Public Agency Board Member Recruitment and Selection

Public Service Commission

Report of the Auditor General
December 2023

Assessment of Implementation Report

Auditor General
OF ALBERTA

About our Assessment of Implementation Report

Management is responsible for implementing our recommendations. We examine implementation plans and perform procedures to determine whether management has implemented our recommendations when management has asserted they have been implemented. We repeat our recommendations if we do not find evidence they have been implemented. We may also issue new recommendations for matters that come to our attention during our assessment.

Our assessments of implementation are conducted under the authority of the *Auditor General Act*. The Office of the Auditor General applies Canadian Standard on Quality Management 1. Accordingly, we have maintained a comprehensive system of quality control, including documented policies and procedures regarding compliance with applicable professional standards and applicable ethical, legal, and regulatory requirements.

Our office complies with the independence and other ethical requirements of the Chartered Professional Accountants of Alberta Rules of Professional Conduct, which are founded on fundamental principles of integrity and due care, objectivity, professional competence, confidentiality, and professional behaviour.

Outstanding Recommendations

Assessment of Implementation Report

Public Agency Board Member Recruitment and Selection

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(August 2019)

Summary of Recommendations

In May 2023, we completed our assessment of implementation of three recommendations from our August 2019 audit of the Public Agency Secretariat's board member recruitment and selection process. We found two recommendations have been implemented and a change in circumstance in another.

IMPLEMENTED Recommendation:
Improve guidance for usage of succession plans and reappointments

CHANGED CIRCUMSTANCE Recommendation:
Improve guidance on use of professional recruitment

IMPLEMENTED Recommendation:
Strengthen the recruitment, screening, and selection processes

Introduction

In 2019, we audited whether the Government of Alberta's recruitment, screening, selection, and appointment processes, as described in the *Guidebook for Appointments to Alberta's Public Agencies*, have been implemented and are operating effectively and efficiently.

We made four recommendations to the Public Agency Secretariat (secretariat). The scope of this assessment of implementation includes three recommendations related to:

- improving the usage of succession plans and reappointments
- improving guidance on the use of professional recruitment
- strengthening the recruitment, screening, and selection processes

The fourth recommendation, to improve information systems to monitor process outcomes, remains outstanding. We will assess this recommendation in the future when the secretariat indicates to us that it is ready for assessment.

Recommendation:
Improve guidance for usage of succession plans and reappointments
IMPLEMENTED

Context

In 2019, we found most board members were reappointed through an open competition rather than using the reappointment process and board succession plans often did not inform the recruitment plan.

Our current findings

The secretariat implemented our recommendation to improve guidance described in the guidebook by having departments:

- include evaluations, biographies, and resumes of board members being recommended for reappointment
- provide the rationale for recruitment approach including succession planning activities

We reviewed the *Centralized recruitment guidebook for Alberta's public agencies, boards and commissions* (recruitment guidebook), as well as policies and supporting materials and found:

- the recruitment guidebook includes an updated process where the secretariat and department confirm the recruitment approach using information from the agency's competency matrix, succession planning activities, board evaluations, and biographies or resumes of members being recommended for reappointment
- that the public agency governance policy was updated to include best practices for all public agencies to engage in regular and ongoing succession planning that informs recommendations to reappoint
- a succession planning guide for public agencies was developed to assist public agencies with effective succession planning

- a member evaluation guidebook for public agencies was developed to strengthen governance, succession planning, competency-based recruitment and increase awareness of best practices for evaluation of public agency members which includes sample member self-evaluation forms and board evaluation for agencies for consideration

Through our review of a sample of public agency board member recruitments, we observed that succession planning activities, member evaluations, and competency matrices were used to determine the recommended recruitment approach.

Recommendation:
Improve guidance on use of professional recruitment
CHANGED CIRCUMSTANCE

Context

In 2019, we found improvements could be made to processes used by departments to determine whether to use professional recruitment services. Effective September 2019, the secretariat centralized recruitment processes for all public agencies. As a result, the secretariat's executive search now performs all public recruitment efforts, including posting positions and conducting searches. Recruitments are no longer outsourced to external professional recruitment firms. Given the significant change in recruitment processes, we have concluded this recommendation is no longer relevant.

Recommendation:
Strengthen the recruitment, screening, and selection processes
IMPLEMENTED

Context

In 2019, we found that the recruitment, screening, and selection processes could be improved by including additional information in the selection package and strengthening controls around conflicts of interest.

Our current findings

The secretariat implemented our recommendation to strengthen the guidance for recruitment, screening, and selection processes by:

- including in the selection package the candidate's assessed competencies and skills along with the interview panel's recommendation of qualified candidate(s)
- setting processes and guides for agencies and departments to identify, assess, and resolve real or apparent conflicts of interest prior to appointment

We found the updated recruitment guidebook includes processes to:

- evaluate applications against desired competencies and skills through shortlisting applicants, and assessing candidates using interview guides and position profiles
- provide the minister's office with the interview panel's recommendation of candidates for consideration
- complete a conflict of interest self-declaration and for departments/public agencies to assess the results of the self-declaration

We found the secretariat developed and implemented a conflict of interest process for all public recruitments or direct appointments. The process includes:

- a standardized conflict of interest self-declaration[48]
- an evaluation of the self-declaration results by departments/public agencies
- guidance for departments/public agencies to identify and manage conflicts of interest should a real or perceived conflict be identified

Through our review of public recruitment documentation, we saw evidence that the executive search and screening team used the public agencies' competency matrix to screen applicants and develop an interview guide. The interview panel assessed the shortlist of candidates and developed a recommendation for the minister's office. Biographies were developed to include the successful candidate's background and competencies for the role.

Through our review of sample recruitments, when candidates identified conflicts, we found the department/public agencies assessed the conflict and developed options for resolution or mitigation prior to the appointment.

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[48] A standardized declaration form is used unless the agency, board or commission has developed an agency specific form.