

STRATEGIC PLAN

2016–2021



The Office of the
ombudsperson
B.C.'s Independent Voice For Fairness

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to the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia

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A MESSAGE FROM THE OMBUDSPERSON

I am pleased to present the Ombudsperson's strategic plan for April 1, 2016 through March 31, 2021.

Over my first few months as Ombudsperson and as I met with staff, the public, public authorities under our jurisdiction and non-governmental organizations it became apparent that the time is right for a new strategic plan for the organization. Fortunately the office has a solid tradition of effective strategic planning and thus, in developing this plan – the organization's fifth in our history – we were able to build on the foundation laid out in the first four strategic plans. Those prior plans have served as important reference points as we set a course for the next five years.

This plan was developed through an active period of consultation over the first few months of 2016. Surveys and in-person sessions were held. Staff, public authorities, non-governmental organizations, the public and legislators participated in a variety of ways. The contributions we received through these consultations were uniformly outstanding. I want to thank everyone who participated. The plan is better for it.

A strategic plan is, by its nature, a high level document. It focuses on describing where the organization is headed rather than the means or the route to get there. Thus, this five year strategic plan integrates into our other planning cycles, namely our rolling three year service plans and our annual operational plans. As we move forward, those more frequent plans will reflect the priorities established in this strategic plan.

As *British Columbia's Independent Voice for Fairness* our office will work diligently to make this strategic plan a reality. In doing so we will be doing our utmost to ensure that everyone is treated fairly by public authorities in British Columbia. I very much look forward to leading the office as it implements this plan.



Jay Chalke
Ombudsperson
Province of British Columbia



OUR PLANNING FRAMEWORK

The Office of the Ombudsperson uses a variety of planning tools to ensure it is delivering its services in a manner that is efficient, thorough, effective, relevant and independent.

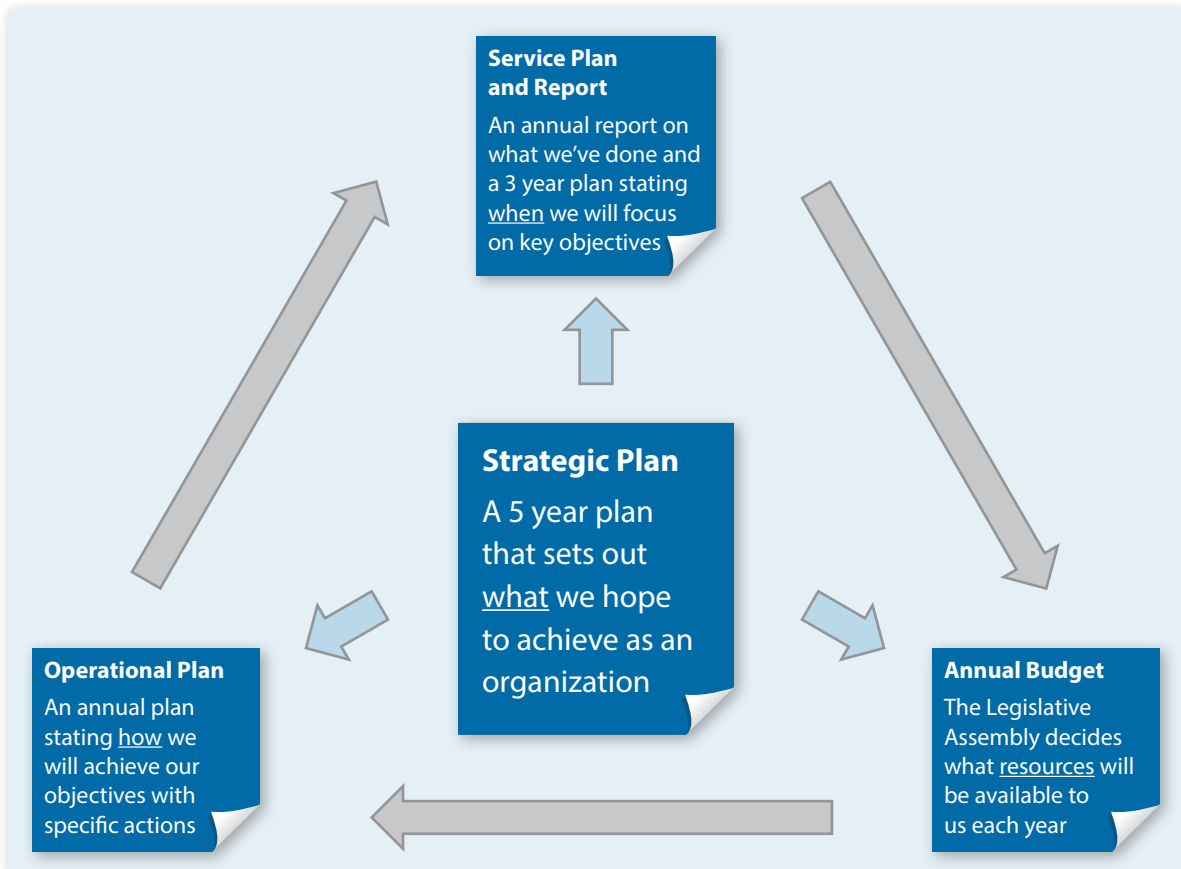
Our **Strategic Plan** is the starting point in the framework, integrating a broad range of input with an assessment of our current environment, a renewal of our vision and guiding principles, the establishment of core goals and objectives, and identification of the overall strategies that will help us achieve the desired future over a five year period.

Over the five year life of the Strategic Plan, a yearly cycle unfolds in which we set specific priorities and activities based on our annual budget and current environment, and report on our performance. This cycle involves two key components - our rolling three year Service Plan and Report and our annual Operational Plan.

Each fall, we present our **Service Plan and Report** to the Legislative Assembly's Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services. Based on the core goals and objectives from the Strategic Plan, this document identifies the major priorities for the upcoming fiscal year (April 1 – March 31) along with an overall strategic direction for the following two fiscal years. It also establishes performance targets for the office while reporting on results from the past fiscal year and our activities to date in the current fiscal year.

Based on our Service Plan and Report and our annual budget submission, the Select Standing Committee reports to the Legislative Assembly each year with a recommendation for our **Annual Budget**.

At the beginning of each fiscal year we produce our annual **Operational Plan**. The Operational Plan is the most detailed of the three planning documents and identifies the specific activities that we will undertake in that fiscal year to achieve the priorities and performance targets set out in our Service Plan, based on our strategic goals and objectives coupled with our current resources, priorities and overall circumstances.



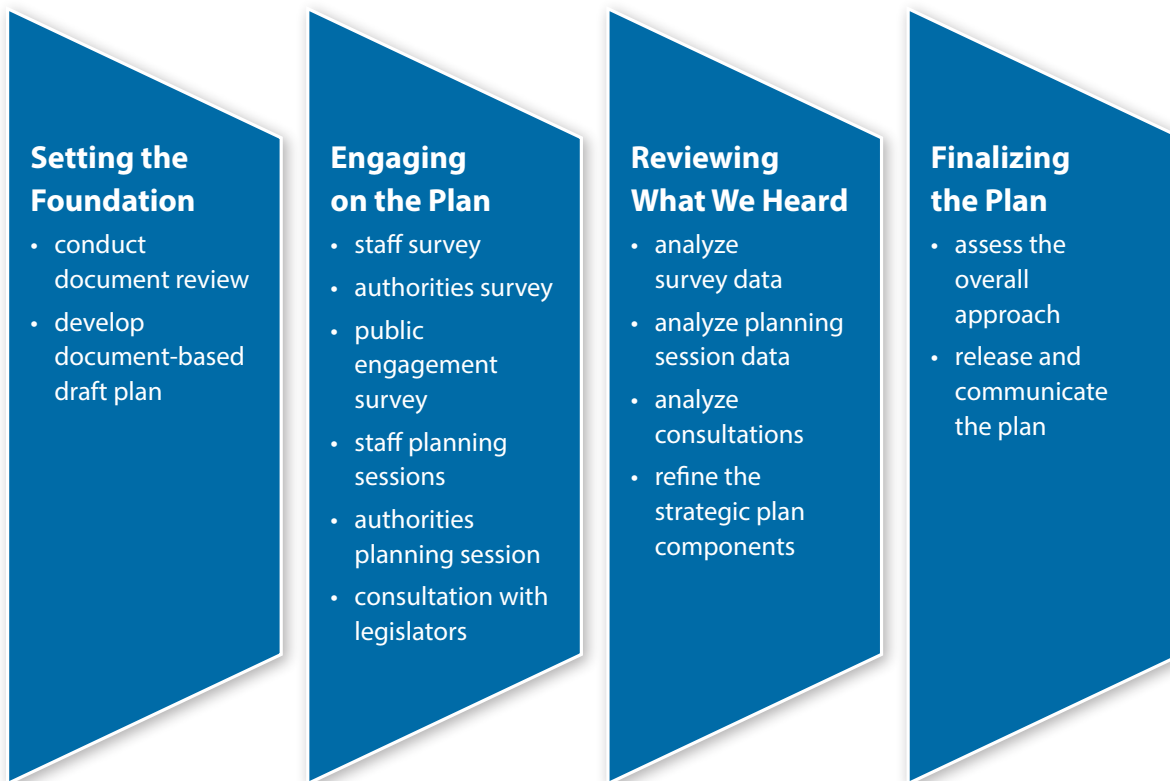
HOW WE DEVELOPED THIS STRATEGIC PLAN

How did we develop the Plan?

Strategic planning is a cyclical process, providing the opportunity to reassess where we are, where we are going, and how we will get there. We drew from the work done on previous strategic and service plans as a foundation on which to build our new plan.

To ensure the new Strategic Plan is informed by a range of perspectives, we sought the views of those we work with and those who benefit from and are impacted by our investigative mandate. Given the unique nature of the Office of the Ombudsperson this involved consulting with our staff, public authorities, the public, non-governmental organizations and legislators.

Our Consultation-Focused Planning Process:



OUR VISION

What do we aspire toward?

The vision statement is an aspirational, far-reaching, and concise definition of the core of what we work toward. First articulated in 2006, our vision remains consistent as it still resonates broadly with staff, the public and public authorities.



OUR MANDATE

What is our role?

As an independent statutory Office of the Legislative Assembly, the Office of the Ombudsperson serves both the public and legislators as it works to fulfill the mandate outlined in the *Ombudsperson Act*.

The Office of the Ombudsperson exists to:

- ensure that the people of British Columbia are treated fairly in the provision of public services
- promote and foster fairness and accountability in public administration
- provide an independent avenue of last resort for individuals with complaints about government services

The Office of the Ombudsperson delivers its mandate by:

- responding to inquiries from the public
- educating citizens and public authorities on issues of administrative fairness
- conducting thorough, impartial and independent investigations of complaints
- independently initiating investigations into apparent administrative unfairness
- facilitating resolutions of complaints and improvements to the administration of public policy through consultation and recommendations
- reporting to the Legislative Assembly and the people of British Columbia to bring attention to matters of administrative unfairness and the work of the office generally

OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

What do we believe?

Our guiding principles articulate the values of our office. These principles inform how we treat the public, authorities under our jurisdiction and one another, as well as how we make decisions on behalf of the office. The guiding principles are shared commitments that help us to ensure consistency of both our actions and words in our role as stewards of administrative fairness for British Columbia.

External Principles

Our commitments to the public, authorities and the Legislative Assembly

- we are fair and impartial
- we are professional and thorough
- we listen with respect
- we seek resolutions that are principled and practical

Internal Principles

Our commitments to ourselves and our colleagues

- we respect and support each other as a team
- we are committed to high standards of practice in our work
- we strive continuously to improve our services
- we value the expertise and knowledge of our staff

OUR CURRENT STATE

Where are we now?

Before we could plan for the future of our office and determine what we would work toward, we needed to examine our organization’s current state. We consulted with current staff, the authorities we work with, and the public to gather their input. From the information we collected, we developed a comprehensive list of our strengths and the challenges we face. We also identified key opportunities available to our organization, which helped to direct our planning focus.

External Operating Environment

Our Strengths	Our Challenges	Our Opportunities
<p>Accessibility for the Public Our complaint and inquiry process is easily accessible to the public.</p>	<p>Volume of Inquiries Given our resources, the number of inquiries and complaints we receive impacts our timeliness.</p>	<p>Focusing on Impact Engaging in preventative and investigative actions most likely to benefit British Columbians.</p>
<p>Reputation and Role Reputation of the Office as an independent and impartial advocate for administrative fairness.</p>	<p>Changing Nature of Public Services Ongoing changes in how public services, including dispute resolution, are administered by public authorities.</p>	<p>Working with Authorities Building relationships with public authorities through education and consultation to ensure administrative processes are fair.</p>
<p>Approach Staff are respectful, empathetic and thorough in their dealings with complainants and authorities.</p>	<p>Public Awareness Many members of the public and public authorities have limited awareness and understanding of the role of the Ombudsperson.</p>	<p>Reporting Sharing and following up on the conclusions of individual and systemic investigations more effectively and more broadly.</p>
<p>Availability of Information Information is broadly available both in print and online on our new website.</p>	<p>Scope Broad jurisdiction and geographic, demographic and cultural diversity to consider in providing services.</p>	<p>Engaging Legislators Working effectively with legislators to address issues in public administration.</p>

Internal Workplace Environment

Our Strengths	Our Challenges	Our Opportunities
<p>Staff Our dedicated, diverse, and highly competent staff bring new ideas and energy to the organization.</p>	<p>Staff Training Varied subject matter and unique skill requirements necessitate significant investment in training relative to our small size.</p>	<p>Retention and Career Development Supporting opportunities for developing staff to build capacity and improve retention.</p>
<p>Culture Supportive culture recognized for its collegiality and teamwork.</p>	<p>Retaining Organizational Knowledge Documenting and effectively organizing our knowledge of the policies and practices of public authorities.</p>	<p>Technology Further opportunities to leverage technology in support of our work.</p>
<p>Office Environment Suitable, modern environment that supports our work.</p>	<p>Internal Policy Support Internal policies need review and renewal to support improved collaboration and simplify administration.</p>	<p>Leveraging Staff Expertise Empowering staff to enhance effectiveness and efficiency while consistently meeting high standards in our work.</p>

OUR GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

What are we working toward?

As an organization, we have set goals that support our vision and our mandate as we look ahead to 2021. The goals are broad, but cover fundamental aspects of what we will work to achieve over the next five years.

Goals

- 1** People who need us are aware of our services and can access them
- 2** Complaints are addressed efficiently
- 3** Thorough and impartial investigations promote fair public administration
- 4** Public authorities are supported in improving administration
- 5** Staff are recognized for their expertise

GOAL

1 People who need us are aware of our services and can access them

British Columbians who benefit from our services include persons facing various economic, social and personal barriers.

In order to ensure that our work is focused where it is most needed, we need to promote awareness of our office and be accessible to British Columbians of all backgrounds and circumstances.

Objectives

- A. Improve accessibility of services
- B. Focus outreach on people most likely to benefit from our services

GOAL

2

Complaints are addressed efficiently

Due to the volume of complaints we receive about public authorities, complainants may be required to wait for their file to be assigned to an investigator and complex investigations can take significant time to conclude.

In order to have a positive impact on the individuals who seek our help and the administration of public services, we need to ensure that complaint files are routed and prioritized appropriately, complaints requiring investigation are assigned as soon as possible, and investigations are conducted efficiently.

Objectives

- A. Process new complaints more effectively
- B. Reduce wait times for files awaiting assignment to investigators
- C. Improve effectiveness and efficiency in concluding individual complaint investigations through supportive policies, tools and training

GOAL

3 Thorough and impartial investigations promote fair public administration

Through our investigations we seek not only to identify and remedy individual examples of unfairness, but also to identify and resolve systemic issues of policy and practice, and to educate authorities on administrative fairness.

To ensure that our investigations are having a positive impact that benefits the public as a whole by promoting fairness in public administration, we need to focus our efforts on identifying opportunities to reduce systemic unfairness. Where unfairness is identified and not remedied by a public authority, we need to ensure the public and legislators are aware of the issue.

Objectives

- A. Increase public reporting
- B. Improve linkage with Legislative Assembly to enhance consideration of tabled reports
- C. Demonstrate influence of investigations in improving public administration

GOAL

4 Public authorities are supported in improving administration

Given our mandate to investigate complaints about public authorities, we focus mainly on resolving issues that are brought to our attention by others, and we make findings and recommendations only when our investigations establish clear evidence of unfairness.

In order to promote fair practices across government and ensure that the complaints we address are ones that could not be more easily and effectively resolved through internal complaint processes, we want to seek out new opportunities to identify and analyze trends and proactively engage authorities to improve program administration and enhance their ability to resolve complaints internally.

Objectives

- A. Increase work with public authorities to improve their dispute resolution processes
- B. Enhance proactive consultation with public authorities about emerging issues relating to their programs
- C. Promote transparency and fair practice among public authorities undergoing program change

GOAL

5 Staff are recognized for their expertise

We have a highly skilled and motivated staff with significant expertise in diverse areas including law, social work and public administration.

With the broadest ombuds jurisdiction in Canada covering hundreds of continually evolving public agencies and programs, and diverse complainants with varying backgrounds and abilities, an ongoing commitment is required to ensure that our staff have adequate access to skills training and subject matter knowledge to support them in their work. We strive to provide them with the tools and resources necessary to enhance and demonstrate their expertise effectively.

Objectives

- A. Provide ongoing professional learning and development opportunities for staff
- B. Enhance development and retention of operational subject matter knowledge and expertise

OUR STRATEGIES

Which areas of focus will help us to achieve our goals and objectives?

In order to deliver on our goals, we have identified strategies focusing on actions that can enhance our capacity. Changing how we do our business will help us to improve our services and benefit the individuals and organizations we help and the public of British Columbia.

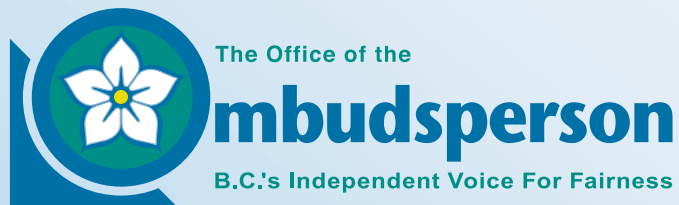
Strategies

- 1** Develop a public outreach strategy focused on underserved British Columbians
- 2** Build a model of preventative ombudship focusing on proactive engagement
- 3** Review our internal processes to reduce delays in service
- 4** Renew and improve internal policies and knowledge management framework to enhance service
- 5** Maximize impact by applying a systemic approach wherever possible
- 6** Develop and implement a revised professional and career development framework

ALIGNMENT OF GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Strategies	Goal 1 People who need us are aware of our services and can access them	Goal 2 Complaints are addressed efficiently	Goal 3 Thorough and impartial investigations promote fair public administration	Goal 4 Public authorities are supported in improving administration	Goal 5 Staff are recognized for their expertise
1. Develop a public outreach strategy focused on underserved British Columbians	✓		✓		
2. Build a model of preventative ombudship focusing on proactive engagement			✓	✓	✓
3. Review our internal processes to reduce delays in service		✓	✓		
4. Renew and improve internal policies and knowledge management framework to enhance service	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5. Maximize impact by applying a systemic approach wherever possible		✓	✓	✓	
6. Develop and implement a revised professional and career development framework		✓			✓





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