



Office of the Clerk - Workplace Review Action Plan

Background:

The [Workplace Review of the Office of the Clerk](#) was conducted by Quintet Consulting Corporation and submitted to the Speaker on August 19, 2021. The report proposed next steps and made specific recommendations for change. The proposed next steps were:

1. Engage the most senior leadership of the convening authority in the necessary action;
2. Thank employees for their participation;
3. Communicate with current employees, to the extent possible, about the outcome of the Review;
4. Commit to taking action;
5. Reassure employees of the sincerity of this commitment and offer protections if required;
6. Take action; and
7. Continue oversight.

The Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly Board of Management (the Board) considered and [accepted](#) the report, including the next steps and recommendations, on August 24, 2021. The Board [directed the Office of the Clerk to prepare an Action Plan](#) to implement the recommendations.

This Action Plan identifies how the Office of the Clerk will implement these recommendations and monitor employee engagement and satisfaction over the long-term. The Clerk of the Legislative Assembly has overall responsibility and accountability to the Board for the implementation of this Action Plan.

Recommendations:

1. Create a dedicated internal Human Resources position within the organization;
2. Address the perception of conflicts of interest and preferential treatment related to staffing;
3. Continue to work on eliminating silos and improving communication;
4. Create a training program or policy including an onboarding program;
5. Continue to address the issues between Clerks and Research Advisors;
6. Address issues with MLAs regarding their interactions with Office of the Clerk staff; and,
7. Address the perception of proximity between managers and MLAs.

Key Dates:

August 19, 2021	Workplace Review Submitted to the Speaker
August 24, 2021	Board Adopts Report and Directs Development of Action Plan
September 13, 2021	Caucus Briefed on Workplace Review Recommendations
September 15, 2021	Workplace Review Released to the Public
October 14, 2021	Clerk of the Legislative Assembly Returns to Work
November 20, 2021	Board Reviews Draft Action Plan
November 22, 2021	Office of the Clerk Employees Return to Workplace Following Localized COVID-19 Outbreak
November 29, 2021	Speaker meets with Clerk's Office staff
November 30, 2021	Caucus Reviews Draft Action Plan
December 10, 13, 2021	Consultations with Office of the Clerk Staff
December 16, 2021	Small Group Office of the Clerk Consultations
December 21, 2021	Public Release of Action Plan

Timeframes:

Items in the Action Plan are identified by certain timeframes. They are:

- **Short-term** – one-time or new ongoing initiatives to be implemented by March 31, 2022
- **Mid-term** – one-time or new ongoing initiatives to be implemented by September 30, 2022
- **Long-term** – one-time or new ongoing initiatives to be implemented by March 31, 2023
- **Ongoing** – current initiatives that will continue

Reporting:

- The Clerk shall, at each meeting of the Board, report on the [status of implementation](#) of this Action Plan.
- The Speaker shall, once per sitting, report to Caucus on the [status of implementation](#) of this Action Plan.
- The Office of the Clerk will conduct and communicate the results of an annual employee engagement and satisfaction survey and related human resource metrics to the Board annually.

Recommendation 1:

Create a dedicated internal Human Resources position within the organization.

Our understanding of the problem: *The centralization of human resources support within the Department of Finance in 2005 left a gap within the Office of the Clerk. The reviewers believe that an “in-house” human resources professional, trusted by all parties, would act as a ‘pressure valve’ and provide early identification and resolution of issues within the workplace.*

Our Challenges

- *the Legislative Assembly is one of three separate “branches” of government: The Legislative; the Executive (Cabinet and the Public Service); and the Courts. Employees of the Office of the Clerk, though part of the Legislative Branch, are members of the broader public service and work within the GNWT’s human resources policies.*
- *the number of employees at the Legislative Assembly – the smallest GNWT “department” - may not justify the expense of a full-time, dedicated human resources professional.*
- *the Minister of Finance holds the responsibility for leading, providing and directing human resources policy and services within the Government.*

Our Opportunities

- *with the right structure, as a small organization, the Office of the Clerk can adapt and change its human resource policies and practices to best serve its employees and reflect its distinct status as an independent branch of government.*
- *a review of the Public Service Act is currently underway. This review may provide additional mechanisms, such as safe disclosure or “whistle-blower” provisions, to address concerns in the workplace.*
- *until the last few years, the GNWT human resources professional assigned to the Legislative Assembly conducted regular, weekly office hours at the Legislative Assembly and attended staff and management meetings.*

Our Actions:

New

- A. Human resource professionals from the Department of Finance will hold weekly office hours at the Legislative Assembly and attend weekly stand-up and management meetings. (**short-term**)
- B. Adopt the GNWT’s [training requirements for supervisors and managers](#) to ensure Office of the Clerk managers have a standard level of human resources knowledge. (**short-term**)
- C. Present Office of the Clerk quarterly Human Resource Management Results to the Board of Management with historical tracking. (**mid-term**)
- D. Seek an amendment to the [Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act](#) to have the Minister of Finance (as the Minister responsible for the Public Service) sit on the Board of Management as an *ex officio* member. (**long-term**)

In Progress

- E. Develop a formal orientation and onboarding program for new employees in the Office of the Clerk. (*mid-term*)
- F. Monitor progress on the proposed new [Public Service Act](#) and advocate for the Office of the Clerk to be a distinct group or institution within the public service. This will allow the Board to develop human resource management policies and supports that recognize the unique nature of work performed by employees of the Legislative Branch. (*ongoing*).

Reinforce (or “Communicate”)

- G. Human Resources advice and [training](#) that is available to supervisors and managers through the GNWT Department of Finance. (*ongoing*)
- H. Availability of dedicated GNWT [human resource professionals](#) to provide advice and direct employees to resources available to them. (*ongoing*)
- I. Access to the [Employee and Family Assistance Program](#) as a means of seeking advice on the resolution of personal and professional stressors or human resource issues. (*ongoing*)

Recommendation 2:

Address the perception of conflicts of interest and preferential treatment related to staffing.

Our understanding of the problem: *There is a lack of trust around staffing processes, and clear communication is required about the rules, processes and procedures guiding staffing decisions and about the safeguards in place to avoid real or perceived nepotism or conflicts of interest.*

Our Challenges

- *In a small jurisdiction like the Northwest Territories, there are deep and common personal and family connections between people that cannot be avoided entirely.*
- *The hiring and advancement of Indigenous peoples within the Office of the Clerk is a priority, and this can cause a sense of exclusion or of being 'over-looked' by non-Indigenous employees.*

Our Opportunities

- *The adoption of clear policies and procedures that are communicated to all staff can increase confidence in the integrity of the staffing process.*
- *A number of staff in the Office of the Clerk are approaching retirement age. This creates opportunities for fair and structured recruitment, promotion and succession planning.*

Our Actions:

New

- A. Adopt specific guidelines for direct appointments, section 37 appointments under the [Public Service Act](#) and transfer assignments. (**short-term**)
- B. Adopt and communicate guidelines to address real and perceived conflicts of interest for participation on staffing selection committees. (**mid-term**)
- C. Better explain the various rules, policies, processes and procedures related to staffing decisions to employees. (**mid-term**)

In Progress

- D. Develop and adopt a succession planning framework for the Office of the Clerk. (**mid-term**)

Transform

- E. Revise the [Code of Conduct](#) for the Office of the Clerk to include a section on perceived and actual conflicts of interest. (**mid-term**)
- F. Transition fully to the GNWT's Performance Objective and Management System for all Office of the Clerk employees. (**mid-term**)

Reinforce

- G. [Alternate Work Arrangement Policy](#) is open to all staff in the Office of the Clerk. (*ongoing*)
- H. [Training and development opportunities](#) available to all staff. (*ongoing*)
- I. Selection Committees will follow all existing and new rules and procedures when running competitions and include a human resources representative on all hiring committees. (*ongoing*)
- J. Availability and benefits of recruitment programs such as the [Indigenous Career Gateway Program](#) for entry-level or trainee positions. (*ongoing*)

Recommendation 3:

Continue to work on eliminating silos and improving communication.

Our understanding of the problem: *Employees report feeling like they work in silos and are not aware of what else may be happening in the Office of the Clerk outside their specific responsibilities. Better communication needs to flow from management, from employees, and from employee to employee across the organization.*

Our Challenges

- *In a busy and demanding work environment, people can become focused on the task at hand, and information sharing or communicating becomes a secondary focus.*
- *The work of some staff requires confidentiality that limits full and open information sharing.*
- *The Assembly faces increased demand for external focused communications from Members.*

Our Opportunities

- *The Clerk's Office is a relatively small employee group located in one building.*
- *Office of the Clerk employees are engaged and desire more and better communication.*
- *New and improved broadcasting and office productivity software can assist in improving internal communications.*

Our Actions:

New

- A. Engage all employees in the Office of the Clerk in identifying ways to improve communication as part of an internal communications strategy. (**short-term**)
- B. Install a digital sign at the main entrance of the building which lists events or meetings happening each day and week as well as important building-wide announcements. (**short-term**)
- C. Host annual events bringing employees together to celebrate Indigenous languages and cultures in observation of National Indigenous Peoples Day and the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. (**mid-term**)
- D. Have each division present an aspect of their work at regular monthly all-staff meetings. (**mid-term**)
- E. Conduct, distribute and monitor results from annual GNWT employee engagement and satisfaction survey. (**short-term**)
- F. Draft and communicate guidelines regarding access to catering services and meals for employees who are required to work outside of normal working hours. (**mid-term**)

In Progress

- G. Engage staff in developing a new mission, vision and values statement for the Office of the Clerk that emphasis information sharing and communication. (**mid-term**)
- H. Hold weekly "standup" meetings on Monday mornings where each division reports on activities happening at the Legislative Assembly that week. (**ongoing**)

- I. Hold monthly all-staff meetings to discuss substantive issues, recognize birthdays and other personal milestones and share information about the roles and duties of various staff and teams. (*on-going*)
- J. Fully adopt the GNWT's records management software, DIIMS, to provide easier access to shared records and improve collaboration. (*on-going*)

Transform

- K. [Office of the Clerk Moodle page](#) into the "go to" source for all internal communications and access to shared policies, procedures and other documents. (*short-term*)

Reward

- L. Initiate a Speaker's recognition program to recognize and celebrate outstanding contributions within the Office of the Clerk. (*mid-term*)
- M. Recognize the long-term service of employees annually. (*on-going*)

Reinforce

- N. Opportunities for information sharing, team building and communication at annual employee events such as workshops, social events and the spring clean-up. (*on-going*)

Eliminate

- O. Use of manually generated email distribution lists that are not consistently updated. (*short-term*)

Recommendation 4:

Create a Training Program or Policy including an Onboarding Program.

Our understanding of the problem: *Some employees feel they do not have the necessary access to training, and this relates to both when they first started with the Office of the Clerk, and training required for ongoing career development.*

Our Challenges

- *In a specialized workplace, it can be difficult to find relevant training opportunities for all staff.*
- *There are limited funds available to support training and development.*
- *Some staff are not familiar with their ability to access GNWT-wide training opportunities.*

Our Opportunities

- *Office of the Clerk staff can participate in training opportunities and programs provided both by the Assembly and by the Government.*
- *Management can use this feedback to engage staff in developing a formal orientation and onboarding program.*
- *The adoption of a training policy and program will ensure limited training funds are accessed and disbursed fairly, according to the organization's needs and in support of improved succession planning.*

Our Actions:

New

- A. Develop a formal orientation and onboarding program for new employees in the Office of the Clerk. (**mid-term**)
- B. Ensure the orientation and onboarding program is reflected in Office of the Clerk operational procedures. (**long-term**)

In Progress

- C. Finalize and adopt the Office of the Clerk Learning and Development Program. (**short-term**).
- D. Ensure all Office of the Clerk staff complete the [Living Well Together program](#) including participation in the blanket exercise. (**short-term**)
- E. Review and update all operational procedures to ensure key processes and procedures are documented and available to all staff, particularly new hires. (**mid-term**)
- F. Develop and maintain a succession planning framework for the Office of the Clerk. (**short-term**)

Transform

- G. Existing onboarding operational procedures to make managers and supervisors responsible for orientation and onboarding of new employees. (**mid-term**).

Reinforce

- H. Availability and access to [current training programs and resources available](#) to employees of the Office of the Clerk. (*ongoing*)
- I. Availability and access to the [internship program](#). (*ongoing*)
- J. Availability and access to specific training programs such as the [Indigenous Management Development and Training Program](#) and the [Building Capacity with Indigenous Governments Program](#). (*ongoing*)

Recommendation 5:

Continue to address the issues between Clerks and Research Advisors.

Our understanding of the problem: *Responsibilities between Clerks and Advisors are not always clear. At times, some feel there is not the same level of importance placed on the work of Advisors as Clerks, because of the Clerks' roles in the House and direct and ongoing communications with committee chairs.*

Our Challenges

- *The relationship between Clerks and Advisors also involves the Committee Chair and Committee Members, changing the dynamic for each committee.*
- *Each has a distinct role to play in and outside of Committee meetings, but they must also work together as a team to serve their Committee.*
- *There is a mix of relatively new and experienced Clerks, Advisors and Committee Chairs leading to inconsistent expectations and practices from committee to committee.*

Our Opportunities

- *Newly-appointed employees can add a unique perspective in identifying longstanding divisions of responsibilities and practices that may no longer make sense.*
- *There are talented and engaged employees in both these roles whose work is valued by Members and by management.*
- *The Clerk and Advisory units are now included in the same division and report to one senior manager, the Deputy Clerk, House Procedure and Committees.*

Our Actions:

New

- A. Engage an outside facilitator to work with Clerks and Advisors to help them identify and agree on updated roles and responsibilities. (short-term)
- B. Identify new professional development opportunities for Advisors, similar to those available to Committee Clerks. (short-term)
- C. Plan an information and feedback session for Committee Members on the new roles and responsibilities once established. (mid-term)
- D. Identify and organize formal training for all Committee Chairs. (mid-term)

In Progress

- E. Onboarding of new Clerks and Advisors is done jointly by Advisors and Clerk staff. (ongoing)

Transform

- F. Review organizational structure to see if additional changes would support the goal of addressing issues between Clerks and Advisors. (short-term)

Reinforce

- G. Clerks, Advisors and Public Affairs staff work together as a team to serve Committees and individual Members. (*ongoing*)
- H. Post Committee meeting debriefs between Clerks and Advisors to Moodle to clearly identify necessary next steps and who is doing what. (*ongoing*)

Eliminate

- I. Current division of roles and responsibilities driven exclusively management's perspective and expectations. (*short-term*)

Recommendation 6:

Address the issues with MLAs with regards to their interactions with Office of the Clerk staff.

Our understanding of the problem: *The distinction between the roles of elected officials and professional public servants can be difficult to understand, particularly for new employees and Members who are not familiar with the structure of government. At times, employees in the Office of the Clerk are called upon to enforce established rules, and this can create conflict with elected Members, who may not always feel they are being treated with appropriate deference or respect for their roles.*

Our Challenges

- *Members have busy and demanding jobs. They look to staff to support them. Rules that are in place to protect them are sometimes viewed as unhelpful, unnecessarily bureaucratic, and arbitrary.*
- *More so than in most government departments, staff of the Office of the Clerk at all levels interact directly and routinely with elected officials as part of their duties.*
- *Some Members report not having a clear understanding of who the various staff of the Office of the Clerk are and what they do to support them.*
- *Unlike a party-based system where party whips are responsible for disciplining Members, there are limited avenues available to Members and staff when disagreements occur over the purpose and application of rules.*

Our Opportunities

- *The ability to work directly with Members is a privilege not all public servants have access to in the run of their careers. This can be a rewarding aspect of the job if managed carefully.*
- *Members are open and willing to work to improve relationships with staff and hold each other accountable if someone is not acting appropriately.*
- *The recently-tabled report of the Independent Commission to Review Members' Compensation and Benefits includes helpful recommendations about the orientation and training of Members concerning the policies that affect the performance of their duties.*

Our Actions:

New

- A. Organize and conduct a Respectful Workplace or Lateral Violence Awareness Session for Members in conjunction with an upcoming Caucus meeting. (**short-term**)
- B. Develop clear and measurable service level standards for the Office of the Clerk similar to those under development across the GNWT. (**long-term**)
- C. Survey Members annually on their satisfaction with the services provided by the Office of the Clerk. (**mid-term**)
- D. Add enhanced training on working with and the role of Office of the Clerk staff to MLA Orientation program. (**long-term**)
- E. Develop a formal Chair Training Program. (**long-term**)

In Progress

- F. Staff are engaged in developing a new mission, vision and values statement for the Office of the Clerk to clearly set out their role as it relates to Members and the Legislative Assembly. (*mid-term*)

Transform

- G. Review the Legislative Assembly's current [Workplace Harassment Policy](#) to ensure it is consistent with the newly-adopted MLA Code of Conduct, meets its stated purpose and is responsive to the findings of the Workplace Review and recent complaints. (*mid-term*)
- H. Re-introduce all staff of the Office of the Clerk to Members in small groups at the start of a series of upcoming Caucus meetings. (*short-term*)

Reinforce

- I. The existence of and ways to access the Workplace Harassment Policy that applies to [employees](#) and [MLAs](#). (*ongoing*)
- J. The public [Statement](#) from the Caucus Chair making it clear that the unfair or inappropriate treatment of staff will not be tolerated, and that Members will hold each other accountable when this occurs. (*ongoing*)

Recommendation 7: Address the perception of proximity between managers and MLAs.

Our understanding of the problem: *Some employees believe that issues with Members are not addressed or resolved because of perceived and real relationships between employees, particularly at the senior level, and some Members.*

Our Challenges

- *The Northwest Territories is a small jurisdiction where friendships between employees and Members may exist prior to a Member being elected or develop while they are in office.*
- *As a small organization, there is not always the option of putting in alternate working relationships to address concerns about proximity between employees and Members.*
- *Many newly-elected MLAs have described a sense of unfamiliarity and undue formality when they first come to the Legislative Assembly that is different from their experiences in smaller communities in the NWT.*

Our Opportunities

- *The ability to work directly with Members is a privilege and can be a rewarding aspect of the job for many staff.*
- *A degree of formality can be put in place to manage situations where employees are, or are seen to be, too close to Members.*

Our Actions:

New

- A. Implement a standard, slightly more formal way of addressing Members to be used by all staff in the building. (**short-term**)
- B. Educate all Office of the Clerk staff on necessary and appropriate working relationships and boundaries between employees, managers and Members. (**short-term**)
- C. Adopt a staff conflict of interest policy that requires the disclosure and management of new or pre-existing friendships or family ties between employees and Members. (**mid-term**)

In Progress

- D. Revise the [Code of Conduct](#) for the Office of the Clerk to include a section on perceived or actual relationships between management and Members. (**mid-term**)
- E. Engage staff in developing a new mission, vision and values statement for the Office of the Clerk to clearly set out their role as it relates to their working relationships with Members and the Legislative Assembly. (**mid-term**)

Explain

- F. The need for some employees, including management, to work in close proximity with Members as part of their jobs. (**ongoing**)

How We Will Track Progress and Measure Success

1. [Workplace Review Reporting Framework](#)
2. GNWT Employee Engagement and Satisfaction Survey (2021 Baseline Data)
3. Quarterly GNWT Human Resource Management Results (2021 Baseline Data)
4. Office of the Clerk Service Level Standards Quarterly Report
5. Office of the Clerk Learning and Development Program Quarterly Report