associate Deputy Minister Speech Request Procedures*.
- Guidelines for publishing and design are in place in support of the Federal Identity Program (FIP) and the departmental visual identity. Because of concerns about the lack of coordination of departmental publications, the Branch is reviewing the departmental publishing policy.
- The Branch has completed a series of employee consultations concerning internal communications and is currently developing a revised employee communications policy and accompanying strategic framework.

Interviewees suggested however that gaps in policy and procedures exist in the following areas:

- Regional communications: the need to address such issues as funding of regional communications, media relations in the regional context, input by regional communicators into Question Period notes and briefing notes, the regional role in issues identification, regional support to the Minister's Office, and communications with the public.
- The Internet: the need to inform Department of Justice employees about what may and may not be put on the Department's Web site (the electronic communications team raised concerns about the adequacy of existing policies dealing with Internet publishing).
- Cost recovery: the need to clarify for program areas how services beyond those provided by the Branch would be funded.
- Media lines: the need to establish a set format and an agreed process for the development and approval of lines.
- Publishing and distribution procedures: the need to ensure coordination of departmental publications (as noted above, the Branch is reviewing the policy).

Awareness of Branch communications policies among Department of Justice communicators varies. Most are aware of key policies such as the media relations policy. However, some individuals who were responsible for ensuring compliance were unaware of their existence. One satellite communications advisor was unaware of any policies, and one regional communicator said training on policies had not been provided on joining the Department.

The audit team recognizes that the Communications Branch is making progress on departmental communications policies and procedures. The team is of the opinion that, given limited resources, the Branch's policy focus at this time should be on regional communications and Internet and electronic communications. Regional communications is an important new area that requires more guidance, and Internet and electronic communications requires policies to support the Communications Branch in promoting compliance with the requirements of the Government of Canada's Communications Policy.

Recommendations and Management Response

- 1. It is recommended that the Director General of Communications give priority to developing policies in the two key areas of regional communications and Internet and electronic communications.**

Agreed. A comprehensive Internet and electronic communications policy was completed and disseminated in November 2002: Electronic and Web Publishing Standards
http://dojnet/intranet_e/publishers_online/standards_intra.htm

Informal discussions concerning the development of a Regional Communications Policy or Guidelines have been held with regional communicators. The policy will be developed over the coming months in collaboration with the Regional Communications Advisors, and input will be solicited from Senior Regional Directors.

In addition, the process of identifying gaps and good practices has been initiated, and efforts are being made to standardize internal and external communications practices across the Department.

Planning

The Communications Policy requires institutions to integrate communications planning into their annual business planning process, to develop a corporate communications plan, and to update the plan in conjunction with the business planning and budgeting cycle.

The auditors reviewed the *Department of Justice Strategic Plan 2001-2005* and two key Communications Branch planning documents—*Strategic Communications Plan 1999-2000* and *Strategic Action Plan 2001-2005*—as well as a sample communications strategy, *Supporting the Department's Change Agenda, May 2000*.

The Department of Justice *Strategic Action Plan 2001-2005* demonstrates a high level of input from communications sources, as it includes an assessment of the general public environment, extensive commitments to improve communications and consultation with Canadians, and commitments to regional and internal communications.

The Director General indicated that, despite the date on the Branch's Strategic Communications Plan, it had been updated to reflect the Department's *Strategic Action Plan 2001-2005*. Three regional communicators noted they used the Branch plan to guide their activities.

However, even updated, the plan predates the most recent change of Ministers and a major reorganization of the Department. Four interviewees said the plan should be updated. A Branch manager noted the plan should be a touchstone for departmental communicators, particularly new employees, but is not effective for this use when it is out of date. The audit team concurs with this assessment.

Two regional communicators have developed regional strategic communications plans, which were provided to the Communications Branch, and a third is working on a regional plan. Northern Region, which does not have a dedicated communications advisor, has a draft plan that was prepared by the Communications Branch.

Of the two satellite communications advisors interviewed, one prepares an annual plan and the other works with a plan developed for a Memorandum to Cabinet (MC).

Communications plans are an important service provided by Branch communications advisors to program managers. The program managers interviewed were highly complimentary about the

Branch's services, and two program managers specifically mentioned the quality of Branch communications plans.

Departmental policy requires a Communications Branch signoff on MCs and Treasury Board (TB) submissions. This requirement provides the opportunity for the Branch to ensure communications issues, including funding, are addressed. Branch advisors expressed frustration, however, that some documents were being signed off without adequate attention to the need for communications funding to support the program activities involved. The audit team is of the opinion that sound communications planning includes consideration of resource requirements, and that the Branch would be well advised to review documents for their resource implications.

Individual workplans are addressed as part of each communicator's annual performance review (PREA). Planning of the ongoing workload tends to be ad hoc or short term, given the nature of communications activity and client demands that cannot be anticipated. An important planning tool is the Monday morning Public Affairs Committee meeting that allows communicators from across the Department, including the regions, to get a heads-up on key upcoming activities.

The audit team believes the lack of an annual strategic plan is a significant gap that affects all other areas of planning. Such a plan, developed in consultation with key Department of Justice stakeholders in concert with the annual departmental strategic planning process, would provide a framework for the development of other plans as well as for day-to-day Branch activities.

Recommendations and Management Response

- 2. It is recommended that the Director General Communications launch a process to develop a new annually updated Strategic Communications Plan for the Department of Justice.**

Agreed. The process to develop an updated strategic communications plan in support of current departmental goals and initiatives is underway: a preliminary draft is being prepared, and efforts made to ensure that it reflects the DOJ's fall agenda.

Organizing

Communications Advisors

The main benefit of the creation of teams of strategic communications advisors, as outlined in the Introduction, is the improved accessibility for those outside the Branch. Our interviews with senior Branch managers, CAs, program managers, satellite communications advisors, and regional communicators indicate that in this respect the 2001 reorganization has been successful.

Senior Branch managers and CAs say they believe relationships with clients are stronger and Branch roles and responsibilities are clearer for clients. The auditors interviewed five program managers served by CAs. Each is largely pleased with the services received. None mentioned difficulties understanding Branch roles, and all made comments that indicated the Branch was responsive and easily accessible to them. The satellite communications advisors and most of the regional communicators also indicated that Branch roles are now clearer to them with the reorganization. However, two regional communicators said they are not yet clear on who in the Branch is responsible for what, and a third would welcome a document that spells out roles and responsibilities.

On the other hand, our interviews with some middle managers and staff in other parts of the Communications Branch revealed some concerns about the reorganization, primarily centered around perceptions of reduced access to the Director General and to clients. Specific issues included:

- Information sharing: Branch service providers cited the need for greater consistency in providing timely, comprehensive information when communication advisors enlist their services; they also expressed a desire for more upfront involvement in planning the extent and nature of Branch responses to client requests.
- Reduced access to senior Branch management by some middle managers.
- Roles and responsibilities are not clear.

The audit team is of the view that the introduction of CAs has been successful in improving service to Branch clients. (See also discussion in Level of Service Provided to the Minister's Office, the Deputy Minister's Office, and Departmental Clients.) However, because the CAs now frequently serve as a first point of contact for clients to access the full range of Branch services, some staff no longer enjoy as much direct contact with clients and expressed difficulty in adjusting to this change.

Nonetheless, in a few interviews the audit team found indications that these tensions are beginning to dissipate. Therefore, a greater effort by senior Branch management to improve relations between groups within the Branch might prove helpful in this regard.

Recommendations and Management Response

- 3. It is recommended that the Director General Communications ensure that senior Communications Branch managers work to improve the relationship between the communications advisors and service providers of the Branch.**

Agreed. Communications Branch is pleased that the audit found the reorganization to have successfully met its objectives. Management realizes that change can be difficult. Efforts to improve relationships have been ongoing, and include the efforts of individual team members to clarify and discuss their respective roles and responsibilities. Process guidelines have been drafted and are currently under review. Representatives from each area meet at least once weekly to discuss workplace issues (Monday Operations Meeting) as well as once a month at Extended Management Group Meetings. Over time, as all staff members continue to acquire greater experience in providing client services under the new organization, working relationships have improved.

Functional Relationship with Program Communications Advisors

The existence of satellite operations, where communication staff report to and are paid by a particular program rather than the Branch, is not unique to the Department of Justice. Such units evolved in a number of departments in the early and mid-1990s as communications branch budgets were cut during Program Review. Program managers who needed but could not receive communications support from their communications branches found resources to establish their own communications units, often by seeking discrete funding for communications.

When such units operate independently of the Communications Branch, their staff may be unfamiliar with departmental and governmental communications policies, procedures, priorities, issues, and messages. They may attempt to deal directly with the Minister's Office on communications matters, contradict key departmental positions in their messaging, or unknowingly contravene government communications policy requirements.

As a senior Branch manager noted, satellite communicators may become too close to their program managers, losing the independent perspective that often allows the communications function to add value to policy development and program implementation. Alternatively, they may become voices in the wilderness with no communications colleagues, particularly at senior levels, to support them in putting forward their views to their managers.

To reduce the likelihood of such problems occurring, the Department of Justice created a functional link between the Communications Branch's Associate DG and the satellite communications advisors in the Department. The heads of these satellite communications units, either a director or a senior communications advisor, sit on the Communications Branch Management Team and are invited to participate in the Branch's Monday morning Public Affairs Committee meeting and the annual conference of Department of Justice communicators. The unit heads are able to seek advice and support from Communications Branch managers, learn about corporate policies and priorities, and obtain approvals from Communications Branch managers when appropriate.

The Senior General Counsel responsible for one satellite communications unit spoke very highly of the relationship with the Communications Branch, describing it as providing superior backup to the satellite communicators, a useful second look, day-to-day input, and especially a broader departmental perspective than the satellite unit itself.

The satellite communicators interviewed said the relationship with the Communications Branch is good and the Branch directors are accessible. One meets every three weeks with the Associate DG and links regularly with Branch senior managers as required. He finds Branch people always available and has received help with speeches, a major communications plan, printing and distribution of media materials, media relations, and the development and implementation of a visual identity. Nor is the relationship all one way. This particular satellite office, which is well funded, was able to serve as the project authority for a major project on behalf of the Communications Branch.

Interviews with two satellite communications heads revealed that the Communications Branch Management Team meetings, which offer important opportunities for functional guidance, are too infrequent and too often cancelled. Both also suggested the Associate DG should facilitate opportunities for the satellite communications advisors to get together to talk, since they have much in common. The audit team agrees that such a step would improve the information sharing between satellite communicators.

Finally, the audit team found that Communications Branch executives are not asked for input into the performance appraisals of the satellite communications advisors, in program offices, who do not have a direct reporting relationship to the Branch, despite offers to provide this input. Such input would be a powerful tool for strengthening the Branch's functional relationship with these offices. A proper performance appraisal provides feedback on how well a job is done and opportunities for improvement. In describing opportunities for improvement for a satellite communications advisor, the Communications Branch would implicitly be providing direction on the function of communications.

Recommendations and Management Response

4. It is recommended that the Director General Communications make a greater effort to hold regular Branch Management Team meetings.

Done. With allowances for the summer vacation period, core branch management team meetings are held weekly and the minutes distributed to all Communications Branch and program communications staff. Extended branch management team meetings, which include communications managers/supervisors from the program areas, are held monthly and the minutes distributed to all staff.

5. It is recommended that the Associate Director General encourage networking among program communications advisors.

Ongoing. In addition to weekly communications meetings to facilitate the exchange of operational and workplace information, monthly extended management team meetings and recognition events (e.g. awards presentations) offer employees a number of opportunities to network. Informal gatherings are also promoted as networking opportunities, e.g. the annual Communications Branch BBQ (June 2003); Open Houses (Electronic Communications, May 2003); special event receptions for staff members.

An annual departmental communications retreat also offers excellent networking opportunities. Budget permitting, the next retreat is slated for September 2003.

The introduction of a satellite communicators forum in June 2003 was designed to link together all program communicators. *This group will meet at least bi-monthly and is chaired by the Associate DG.*

6. It is recommended that the Associate Director General contribute to the performance appraisals of program communications advisors.

The ADG is already responsible for the provision of performance appraisals for the program communications advisors who report directly to him. Procedures were put in place in Spring of 2003 to provide input into the appraisals of advisors who report directly to Heads of Program.

Regional Communications Advisors

The Branch's link with the new regional communicators is proving valuable to some communicators in headquarters. The CAs say they get much better feedback and information from the regions under the structure resulting from the 2001 reorganization. They describe the regional communicators as a great asset on the ground, who are able to advise on how issues may play out in their part of the country. The outreach team, which seeks to develop strategic partnerships with academia, law students, and stakeholders in the private sector, describes the regional communicators as invaluable in providing on-the-ground perceptions for speechwriting and assistance with *justice canada* magazine. (*justice canada* is a quarterly newsletter published by the Department of Justice that profiles the Department and its issues to Canadian legal practitioners, those at law schools, government policy analysts, and members of the public interested in government and the law, while also providing a forum for legal discussion.)³

Senior Branch managers believe the regional communicators have improved the Department's communications by, for example, helping litigators talk to the media. However, the audit team found headquarters and regional communicators have a difference of opinion over news release policy. Some regional communicators would like to release them on their own, but departmental policy requires that they come through the Communications Branch because they are issued on behalf of the Minister. The audit team believes news releases should continue to be issued through the Communications Branch. However, the Branch might explore the possibility of allowing regional offices to provide, under limited conditions, written information to the media in other formats (e.g. as notices to the media or backgrounders).

The regional communicators are not consulting the electronic communications team on the development of regional Internet/Intranet sites with the result that these sites are often non-compliant with the departmental look and feel. (Recommendation 1 should address this concern.) And the media relations group sometimes has to debate with regional offices about whether

³*justice canada*, Vol. 1 No. 1, Nov. 2002.

issues are national in scope and should be handled in Ottawa, or are strictly regional in nature and should be handled regionally.

The Communications Branch's functional relationship with the five regional communicators is discussed in the Functional Direction Provided to Regional Offices section of this report.

Controlling

The Government of Canada's Communications Policy requires that departments maintain a clear and consistent corporate identity in accordance with the Federal Identity Program (FIP) and Treasury Board's Common Look and Feel Standards for the Internet. The policy also calls on institutions to ensure that information and messages are coherent and consistent across all channels of communication.

Communications branches across the government, including at the Department of Justice, play key roles in ensuring these requirements are met.

Common Look and Feel

The *Department of Justice Visual Identity Guidelines* contains the common look and feel adopted by the Department in January 2001. According to this document, all Department of Justice information materials must conform to departmental design guidelines. Numerous examples of Branch communications products provided to the audit team had a common look and feel. According to the Director General, this was not the case three years ago, before the introduction of the departmental guidelines. A senior Department of Justice official said the Branch did an excellent job in developing and implementing the common look and feel for the Department, and the situation has much improved over the past two years.

Communicators across the Department indicate their acceptance of the need for guidelines, but some find them too constraining, describing them variously as "strict", "rigid", and "restrictive". This suggests the Branch and communicators are taking the guidelines seriously.

To make the guidelines easy to use, the Communications Branch has developed graphic templates for a range of products. The Visual Identity Policy is in its early stages and, while uptake has been visibly widespread (particularly in corporate applications such as reports, presentations, information packages), compliance in every aspect of the policy's guidelines continues to be an iterative process. In areas of the Department that do not regularly consult

Communications Branch, information items are sometimes produced that do not fully comply with the guidelines. The Branch may become aware of these products too late in the production process to influence their look or feel. Inevitably, however, as users become more familiar with the requirements of the policy and, in certain program areas, update pre-existing designs, application of the Visual Identity Policy will become more widely entrenched.

The situation is evidently similar for electronic communications products. The audit team was told products emanating from the Branch and the Minister's Office are consistent in look and feel, while those coming directly from programs are not. The electronic communications team also says it has considerable difficulty with non-compliant regional Internet and Intranet sites. They say there is no mechanism in place to stop non-compliant products from being distributed.

There would likely be diminishing returns from attempting to sanction every breach of the departmental guidelines. Some value might be had, however, in increasing efforts to promote consistency in electronic products, which have the potential to reach large audiences and which could be altered to meet guidelines even after they have been produced.

The development of a departmental Internet and Electronic Communications policy as outlined in Recommendation 1 would substantially assist the Branch in improving its control of look and feel consistency in electronic communications products.

Message Consistency

Consistency in look and feel does not ensure consistency in messages. To help achieve message consistency, interviewees indicated the Communications Branch uses the following mechanisms:

- an approval process that requires signoff by a Director and the DG on communications products;
- frequent reference to and quoting from key source documents, including the Strategic Communications Plan, the Speech From the Throne, and the Minister's annual Canadian Bar Association speech;
- regular contact with the Privy Council Office (PCO) on key government messages;
- wide distribution of Questions and Answers (Qs&As) so there is a consistent government line on particular issues;
- regular Monday morning meeting/conference call for communications advisors across the Department (communicators from the Branch, the regions, and satellite communication groups are invited to participate);

- cooperation between regional offices and the Communications Branch in developing common media lines and briefing each other on media calls;
- cooperation with communicators in client departments on joint issues.

Overall our interviews revealed that message consistency is not a major concern. One regional communicator did note that regional offices are sometimes caught by surprise by high profile announcements that could lead to questions from regional media. The results of the audit suggest this was more of an anomaly than a systemic problem.

Evaluation

A key tool for determining if communications products are consistent and effective and for deriving lessons learned from completed projects is evaluation. The federal government's Communications Policy says institutions must “evaluate the effectiveness, including cost-effectiveness, of communication programs and campaigns developed in support of policy or program initiatives, and make improvements or adjustments as needed to ensure the efficacy of plans, strategies and activities.”⁴

With regard to Branch communicators, the audit team found the following evaluation mechanisms in place:

- media monitoring and analysis
- tracking and analysis of public enquiries
- feedback from polling undertaken by the Department through the Communications Branch and by Communications Canada
- client surveys through regular questionnaires on JusNet
- targeted surveying regarding internal communications
- regular meetings with clients to get feedback
- tracking of Web site trends
- internal reviews conducted in response to complaints
- post mortems after speeches

Although the above mechanisms are in place, Branch communicators identified these concerns:

⁴ Canada, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, Communications Policy of the Government of Canada (Ottawa 2002) Section 13: Planning and evaluation.

- Little, or no, formal or systematic evaluation of communications initiatives occurs.
- No mechanisms exist to integrate lessons learned into processes.
- Evaluations are generally restricted to clients.
- External communications are less rigorously evaluated than internal communications.
- Overall, funds are lacking for evaluations.

Two regional communicators commented to the audit team on the issue of evaluation. One said initiatives are not systematically evaluated because of a lack of financial resources. Another noted that the Communications Branch does not provide the regions with any assistance to evaluate regional products. Focus groups are used in one region, and pilots in another to test or evaluate some initiatives.

The programs served by satellite communicators tend to spend significant amounts of money on communications. Both of the satellite communicators interviewed noted that their programs have to measure performance in order to report to Treasury Board. One satellite unit evaluates advertising campaigns, puts feedback cards in publications, and asks callers to call its toll-free line about the quality of the service they have received. The other tracks media coverage and Web traffic, focus-tested its visual identity, insists on evaluation of all products developed with provincial and territorial partners, conducts post mortems on Ministerial announcements, and included a user evaluation form in a newsletter after the sixth issue. Both indicated these evaluation efforts do not involve the Communications Branch.

As is clear from these findings, within the Branch itself the Communications Branch is not effectively evaluating its communications initiatives, while in the regions the practice apparently varies.

The Department of Justice is not unique in struggling with evaluation. According to a 2001 study commissioned by the Privy Council Office, entitled *Draft Benchmarking Review of Federal Government Communications Branches*, only a small number of communications branches have addressed how they can define and measure their performance; much of what is now done in the name of evaluation is not done in a systematic way.

Within the Department of Justice, the significant spending on communications tends to take place in the satellite programs, and these initiatives do appear to include an evaluation component. As for the Communications Branch, it would be difficult for it to justify spending considerable additional effort on evaluation given its constrained finances (discussed in the Financial Resources Management section). Nevertheless, a more systematic approach to

evaluation could produce dividends with a small amount of effort. Such dividends would be deriving lessons learned that will result in more consistent and effective communications as noted by the Communications Policy.

Recommendations and Management Response

- 7. It is recommended that the Director General Communications develop an annual evaluation plan to ensure that significant Branch communications initiatives are evaluated, and that the results of evaluation efforts are shared widely.**

Communications Branch agrees in principle. Communications Branch recognizes that evaluation is an important component of the communications planning process but, as noted in the audit report, the Branch has limited resources with which to support a rigorous systemic evaluation function.

As set out in the Branch's 5-Year Strategic Action Plan, evaluation of discrete program elements are conducted, for example, an internal publications evaluation was recently completed, and an evaluation of the Visual Identity Program and *justicecanada* readership survey are planned for the CY.

Conversely, Communications Branch also recognizes that evaluation is not a primary component of effective issues management, which accounts for a significant part of the Branch's workload. The unpredictability of factors such as shifting court and parliamentary calendars, rapidly-emerging issues and capricious public opinion curtail the usefulness of systemic evaluation as a reliable tool for issues management purposes.

Leading and Communicating

A variety of factors affect the ability of Branch management to provide leadership. The physical layout of the Communications Branch's offices in the East Memorial Building in Ottawa makes informal internal communications difficult. Employees are divided on two floors, mostly in individual offices. Furthermore, the electronic communications team is located in another building altogether, several blocks away from their colleagues. This means the Branch needs to devote particular effort in order to foster good internal communications.

Since the satellite communications advisors are located in other buildings, and the regional communicators are in cities across the country, the Branch must have well conceived

communications processes to ensure that people have access to the information, guidance, and support they require.

In response, the Branch has in place several formal mechanisms for information exchange:

- a Monday morning Public Affairs Committee meeting to which all Department of Justice communicators, including those in satellite groups, are invited (regional communicators participate by telephone);
- a Tuesday morning meeting on the Minister's Calendar of events involving senior communicators and the Minister's Office;
- daily meetings between the DG and her direct reports, and regular meetings between directors and their direct reports;
- periodic Branch Management Team meetings, which include the heads of the satellite communications units;
- ad hoc all-staff meetings;
- bi-monthly bulletins issued by the Director of Public Affairs and Outreach;
- an annual conference for all Department of Justice communicators.

Most of the Branch communicators interviewed made reference to the Monday morning meeting, as did both of the satellite communications heads and all five of the regional communicators. The meeting, which reportedly links between 20 and 40 people, is clearly an important opportunity for the Branch to circulate information.

However, four interviewees and one group indicated the meeting did not meet all their needs. Comments included the following:

- not conducive to a detailed discussion;
- serves little purpose for the region and is not a good use of time; regional communicators need more information than is provided through that forum;
- a waste of time; everyone speaks in their own code that others don't understand unless they ask;
- too large, with a rigid format, mostly just roundtable;
- not appropriate to raise administrative issues that affect the electronic communicators.

On balance, the meeting appears to be a significant communications tool for most, although clearly not all, Branch communicators, but on its own it does not meet all internal communications needs, nor is it likely able or intended to. This means complementary internal

communications mechanisms such as the Tuesday meeting, the DG's and Directors' meetings, the ad hoc all-staff meetings, and the bi-monthly bulletins are important.

Although the internal communications requirements of the administrative staff, most Branch communicators, and most regional communicators appear to be largely met, the audit team is of the opinion that one key group—the electronic communications team—experience many gaps in communication within the Branch and with regions. Team members do not know what to expect, nor are they always briefed on what happens at the Monday morning meeting. Their location, away from headquarters, has isolated them from other Branch communicators.

Interviewees had concerns about two other internal communications activities—the annual communicators conference and the Branch Management Team meetings. Three people mentioned that the former had to be cancelled this fiscal year because of a departmental freeze on spending. Regarding the latter, both satellite communications advisors said they would like more such meetings, as noted above in the Organizing section of this report. Recommendation 5 also addresses this concern.

Recommendations and Management Response

- 8. It is recommended that the Associate Director General explore mechanisms for improving communications between the electronic communications team and other departmental communicators.**

Ongoing. Efforts to encourage networking with program communications advisors (please see Response 5) include and also benefit the electronic communications team.

The reconstitution of the monthly extended management meeting, and sharing weekly as well as monthly management meeting minutes with the electronic communications team, provide effective channels of communication for all departmental communicators.

Efforts are made to vary the location of meetings between Headquarters and EC team premises.

The location of the EC team remains an ongoing concern for the Communications Branch. The move, in June 2003, of the EC Team to offices closer to Headquarters will improve -- but not resolve -- the communications constraints imposed by their off-site location.

Human, Financial, and Materiel Resources Management

Human Resources Management

The Public Service Commission's *Demographic Study of the Communications Community in the Federal Public Service*, published in 2000, identified a higher than average interdepartmental mobility of communicators within the IS group and a fairly high rate of turnover in the community (relative to other groups) that could generate acute problems recruiting individuals with specialized skills. This suggests that human resources management practices such as performance appraisals, training, flexible working arrangements, and promotion strategies are important to attract and retain qualified staff within communications branches.

If used effectively, the annual performance appraisal can help develop and motivate employees. The audit team was provided with the 2002 Performance Review and Employee Assessment (PREA) sign-off dates for 34 Communications Branch employees below the level of the DG. The dates range from April to July.

Branch employees were asked for their views on the effectiveness of the PREA process. Reaction from those who commented was about evenly mixed. Some described it as "a good process", "a positive experience" and "a developmental tool, not a threat." One said administrative staff do not see it as a useful tool. Another said the standard Department of Justice form is designed for lawyers and is not suitable for all staff. Others said changes in departmental priorities over the course of a year make the PREA irrelevant. One person suggested employees be able to assess their bosses so that feedback could be provided in both directions. The audit team is of the opinion that on balance the Branch seems to be using the PREA process reasonably well.

Individual training needs are addressed in the PREA process. The Department of Justice allows employees five days per year for training and allocates \$1,000 per employee. This funding remained available despite the freeze imposed on spending. All Branch interviewees said training is available and encouraged, although one group said its members could not take the time for training. Regional communicators were split on whether they recalled receiving information from the Branch on training opportunities, while both satellite communicators said they had received information.

Branch management appears open to flexible working arrangements. The audit team noted that one executive works four days a week and one communicator at the IS-06 level works three days

a week. This flexibility may help explain the Branch’s success in retaining some senior members over many years—a notable achievement given the stiff competition for communications executives in the government.

According to the organization chart, Branch communicators are distributed among the different IS levels as shown:

IS-06	IS-05	IS-04	IS-03	IS-02	Total
4	11	11	6	5	37

This distribution of staff provides the Department of Justice with a very small pool of junior communicators from which to draw upon to fill the positions at the more senior levels. One senior manager in the Communications Branch noted to the audit team that finding seasoned communicators is a challenge across government, with the talent pool quite thin. The 2001 *Draft Benchmarking Review of Federal Government Communications Branches* (commissioned by the PCO) expressed concern that “people are rising too fast” and that IS-05s and IS-06s are “not as competent, not as strategic as they should be.”

Despite this challenging environment, the Department of Justice Communications Branch does not have a staffing plan or promotion strategy in place. According to one Branch manager, “People are pigeonholed at a level when they arrive. There is no climbing strategy.” Given the highly competitive market for senior IS staff, the audit team is of the opinion that there may be opportunities for the Branch to recruit and retain good employees through a developmental program for junior employees. Such a program would allow a person to progress to more senior levels by completing developmental assignments. It could reduce turnover, enhance morale, and help the Branch increase over time the number of employment equity group members at more senior levels.

Recommendations and Management Response

9. It is recommended that the Director General introduce a developmental program for junior IS communicators.

Agreed. Communications Branch recognizes the need to incorporate young practitioners into the Branch and a youthful outlook into its work. Justice’s Communications Branch is a participant in the federal government’s Communications Community Office’s

Interdepartmental Network, and is also represented in the newly-created HR Working Team, part of CCO's Recruitment and Retention arm. Among the goals of the CCO are the development of a learning program and the creation of tools to facilitate the mobility of junior IS communicators (IS 1s, 2s, and 3s). A business plan has been developed and funding secured.

Justice's Communications Branch will ensure that these tools and program, once realized, are fully promoted and made available to its staff.

Financial Resources Management

A 2001 interdepartmental study, *Trends in Communications Spending*, showed that the Department of Justice ranked 22nd out of 28 federal departments and agencies in A-base allocation for communications. According to the DG, the Department's Communications Branch has suffered from chronic under-funding. This perspective was echoed by another senior executive from outside the Branch and by the Privy Council Office.

The Branch's Operations and Maintenance (O&M) budget for 2002-2003 is \$1,505,089, and its salaries budget is \$2,660,496, for a total of \$4,165,585. For the same period the A-base budget was \$1,156,170 (O&M) and \$1,949,381 (Salaries). This does not reflect total departmental spending on communications. The programs supported by satellite communications units have substantial communications budgets. The National Crime Prevention Centre, for example, has a communications complement of 13.5 FTEs, plus IS-03s in each of six regions. Five of the Department's regional offices also have regional communicators, who are funded out of regional budgets.

The DG Communications launched a Communications Expenditure Study in summer 2002 to attempt to quantify the amount the Department spends on communications; the results of the study were not yet available by late 2002 at the time of this audit.

The Branch is attempting to find ways to improve cost recovery from other parts of the Department. Such costs may not be obvious. For example, the Branch incurs costs in assisting with staffing, responding to requests for communications advice, directing (functionally) and coordinating the satellite communications units in order to fulfil its responsibility to provide coherence and consistency in departmental communications. The audit team believes an approach that would compensate the Branch for such costs deserves support.

Regarding management of the Branch's finances, the senior Branch Administrator acts as an advisor to the other administrators in the Branch such as the Office Coordinators in each Directorate and the DG's Executive Assistant, who administer Division budgets, initiate contracts, and process invoices. All financial reports are produced by the Branch Administrator who is also responsible for starting the annual budget process, based on the past year's budget. The draft budget is forwarded to Branch managers for review; managers add new items and make changes for the coming year. Monthly updates to the budget are submitted to managers for review, to ensure expenses are correct, to review and confirm commitments, and to confirm that forecasted items reflect planned expenses for the future.

The audit team found the Branch had good control over finances from a budgeting, updating, and review perspective.

To make purchases, Branch staff provide an administrative officer with a requisition, which has to be signed by a Director. When invoices arrive, the administrative officers process them for payment. The relevant Director or the DG signs to indicate that the goods or services met with expectations. Administrators are delegated signing authority under section 34 of the *Financial Administration Act*. The audit team reviewed invoices, contracts, and requisitions (call-ups against standing offer agreements) and found good records in place.

Each administrative officer has a credit card in his or her name. Except in the case of the Branch Administrator whose purchases are signed off by the DG, the audit team is of the opinion that the administration of the credit cards lacks proper separation of responsibilities. One individual can purchase, commit, and authorize payment (section 34) without a review of the information by anyone in a supervisory capacity prior to payment by the Department of Justice Finance. Ultimately, the credit card purchases are submitted in a list to the Branch Administrator when she is preparing reports of expenditures and forecasts.

Recommendations and Management Response

10. It is recommended that the Director General Communications change the procedure for approval of credit card purchases by administrative officers to ensure someone other than the purchaser signs off on expenditures.

Done. Credit card purchases are now approved by Responsibility Centre managers and/or directors.

Materiel Resources Management

The Communications Branch has a supply of equipment such as cellular telephones and laptop computers that is loaned out to Branch staff to help them do their jobs. No inventory of assets is on hand nor are there any procedures in place to control these assets when they are loaned out.

The Branch Administrator indicated no losses have occurred in the last five years. Nevertheless, the audit team is of the opinion that a control sheet indicating the location of all the Branch's loaned assets is required.

Recommendations and Management Response

11. It is recommended that the Director General Communications introduce a system to track and control valuable assets that are loaned out to Branch employees.

Done. An inventory was performed and a system of tracking Branch electronic and audiovisual equipment on loan (e.g. cameras; recorders; cell phones) was developed in March 2003. It is maintained on an on-going basis by designated support staff.

2.2 Communication Linkages

The Department of Justice is responsible for the stewardship of the justice system and for providing legal services and advice across Canada for a broad range of government departments and agencies. In fulfilling these responsibilities it deals frequently with high profile, sensitive issues involving the Department's Minister, senior program and regional managers, other departments and agencies, and the Privy Council Office (PCO).

To manage the communications aspects of these issues effectively, the Communications Branch must have good linkages with the Minister's Office, the Deputy Minister's Office, program managers, communicators in regional and program offices, communicators in other departments and agencies, and the PCO. Communication Branch managers believe the linkages they have established are working well.

We found the following interactions with the offices of the Minister and Deputy Minister:

- weekly meetings with the Minister's Office to review invitations for the Minister to

- participate in events and to recommend which events the Minister should attend;
- a weekly speech meeting with the Minister's Office;
 - constant open communications with the Minister's Office generally through the Minister's Director of Communications;
 - regular communications with the Deputy Minister's Office to advise on what material is being provided to the Minister's Office;
 - speeches provided for the Deputy Minister's team and support for the tabling of legislation (e.g. media kits with backgrounders, Qs&As).

The audit team interviewed the Minister's Director of Communications and the Deputy Minister's Executive Assistant. The former described the Branch as very accessible and flexible and said linkages are working well. The latter says the Branch seems to adapt well to any situation. She said from her perspective that the Branch performs miracles—they are always the last in line, getting material at the last minute, but they consistently produce excellent work.

Based on the audit team's experience, the Department of Justice Communications Branch has excellent linkages with the offices of the Minister and Deputy Minister that many of their colleagues in other departments are striving to achieve.

Over the past couple of years the Branch has focused on linkages with regional and program offices. During this period, Senior Regional Directors in five regions appointed regional communicators who report functionally to the Communications Branch. At the same time, the Branch established its teams of CAs to serve program clients and created a functional relationship with these satellite communications advisors. In interviews with the audit team, three Senior Regional Directors noted specifically that the creation of the regional communicator positions freed them from the role of prime point of contact for communications issues—the individual who the media or the Communications Branch will contact when more information is required on any matter of potential interest—so the linkage to the Communications Branch through their regional communicator is very much to their liking. One Senior Regional Director said links with the Communications Branch are very good. The other four who have their own communications advisors raised no concerns about linkages, although one raised other issues, which are discussed in the Functional Direction Provided to Regional Offices section of this report. The Director of the Northern Region, which does not have a dedicated regional communicator, would prefer to get communications advice and support from an in-house communicator rather than from the Branch, but cannot afford one.

As noted above in the Organizing section, program managers served by the CAs reported satisfaction with linkages with the Communications Branch. A senior departmental executive said in an interview that Branch communicators are “always there; you can rely on them”. The Senior General Counsel in one of the satellite programs used similar language, saying the Branch is “always there when needed.”

The Branch’s mechanisms for communicating with regional and satellite communicators are described and assessed above in the Communicating section.

The issue of Communications Branch linkages with other government departments arose in interviews with Branch managers, with Department of Justice program managers, and with the Privy Council Office. The DG Communications noted that the majority of the issues the Department deals with are horizontal, involving other government departments. One Branch manager said the Legal Services Units based in other departments will sometimes come to the Communications Branch for advice—“when in doubt, go to the Mother House”—and that such issues often lead to interaction with other departments. Another manager said the Branch distributes its Qs&As on interdepartmental issues to other departments so there is a consistent government line. These comments imply an appreciation of the importance of close linkages with other departments.

Two program managers also raised the matter of Communications Branch linkages with other government departments, noting good relationships exist.

A senior official in the PCO’s Communications and Consultation Secretariat said the Department of Justice Communications Branch works very well with other departments—to the extent that its resources allow it. He described the Branch as “resource-light” and unable to contribute to corporate initiatives such as polling or service guides. He also said the Branch cannot speak for the entire Department since so much communications money is in other parts of the Department. He described this situation as “not well designed.”

The audit team notes that the former Director General has raised with the Department’s executive management committee the issue of Branch funding and the distribution of communications funding in the Department, and that work on this issue is underway.

As for Department of Justice – PCO links, the PCO official spoke highly of the Branch, saying it keeps the PCO sufficiently informed about upcoming issues and consults it adequately on the development of strategies, plans, products, and activities.

Based on the comments received from clients and the PCO, the audit team is of the opinion that, in general, linkages between the Communications Branch, clients, and other government departments are very good and are affected only by the Branch's funding constraints.

2.3 Level of Service Provided to the Minister's Office, the Deputy Minister's Office, and Departmental Clients

It is the lot of communications branches across government to be accused of devoting too much attention to the needs of the Minister and Deputy Minister to the detriment of the rest of the Department. The DG indicated that this was the case in the Department before the Branch established the CAs, who are dedicated to meeting the needs of programs across the Department.

The 2001 reorganization was intended to achieve two ends—to better meet the needs of the programs and to maintain the quality of service to the Minister and Deputy Minister. The audit team's interviews with officials in the Minister's and Deputy Minister's offices and with departmental clients reveal that this intended goal has been achieved. Satisfaction with the levels of service provided is very high.

The Minister's Office says its confidence level in the Communications Branch is very high. It says it can work with the Branch without the sense it is dealing with a bureaucracy. It describes Branch employees as team players who provide quality work. The only possible issue is "We would always like them to be more proactive than reactive, but this may be impossible."

The DM's Office says the Branch is a key player in accomplishing what the DM wants to achieve, handling all his communications both internal and external. The Branch does the job "extremely well" and also has the confidence of the Minister's Office.

Most Senior Regional Directors appear largely satisfied with the service they receive from the Communications Branch, although all would like more resources for communications. One said things are working well. Another relies on his regional communicator and does not know what comes from her and what from Ottawa. A third said the people in the Communications Branch are good, and the level of service is good. She said the Branch did a first rate job in handling a sensitive media relations issue. It also demonstrated a willingness to dialogue on differences of opinion by listening to the regional office's views about how to handle an issue involving the Minister.

One region would like to see the Branch provide more media training, especially for managers, because the Government wants departments to be more proactive with the media. And one Regional Director says Branch service is fine on specific ad hoc requirements, but he would like to be able to do more in the communications area. The audit team agrees that these are good suggestions, but does not see them as immediate priorities and so offers no recommendations in this regard.

Finally, one Senior Regional Director raised serious concerns about the quality of the communications services the region receives. The addition of a regional communicator has been helpful, especially for media relations. However, according to the Director, Ottawa is not in a position to help with strategic issues that are unique to that region, and the regional communicator's strengths are in media relations, not strategic communications.

Six senior managers at headquarters commented on the level of service provided by the Communications Branch, and all were highly complimentary, some at considerable length, with examples of specific situations in which the Branch had performed well. One however had the following suggestions for improvement:

- The Branch could prepare Qs&As (although the Branch does not see that as its role).
- Major thematic speeches for the Minister such as the Canadian Bar Association speech often “get it wrong” by oversimplifying; the Branch should exercise more of a quality control function with contract speechwriters or do the work in-house.
- The Department of Justice Web site should be improved, with more emphasis on the Department's public image.

These comments are one person's view, expressed in the context of numerous complimentary comments, and are included here for the Branch's information. Overall, the 2001 reorganization appears to have achieved its objectives, with almost all service recipients expressing satisfaction with the services the Branch provides.

2.4 Functional Direction Provided to Regional Offices

The Communications Branch exercises its functional authority for regional communications through a number of mechanisms, the most important likely being the informal, day-to-day

telephone and e-mail communication between senior Branch managers and the regional communicators.

Other tools include: the Monday morning meeting/conference call; occasional bulletins sent out from the Branch; promulgation and enforcement of written departmental communications, policies, and procedures; and the annual departmental communications conference (cancelled in 2002 - 2003 because of a spending freeze).

When the audit team asked the Senior Regional Directors for their views on the Branch's functional direction to the regional communicators, it found comments varied among the different regions:

- Substantial direction was provided from the Branch to the communicator in one region.
- Another indicated that rather than providing functional direction, the Communications Branch does more of a cross-country check-up to determine what is happening in the regions. Any direction offered in the region is more likely on national issues such as the firearms registry.
- A third suggested the regional communicator is meeting Ottawa's needs in providing for example input to briefing notes, arrangements for Ministerial visits, and outreach activities with universities and legal firms. However, some legal staff feel the region itself is receiving limited value-added, while having resources taken away from other areas to fund the position.
- Another region does not get any feedback from Ottawa on the quality and timeliness of the information (input to Minister's speeches, periodic summary of key regional issues, etc.) it provides other than at PREA time; a periodic report card (perhaps quarterly) would be helpful.

The regional communicators themselves gave somewhat mixed reviews regarding the quality of the functional direction they received from the Communications Branch. Four indicated the Branch is very accessible and willing to provide advice when asked. But, as one regional communicator said, for the most part she is on her own and it is up to her to determine when she feels she needs input from the Communications Branch. She said a big frustration is the lack of feedback on material sent to Ottawa.

Another regional communicator suggested the Branch talk to the regional director more frequently, in order to influence the direction the communicator gets from the regional director, who is not knowledgeable about communications.

As was noted with reference to Branch communicators, performance appraisals would also offer an opportunity for the Communications Branch to provide guidance regarding regional communications. One regional communicator said the Branch did not provide input into her PREA, and another communicator was uncertain if input had been provided. One regional director (as noted above) made reference to receiving feedback from Ottawa at PREA time.

The audit team notes that relationships between regional offices and Headquarters of communications branches are a challenge in any department, and recognizes that this is particularly likely to be true in the Department of Justice where the relationship is still in its early stages. The team believes that the Communications Branch and the regional offices should continue their efforts to define the type and extent of the functional guidance that Headquarters can provide to regional communicators.

Recommendations and Management Response

- 12. It is recommended that the Director General Communications develop a plan for taking a more proactive approach to providing functional guidance and feedback to the regional communications advisors and their regional directors.**

Agreed. Communications Branch is considering some structural improvements in its provision of functional guidance to regional communications. Efforts will be made to discuss regional issues more frequently, and to contribute to the performance evaluations of the regional communications advisors. The plan will take shape as part of the collaborative process used to develop the Regional Communications Policy or Guidelines (please see Response 1).

3. RECOMMENDATIONS AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

1. **It is recommended that the Director General of Communications give priority to developing policies in the two key areas of regional communications and Internet and electronic communications.....11**

Agreed. A comprehensive Internet and electronic communications policy was completed and disseminated in November 2002: Electronic and Web Publishing Standards

http://dojnet/intranet_e/publishers_online/standards_intra.htm

Informal discussions concerning the development of a Regional Communications Policy or Guidelines have been held with regional communicators. The policy will be developed over the coming months in collaboration with the Regional Communications Advisors, and input will be solicited from Senior Regional Directors.

In addition, the process of identifying gaps and good practices has been initiated, and efforts are being made to standardize internal and external communications practices across the Department.

2. **It is recommended that the Director General Communications launch a process to develop a new annually updated Strategic Communications Plan for the Department of Justice.....13**

Agreed. The process to develop an updated strategic communications plan in support of current departmental goals and initiatives is underway: a preliminary draft is being prepared, and efforts made to ensure that it reflects the DOJ's fall agenda.

3. **It is recommended that the Director General Communications ensure that senior Communications Branch managers work to improve the relationship between the communications advisors and service providers of the Branch.15**

Agreed. Communications Branch is pleased that the audit found the reorganization to have successfully met its objectives. Management realizes that change can be difficult. Efforts to improve relationships have been ongoing, and include the efforts of individual team members to clarify and discuss their respective roles and responsibilities. Process guidelines have been drafted and are currently under review. Representatives from each area meet at least once weekly to discuss workplace issues (Monday Operations Meeting) as well as once a month at Extended Management Group Meetings. Over time, as all staff members continue to acquire greater experience in providing client services under the new organization, working relationships have improved.

4. It is recommended that the Director General Communications make a greater effort to hold regular Branch Management Team meetings.17

Done. With allowances for the summer vacation period, core branch management team meetings are held weekly and the minutes distributed to all Communications Branch and program communications staff. Extended branch management team meetings, which include communications managers/supervisors from the program areas, are held monthly and the minutes distributed to all staff.

5. It is recommended that the Associate Director General encourage networking among program communications advisors.17

Ongoing. In addition to weekly communications meetings to facilitate the exchange of operational and workplace information, monthly extended management team meetings and recognition events (e.g. awards presentations) offer employees a number of opportunities to network. Informal gatherings are also promoted as networking opportunities, e.g. the annual Communications Branch BBQ (June 2003); Open Houses (Electronic Communications, May 2003); special event receptions for staff members.

An annual departmental communications retreat also offers excellent networking opportunities. Budget permitting, the next retreat is slated for September 2003.

The introduction of a satellite communicators forum in June 2003 was designed to link together all program communicators. *This group will meet at least bi-monthly and is chaired by the Associate DG.*

6. It is recommended that the Associate Director General contribute to the performance appraisals of program communications advisors.18

The ADG is already responsible for the provision of performance appraisals for the program communications advisors who report directly to him. Procedures were put in place in Spring of 2003 to provide input into the appraisals of advisors who report directly to Heads of Program.

7. It is recommended that the Director General Communications develop an annual evaluation plan to ensure that significant Branch communications initiatives are evaluated, and that the results of evaluation efforts are shared widely.23

Communications Branch agrees in principle. Communications Branch recognizes that evaluation is an important component of the communications planning process but, as noted in the audit report, the Branch has limited resources with which to support a rigorous systemic evaluation function.

As set out in the Branch's 5-Year Strategic Action Plan, evaluation of discrete program elements are conducted, for example, an internal publications evaluation was recently completed, and an evaluation of the Visual Identity Program and *justicecanada* readership survey are planned for the CY.

Conversely, Communications Branch also recognizes that evaluation is not a primary component of effective issues management, which accounts for a significant part of the Branch's workload. The unpredictability of factors such as shifting court and parliamentary calendars, rapidly-emerging issues and capricious public opinion curtail the usefulness of systemic evaluation as a reliable tool for issues management purposes.

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The location of the EC team remains an ongoing concern for the Communications Branch. The move, in June 2003, of the EC Team to offices closer to Headquarters will improve -- but not resolve – the communications constraints imposed by their off-site location.

9. It is recommended that the Director General introduce a developmental program for junior IS communicators.27

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Justice’s Communications Branch will ensure that these tools and program, once realized, are fully promoted and made available to its staff.

10. It is recommended that the Director General Communications change the procedure for approval of credit card purchases by administrative officers to ensure someone other than the purchaser signs off on expenditures.29

Done. Credit card purchases are now approved by Responsibility Centre managers and/or directors.

11. It is recommended that the Director General Communications introduce a system to track and control valuable assets that are loaned out to Branch employees.30

Done. An inventory was performed and a system of tracking Branch electronic and audiovisual equipment on loan (e.g. cameras; recorders; cell phones) was developed in March 2003. It is maintained on an on-going basis by designated support staff.

12. It is recommended that the Director General Communications develop a plan for taking a more proactive approach to providing functional guidance and feedback to the regional communications advisors and their regional directors.....36

Agreed. Communications Branch is considering some structural improvements in its provision of functional guidance to regional communications. Efforts will be made to discuss regional issues more frequently, and to contribute to the performance evaluations of the regional communications advisors. The plan will take shape as part of the collaborative process used to develop the Regional Communications Policy or Guidelines (please see Response 1).