



Give the government a piece of your mind

The Government of Canada Fellows Program offers a select few Canadians an opportunity to share their ideas with the Feds

The Government of Canada is the largest, and easily the most complex, enterprise in the country. It will spend approximately \$210 billion this year, employ more than 470,000 people, simultaneously manage dozens of different lines of business, operate 1,600 points of service across Canada and be present in 180 countries around the world. And now, this fascinating colossus is inviting you to give it a piece of your mind.

The Government of Canada Fellows Program, an executive exchange program between the federal public service and the business community, academia, NGOs, and other levels of government, was announced by Prime Minister Harper in October 2006. This new program offers a select few Canadians an opportunity to share their experience and ideas with the federal government and, just as importantly, gives senior public servants a window to see the world outside of government.

Participation in the Fellows Program should be of interest to all private sector organizations that interact with the federal government on a regular basis. Furthermore, given the program's focus on candidates with exceptional strategic thinking skills and management excellence, CMAs both in and out of government should be considered prime candidates to become Fellows.

A tool for public service renewal

The Fellows Program is the successor to the Business-Government Executive Exchange Program, which was established in 1987 but fell victim to the 1994 deficit-reduction program review exercise. While it's a long-established tradition in the United States, the flow of senior executives back and forth between government and the private sector has been less common in Canada. The Fellows Program represents a renewed attempt to inject greater mutual awareness and understanding between the private



and public sectors in Canada.

Bearing the imprimatur of the Prime Minister lends prestige and distinction to the Fellows Program. In addition, the seriousness with which the government takes this initiative is indicated clearly by the hands-on involvement of the Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet, Canada's most senior public servant and non-partisan advisor to Prime Minister Harper. Kevin Lynch chairs the Advisory Panel that reviews applicants for, and selects participants in, the program, ensuring that the Prime Minister's objectives will be met.

Moreover, Lynch has identified the Government of Canada Fellows Program as a key component of his long-term plan to renew Canada's federal public service. In his *Fourteenth Annual Report to the Prime Minister on the Public Service of Canada*, the Clerk pointed to the program as an important tool with which to equip senior public servants on the road to renewal. One of the objectives of renewal is to make sustained investments in development and learning across the public service, thereby building up talent and enhancing the commitment of employees. Implementing the Fellows Program is one of the short term actions identified by the Clerk as a means to this end. As Lynch says:

Public service renewal is one of my top priorities and we cannot succeed in this endeavour without strong support from within and outside government. Initiatives like the Fellows Program provide a unique opportunity for the public and private sectors to broaden our perspective, build mutual understanding and ultimately, develop our next generation of leaders.

Details

According to The Leadership Network of the Canada Public Service Agency, candidates for the program should have the following attributes:

- Extensive professional experience at a senior level.
- Exceptional leadership skills, including values and ethics, strategic thinking, engagement and management excellence.
- An interest and ability to succeed in an assignment outside their current work environment.
- The ability to build and sustain good working relationships.
- A willingness to return to the federal public service for 5 years (for public servant participants).



Government participants must be identified and sponsored by their Deputy Head and approved by the Clerk of the Privy Council and a committee of senior public servants. Participants going into the federal public service will be nominated by the President/CEO of their organization, and be selected by an Advisory Panel chaired by the Clerk and include leaders from business, academia, not-for-profit organizations and other levels of government.

Exchange assignments can range from six to twelve months' duration. People selected to become Fellows remain employees of their home organization for purposes of compensation and other benefits, and will be subject to relevant security clearance requirements. Participants coming into the federal government must respect the principles and intent of the *Values and Ethics Code for the Public Service* and refrain from engaging in political activity that may impair, or be perceived as impairing, his or her ability to perform assigned duties in a politically impartial manner. For their part, public servant participants remain subject to the *Code* while on assignment.

The Fellows Program includes a formal learning component supported by the Canada School of Public Service, in addition to the practical experiences gained from the specific assignment. This includes an orientation program to how the federal government works, including the parliamentary process, and a mentor to help guide each Fellow throughout the exchange period.

This fall, six senior public servants left their government posts on assignment, with an equal number of private sector participants coming into the Government of Canada in January 2008. In future years, up to 20 senior executives may be chosen to participate. The public servants who went out on assignment in September 2007 have a varied departmental background, including the Canada Food Inspection Agency, Natural Resources Canada, and Health Canada. Applications for participants coming into government had to be received by September, with the selection process being made later in the fall.

The benefits

Participating in the Fellows Program should reward individual participants and sponsors, be they government or private sector, in many ways. For individuals selected as Fellows, they will be given a unique oppor-

tunity to work in a completely new environment for up to one full year, testing and building their adaptation and leadership skills, enhancing their knowledge and expertise, expanding personal networks and, ideally, increasing their value to their employer.

From the Government of Canada's perspective, the Fellows Program should enrich Canada's public service by offering public servants the chance to obtain diversified experience in sectors of the economy and society that they need to understand, initiate partnerships with business, NGOs, academia, and public servants from other levels of government, and build the pool of talented leaders within the federal government. The ideal public servant of the future will include senior executives for whom government has not been their only career.

For private sector organizations sponsoring a Fellow, their employee would be exposed directly to the federal policy development and decision-making processes, including stakeholder engagement and consultations, gaining a unique understanding of how government works and how complex public policy issues are managed. These broader understandings and networks should deliver value to the enterprise when the Fellow returns to share knowledge and experiences and cultivates the new relationships planted during the exchange.

To learn more about the program, visit www.psagency-agencecfp.gc.ca/leadership/fp-pd/index_e.asp. ■

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