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International Federation of Library
Associations and Institutions

Guidelines for parliamentary research services



Acknowledgements

In August 2013, in light of the growing interest expressed by its membership about parliamentary research services, the Standing Committee of the IFLA Section on Library and Research Services for Parliaments proposed the production of guidelines for the development of such services. A Working Group was established to advance this initiative under the chairmanship of Sonia L'Heureux, Parliamentary Librarian for the Parliament of Canada. The Section would like to formally acknowledge the contribution of the Working Group members for this project.

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Special thanks are also extended to Étienne Bassot, Director of Members' Research Service at the European Parliament and Ida Kelemen, Head of Department at the Information Service for MPs of the Hungarian National Assembly, who acted as external reviewers.

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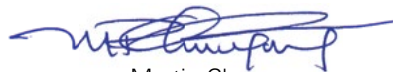
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Foreword

Well-resourced parliamentary research services are one of the building blocks of an effective parliament. They are of incalculable value as a source of independent, neutral and non-partisan analysis. They offer a safe space where parliamentarians from all political parties can ask questions and get answers they can trust. They contribute to a parliament's autonomy by providing a reality check on the perspectives put forward by the executive branch of government, lobby groups and the news media. Their analysis informs a parliament's legislative and oversight work and provides parliamentarians with the information they need to do their job well.

Although research capacity varies considerably among parliaments, these Guidelines are intended to help all legislatures develop their capacity. They describe the component elements of successful parliamentary research services, based on the experience of the men and women who run such services. The Guidelines will, I am sure, be particularly helpful where there is already the political will to invest in building research capacity. I hope they will also help to convince all parliaments of the importance, and feasibility, of doing so. IPU will most definitely use the Guidelines in its own efforts to help parliaments develop their research services.

Finally, the Guidelines are testimony to the vitality of the network of parliamentary library and research services. The network comes together to share experiences and good practices under the auspices of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), a body which has proved to be such a strong partner for IPU over the years. I highly commend these Guidelines to you.



Martin Chungong
Secretary General,
Inter-Parliamentary Union

Foreword

The IFLA Section on Library and Research Services for Parliaments operates at the intersection of two international communities: one of libraries, which finds its global voice in the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), and the other of parliaments, represented at the highest level by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

While different in their membership and governance, both organizations believe that cooperation and the sharing of experiences are strong enablers for progress, and that knowledge is vital for development. They both promote, in their own environments, access to reliable and high-quality information as one of the essential elements of democratic societies.

Guided by those values, the members of the Section on Library and Research Services for Parliaments have been collaborating over the years to become trusted “key information brokers” for legislatures, able to respond in a timely and efficient way to the needs of legislators and, when possible, of the public. Within the Section, each member has become an important player in making parliamentary library and research services around the world stronger and capable of better supporting their institution.

Collectively, during its decades of activity, the Section has successfully promoted understanding and cooperation among legislatures by offering a platform for librarians and researchers to exchange practices, provide advice and assistance, and build fruitful and long-lasting relations among peers from around the world. In doing so, the Section has built up its own collective knowledge through which it has delivered important activities, documents and publications aimed at improving the professional skills and working methods of colleagues. Over time, this collaboration has led to the creation of a body of sound references for innovation.

These *Guidelines for Parliamentary Research Services* are a new step in the capture of our collective knowledge. Developed in response to a persistent demand from members of the Section for guidance in strengthening research services for parliaments, this publication is an example of how results can be achieved by working together and by mutually supporting each other in our professional work. The Guidelines are grounded in the work that librarians and researchers carry out every day, in the reality they face while serving the institution they work in, and in the collective expertise and knowledge grown in the Section through cooperation, collaboration and the sharing of ideas.

The result is a document that takes into account different realities and parliamentary contexts, capacities and levels of development, organizational structures and institutional environments. As underlined in the publication, “many considerations can shape the design of a parliamentary research service. The observations offered here should not be construed as strict recipes to be followed. Ultimately, they must be assessed and pursued with deference to the culture and context within which the parliamentary research service is established”.

The *Guidelines for Parliamentary Research Services* are the outcome of the work of a group of professionals who committed their time and knowledge in support of the Section’s goals. My thanks go to them for the excellent work done, and to IPU and IFLA for making this publication possible.



Raissa Teodori

Chair, IFLA section

Library and Research Services for Parliamentsts

Executive summary

A number of representatives of parliamentary administrations around the world have expressed an interest in knowing more about elements to take into account when considering the development or expansion of a parliamentary research service. To respond to this increasing demand, managers of library and research services for parliaments represented in the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) have decided to publish these guidelines for the development of research services, in cooperation with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

The capacity for parliamentary research in parliaments around the world varies greatly. At one end of the spectrum, comprehensive services are offered in nations that have built their parliamentary research services over many decades. At the other end, many parliaments aspire to establish or expand such a function within their institutions but struggle to identify the path forward, often due to lack of resources, challenges in establishing democratic institutions, or both.

A certain degree of institutional stability is necessary to create the conditions on which a research service can be built. Foundational elements, such as a constitution or rules and procedures governing the functioning of parliament, have to be in place. Nevertheless, experience in various parliaments suggests that parliamentary research services can support democracy in its development by promoting better access to information and understanding of the impact of legislation and proposed public policies. An autonomous research capacity contributes to strengthening the parliamentary branch in its relations to other institutions that are part of a democratic system of government.

This document does not cater to a specific group along that spectrum, but provides an overview of considerations informed by the practice of jurisdictions with a history of providing parliamentary research services.

Why a research service?

The ultimate reason for establishing a parliamentary research service is to provide non-partisan and balanced analysis that is adapted to the needs of parliamentarians.

A key role for parliamentarians around the world consists of developing, assessing and voting legislation. In addition, parliamentarians are expected to hold governments to account. They can also be called upon to scrutinize the activities of governments, in order to ensure that governments are implementing the decisions of a parliament. Their ability to perform these roles all along the policy and legislative cycle will be shaped by their access to authoritative and reliable information.

Therefore, as they prepare themselves for their parliamentary activities, parliamentarians have the daunting task of having to secure access to authoritative and concise material that presents synthesis and analysis of the relevant facts necessary for them to intervene effectively (often on short notice) on public policy issues addressed by a parliament. In general, the parliamentary administration will be the best place to seek non-partisan assistance. Many parliamentarians will look to secretaries general of parliaments and ask where they can find assistance to fulfil their research needs. A parliamentary research service can assist by preparing synthesis and analysis of proposed legislation, policies or programmes considered by a parliament. Activities can include the preparation of factual assessments, the provision of second opinions on information provided by the government or even assessments of whether the government has implemented the actions it committed to take.

The role of the research service will be to provide analysis covering the spectrum of perspectives through products and services that do not attempt to lobby, are non-partisan and are offered to governing and opposition parties alike. Analytical work will focus on synthesizing facts and presenting information in a balanced manner both in political terms and in the approaches adopted to conduct analysis.

A research service will be successful if it understands which products and services are valuable to parliamentarians. A research service that can explain how it shapes its activities to respond to the needs of parliamentarians is better positioned to demonstrate its relevance.

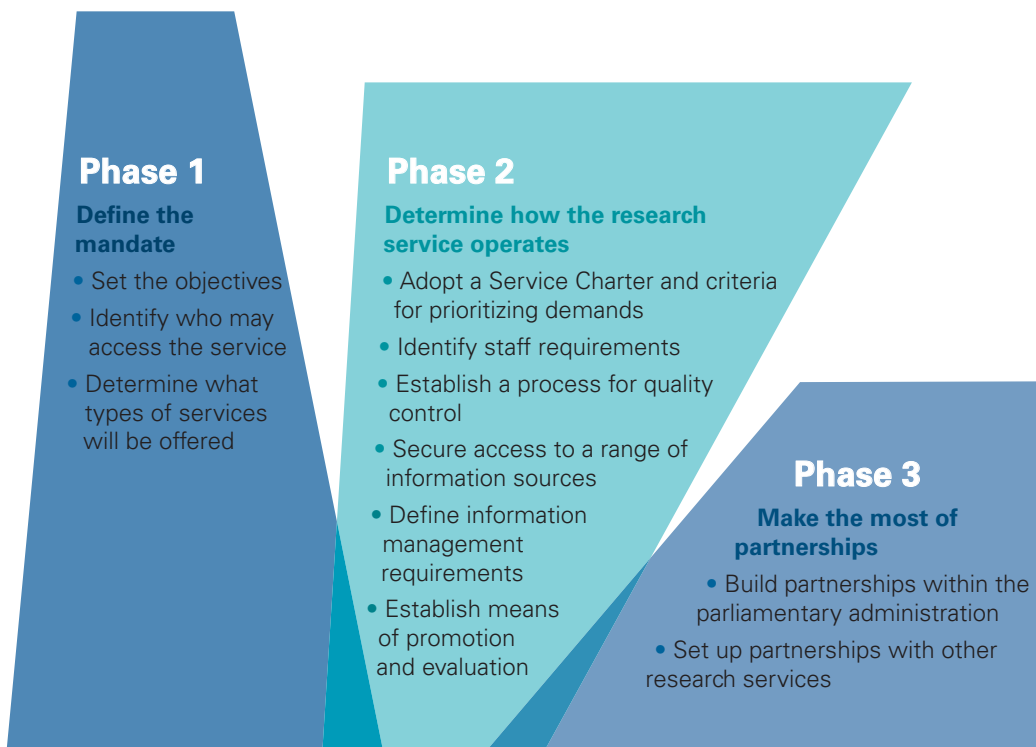
How to move forward?

Existing parliamentary research services were not created overnight. They grow gradually as the need for analytical support is better understood and operating budgets are secured. It is very much an iterative exercise.

Parliamentary research services are shaped by the culture and traditions of the context from which they emerge. There are no “recipes” to follow. However, some commonly agreed-upon steps in planning a future research service will assist managers in their efforts to develop such a service. As illustrated in Figure 1, the managers should first define the mandate they are trying to fulfil, then determine how the service will operate and, finally, give consideration to ways of making the most of potential partnerships.

Figure 1

Establishing a parliamentary research service: key phases



This document highlights the different considerations associated with these phases of planning. These considerations are summarized on the following pages.

Guidelines for the development of a parliamentary research service

- A certain degree of institutional stability is necessary to create the conditions on which a service can be built.

Define the mandate

- The research service should strive to inform the parliamentary and public debate on issues facing parliament, not to lead the debate. Parliamentarians value a service that explains an issue and analyses the impacts of proposed legislation, policies and programmes considered by a parliament.
- Different organizational models exist for establishing or expanding a research service. The model chosen should balance considerations related to costs, access to corporate support and administrative accountability.
- The parliamentary tools (e.g., legislation or motion) through which the research service is established or expanded normally sets the scope of the service expected. A mandate that is poorly crafted or too broad for the resources available will be doomed to fail.
- Parliamentary bodies such as parliamentary committees, commissions or associations, as well as parliamentarians from both governing and opposition parties are typically eligible for research support. Assistance with research is generally not extended to political or other organizations outside parliament.
- While some parliamentarians value access to in-depth analysis of complex public policy issues, the vast majority will prefer timely access to succinct material that supports their parliamentary work.
- There is demand for both customized and general analysis. When resources are limited, priorities must be balanced to manage:
 - individual requests for customized work;
 - requests for analysis for multi-party parliamentary bodies; and
 - the need for general analysis to provide all parliamentarians with better information on an issue.
- The research service should be a safe haven where parliamentarians feel comfortable asking questions without fear of being judged for the extent they understand (or do not) a public policy issue. Confidentiality of their interactions with the research service will be an important consideration.

Define how the service will operate

- A Service Charter is a useful tool that helps to capture the scope of services available and assists in managing expectations.
- Knowledge of law and economics are critical areas of expertise when starting a parliamentary research service. However, as more resources become available, knowledge of a wider range of public policy fields will be required. Over time, managers of research services will need to determine the balance between specialist knowledge and generalist expertise that they should achieve in order to best respond to parliamentarians' need for analysis.
- The products should be timely and easy to find, and analysis easy to understand. The products need to be located where the parliamentarians spend time, in terms of both physical spaces and web-enabled electronic tools.
- No matter where the research service is situated in the organization, researchers will need access to a collection of reference material. Parliamentary researchers will normally require material suited for in-depth analysis.

- Parliamentary libraries that partner with research services should worry less about physical holdings and focus more on being able to rapidly access knowledge and expertise in support of research activities.
- An electronic client request and records management system may be one of the internal tools used by a research service to support the best use of available resources.

Build useful partnerships

- A parliamentary research service should develop partnerships with the following:
 - procedural and administrative colleagues;
 - parliamentary libraries;
 - national and other “research” focused libraries (e.g., law libraries and academic libraries);
 - agents of parliament and special agencies; and
 - networks of parliamentary research colleagues in other jurisdictions.
- Different entities may be involved in supporting parliamentarians in the analysis of public policy issues. Efforts should be made to avoid duplication and to integrate outside expertise when appropriate.
- Seek the advice of:
 - editors and graphic designers when preparing high-impact products;
 - communication experts when designing ways to raise awareness about the services available from the research services; and
 - information management/information technology professionals to make the most of opportunities presented by technology.

Report how the research service meets parliamentarians’ needs

- A research service that can explain how it shapes its activities to respond to the needs of parliamentarians is better positioned to demonstrate its relevance. Such an explanation could be made through:
 - annual reports;
 - presentations to parliamentary committees;
 - informal meetings with leaders of parliamentary caucuses; and
 - reports of feedback received.

Introduction

As part of its annual conferences, the Library and Research Services for Parliaments Section of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) holds a series of activities during which delegates from parliamentary administrations share their challenges and success stories. In recent years, an increasing number of participants have expressed an interest in knowing more about factors to consider when developing or expanding a parliamentary research service.

The Section is fortunate to have members from some of the major parliamentary research services on the international scene. As a response to the growing demand for information on best practices, the Section tapped into the members' wealth of knowledge to publish these guidelines for the development of research services in parliaments.

A few points should be kept in mind when reviewing the guidelines. First, a certain degree of institutional stability is necessary to create the conditions on which a research service can be built. Foundational elements such as adopting the constitution for the country, rules and procedures governing the functioning of the parliament, internal processes to manage and preserve key parliamentary documents (e.g., debates and legislation) or even a website to share information with citizens about what is occurring in parliament are sometimes seen as higher on the list of priorities than the development of a parliamentary research service. However, an autonomous research capacity contributes to the strengthening of parliamentary institutions in a democratic system where both the legislative and executive institutions should have the resources required to perform their respective roles.

Second, the information provided in these guidelines should not be seen as a "recipe" for establishing or expanding a parliamentary research service. The ingredients that will be used will vary from country to country, because the capacity for parliamentary research varies greatly in parliaments around the world. At one end of the spectrum, nations with a long history of democratic forms of government frequently offer comprehensive services. They built their parliamentary research services over many decades. At the other end, many emerging democracies aspire to establish the beginnings of such a function within their parliament but struggle to identify the path forward, often due to lack of resources and/or challenges in establishing or strengthening democratic institutions. Yet, a great number of parliaments find themselves in the middle of that spectrum, hoping to enhance the limited offerings currently available to their parliamentarians.

The level of resources available to a parliament will also impact the size of a research service. Parliaments located in richer nations with access to more significant budgets will likely rely on larger administrations and be able to fund bigger research services. Large research units will be in a better position to offer a comprehensive suite of products and services. For those parliaments with more modest resources, focusing on a more limited number of high-quality products may be more realistic.

This document does not cater to a specific group along that spectrum, but provides an overview of considerations informed by the practices of jurisdictions with a history of providing parliamentary research services. It highlights considerations that parliamentarians and managers of parliamentary administrations should take into account in moving forward to build a parliamentary research capacity.



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I. Pressure for a new service

Why establish a parliamentary research service?

Parliamentarians are expected to propose and vote on legislation covering a wide range of issues. They are expected also to hold governments to account. Parliamentarians are called upon to scrutinize the activities of governments, in order to ensure that governments are implementing the decisions of parliaments. Yet, they are not experts in all of the areas of public policy on which they are called upon to express themselves. These issues are increasingly complex and require specialized expertise to determine the various factors at play. Their ability to perform these roles along the policy and legislative cycle will be shaped by their access to authoritative and reliable information.

In addition, parliamentarians are often faced with an uneven ability to obtain pertinent information. The executive branch will tend to have access to a wider range of information than the legislative branch. This information is often acquired through the administrative activities of the branch, and often on a confidential basis.

Therefore, as they prepare themselves for their parliamentary functions, parliamentarians have the daunting task of having to identify relevant and authoritative information. They must determine who the stakeholders are on various issues and what they are saying. They need to figure out what the issues mean politically, legislatively, economically, locally, and so on. Not only do they have to collect this information, but often they must also intervene at short notice as public policy issues are addressed by parliaments.

To deal with these demands, parliamentarians need access to a safe place where they can ask both basic and complex questions to better understand public policy issues without fear of being judged or lobbied. To be effective, they need to be able to obtain concise synthesis and analysis of the relevant facts quickly.

Parliamentarians need access to a safe place where they can ask both basic and complex questions to better understand public policy issues without fear of being judged or lobbied.

Secretaries general of parliaments know that a strong set of rules and procedures are necessary for a well-functioning parliament and many parliaments have established services to support the process of law-making. Unfortunately, rules and procedures generally do not provide parliamentarians with information and analysis of public policy issues considered by the parliament. Other actions must be undertaken to secure access to such knowledge. The following sections explore ways that parliamentarians may obtain research services.

Turning to external services for information and analysis

Parliamentarians seeking information and analysis are often left to their own devices and are not sure where to turn for support.

Many sources external to parliaments, such as universities, political parties, civil society organizations and lobbyists, are available, but most of these pursue a specific agenda. The analysis produced by external sources may be aligned with the interest of the person or group providing the analysis and generally may not account for the parliamentary context.

- Analysis provided by political parties may offer arguments that highlight only elements aligned with the party's political position.
- Academic research may be too complex or theoretical. Parliamentarians may have difficulty relating the academic work to the specifics of a proposed piece of legislation, a policy or a programme. Furthermore, academic researchers are encouraged to provide their own professional opinion, rather than outlining the different approaches to address a public policy issue in a balanced way.
- Governments will often provide information on the rationale behind their proposed legislation, policy or programmes, but this information will tend to align with the perspectives of the governing party.

Asking for additional staff

In general, the parliamentary administration will be the best place to seek non-partisan and balanced assistance. Many parliamentarians will look to the secretary general of parliament and ask where they can find assistance to meet their research needs.

Sometimes, the fastest and easiest way for parliamentarians is to seek funds to hire more of their own political staff. In practice, however, these employees are often quickly reassigned to tasks focused on the re-election of the parliamentarian. Another request will often be made for yet more funds to hire consultants to do analysis for parliamentarians. However, this approach comes with its own set of issues.

- The tendency will be to hire friends of the regime or offer a contract as a political favour. The analysis produced may not be as comprehensive and non-partisan as it could be.
- The approach is not sustainable for parliaments, as the network of consultants will disappear when elected officials change. The corporate knowledge to support parliamentary debates will then be lost and must be rebuilt.
- Consultants tend to charge higher fees than would be spent on permanent employees who do not have to charge for administrative overhead expenses if they are integrated into the parliamentary administration.

In the end, resources may be spent without the expected results being achieved. Parliamentarians will still struggle to get a complete and accurate picture of the public policy issue they need to address, because either they lack the time necessary to synthesize the information themselves or they do not have the depth of knowledge necessary to complete this task.

Using existing resources

Most parliamentarians have access to a parliamentary library. While available resources may be limited and present challenges in the scope of services to be offered by parliamentary libraries, reference librarians are trained to find reliable and authoritative information quickly. However, most

librarians are not trained to synthesize and analyse various public policy issues in a manner that can inform decision-making. For example, librarians would generally not be qualified to explain the purpose and impacts of proposed legislation or assess the economic impact of measures included in the annual budget presented by the government.

Employees of a legislative services unit would be experts at drafting legislation and skilled at supporting a process to turn an idea into law according to proper procedures. However, their expertise does not generally extend to assessing the impacts (economic, social, environmental, etc.) of public policy proposals before parliaments.

Creating a parliamentary research service

A parliamentary research service can assist parliamentarians by preparing synthesis and analysis of proposed legislation, policies or programmes being considered by the parliament. Its professional staff could offer the following:

- factual assessments of the different perspectives on a public policy matter or proposed legislation that are concise and ready in time for a parliamentarian's intervention in the chamber or in committees;
- a "second opinion" on information provided by the government – this would involve providing assessments of the impact of policies or programmes proposed by governments and informed by the synthesis of the range of perspectives expressed on a public policy matter; and
- assessments of whether governments have implemented the actions they committed to take.

A research service strives to inform the parliamentary and public debate on issues facing parliament, not to lead the debate.

The role of a research service is to provide neutral analysis covering the spectrum of perspectives through products and services that are non-partisan and offered to governing and opposition parties alike. Analytical work focuses on synthesizing facts and presenting information in a balanced manner.

A research service strives to inform the parliamentary and public debate on issues facing parliament, not to lead the debate. Although researchers may be asked to present the key findings from the synthesis and analytical work, they do not engage in public debate either in the media or in parliamentary proceedings (e.g., during deliberations at a committee hearing or even in the analysis they release through publications). It is parliamentarians who are accountable and mandated to democratically represent the citizens.

The various types of research support required by parliamentarians are generally best provided by a research service that is part of a non-partisan parliamentary administration. The researchers can be relied upon to use well-founded and accepted arguments to develop lines of enquiry as they assist parliamentarians in their work. As professional members of the administration, they are also best placed to make themselves available to explain more complex aspects of the analysis conducted, if needed.

As the range and complexity of issues before parliament increase, some administrations are called upon to create specialized research units to respond to particular aspects of legislative work. For example, some units have been created to analyse the human rights and gender dimensions in that context.

A parliamentary research service provides balanced and non-partisan support to parliamentarians seeking reliable information to help them respond as needed to parliamentary demands. The following sections highlight the considerations to take into account in setting up such a service.



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II. Governance

Who may be responsible for the service?

Where the research service will be located in the organization is an important question to consider. Different models exist around the world, each offering different access to existing resources and generating different expectations. The most common include:

- services that are integrated with the parliamentary library;
- research capacity that is part of the legislative procedural services; and
- an independent research service entity.

Parliamentary library

It is common to establish a parliamentary research service as an extension of a parliamentary library or documentation and information centre. Such a centre can provide good support to a research service, because it is usually tasked with maintaining a collection of parliamentary records and can be relied upon to find information for parliamentary users. Employees gather and transmit in an organized manner bibliographical, archival, legislative, legal and statistical information in response to requests from parliamentarians, staff and, in some jurisdictions, citizens.

When the research service is integrated into the library, employees of the research service can benefit directly from the wealth of information available at the library. Typically, a request from a parliamentarian will start with a need to gather information on a particular topic. A response to this request is normally best provided by librarians who, as information science specialists, are skilled at finding authoritative and reliable information rapidly.

Often, the request will quickly evolve into a need to synthesize and analyse the information provided to address specific questions or support an action the parliamentarian wants to pursue. Since

the activities of librarians are focused on gathering existing information, analysis is normally done by research employees. In light of the continuum of work that flows from reference to research, establishing or strengthening a unit under which library and research services are integrated may be the best solution for parliamentarians. The risk of sending requests to the wrong unit is reduced, because the single unit ensures that the right employees handle the relevant tasks.

In addition, the research service could benefit from the support of elements of the corporate infrastructure already in place to support the library administration, such as human resources and financial management, as well as support for information technology (IT).

When the research service is integrated into the library, employees of the research service can benefit directly from the wealth of information available at the library.

Legislative procedural services

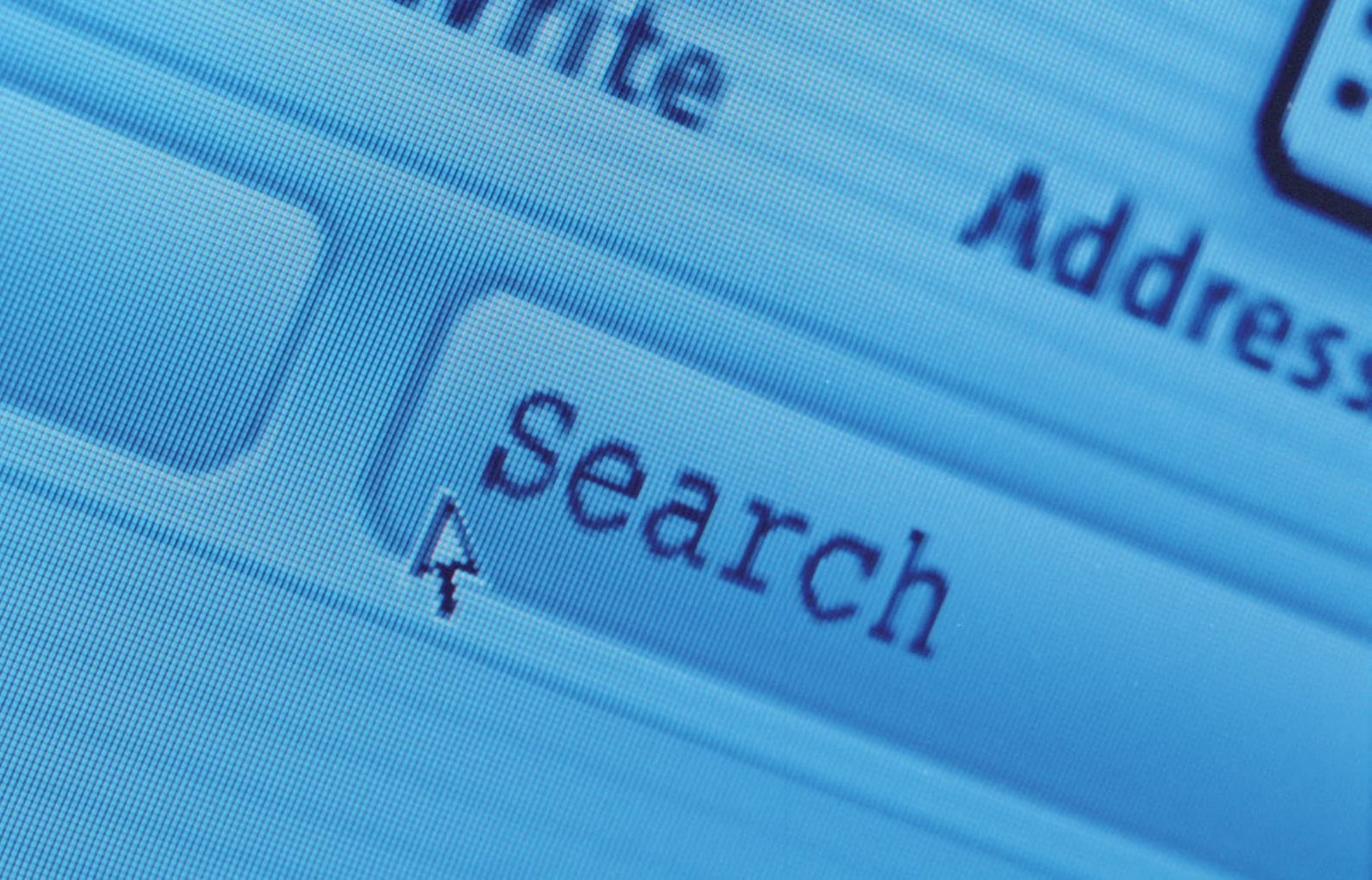
Alternatively, some parliaments expand the role of employees who have procedural duties (e.g., committee clerks) to include research tasks. This model has the advantage of providing an environment under which the parliamentary context and activities can be more easily anticipated. However, the need to ensure the timely and efficient functioning of the plenary sessions and committees can limit the time available to proceduralists to conduct analytical work. To prevent a situation where analytical work receives only residual attention, managers should hire employees to focus on analytical work instead of procedural matters.

The competencies of a proceduralist generally differ from those of a researcher. Analytical work will be considered to be of good quality and reliable by parliamentarians if the employees conducting such work are seen to have the skills set and expertise relevant to the type of research expected. As a result, the legislative procedural services would need to have employees with a range of professional backgrounds and the managers to have the necessary competencies to oversee both procedural and analytical expertise. Examples of the professional backgrounds and skills typically sought after in a research service are highlighted later in this document.

Independent research entities

Some parliaments prefer to create a completely separate entity that reports directly to the senior executive management of the parliament. Under such a model, the research service may have a more direct and visible connection with a secretary general or a clerk. Such a structure will be efficient if it succeeds in maintaining effective collaboration with the library to access the collection, influence the acquisitions in order to meet the needs of researchers conducting analysis for parliamentarians and share the services of information management (IM) professionals. Otherwise, the administration runs the risk of creating a budgetary pressure and inefficient redundancy if the research service must acquire similar information and databases to conduct analytical work.

The challenges listed above are compounded in parliaments with two legislative chambers. In general, parliaments have limited resources and cannot afford the duplication of activities across different units. Parliaments that have a governance structure under which common services are shared (e.g., library, security, IT services, management of buildings and food services) may have more success in relying on a single parliamentary research service to serve both chambers. On the other hand, each chamber may wish to retain sovereignty over the activities of the administrative support provided by the research service.



III. Mandate

The structure of a parliamentary research service and its products, users and resources will be determined by the objectives the service strives to meet. Before choosing the tools needed to operate the service, agreement to create the service, as well as consensus about the types of support it will provide, should be sought from the political parties. This will help to set expectations and identify the parliamentary tools (e.g., a legislation or a motion) needed to fill them.

The mandate of the research service and the clientele it is expected to serve must be clear to limit pressures in carrying out political activities. Setting a clear mandate should assist in ensuring that expectations match the resources available to the research service. Over time, the mandate will likely evolve as parliamentarians become familiar with the value of the service provided and the resources it has to carry out its activities.

Figure 2 illustrates the key elements to consider when deciding the mandate of a parliamentary research service.

Figure 2

Establishing a parliamentary research service Phase 1 – Define the mandate



How can the service be established?

A research service can be created by different means, including a mention in legislation governing the parliamentary administration, a motion arising from a chamber or a recommendation from a parliamentary committee. However, a parliament should resist the temptation to legislate the creation of a new research service before the scope of the service's work is clear.

Instead, the service may come into being bit by bit, as subgroups of parliamentarians work with the support of parliamentary researchers. Motions about a service may be passed in the chamber, or they may be voted in committees, as part of special commissions or in multi-party caucuses. Typically, expectations of the mandate and activities of a research service will evolve as parliamentarians learn to use the service and as available budgets are secured. As clarity emerges around the type of research that parliamentarians expect and the challenges faced by the administration, it will be easier to identify the best way to establish a research service.

The manner adopted by a parliament to create a parliamentary research service may affect the ability of its researchers to access the information needed to conduct analysis requested by parliamentarians. In many instances, professional researchers with graduate degrees will be able to provide good analytical support by relying on information that is publicly available or accessible in specialized literature and databases.

However, increasingly, parliamentarians are called upon to make decisions that require access to "raw" information from government departments. This is the case, for example, for questions that would require research services to scrutinize budgets or evaluate the cost of various existing or proposed government policies or programmes. Having analysis drawn from raw data provides parliamentarians with a better means to make their own judgements on public policy issues rather than rely on government-provided analysis.

Possible means of establishing a parliamentary research service

- Mention in legislation
- Motion arising from a legislative chamber
- Recommendations from a parliamentary committee

In countries with laws that guarantee free access to government information, protocols can be established that enable the research service, via open data, to have access to raw information stored in government databases. However, this is a particularly difficult task when parliaments expect the research service to provide a second opinion on information held exclusively by the executive branch and not accessible under free access legislation. Hence, parliaments may need to pass legislation or motions to enshrine their right to specific information.

What steps could limit the risk of partisan interference?

Governing parties and the executive branch of government may attempt to limit the impact or the ability of a parliamentary research service to conduct analytical work. A fundamental feature of a parliamentary research service is its independence from the governing parties and the executive branch of government. Subtle interventions meant to slow or challenge the research service's access to information or resources could impede analysis requested by parliamentarians.

Steps can be taken to facilitate independent analysis, free from partisan interference.

- A senior parliamentary official (e.g., a presiding officer, secretary general, parliamentary librarian or chief information officer) could be made responsible for ensuring that the research service is available to all parliamentarians and made accountable for its day-to-day non-partisan operations.
- The parliamentary administration could be allocated a specific budget to ensure that parliamentary motions asking for research support can be fulfilled.
- Rights to access specific information could be enshrined in legislation or parliamentary motions. These can also be worded to include requests for parliamentary research staff to conduct analytical work.

A parliament should resist the temptation to legislate the creation of a new research service before the scope of the service's work is clear.

A fundamental feature of a parliamentary research service is its independence from the governing parties and the executive branch of government.

- A parliamentary oversight committee representing parliamentarians both from governing and opposition parties could be mandated to review the overall operation of the research service annually. Care should be taken, however, to limit the mandate of the committee to expressing its views on the general direction of the research service, not on the specific content of the analysis conducted for the benefit of parliamentarians. The latter would essentially politicize the content of the analysis produced.
- The recruitment procedure for staff of the research service needs to be transparent in order to support the non-partisan character of the service and limit executive influence over staff.

The extent to which parliaments will want to frame the administration of parliamentary research services will differ according to the traditions and culture of each parliament and the success each has experienced with relying on non-partisan support.

Who may access the service?

The services offered by a parliamentary research office are guided by the people it is meant to serve. The ultimate reason for establishing or strengthening a parliamentary research service is to provide analysis that is adapted to the needs of parliamentarians, without attempting to influence debate or decisions. While a lot of information is now publicly available, especially through the Internet and social media, such information may not be authoritative or objective in its coverage of public policy issues.

Interactions with political entities such as political parties or lobby groups are common in a parliamentary environment. However, parliamentary research services generally do not provide analytical services to political or other organizations outside of parliament. Instead, research services are usually offered only to individual parliamentarians from both the governing and the opposition parties and officially recognized parliamentary bodies. In offering the same opportunity for support to both governing and opposition parties, there is less risk of compromising the ability of the service to support all of parliament in a neutral, objective and trustworthy manner.

The clientele for a parliamentary research service, then, will likely include:

- multi-party parliamentary bodies such as parliamentary committees, commissions or associations;
- individual parliamentarians or parliamentary groups; and
- the public, through general publications.

Assistance to multi-party committees, commissions or groups of parliamentarians conducting in-depth studies will provide a platform through which a research service can demonstrate its ability to offer non-partisan analytical work. Availability of general products for all parliamentarians, as well as customized analytical products for members across the political spectrum, will assist in building this credibility.

Parliamentary research services generally provide analytical services to individual parliamentarians from both the governing and the opposition parties and officially recognized parliamentary bodies.

In addition, many parliamentary research services offer series of publications on public policy issues faced by parliaments. While drafted with parliamentarians in mind as their primary constituency, they are often available to the public through a parliamentary website. However, some research services do not share any analysis with the public. This approach has the benefit of leaving all interactions in the public domain to parliamentarians. Nevertheless, even under this model, it is common for parliamentarians to share with their constituents or other members of the public material prepared by the research service. It is one way to demonstrate that their position on public policy issues is informed and based on sound analysis of facts. Ultimately, the traditions and culture of the parliament will inform whether analysis can be released to the public.



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IV. Content

What services and products will be offered?

Parliamentarians are exposed to large quantities of information. Because of their roles as legislators and decision-makers, they are lobbied on a wide range of public policy issues.

It is getting increasingly easier for parliamentarians to access information, as perspectives from representatives of civil society, academic circles or political and lobby groups can often be found on the Internet. However, more specialized knowledge is needed to assess these perspectives against the specific provisions of the legislation, policies or programmes being considered by parliament and to take into consideration the reality of the country in which these are considered. A politically neutral analysis of these perspectives and of the impacts and effects of different options to address public policy issues is the valued service that can be provided to parliamentarians by a parliamentary research service.

The spectrum of services and products offered will be defined by the resources available to and the analytical support expected from the research service. Typically, the range of products and services includes some of the following.

- General products:
 - summaries/concise analyses of proposed legislation (available in time for debate);
 - information packages for specific parliamentary meetings (e.g., committees, parliamentary associations, meetings of international organizations);
 - fact sheets (e.g., an introduction to issues using brief facts);
 - background studies;
 - statistical profiles;
 - Geospatial Information System (GIS) and mapping products; and
 - training, seminars and learning materials (toolkits, information literacy courses).

Accessing information may be easier than in the past, but more specialized knowledge is needed to assess that information and analyse the impacts and effects of different options to address public policy issues. This valued service can be provided to parliamentarians by a parliamentary research service.

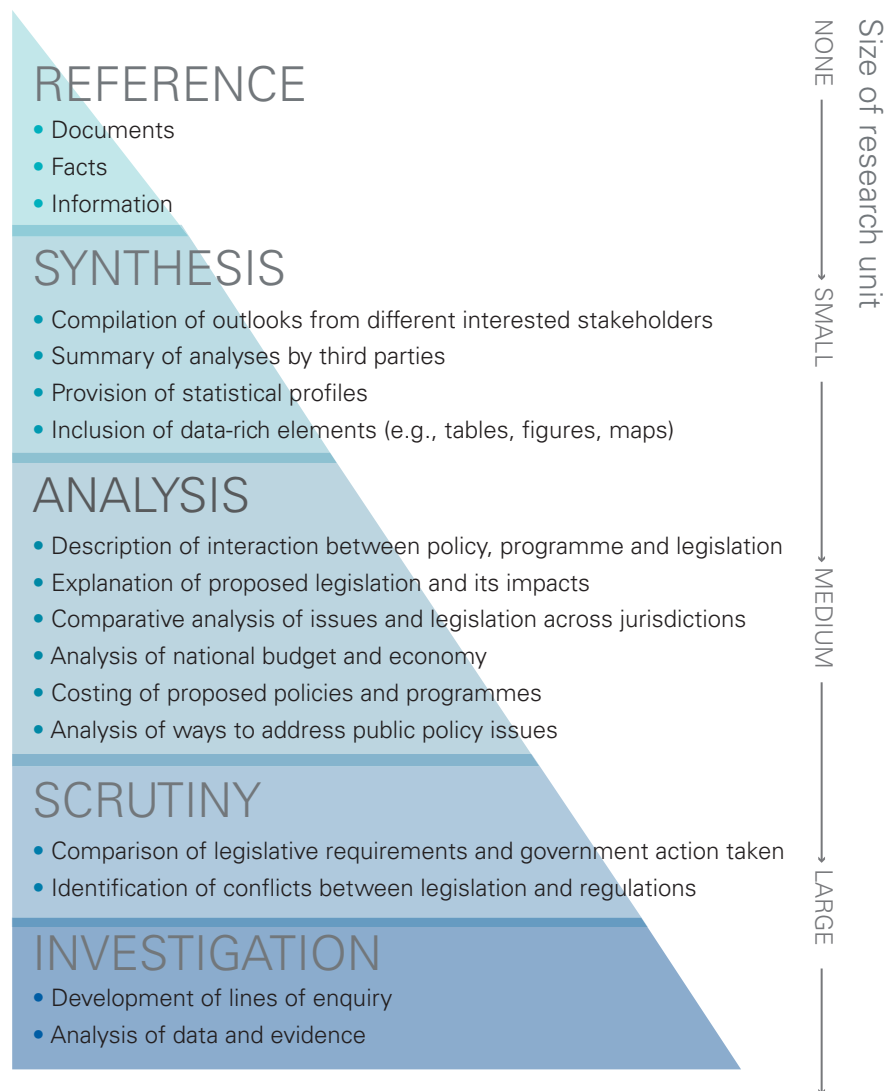
- Customized products:
 - short written analyses responding to specific requests from individual or groups of parliamentarians; and
 - in-person oral briefings to individuals or groups.
- Assistance in drafting legislation.
- Assistance to multi-party parliamentary inquiries and investigations.

As the budget of the research unit and the complexity of the work it carries out expand, the scope of products and services offered will evolve. Figure 3 illustrates the range of products that could be offered in response to the different functions expected from the research service.

A small unit is likely to focus on synthesis products, but as it becomes larger in size, it could gradually expand its offering to more analytical products. For example, a small unit of fewer than five employees may be able to provide synthesis of different perspectives on many public policy issues of interest to parliament, supplemented by some analysis of key legislation or policy initiatives. However, the systematic provision of analysis for all proposed legislation, budgets and policy initiatives may be more realistically achieved by a medium size unit of, say, 15 to 25 employees. If the research unit is also expected to answer requests from individual parliamentarians and parliamentary bodies such as committees or commissions, then more resources will likely be required.

Figure 3

Range of analytical support offered by parliamentary research services



In designing the products to be offered, the managers of the research service will need to balance the need for in-depth analysis with the need to produce material that is easy to use. Parliamentarians value access to reliable analysis, at their fingertips, whenever questions arise in their daily work. Activities should match the expectations of parliamentarians and be adapted to their way of working. While some parliamentarians value access to in-depth analysis of complex public policy issues, many also prefer timely access to succinct material that supports their parliamentary work. For example, during their interventions in chamber, at hearings during studies of proposed legislation or programmes and in their interactions with constituents, parliamentarians tend to have little time to convey their message or ask questions. In their preparation for such interventions, they will rely on products that are concise, to the point and easily understood. Research services should be able to provide products with key facts that can assist parliamentarians with “user-ready” information.

What types of analysis will be provided?

Balancing general and customized analysis

Both general publications and customized analysis are valued, and they meet different needs. General publications consist of documents that are produced generally on a proactive basis and available to all parliamentarians and sometimes the public as well. On the other hand, customized analysis is generally produced at the request of an individual parliamentarian or parliamentary body. Most often, it is available only to the parliamentarian or parliamentary body who requested it.

Faced with limited resources, it could be difficult to respond to all demands for these two types of products and services, all the time. For efficiency, managers of the research service will want to strike a balance between the two to satisfy competing priorities when there are not enough resources to meet all the demands.

In the end, the scope of analysis performed by a small team – one with fewer than five researchers, for example – would call for a different balance than that provided by a service benefiting from substantially more resources. Whatever the level of available resources, the focus of the work of a parliamentary research service will inform how the human resources available will be used to meet the needs of users.

When insufficient resources are available to offer both general and customized analysis, the research service should be clear about its service offering in an effort to manage expectations. As mentioned later in this document, a Service Charter endorsed by a presiding officer or a secretary general can be of assistance in managing such situations.

Balancing proactive and on-demand analysis

Some parliamentarians welcome receiving relevant and easy-to-absorb information on a topic that interests them. Others feel inundated with information and will discard anything that they did not specifically request. Managers of research services will need to strike the appropriate balance according to the traditions and culture within their parliaments and the success of the material produced.

To avoid the perception of leading the public debate, some research services conduct analyses on a strict “on-demand” basis. With this approach, the service responds only to parliamentarians’ specific requests for analysis. However, challenges can arise with this way of operating. Access to analysis may be limited to those who ask. Parliamentarians who hesitate to request analysis for fear of looking incompetent or who do not request analysis on topics that do not fall in their portfolio of responsibilities may miss out on information that could prove useful as they prepare to vote on proposed legislation. In most parliaments, members will specialize and focus on specific issues. However, members will vote on all issues facing parliament in plenary sessions and may be asked to address the media and voters on issues going beyond their assigned portfolio. In addition, providing information only on demand ignores the possibility that parliamentarians “don’t know what they don’t know” and may not be aware that different public policy issues may be connected and therefore not know what questions to ask.

While some parliamentarians value access to in-depth analysis of complex public policy issues, many also prefer timely access to succinct material that supports their parliamentary work.

An exclusively “on-demand” service also runs the risk of always being behind the debate and of not providing timely analysis. Parliaments follow calendars according to which certain activities are predictable. The research service can anticipate the type of analysis parliamentarians will request at different times during the parliamentary year and may wish to produce some analysis proactively. Taking the initiative in providing analysis allows more in-depth analysis to be produced in time for the scheduled activities. Using products prepared proactively, the research service can also show parliamentarians the types of analysis available to them and the range of issues that can be analysed by its researchers. Offering products on a proactive basis may also be helpful after a general election when a share of the elected officials may be not aware of the availability of parliamentary research services.

Proactive activities could include:

- general publications on frequently debated topics (e.g., summaries of proposed legislation);
- fact sheets on topics of significant interest (e.g., if more than 5 or 10 parliamentarians request information on the same topic); this may have the added advantage of reducing duplication; and
- special background analysis of events or issues that recur every year (e.g., a short document explaining the tax system when tax filing season occurs or information seminars before the release of annual budgets).

In order to avoid criticism about the choice of topics and the timing of their release, it would be important to ensure balanced analysis and solid quality control of the material. Steps that can assist in ensuring quality control are discussed elsewhere in this document.

Rather than attempting to lead debate on public policy issues, working proactively means the research service identifies emerging issues that parliament will likely be called upon to address in the short to medium term.

Balancing confidentiality and transparency

The designers of the research unit will need to balance the value of confidentiality for parliamentarians against the expectation of transparency from the people the parliamentarians represent.

A research service should be a safe haven where parliamentarians feel comfortable asking questions without fear of being judged for the extent to which they understand (or do not) a public policy issue. Parliamentarians generally come from various parts of society, whether geographically, culturally or professionally. They cannot be expected to be familiar with all the topics considered by parliament. Hence, they value opportunities to ask questions of professionals who can explain in simple terms the different elements of public policy issues debated by parliament.

For many parliamentarians, the confidentiality of their interactions with the research service will be an important consideration. Research services must therefore be careful not to share the following information with other parliamentarians or anybody outside the research service:

- who made a request;
- what information was requested;
- the format in which it was provided; and
- the purpose for which it was requested.

Only employees of the research service should be aware of the details of interactions with parliamentarians. This knowledge is important to the service for two reasons:

- to ensure that relevant analysis is provided; and
- to record the interaction so that the service will be aware of it should a new request for analysis be submitted.

Expectations from parliamentarians must also be balanced against pressures from the public.

The designers of the research unit will need to balance the value of confidentiality for parliamentarians against the expectation of transparency from the people the parliamentarians represent.

In some jurisdictions, research services may be pressured to release information about parliamentarians' information requests, as a result of the trend around the world towards greater transparency. It is argued that as a non-partisan entity whose work is funded by taxpayers, the research service should make its work available to all parliamentarians or even to the public.

Other research services release information about requests with the agreement of the parliamentarians who made the requests. Another approach consists of clearly stating that information about the request (sometimes including the analysis submitted) will be released after a specific amount of time has elapsed. For example, all customized analysis may be made public 90 days or a year after it was provided to the requesting parliamentarian or if the parliamentarian makes it public.

The culture of each parliament will affect how a balance will be reached, and ultimately the legal framework in place will determine how material will be handled. For example, in some countries, parliament is subject to freedom-of-information legislation. The research service may need to follow legislative provisions in determining what may be released or kept confidential. Similarly, some information required to conduct analysis may be subject to confidentiality provisions. The nature of the content that could be released to the public may be restricted by such provisions.



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V. Operations

How will the service operate?

Securing multi-party support and the parliamentary authorities (e.g., through legislation and motions) required to access budgets are key elements in the process for launching or strengthening a parliamentary research service. However, parliamentarians and the administration may still have different understandings about the nature and the extent of services to be offered by the research service. Establishing a Service Charter may help to reduce misunderstandings by formally stating the scope of services available.

Adopting a Service Charter

A Service Charter is a document that states what the research service will commit to provide to its parliamentary clientele. It includes the parameters that will guide how the products and services will be provided. Typically, it would spell out the services offered, who can access these services and the manner in which they are delivered. Examples of elements to include in a Service Charter are given in Appendix A. They include operating principles and descriptions of what is – or is not – within the scope of the research service. From this charter, it should be clear that:

- the research service is offered to support parliamentary duties only;
- there is no support for the educational or academic pursuit of a parliamentarian (or a member of his or her family or staff); and
- personal financial, medical or legal advice will not be provided.

A Service Charter can capture the scope of services available and assist in managing expectations.

Parliamentary duties generally include activities such as proposing, debating and approving laws and budgets, scrutinizing activities of the executive branch, representing constituents and representing parliament. The range of analytical support required will therefore vary according to the activities pursued by parliamentarians during a parliamentary session.

Research services usually avoid supporting activities that could be perceived as “political” such as speech writing and responding directly to questions from parliamentarians’ constituents. Rather, research services may provide the factual information parliamentarians need for a speech or to prepare a response to a constituent. It is the parliamentarian or a member of his or her office who should give a speech its tone and outlook, or who should interact directly with the constituent.

By capturing key operating principles in a Service Charter, managers and employees of the research service can ensure consistency in the manner in which they interact with parliamentary clients, and they can manage expectations. When appropriate, the Service Charter may include comments about the types of services and the corresponding quality to be expected. For example, an answer to a complex question prepared to meet a 24-hour deadline will not be of the same quality as a comparative analysis of a many-sided topic that the research service had three weeks to complete. There is generally a trade-off between the time available to produce an analysis and the depth with which an issue is analysed. A Service Charter could be drafted to convey this message to its parliamentary clients.

Managing demands through a Service Charter

A Service Charter can also help with managing demands. As the research unit becomes known and relied upon by parliamentarians, managing demands will become a challenge. Assuming that all parliamentarians will have equal access to the research service, there will be times when there are not enough resources to meet all the requests. The managers of the research unit will need to decide the order in which requests will receive the attention of researchers.

Parameters will need to be clear, as not all parliamentarians will agree with the order in which the managers assign work, thinking that their own requests should be handled first. Consistency in assigning priorities will be essential in managing such situations. For example, the Service Charter could make it clear whether requests from a group of parliamentarians, such as a committee, receives greater priority than individual requests.

If part of the work carried out by the research service is costing policies and programmes, it may want to establish a “financial impact threshold” with respect to the anticipated monetary impact below which it will not conduct analysis. Given the likely limited resources of the service, adopting such a threshold would allow it to focus its attention on more significant initiatives.

Sharing the content of a Service Charter

Some parliamentary administrations may wish to make a Service Charter a formal document, available to a range of people, while others may wish to keep it as an internal document guiding their operations. For those who favour formalizing the Service Charter, different options exist to determine who has authority over its content.

- A group of parliamentarians that oversees the functioning of the parliamentary administration could be consulted or asked to approve a Service Charter.
- A presiding officer or a secretary general could be given authority for the Service Charter.

The Service Charter may be shared with parliamentarians for greater transparency and as a way to manage expectations.

For jurisdictions with a tradition of providing research services, a Service Charter may not be necessary to inform parliamentarians about the scope of services available. Nevertheless, the administration should find a way to capture the key elements that would be included in a charter and share this information with new parliamentarians as they enter parliament.

Even as an internal-only document, a Service Charter can be an informative tool to orient new employees as they are integrated into the research service. A Service Charter would help new recruits to quickly learn the operating principles and values of the organization, and to adopt behaviours consistent with the tradition of the parliamentary research service.

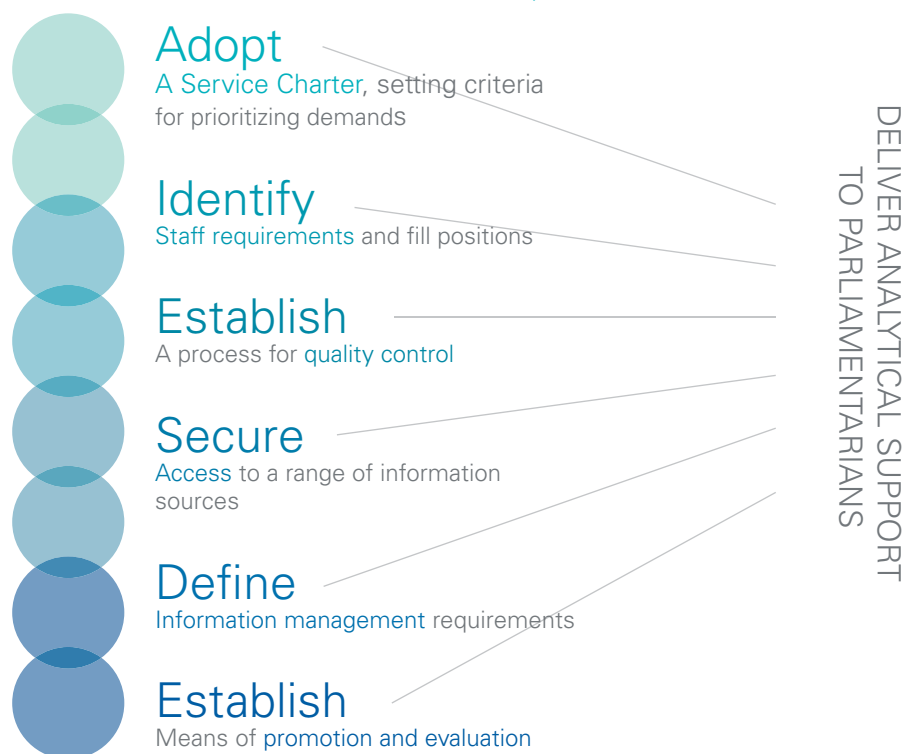
Who will provide the services?

The range of products and services offered by a research service to its parliamentary clientele will be determined by the resources available to the unit. To be effective, the service will require qualified employees, access to a collection of relevant books, publications and databases, and information management and technology support. Figure 4 illustrates the key elements required to operate a research service.

Figure 4

Establishing a parliamentary research service

Phase 2 – Determine how the research service operates



The quality of the employees hired will be essential in establishing or expanding a successful parliamentary research service. There may be temptation to hire staff according to "who you know". However, the credibility of the research service will be severely damaged if the new recruits do not have the professional background necessary to conduct the work. This situation will be exacerbated if the employees were previous parliamentary staff or relatives of parliamentarians or administrative decision-makers and lead to lack of confidence in the neutrality of the research service.

Of course, there may be competitive pressures from private-sector or other employers for highly skilled professionals. Parliaments may struggle to match the salaries available in the private sector. Hence, it is important to recruit on the basis of not only professional background but also skills. For all but the most specialist jobs, knowledge can be learned. Training is, therefore, an important element in the development of a professional research service as a way to both strengthen the quality and retain employees.

In addition, a stable workforce will benefit the parliamentary clientele, since research staff will gradually develop parliamentary knowledge, thereby supporting the provision of analysis for parliamentarians that is better aligned with the demands of parliamentary work.

The quality of the employees hired will be essential in establishing or expanding a successful parliamentary research service.

Selecting varied professional backgrounds

Law-making and the economic management of the country are important for virtually all parliamentarians. Therefore, since the service may well have limited resources at the start, beginning by hiring analysts with law and economics degrees will allow the service to quickly answer the more pressing needs for analytical support.

As the research service gains credibility and parliamentary clients begin to expect more of it, the service may be granted more resources. The managers could then look to hire employees with a greater diversity of professional backgrounds, such as social science, international affairs, public administration, natural resources management or environmental studies. A workforce with a range of professional expertise will allow the service to address multidisciplinary requests. The portfolio of issues assigned to standing committees may assist in identifying the more common range of issues likely to be discussed by parliamentarians and the professional background required to undertake the related analytical work.

Another point to consider when deciding on the type of researchers to hire is the nature of the work to be accomplished. For example, in some parliaments, only the executive branch can initiate bills, while in others, parliamentarians can initiate bills on a wide range of issues. Parliamentarians in the latter system may need access to a more comprehensive range of analytical abilities in order to better define the policy proposals they wish to turn into legislation.

In addition, managers of research services will want to strike a balance between employees with deep expertise in topics of recurring interest to parliamentarians and employees who can cover multiple issues, albeit likely with less in-depth expertise.

Requiring professional credentials as a condition of employment will assist in bringing credibility to the research unit. If possible, employees with university degrees should be favoured. The service could rely also on interns and students to supplement the work of its professional research staff.

Finally, employees who can operate in globally recognized languages can be an asset. Through them, the service will be better equipped to conduct comparative analyses of questions studied in many countries and to integrate research from international sources into their analysis.

Looking for key competencies and values

Professional credentials constitute only one aspect of the characteristics a manager should look for when hiring research staff. The manner in which employees conduct their work can be as important as their educational qualifications. The key competencies managers will look for as they recruit employees will generally include the following:

- ability to communicate simply, both orally and in writing;
- ability to synthesize complex ideas;
- ability to find and extract relevant information;
- knowledge of research methodologies;
- ability to present analysis in a balanced manner;
- ability to interact with parliamentarians in a non-partisan way;
- political awareness and an understanding of political cultures and the political process;
- understanding of laws/legal systems and the legislative process;
- understanding of a client-service culture;
- adaptability;
- ability to negotiate with clients and resolve conflicts; and
- technological skills.

The credibility of a parliamentary research service will also be influenced by the values by which employees abide. Typically, values such as impartiality, the use of reputable information,

Beginning by hiring analysts with law and economics degrees will allow the service to quickly answer the more pressing needs for analytical support. As the research service gains credibility and parliamentary clients begin to expect more of it, the service may be granted more resources. The managers could then look to hire employees with a greater diversity of professional backgrounds.

confidentiality of interactions with individual parliamentarians, and professionalism conveyed both through interactions and the analytical material produced will assist in building respect for the research service.

In some parliaments, research employees may be asked to be physically available during committee meetings or sessions on the floor of the chamber to clarify issues pertaining to bills being discussed. Although only parliamentarians are generally allowed to speak at such sessions, research employees may be called upon to provide analysis or explanations directly to individual parliamentarians during the debates. It will be important for employees from the parliamentary research service to limit their interventions to sharing facts that inform parliamentary discussion, without engaging in the debate. Similarly, researchers would generally refrain from debating with commentators (e.g., parliamentarians, the media or the general public) who may seek policy prescriptions on the basis of the analytical work the researchers have done.

Refraining from participating in debate is particularly difficult for researchers involved in investigative work supporting parliamentarians. If parliamentarians have the power to conduct inquiries, they may turn to a research unit to assist them in developing questions. In such situations, limiting analysis to a synthesis of the spectrum of perspectives would be insufficient. The objective in these cases is not so much to provide a balanced spectrum of perspective as to assist parliamentarians in their investigative role.

Retaining quality staff

The recruitment of quality staff must be supplemented by some action to retain the solid analysts hired by the service. Efforts should be devoted to manage the careers of these employees, with a view to ensuring that their skills are kept up to date.

Over time, employees will need to expand their knowledge and have opportunities to stay abreast of new developments in their field of specialization. They will likely face the need to learn new techniques for conducting analysis or communicating the results of their analysis. They will also be called upon to strengthen their abilities as they take on more responsibilities or must use new tools in their work.

Some employees will be naturally inclined to seek new knowledge or learn to use new tools on their own. Others may not have the resources or the time to embrace training outside of work. Yet, these individuals may be quality employees for whom investment in training would make sense. Such an investment would allow them to increase their productivity.

The research service should set aside some resources to assist in keeping the employees' skills up to date. All employees do not require the same type of training. Some will benefit from attending conferences, while others will gain more by attending individual courses. In some cases, in-house training for a group of employees or even mentoring programmes would be better suited to needs. An approach based on a mix of options is likely to be preferable if the objective is to align the respective needs of the employees and those of the research service.



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VI. Service components

How to ensure quality control?

The credibility of the research service, and indirectly the reputation of the parliament, can be damaged by a lack of rigour in assessing public policy issues. Even a small percentage of failures in meeting expectations or a perceived unbalance in analysis can lead to a crisis of confidence. Hence, implementing internal systems to conduct a form of quality control on the products submitted to parliamentarians is key.

Quality considerations

Materials should be:

- fact-based
- well-sourced
- balanced

Care should be exercised to provide products that are fact-based, well-sourced and balanced. Parliamentarians from different political persuasions should be able to find value in the analysis they receive – this will lead to appreciation for the research service. Several attempts may be needed to find the appropriate format and level of detail that starts to build trust in the work produced by the research service.

Depending on the size of the unit, the responsibility to review the quality of the reply to a request could fall on a senior researcher, a manager or even a director of quality control. However, the quality of the work is ultimately a shared responsibility between the analyst who prepares the material and the supervisor who authorizes its release to the parliamentary client. Hence, the research service should develop tools, such as a checklist, and training to ensure that its employees know what the expectations are when producing analysis that is considered authoritative and nonpartisan. Examples of elements to include on a checklist are provided in Appendix B. In addition, in-house manuals providing information on the scope of content and format requirements to be applied to different analytical products would help researchers develop materials according to the standards expected from the research service. For example, this would include information on the length expected for different products, the type of information to be provided or how to reference source material. Such manuals are particularly useful for

Even a small percentage of failures in meeting expectations or a perceived unbalance in analysis can lead to a crisis of confidence.

new employees as they learn and adopt methods consistent with the practices accepted by the research service.

Performing analysis in a balanced manner can be a challenge for researchers, who, as employees of a parliamentary administration, are particularly interested in parliamentary debates. With repeated exposure to debates over public policy issues, they may develop personal opinions on matters before parliament. So as not to erode confidence in the analysis they provide, they must ensure that their personal views do not influence their work. Hence, establishing quality standards for information products and actively enforcing them with staff is essential to a successful research service.

In parliaments operating in more than one language, attention must be paid to concordance of information provided in different languages. The research service may need to rely on translators and editors to ensure that material provided in different languages conveys the same information with the same nuances, irrespective of the language used.

Another point to keep in mind is the importance of respecting copyright and licensing rights. Plagiarism and unauthorized uses of material are illegal in a large number of countries. In addition, these activities reduce the credibility of the research service.

What elements support the service?

The collection

To be effective in their work, researchers will need to have access to information. Parliamentary libraries will be key among the different sources of information available. Their librarians are knowledgeable about how to develop and manage a collection that responds to the needs of a parliamentary clientele. Parliamentary researchers will normally make extensive use of this collection.

When a parliamentary library has been established prior to the research service, the scope of the library's collection may have to be updated to respond to the need of parliamentary researchers. For example, with respect to the content of the collection, it is important to note the following considerations.

- The collection must be seen to include relevant and authoritative information. In building collections, purchasing databases and developing services, the needs of the research service must be taken into account. The focus will likely be on law, history and political science. Also helpful will be documents from international organizations with whom the parliament interacts (e.g., the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank) or the countries/entities with whom it has official ties (e.g., the European Union).
- Researchers need access to highly specialized industry or academic publications; serials with a frequent publication schedule, such as reports and newsletters; and technical and legal documents.
- Researchers often require historical data to show long-term cycles (e.g., economics and statistical data), and therefore longer runs of some collections will be necessary.
- Both researchers and parliamentary users analysing subject areas new to them require access to items intended for non-experts, such as general reference material, newspapers, magazine/journal articles and monographs. It is important to have documentation suitable for a variety of users, because analysts with expertise in a particular area may be asked to recommend appropriate reading material to supplement what they have written for the parliamentarians.
- A core collection of reference titles will also be needed to assist researchers when they are faced with responding to requests outside their area of specialization, in order to get them started with a base of information.

To be effective in their work, researchers will need to have access to information. Parliamentary libraries will be key among the different sources of information available.

In developing the collection, effective communication between collection managers and researchers must prevail to ensure the best use of the budgets available for services to parliamentarians. Specifically, this means the following:

- The collections used by the researchers must be accessible in a convenient location, whether they are print or electronic. This can include having office copies at hand and licences for frequently consulted data.
- The relevance of the collection to researchers will be based on regular consultation between the collection development librarians and researchers so that the librarians can better understand the specific needs of the researchers and be informed when new areas of study arise.
- It is essential for the collection development librarians who support the work of a parliamentary research service to maintain their awareness of current events in order to seek out resources that address emerging subjects of interest which may not be well represented in the library's general collection.
- As new items are added to the collection, librarians should inform researchers of the acquisitions in their respective fields of study.
- Collection development should remain balanced and focused on the needs of parliamentarians and the research service as a whole rather than be driven by the personal interests or passions of individual researchers.

The digital environment

The ability to find information quickly is increasingly important. For that reason, parliamentary libraries should worry less about physical holdings and focus more on being able to rapidly access knowledge and expertise. To that end, parliamentary libraries should take advantage of the power of technology.¹

The trend towards digital formats will have some major benefits for the research service, particularly given that the library's print collection may be housed in several locations or may not be immediately available. Licences that allow many concurrent users to access material facilitate faster and broader use of library resources. When less time is needed to gather information, researchers are able to get their work to parliamentary clients sooner.

The ability to digitize public-domain documents on demand can be extremely helpful for researchers working on parliamentary committees. Through digitization, a single print copy of an item from the collection can be shared simultaneously with all committee members.

Researchers and parliamentarians alike can access the increasing amount of material that rapidly becomes freely available electronically, including government material, open information and open data, and substantial data sets and powerful business intelligence tools that allow data mining on a bigger scale.

Parliamentary libraries can provide access to such sources of information. It should be remembered that they also provide access to information management professionals, such as librarians. While researchers are increasingly adept at finding information on their own, they should not hesitate to work with librarians to make the most of their information searches. After all, researchers are hired primarily for their analytical skills rather than their information management abilities.

Unfortunately, digital formats can be at the root of some challenges. Digital products are often priced higher than print products. Licence and technological restrictions, such as paywalls requiring payment before material can be accessed, may prevent the library from redistributing content and making it widely available to users and even to library and research employees. Most digital products for which libraries pay are subscription-based, and there is a concern that if a library cannot afford to maintain access to these products, access to the historical elements of the collection will suffer in the future.

Parliamentary libraries should worry less about physical holdings and focus more on being able to rapidly access knowledge and expertise. To that end, parliamentary libraries should take advantage of the power of technology.

¹ Parliamentary libraries have opportunities to use technology to improve their services in a way that benefits the whole of a parliamentary institution. Overviews of the software, systems and services that can be adopted by parliamentary libraries are offered in the handbook *Information and communication technologies in parliamentary libraries* prepared by the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament and released in 2012. It can be found at <http://www.ipu.org/english/handbks.htm#ict>.

Increasingly, in part because of the perception that material can easily be obtained in a digital environment, pressures exist for parliamentarians to be able to access information and data sets held by the executive branch, whether or not they are held in an electronic format. Some countries include access provisions in their legislative rights for parliament, thereby improving the access of the research service to statistical databases held by the executive branch. However, many rely on less formal arrangements that are often difficult to enforce, making access to the material less certain.

Information management

An active parliamentary research service may have many individual transactions with parliamentary clients. To ensure consistency in its treatment of its clients and analysis, the research service will likely require some internal processes to manage the information it provides.

Tracking requests

The research service will likely need to keep track of which parliamentary client requires what analysis, before which deadline, along with details of the actual service that is being provided. It will also want to avoid duplicating efforts by ensuring that it keeps good records of analysis already conducted, in order to make the most of its resources by modifying or building on material it has created (when appropriate). Therefore, an electronic client request and records management system may be one of the tools used by the research service to support the best use of available resources.

As mentioned in an earlier section, if the research service abides by a strict confidentiality principle in serving the parliamentary clientele, it will also need to consider adopting a set-up that prevents the accidental release of information. Access rights and rules about when some information can become public may need to be integrated into the design of the internal information management system. The ability to automate safeguards and warnings would assist in reducing the potential for errors in managing the confidentiality of information.

Establishing an internal file management system

Information management requirements extend beyond individual transactions with parliamentary clients. Over time, the research service may become the corporate memory for the analytical work of parliament. Keeping good records of analysis conducted in past years may prove essential in building the credibility and public accountability of the research service. A research service that can rapidly provide, in a reliable and non-partisan manner, information about analytical work conducted by previous parliaments enhances the service it provides.

Managers of the research service should consult with information management professionals, such as librarians, about ways they can set up their internal file management system to ensure fast and efficient access to and retrieval of their analytical work. As the size of this body of work increases over the years, the tool chosen may require the integration of a user-friendly taxonomy and associated search capacity.

Information management professionals, who will generally be familiar with digital platforms designed for libraries, will often be able to advise on the best information management software to consider. For example, while several open-source softwares are available to manage documents, some parliaments' IT services may impose restrictions because of IT security concerns. The information management professionals will likely be able to help identify requirements and possible solutions.

How are research services promoted and evaluated?

Parliamentarians may express an interest for research services, but they should not be expected to have the time, resources and knowledge to find what is available to them. The research service must therefore consider how it will make its products and expertise available to parliamentarians and their staff.

An electronic client request and records management system may be one of the tools used by the research service to support the best use of available resources.

Activities related to the operation of plenary sessions and standing committee meetings are generally highly structured. Parliamentarians must proactively seek to interact with employees from the procedural services in order to further any action they wish to bring forward during plenary sessions or committee meetings. Research services, on the other hand, operate in a more competitive environment where analytical contributions can come from multiple sources, both internal and external to parliaments. The research service must therefore make a special effort to ensure its products and services are not only known to consist of non-partisan and balanced information but also easily accessible and recognizable as documents from the parliamentary research service.

Often, for busy people, a presentation that blends text, images and audiovisual elements may be the best format.

Building awareness

Most parliaments organize special orientation activities for new parliamentarians following a general election. Through special training sessions, seminars, service fairs, special “drop-in / welcome” days or individual visits, parliamentarians are provided with information about the services and support available to them for the conduct of their parliamentary duties. In participating in such activities, the research service can start building awareness for its products and services.

Even if orientation activities are not offered by the parliamentary administration, the research service should prepare orientation material outlining the type of services available to parliamentarians, the range of products offered, the principles governing its work and information about how to reach the research service. For example, the latter would include hours of operation, phone numbers and email addresses, and links to intranet and Internet sites where research material can be found. While most relevant in the weeks following an election, this material is of assistance through the entire duration of a parliament.

Visual identity

The look and feel of research service products should be appealing. The research service should adopt a “common look and feel” for its products. Having a style, visual presentation and logo that clearly identify the products as originating from the research service will help in the service’s branding effort. Adopting specific templates for the research products will help define and apply a standard visual identity for the research service.

In some parliaments, visual identity may be set for the entire parliamentary administration and its official parliamentary documents, thereby preventing the research service from adopting its own visual identity. Nevertheless, even in these circumstances, it is generally possible to use headers, titles and footnotes to indicate clearly that the products originate from the parliamentary research service. Over time, as the products are recognized to have originated from the research service, the look and feel may assist in identifying them as non-partisan and professional materials.

User-friendly content

Building awareness through branding, however, cannot rest only on its visual identity. The quality of the content and the ease with which parliamentarians can use the material are essential attributes.

Parliamentarians are increasingly pressed for time. They expect information to be presented in a user-friendly fashion with, whenever possible, visual elements such as tables, charts and images. Videos and podcasts may be good formats for conveying information. Often, for busy people, a presentation that blends text, images and audiovisual elements may be the best format. Typically, given the desire of most parliamentarians to consult concise and easy-to-absorb material, the challenge is to present content in such a way that users quickly understand the critical aspects of an issue.

As a rule, information about the services and products offered by the research service should be timely and easy to find.

Easy access

As a rule, information about the services and products offered by the research service should be timely and easy to find.

An analysis of the tools used by parliamentarians in their daily activities can be used to determine how the research service should market and disseminate its services and products. These offerings need to be located where the parliamentarians spend time.

Some quantitative measures may help identify which products are more sought-after by the parliamentary clientele. ... The objective is to understand when and how the research service provided added value in the day-to-day work of parliamentarians and their staff.

- Establishing a kiosk or an office near a cafeteria or a reading room used by parliamentarians and their staff could be a good idea. Making research publications available there in print or electronically, possibly with employees available to answer questions, could help to build awareness of the service.
- Most parliamentary administrations operate intranet sites and public websites. Products of a general nature prepared by the parliamentary research service should be available on these sites.
- Regular electronic newsletters on new research products, with links to the electronic publication and related information, could facilitate access to particular products as well as awareness of the service as a whole.
- Social media may be where parliamentarians and their staff look for information. If they rely on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, text messages and other social media to access information, the research service should consider making its products available through these channels. Links to publications or podcasts can be disseminated via these channels at relatively low costs.

Evaluating the products and services

A research service will be successful if it understands which products and services are valuable to parliamentarians. It needs to identify what works, or not, and for whom. As it develops how it will evaluate its service offering, it must consider the needs of both the parliamentarians and the staff that work for them.

Some quantitative measures may help identify which products are more sought-after by the parliamentary clientele. Typically, the research service will track the number of parliamentarians and staff supported, and the number and frequency of use of the research products. There may be other elements, such as the time elapsed between the receipt of a request and the provision of a response, that help to indicate how well the service responds to parliamentarians' needs.

Some ways to evaluate products

Track:

- the number of parliamentarians and staff supported
- the number of times a product is used
- the time taken to reply to requests

Technologies exist to track the use of electronic products, including a count of hits on websites (intranet- and Internet-based) and whether hits come from a single address or multiple addresses. Similarly, it is possible to track the number of times a product is requested or the number of times a tweet providing a link to a publication is retweeted.

Another measure consists of tracking the number of times information from the research service is referred to during debates in plenary sessions or committees. Such information can be obtained through a review of the verbatim reports of debates.

It is, however, more difficult to gather qualitative measures of the value of research products. Invariably, this requires a conversation with the end-users (usually the parliamentarians and their staff). Questions should be designed to ascertain the utility of the products and services. These are some examples:

- Which product/service do you use every week?
- Which product/service made a positive difference in the last month?
- Are there examples of an inadequate product/service?

There can be a long list of such questions. The objective is to understand when and how the research service provided added value in the day-to-day work of parliamentarians and their staff. In fact, some research units ask whether someone representing their service can "shadow" a member of a parliamentarian's staff for a day to better understand the needs. This could be a very practical way to get first-hand knowledge of what is required, when and in which format.



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VII. Useful partnerships

Whatever their size, parliamentary research services will need to call upon external resources to help them respond to their parliamentary clientele. Seeking partnerships with organizations that hold information likely to strengthen their analytical work will benefit such research services.

Specific expertise may already exist within a country but not be channelled in a way that helps the parliamentary clientele. To enrich the substantive content of their service offering, parliamentary researchers could seek partnerships with a range of sources outside the service that could help provide access to that expertise.

Equally helpful are colleagues in other administrative units who have expertise in parliamentary or corporate services and can assist in producing or delivering research services to the parliamentary clientele.

Figure 5 provides an illustration of potential partnerships to explore when looking for additional information and context to enrich the analysis provided to parliamentarians.

Figure 5

Establishing a parliamentary research service Phase 3 – Make the most of partnerships



Parliamentary libraries

Whatever their size, parliamentary research services will need to call upon external resources to help them respond to their parliamentary clientele.

Most parliaments rely on the services of a parliamentary library to meet their information needs. These libraries are often staffed with people skilled at finding and managing information sought by parliamentarians and their staff as they conduct their parliamentary business. As mentioned earlier, the research service can be integrated with the library or be a separate entity enjoying a close partnership with the library. Under either model, the research service can improve its cost-effectiveness by developing a successful partnership between researchers and library professionals.

Wherever the research service is located in the organizational structure, researchers will require access to a collection of reference material. Yet, any library will find it is impossible to have at hand all of the titles that researchers will request. Therefore, it is useful for librarians to set up relationships with other libraries and specialized institutions that will be willing to lend or provide copies of the required information in a timely manner.

Arrangements could also be made to access the national library (either formally in enabling legislation, or informally). Developing partnerships with other libraries (e.g., state/provincial libraries, law libraries, academic libraries, libraries connected with think-tanks) that hold information not found in the parliamentary library will also expand the sources of information available.

Similarly, researchers often have a need for unpublished documents. Personal contacts or more time may be needed to obtain them. In these cases in particular, the personal network of the employees will often make a difference in accessing relevant information.

Agents of parliament and special agencies

Parliamentary research services can be asked to analyse matters on which agents of parliament or representatives of special agencies regularly comment. To be effective in its work, the research service may benefit from establishing partnerships with these entities, which include the offices of auditors general, information commissioners, budget officers and statistical agencies. Such partnerships would facilitate information exchanges to collectively provide stronger analytical support to parliaments. However, appropriate regard for differing mandates and confidentiality obligations must be maintained.

The institutional arrangements between various entities supporting parliaments will vary across different jurisdictions. A single best approach may be difficult to identify. Clearly, the objective should not be to share information for which legislation prohibits the exchange or dissemination beyond established parameters. Rather, research managers should consider whether there may be an advantage to sharing best practices when parliamentarians ask the same questions of different entities or when all of the entities experience similar challenges in accessing information. Since these organizations also provide information to parliamentarians, the research service could benefit from learning about their best practices.

- Auditors general and budget officers generally conduct analysis in specific domains and according to annual or biannual calendars. Ongoing consultations with these offices may assist the research service in avoiding duplication.
- Information commissioners may be aware of techniques or enjoy privileged access to information that may help the research service design its own approach to accessing information from entities more reluctant to share information.
- Statistical agencies may be willing to develop administrative arrangements to provide access to data or compilations of specific data sets at preferential costs.

There may be an advantage to sharing best practices when parliamentarians ask the same questions of different entities or when all of the entities experience similar challenges in accessing information.

Maintaining a network of individual professional contacts may also help the research service to stay abreast of developments that are of interest to parliamentarians. For example, parliamentarians can take a particular interest in public procurement and the public disposal of assets. This can involve significant sums of money and/or have an important impact in constituencies represented by individual parliamentarians. It may be beneficial for researchers to develop a good understanding from procurement authorities of the information available on acquisition or disposal of assets, as parliamentarians may ask questions about these transactions.

Ministries

Similarly, researchers specializing in specific fields of public policy may wish to develop a good rapport with the parliamentary advisors in the relevant ministries who are assigned to the same portfolio. These advisors are generally tasked with ensuring that parliamentary procedures and the legal process are considered by ministries developing policies or programmes to be brought forward to parliament by their ministers.

Researchers may be called upon regularly to prepare analytical material explaining the objectives and impacts of proposed policies and programmes. A researcher with a good relationship with ministerial parliamentary advisors may be directed quickly to relevant information. Even if the information is public, accessing it could be more effective if the researcher has a contact in the ministry. This can be particularly useful if the researcher is pressed for time to prepare the analysis.

While it is often necessary for parliamentary officials to seek information about government policies and programmes, it is critical to maintain a clear separation between the work of parliamentary and government officials. Because of the need for parliament to form its own judgement on public policy matters, it would be inappropriate for government officials to dictate or review analysis conducted by parliamentary researchers before sharing it with parliamentarians.

Advisors in ministries could also benefit from this relationship. For example, they could ask a researcher what aspects parliamentarians wish the minister or senior officials to cover during a parliamentary hearing. Such a communication would cover information about the general nature or purpose of the hearing and would need to ensure that the researcher's confidential relationship with the parliamentary commission or committee is not compromised.

Of course, care will need to be exercised to ensure that the advisors, as representatives of the executive branch, do not control the actions of the researcher or the content of his or her analysis. In some jurisdictions, parliamentary advisors from the ministry actively lobby to influence the membership of committees, the list of witnesses invited to testify or the information shared with parliamentary committees. Researchers may have to filter what they share with the advisors. To avoid a perception of conflict of interest, the researcher will also need to be careful not to be perceived as entertaining too close a relationship with the ministry.

The various parliamentary services need to understand their respective roles and responsibilities and work collaboratively to ensure that parliamentarians can take “no wrong doors” in accessing research services.

Other research services

Within the parliamentary environment

Other entities may support parliamentarians in the analysis of public policy issues. For example, colleagues in procedural services may support the work of parliamentary committees or commissions, and legislative analysis units or a parliamentary budget office may already exist. Such colleagues could be valuable partners in the development and provision of analytical products to assist the work of the committees and commissions. Some parliamentarians have been known to ask the same question of more than one unit in a parliamentary administration. Although this may lead to internal debates and challenges that can generate stronger advice, if confidentiality provisions allow it, efforts should be made to touch base with other services and avoid duplication that may result in the wasting of resources.

Above all, a research service must strive to understand the context in which analytical work is requested. Because parliamentarians often do not distinguish who is employed by the procedural, administrative, library or research services, it is possible that they will address their enquiries to the wrong unit. The various parliamentary services need to understand their respective roles and responsibilities and work collaboratively to ensure that parliamentarians can take “no wrong doors” in accessing research services. “Behind the scenes” guidelines, agreements or memorandums of understanding may help to ensure that time and effort are not wasted in figuring out who must complete which tasks. The objective is to finish the tasks requested as soon as possible, not to spend time arguing about who performs them.

A good rapport and close working relationships with procedural and administrative units will assist in best using the skills and resources if the following situations arise.

- Committees or select groups of parliamentarians may be responsible for proposing and conducting in-depth studies on public policies, which will normally result in legislative initiatives. Researchers can work with support staff for these committees or groups and be the main providers of research support.
- Parliamentarians may resort to outsourcing papers and studies to universities and think-tanks, but they may ask parliamentary researchers to facilitate this process and assess the outsourced work.
- A unit separate from the research service often drafts legislation. However, researchers may assist the unit in developing concepts to be turned into legislation. Legislative drafters may provide advice about writing a specific bill or may analyse a bill that is initiated by another parliamentarian, the executive branch, the judiciary or by groups in the population at large. When doing this, the legislative drafter must evaluate if the original proposal is constitutional, legal and technically adequate. During this evaluation, the drafter may work with a researcher to analyse legal, economic and social impacts of bills and laws.

In other jurisdictions

Expertise may also reside in parliamentary research services from other jurisdictions. Parliamentarians often request comparative analysis of public policy issues or legislation pertaining to other jurisdictions. This kind of analysis can be important in a globalized world. International and regional networks of parliamentary research services may be an important source of support in the provision of research products. Experience in many parliaments suggests that the exchange of documents, peer-review processes and videoconferencing between researchers from different parliaments are useful in strengthening the analysis provided to parliamentarians.

While networks have been important for many years, international parliamentary cooperation is deepening. The more prominent networks include the IFLA Library and Research Services for Parliament Section, the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD) and the Exchange Network of Parliaments of Latin America and Caribbean (ENPLAC). Other regionally based networks exist in Nordic countries, Africa, Australasia, Asia-Pacific and Arab countries. While they may include a smaller number of countries or have been more recently created, these newer regionally based networks may be good partners in developing analytical materials for parliaments with similar traditions and contexts. In addition, these networks regularly hold seminars and training sessions for the benefit of their members.

In academia and civil society

To supplement the wisdom and assistance of colleagues in other jurisdictions, specific expertise not readily available within a parliamentary research service may be accessible in academia or in civil society through think-tanks. Caution should prevail, however, when interacting with researchers from universities and think-tanks, as these entities do not necessarily take a non-partisan approach to their work. Frequently, they will comment publicly on policy issues and possibly be associated with some elements of political parties' platforms. Although they tend to rely on evidence to develop their analysis, they often pursue certain public policy outcomes and seek to gain direct access to parliamentarians who have the power to implement legislation or actions that may further the outcomes of their research.

A parliamentary research service will need to balance the value of the expertise found in academia and think-tanks against the risk of being associated with partisan endeavours. One way to lessen this risk is to limit the possibility of direct interactions between these external experts and parliamentarians to multi-party and well-structured settings. For example, it may be preferable to rely on these experts as witnesses in a parliamentary hearing focused on a specific field of study.

Alternatively, the parliamentary research service could invite academics who hold diverse views to write papers on specific issues concerning a public policy issue of interest to parliamentarians.

To supplement the wisdom and assistance of colleagues in other jurisdictions, specific expertise not readily available within a parliamentary research service may be accessible in academia or in civil society through think-tanks.

These papers could then be summarized for parliamentarians by the research service, with proper recognition of the contribution of these academics. Hosting seminars or round-table discussions with external experts is another option. Videos or written summaries of such sessions could be made available to parliamentarians.

Corporate support

As consumers of analytical products, parliamentarians favour material that is easy to use, convenient and visually pleasing. In order to produce material with these attributes, research services may wish to consider developing partnerships with colleagues or external groups that can assist with the “production” side of their service offering.

The ability to convey a message in a simple and concise manner may be enriched by reliance on editing and graphic design services. Smaller research services may not have the resources to have such expertise within their unit. However, they may wish to consider acquiring support in this area when producing a “marquee” or “high-impact” product. An example of such a product would be a publication provided to all parliamentarians during an orientation event after a general election.

In addition, access to marketing and outreach skills can help the research service to successfully deliver its materials. Reliance on employees who have superior analytical skills will not ensure success if parliamentarians are not aware of the products and services available. Caught up in the busyness of parliamentary duties, even the most well-intentioned parliamentarian may lose sight of the products and services provided by the research service. Therefore, it is advisable to seek the advice of communication experts within the parliamentary administration when designing products or approaches to raise awareness among the parliamentary clientele about the services available from the research service. Being proactive in ensuring that the service is understood by parliamentarians and their staff is essential, especially when there is high turnover of the staff that directly supports parliamentarians in their daily activities.

Another aspect to consider is the expectation among the parliamentary clientele that material will be available digitally via web applications. To meet that expectation, developing links with partners who have expertise in web design and management should be a priority. It is not necessary to develop a fully fledged IT capacity within the research service. The intent is not to acquire technology and seek to appear modern by providing computers and such electronic devices as smartphones and tablets. Technology is an enabler and not a goal in itself. Rather, the objective is to take advantage of the opportunities presented by digital access to support parliamentarians with analytical material.

Technology should be used to present information in a user-friendly and intuitive manner in a way that matches expectations from parliamentarians. In their personal lives, they often rely on technology to conduct a variety of transactions – for example, when they make travel arrangements, consult public libraries, make purchases online and read online documents. Their user experience during these transactions will create expectations about how they access support for their parliamentary work. Access to a solid information management / information technology (IM/IT) infrastructure, along with the expertise of people who can produce and manage user-centred web applications, will be an asset for a research service. In addition, it will help to ensure that the research service offerings are integrated efficiently with other online services provided to the legislature.

The ability to convey a message in a simple and concise manner may be enriched by reliance on editing and graphic design services. ... Access to marketing and outreach skills can also help the research service to successfully deliver its materials.

VIII. Reporting to parliament

A parliamentary research service would most likely rely on taxpayer-funded resources to function. In some countries, the parliamentary research services may even be developed with the assistance of external funding from donors. In both contexts, the parliamentary administrations will be expected to be accountable for their use of public funds either to the general public or to a body that represents their interests, possibly to a parliamentary oversight committee. Taking advantage of opportunities to report to parliament will help the research service to demonstrate its political neutrality and be transparent about the role it plays in supporting parliament. It may be a key step in gaining the respect of parliamentarians.

The approach to reporting will be guided by the governance structure of the research service and the parliamentary tool through which the service was established. In some parliaments, the reporting requirements could be specified in the legislation or motion used to create or expand

Possible ways to report to parliament

- Annual reports to parliament
- Presentations to parliamentary committees
- Informal meetings with leaders of parliamentary caucuses
- Reports of feedback received

the research service. For example, if legislation led to the establishment of the research service or the administrative unit where it is located, the administration may be required to report formally to an oversight committee. Official annual reports on the activities of the service and how it spends its budget may also be required. The accountability for such reporting activities would typically be assigned to a specific senior parliamentary official, such as a secretary general or clerk, a parliamentary librarian or a chief information officer.

Under such a formal legislated process, the senior parliamentary official may be expected to participate in a hearing of a multi-party oversight committee of parliamentarians. The objective of the hearing would be to share information about the overall activities of the research service. The hearing would likely focus on a review of the type of activities conducted during the year, how the budget was spent and priorities for the upcoming year. This information would most likely be integrated into the report of the broader administrative unit, such as the whole of the chamber administration or the parliamentary library administration, depending on the organizational location of the research service. Typically, this would occur during the budget appropriation process.

Even in the absence of formalized reporting processes, there are benefits to reporting activities and challenges to parliamentarians in some organized manner. Support for the research service is less difficult to secure when the parliamentary clientele has a better appreciation for the work it conducts. A research service that can explain how it shapes its activities to respond to the needs of parliamentarians is better positioned to demonstrate its relevance.

Reporting to parliament could be done in different ways. For example, it could be through the production of annual reports released to the public or tabled in parliament, presentations to parliamentary committees and presiding officers, consultations with multi-party parliamentary bodies, informal meetings with leaders of governing and opposition parties or even the release of the results of annual surveys of parliamentary clients.

The culture of each parliamentary administration and the parliamentary tools used to establish or strengthen the service will shape the type of information to be reported to parliament. Typically, it would include the following:

- the mandate of the research service;
- the size of the budget and the number of employees;
- the activities conducted by the research service – examples include:
 - number of publications prepared;
 - number of requests from parliamentarians answered;
 - number of multi-party parliamentary bodies supported by the research service; and
 - number of training seminars offered;

- highlights of special projects, investments or key events;
- highlights of feedback from the parliamentary clientele; and
- performance against criteria of particular relevance to the parliamentary administration (e.g., service standards, budget goals, completion of special projects).

The process governing how the research service reports on its activities to senior parliamentary officials and/or parliamentarians provides an opportunity to assess whether the resources allocated to the service are aligned with the mandate given to the service. It also provides an opportunity to discuss whether the scope of activities included in the mandate should be modified. An annual assessment of the information provided and the reaction of senior parliamentary officials and parliamentarians should help determine how managers and their employees can improve the research service.

A research service that can explain how it shapes its activities to respond to the needs of parliamentarians is better positioned to demonstrate its relevance.

IX. Expanding an existing parliamentary research service

Many of the considerations highlighted in this document are relevant to parliaments that already benefit from a modest research service. For the managers of these services, the challenges will generally reside in developing business cases for additional resources to assist in delivering a more complete suite of products and services to meet growing demands from the parliamentary clientele.

As outlined earlier in this document, a service that benefits from more resources is likely to be better positioned to offer:

- both synthesis and analytical products;
- general and customized products;
- services to individual parliamentarians and parliamentary bodies;
- analysis of a broader range of proposed legislation, policies and programmes considered by parliament; and
- expertise in a wider range of public policy fields.

While any of these expanded services may be valuable, they will be in competition for limited resources available to the whole of the parliamentary administration. Demonstrating value for the service will be necessary but likely not sufficient.

At a minimum, the managers of existing services should ensure they are reporting on the use of existing resources to parliament. Also, given that they benefit from real experience with parliamentarians, managers should track the needs of parliamentarians that cannot be met with current resources levels and inform decision-makers about options to fulfil such needs. Suggesting that a new product or service be offered as a pilot project may assist in developing a business case for additional resources by collecting information about the real cost and demand for such product or service.

In the end, general impressions towards the research service will also matter. The research service must be seen as a credible unit that offers quality and non-partisan support on an ongoing basis. Parliamentarians and decision-makers who have a positive user-experience with the research unit are more likely to be open to its requests, particularly if the unit is considered to be a valuable partner to other units in the parliamentary administration.

X. Some lessons learned

Over the years, members of the Library and Research Services for Parliaments Section of IFLA have learned important lessons about practices, behaviours and activities likely to lead to success in their organizations. Here are some broad observations based on their collective experience.

Without a doubt, the most common challenges are the lack of resources and increased competition for limited budgets. For this reason, it is extremely important to continually demonstrate the valuable contribution of a research service to parliamentarians' ability to perform their daily parliamentary tasks successfully.

Above all, the employees of the parliamentary research service must build credibility with parliamentary clients and win their trust. To achieve this goal, the Service will need to rely on good and competent staff who deliver reliable and relevant products and services.

Faced with more and more sources of information, parliamentarians need help sifting through material and particularly navigating competing and conflicting electronic information sources. The research service is uniquely placed to be the trusted service, entirely dedicated to them, that understands the changing world of the parliament and can provide them with the products and services that they need. The following observations, taken from the experience of successful parliamentary research services, are offered to help research services achieve this objective.

- Human interaction through a telephone conversation or a face-to-face meeting is essential for building trust, even though the vast majority of interactions may take place electronically (e.g., through email or text messaging).
- Establishing contact very soon after a parliamentarian makes a request helps show how committed the research service is to understanding the requirement and serving the parliamentary client well.
- Managers should balance the need for researchers to be physically close to their parliamentary clients, and the need to keep a respectful distance to avoid the perception of political proximity to parliamentarians.
- Products prepared for parliamentary clients should be reviewed to ensure objectivity and accuracy. Material should be void of political advice and should instead focus on facts that are properly sourced.
- Employees' skills must be kept up to date. Resources should be available for professional development. For example, accessing a library collection that includes the purchase or licensing of professional development material will be an asset. Resources should also be available to facilitate researchers' attendance at seminars and conferences or even the pursuit of further education.
- Soliciting and acting on user feedback on the quality and relevance of services, through formal evaluations and regular and informal conversations, is important. Quick contact after receiving requests is a way of gathering feedback informally. It is important not only that the feedback is acted upon but also that users know that it is.
- Internal communication should not be an afterthought. All staff must be on the same page, sharing a common understanding of their purpose, operating principles and client-service focus. Even a small percentage of transactions that fail to meet parliamentarians' expectations may be enough to create a crisis of confidence.
- The research service should adopt a "no surprise" approach to its activities. Despite all the safeguards an administration may establish, conflicts and difficult situations will arise. Maintaining good communication with the senior officials responsible for the research service (e.g., the presiding officer or the secretary general) and keeping them informed of the service's activities will be critical to enlisting the support of his or her office when difficult situations occur.

Many considerations can shape the design of a parliamentary research service. The observations offered here should not be construed as strict recipes to be followed. Ultimately, they must be assessed and pursued with deference to the culture and context within which the parliamentary research service is established.

Above all, the employees of the parliamentary research service must build credibility with parliamentary clients and win their trust. To achieve this goal, the service will need to rely on good and competent staff who deliver reliable and relevant products and services.

Appendix A

Sample elements for a Service Charter

The establishment of a parliamentary research service can generate a range of expectations about the activities it would pursue and how it would respond to the needs of parliamentarians. In an environment often characterized by strong partisanship, some jurisdictions may see value in developing a Service Charter to guide the operation of a parliamentary research service. Here are some examples of elements that could be included in a Service Charter:

- Values adopted by the organization
- Scope of services available to parliamentarians and their staff:
 - Research services offered to support parliamentary duties only
 - Exclusion of partisan activities (e.g., speech writing for political events)
 - Exclusion of support for a parliamentarian’s educational pursuit
 - Exclusion of financial, medical or legal advice of a personal nature
- Descriptions of who can access the research services – examples may include:
 - Individual parliamentarians
 - Multi-party parliamentary bodies (e.g., oversight committees, parliamentary commissions or associations)
 - Caucuses or parliamentary groups
 - Senior parliamentary officials
 - Parliamentary press
 - Public
- Operating principles should address:
 - Whether the research service produces analysis on a proactive basis
 - Confidentiality provisions
 - Parameters used in setting priorities for handling requests
 - Service standards, such as:
 - requirements to produce material in certain languages
 - deadlines for responding to different types of requests
 - format for material (e.g., compatibility with certain electronic devices)
- Respect of copyright and licensing rights

Appendix B

Sample quality control checklist

Tone

- Tone is appropriate for the audience and purpose
- Response is balanced, impartial and free of both real and perceived political bias
- Response assists in educating the parliamentary client in an appropriate manner

Style and format

- Style and format are appropriate for the audience and purpose
- Arguments and thoughts are presented in an analytically sound, clear, logical and properly documented manner
- Title indicates context
- Opening paragraph indicates issues to be addressed
- Response addresses all important elements of the topic
- Numbering and lettering of headings, subheadings, figures and tables are sequential
- Tables, figures, etc. are referenced in text
- Table of contents, subheadings, lists, tables, figures and glossary are used for clarification
- Footnotes, bibliographic references, capitalization and abbreviations are complete and accurate

Language

- Language is appropriate for the audience and purpose; it is plain and accessible
- Active voice is used
- Grammar, punctuation and spelling are correct
- At first use, abbreviations are preceded by an indication of meaning
- Sentences and paragraphs are short
- Excessive and redundant modifiers, repetition, irrelevant context and unnecessary detail are removed
- Jargon and technical terminology are used sparingly and explained clearly

Accuracy

- Reference documents used to prepare the response are timely, relevant and credible
- Facts, quotations, retyped material, tables and figures are accurate, and sources are cited properly
- Dates and numbers make sense
- Numerical data and units of measurement are consistent
- Calculations are correct
- Data discrepancies are explained
- Hyperlinks are active and current

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ISBN 078-92-9142-630-0 (IPU)

Original version: English
Cover design and layout by Ludovica Cavallari
Printed in France by Imprimerie Courand et Associés




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