

## Arm's-Length Agencies and Canadian Public Administration

### Chapter Summary

Arm's-length agencies, public agencies, semi-independent bodies, non-department organizations, agencies, boards, and commissions, or semi-independent government organizations, all constitute a growing influence on Canadian citizens, government, and society. The growing influx of arm's-length agencies outside of government have been attributed to government taking on too many roles, while others suggest that with the changing role of government, it was necessary to develop arm's-length organizations. In particular, New Public Management (NPM) has been suggested as a possible rationale for why arm's-length agencies developed in Canada, as they can offer the option of alternative service delivery (ASD) and be seen to be responding to citizens' requests.

The effective governance of arm's-length agencies is intensely debated and is tied to their level of independence on government. Four studies are analyzed for their responses to two questions posed by the author: Do semi-independent agencies behave differently than other types of government organizations? Do they deliver the benefits that are associated with them? In the first of two Canadian studies, it was found that improvements to the service were inconclusive; there was not a direct relationship found between the existence of an arm's-length organization and service quality. The study questioned whether organizational form had an independent effect on organizational efficiency. The answer to this question was that there were some improvements, but the conclusion was indeterminate. In the subsequent three studies, it was found that citizens were not necessarily more satisfied with arm's-length organizations or independent public bodies than traditional government departments or agencies.

It is stressed throughout this chapter that there is a distinct void in the Canadian public administration literature regarding the accountability of arm's-length agencies, particularly focusing

on their effectiveness, successes, and requirements for evaluation and assessment. It was strongly advocated that a more inductive process be followed in qualitative research in order to allow a broader theory relative to the overall costs and benefits of arm's-length agencies in Canada's political system.

## Annotated Weblinks

- 1) <http://www.polarcom.gc.ca/eng/content/canadian-non-governmental-organizations>

A list by the Government of Canada of all the non-governmental organizations in Canada, in alphabetical order, and a brief description of their purposes and missions.

- 2) <http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/fund-fina/cfngo-ciong/p1.html>

The Department of Justice published this handbook that outlines the eligibility requirements and financial reporting standards for funding of non-governmental organizations in Canada.

- 3) <https://www.oecd.org/canada/43506633.pdf>

The report "Distributed Public Governance: Agencies, Authorities and Other Autonomous Bodies in Canada" was co-written by Toby Fyfe and Tom Fitzpatrick, former members of the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat. The report offers a review of the history of autonomous agencies in Canada and their relationship to the federal government.