

COBA 2008 CONFERENCE  
NOVEMBER 6, 2008

### **What We Are Trying to Achieve**

- Agencies and tribunals have a similar objective to the Ontario government, namely to provide high quality services to Ontarians responsively and equitably. To meet this objective, agencies and tribunals must share similar values as the Ontario Public Service (OPS), particularly as they relate to diversity and accessibility. Like the OPS, agencies and tribunals must reflect the public they serve, be responsive to the diverse needs of the public and employees, to increase inclusion, as well as strive to ensure decisions and decision-making processes are equitable and barrier-free.
- Like the OPS, agencies and tribunals in Ontario must operate within the requirements of the Ontario Human Rights Code, the Ontarians with Disabilities Act and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

### **Diversity Challenges for Agencies and Tribunals**

- A major concern of agencies and tribunals is public perception regarding fair, open and transparent processes and practices. A large-scale study in the United Kingdom revealed that about one in five tribunal users belonging to minority ethnic groups (e.g. South Asian, Caribbean, Somali) perceived unfairness in the process due to their ethnicity. However, these individuals were less likely to perceive the process as unfair when the tribunal itself was ethnically diverse. This raises a second issue, namely that agencies and tribunals need to reflect the public they serve.
- Communication and awareness are two issues facing agencies and tribunals consistent in the literature. As agencies and tribunals are responsible for handling specific complex matters, this can hinder understanding about how these organizations work and make decisions, particularly among individuals whose first language is not English. In the case of tribunals specifically, language and cultural differences can present serious complications when users represent themselves at hearings. Coupled with insufficient or inaccurate information about tribunals, language and cultural differences were found to be critical barriers to people accessing the tribunal system and perceiving the process as being fair.

### **Best Practices and Recommendations**

- Members of agencies and tribunals need to increase their cultural competency (e.g. an individual's understanding and appreciation of cultural differences) to recognize and remove potential barriers within decision-making processes. Doing so will enable the public to participate effectively in tribunal processes and receive fair, equitable and accessible services.

- Like the Ontario Public Service, agencies and tribunals must reflect the public they serve, particularly on decision-making panels.
- Agencies and tribunals need to be responsive to the diverse needs of Ontarians when accessing services. This can include: providing translator services, producing information in alternate formats and languages other than French and English, ensuring full accessibility for persons with disabilities and training front line staff on how to provide helpful customer service to a diverse range of clients.

### **The OPS and Diversity**

- The OPS is finalizing its Diversity Strategic Plan, which sets out a change management approach for embedding diversity in the public sector as well as our services to the public. The goals of the Diversity Strategic Plan are to deliver on OPS business commitments and improve service delivery through an inclusive, diverse, equitable and accessible public service that reflects Ontario, increase employee engagement and achieve culturally responsive institutions and practices.
- The Diversity Strategic Plan includes four key strategies drive transformational change in the OPS. These are: informed, committed leadership and strong governance, behavioural and cultural transformation, mainstreaming of diversity objectives and measurement, evaluation and reporting. Our Plan will leverage and build upon existing OPS policy and business processes and systems.
- The OPS Diversity Office will act as a Centre of Excellence regarding diversity and inclusion. The OPS Diversity Office is available to agencies and tribunals interested in learning more about what they can do to make their workplaces more responsive, equitable and accessible to employees and clients.