

PARLIAMENTARY BUDGET OFFICER

STRATEGIC FOCUS — 2013–2018

1. INTRODUCTION

The Parliamentary Budget Officer (PBO) serves the Senate and the House of Commons and their members in a number of ways by:

- providing the Senate and House of Commons with independent analysis of “the state of the nation’s finances, the estimates of the government and trends in the national economy.”¹ This work is conducted proactively, meaning that the PBO can undertake and provide it on his own initiative;
- performing research into “the nation’s finances and economy” when requested to do so by a named committee;²
- undertaking research into “the estimates of the government” when asked to do so by a committee mandated to consider the estimates;³ and
- estimating the financial cost of any proposal that relates to a matter over which Parliament has jurisdiction when requested by a member of either House or by a committee of either or both Houses.⁴

In pursuing this mandate, the PBO is supported by an expert staff of non-partisan analysts who help the Senate and the House of Commons and their members carry out their constitutional duty to review the raising and spending of public money and to hold the government to account.

The PBO’s [2008 Operational Plan](#) — developed during the first five-year term — provides the foundation for continuity. Although the PBO’s role will evolve over the second five-year term, it will continue to follow certain internationally established and recognized principles developed by the OECD for independent fiscal institutions.

¹ PCA Paragraph 79.2(a)

² PCA Paragraph 79.2(b)

³ PCA Paragraph 79.2(c)

⁴ PCA Paragraph 79.2(d)

These OECD [principles](#) emphasize independence, non-partisanship, transparency, service to parliamentarians, and technical expertise as characteristics of an independent fiscal institution. In Canada, these principles have remained relevant to the PBO under minority and majority governments, and they will continue to guide the PBO's activities into the future.

2. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR 2013–2018

The Strategic Focus for the five-year period 2013–2018 builds on these commitments and will assist the Parliamentary Budget Officer (PBO) in fulfilling his responsibilities.

For the coming term, the PBO has identified five priorities, which are convergent and synergistic. They are designed more to reinvigorate the PBO's day-to-day work, rather than radically overhaul it. These priorities have one main objective: ensure that the PBO continues to serve and support the Senate and House of Commons as they exercise their authority to scrutinize and approve the use of public funds.

Strategic Priority 1: Expand the PBO's current service offering by adding new, high-quality products and services tailored to the needs of parliamentarians.

The PBO will encourage and support his staff in continuing to develop new high-quality products and services.

The PBO's reports and analytical documents have a proven track record in terms of their importance to parliamentarians and their ability to raise the level of public debate. However, routine changes over time, as well as normal parliamentary developments, mean that the needs of parliamentarians change. Tailored products responsive to these evolving needs can have a profound impact on the ability of parliamentarians to carry out their roles. It is, therefore, incumbent on the PBO to consider how to best satisfy Parliament's requirements through new products and services. The creation of new products is also broadly consistent with the PBO's mandate to proactively analyze "the state of the nation's finances, the estimates of the government and trends in the national economy."⁵

⁵ PCA Paragraph 79.2(a)

Strategic Priority 2: Expand information sharing through social media.

As mentioned above, the PBO is mandated to provide the Senate and House of Commons with analysis. This involves communicating information in an effective manner and, moreover, making it available to parliamentarians in the media most accessed by them.

To this end, the PBO is constantly seeking new and improved ways to disseminate analysis, including webcasts, podcasts, Twitter and other social media.

Furthermore, on behalf of parliamentarians, the PBO shares relevant information with taxpayers and all members of society. This helps ensure that the public understands the importance of transparency in the nation's finances, as well as the importance of the role played by the legislative branch in terms of accountability.

The PBO must ensure that analysis is made available to as wide an audience as possible. To this end, the PBO is committed to using new media tools wherever possible to provide parliamentarians and the public with relevant and timely information.

Strategic Priority 3: Support ongoing professional development for employees, in line with operational requirements and the execution of the PBO legislative mandate and strategic priorities.

The fundamental values of independence, non-partisanship, transparency, responsibility and technical expertise lie at the core of the PBO's legislative mandate. The PBO will continue to support ongoing professional development for employees, encouraging them to stay abreast of new trends. Team members must feel their skills are being appropriately used and developed so they can deliver superior and highly specialized service to parliamentarians.

As well, the PBO must demonstrate that he encourages and values the contribution, active participation and recognition of each team member.

Strategic Priority 4: Defend and clarify the legislative right to obtain the relevant information required to carry out the PBO's mandate.

It is vitally important to continue to defend the legislative right to obtain the financial or economic data that the PBO requires to carry out his mandate to inform Parliament.

The *Parliament of Canada Act* provides the PBO “is entitled, by request made to the deputy head of a department ... to free and timely access to any financial or economic data in the possession of the department that are required for the performance of his or her mandate.”⁶

Over the years, certain government departments have occasionally hesitated, if not simply refused, to provide specific information requested by the PBO, often arguing that it is “outside the PBO’s mandate”.

This has led to certain impasses, making it difficult to respond to requests by parliamentarians. As implied by the OECD principles, such challenges in obtaining information are not isolated to the Canadian context.

Over the next few years, the PBO will renew efforts to obtain information, which may take a number of forms. These include seeking support from parliamentary partners (for example, the Clerks of the Senate and House of Commons); maintaining informal bilateral relationships with government departments and agencies; implementing memorandums of understanding; and any other means deemed appropriate.

Strategic Priority 5: Produce an annual administrative report for the PBO.

While the Library of Parliament’s annual report summarizes some of the activities and studies carried out by the PBO, its treatment of the PBO’s activities remains an overview. In order to address this situation, the PBO will prepare its own administrative annual report that outlines, in greater detail, its activities.

Implementing an annual report will allow the PBO to communicate to parliamentarians, in a transparent and accountable manner, the work undertaken, the challenges encountered, and the advances made.

⁶ PCA Sub-Section 79.3(1)