

Special Report No. 20  
March 1998

to the Legislative Assembly  
of British Columbia



# Ombuds

## *Strategic Plan*



2001  
2000  
1999  
1998  
1997

*Promoting  
Fairness  
for  
British  
Columbia*

Special Report No. 20  
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to the Legislative Assembly  
of British Columbia

*Ombuds*  
*Strategic Plan*  
1997-2001

*Promoting  
Fairness  
for  
British  
Columbia*

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# INTRODUCTION

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The Office of the Ombudsman is committed to continuous quality improvement in all of its work. In order to fulfil our statutory mandate in the years to come, we must be efficient, effective, open and strategic. The only constant at the Office in recent years has been change. The number of public bodies we investigate escalated over a four-year period from 180 to 2,800. Although our budget increased marginally to permit the hiring of new staff to cope with the increased workload, the numbers of inquiries and complaints to our Office rose sharply during proclamation of the new public bodies. Everyone working for the Office has shown creativity, resilience and tenacity during this period. For that, all of the management team is grateful.

Regardless of the number of complaints, we must be available to all people who need to rely on our Office. We must continue to ensure our investigations are impartial, independent and thorough. We must pursue with vigour the promotion of fairness in the administrative practices of government and other public bodies (“authorities”).

In order to attain these goals more effectively and efficiently, our Office has recently undertaken a strategic management planning process. All of the staff have been involved in the creation of this plan for the period from now until the year 2001. We shared the proposed plan with a randomly chosen sample of people who work for authorities. The two groups, one in Victoria and one in Vancouver, represented authorities with whom we have had a long-established working relationship and some that have recently come within our jurisdiction to investigate. They represented both small and large agencies. I was honoured that so many senior officials took the time to participate in the sessions. We welcomed their input and insight into our Vision, Guiding Principles and Core Strategies.

The central theme of our Office is to promote fairness for British Columbia. Our focus until the year 2001 will be to strive for improved quality of service to benefit the public and authorities. We are committed to making our strategic plan a reality.



Dulcie McCallum  
Ombudsman for the Province of BC

# STRATEGIC PLANNING MODEL

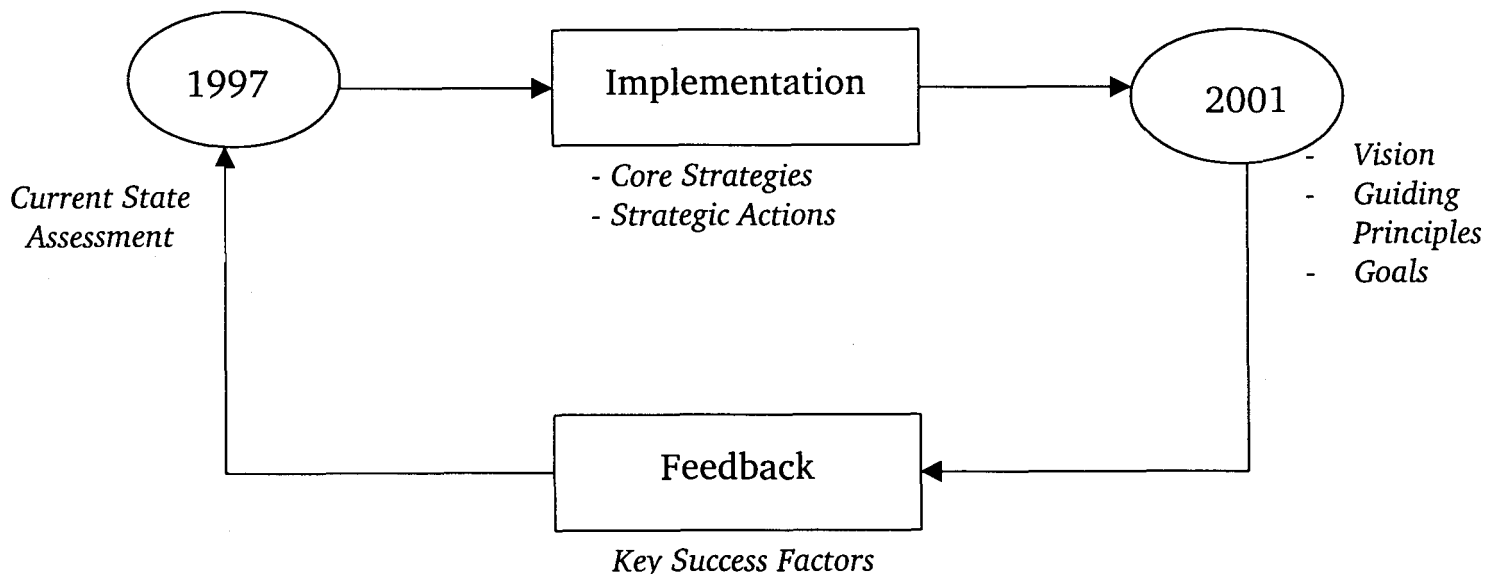
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Our Strategic Planning Model is based on four main elements:

- Describing our **VISION**
- Identifying the **KEY SUCCESS FACTORS** to monitor progress
- Assessing our **CURRENT STATE**
- Implementing **CORE STRATEGIES** and Strategic Actions

This Strategic Plan records each of these main elements as well as background information and additional details based on planning work carried out in the summer and fall of 1997.

The plan lays out the vision for the Office of the Ombudsman and identifies the core strategies and actions we need to achieve that vision. Although unknown challenges will arise during the five-year time frame of the Strategic Plan, we expect that the plan will function as a guide for the Ombudsman and staff in the Office of the Ombudsman.



# OMBUDSMAN VISION

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***The Ombudsman  
is an independent  
Officer of the  
Legislature  
appointed pursuant  
to the Ombudsman  
Act.***

The Vision for the Office of the  
Ombudsman today and for the future is  
to ensure fairness and accountability in  
public administration in  
British Columbia by

*improving our quality of service to benefit the  
public and authorities;*

*working in a supportive environment and  
serving as a role model for our Guiding  
Principles; and*

*fulfilling our statutory mandate.*

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# Guiding Principles

***In keeping with our Goal of a Principled Approach these Guiding Principles govern the way we do our work with the public, authorities and one another. These Guiding Principles are intended to be consistent with the principles of Natural Justice and Administrative Fairness, the Ombudsman Act, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and relevant international covenants, treaties and agreements.***

## *Respect*

Treating everyone with courtesy, dignity and respect.

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## *Leadership*

Modeling and promoting fairness, equity, clarity, innovation and consistency.

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## *Equality*

Promoting equality, inclusion and access for all persons regardless of such factors as age, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, physical or mental ability, race, national or ethnic origin, religion or creed, language, and family or economic status.

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## *Empowerment*

Encouraging and helping people using public services to find their own solutions to problems.

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## *Continuous Learning*

Promoting and encouraging continuous learning for staff, authorities and the public.

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## *Cooperation*

Using cooperation, empathy and good will in all our work.

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## *Teamwork*

Combining the diversity of experience and talent of people who have a unity of purpose and commitment to success.

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## *Integrity*

Being independent, impartial and honest.

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# Mandate

***The mandate and function of the Office of the Ombudsman are set out in the Ombudsman Act. The Ombudsman can investigate complaints about the administrative decisions or actions of authorities. Appendix A contains the Schedule of Authorities within the Ombudsman's jurisdiction.***

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## *Why We Exist*

- To ensure that every member of the public is treated fairly by authorities.
  - To promote fairness in public administration.
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## *Whom We Serve*

- The public.
  - The Legislature of British Columbia.
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## *What We Do*

- Respond to inquiries from the public.
  - Conduct thorough, impartial and independent investigations of complaints.
  - Resolve complaints.
  - Consult with, provide reasons and make recommendations to authorities to improve administrative practices.
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# Goals

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## *High-quality Service*

We:

- Have, and put into practice, clear policies and procedures that are fair, comprehensive, documented and available;
  - are committed to providing high-quality service and assisting the authorities we investigate to do the same;
  - provide a service that is equitable, accessible and inclusive for all people;
  - continue to promote an evolving definition of equality, accessibility and inclusiveness;
  - strive for continuous improvement in our services; and
  - are committed to educating people about administrative fairness and the role of the Ombudsman.
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## *Principled Approach*

We :

- demonstrate respectful behaviour towards one another, and all people with whom we come in contact;
  - strive to be respected, valued and recognized as a positive role model by acting according to our Guiding Principles; and
  - encourage authorities to establish and follow a set of guiding principles.
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## *Thorough and Impartial Investigations*

We:

- undertake thorough and impartial investigations;
  - attempt to resolve complaints through consultation when appropriate;
  - make recommendations and issue reports that are based on sound analysis of the facts and are consistent with our statutory mandate, the principles of natural justice and administrative fairness;
  - actively employ a systemic approach, one that incorporates a broad view of the factors that cause complaints, in order to identify, investigate and resolve the complaints; and
  - promote the development of skills and organizational structures that enhance the systemic approach to investigations.
- 

## *Well-being in our Workplace*

We:

- encourage a supporting and trusting environment that promotes open and effective communication;
  - share a common purpose and participate in decision making;
  - are valued, heard and share a sense of high morale; and
  - maximize learning and the enhancement of skills.
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## *Appropriate Use of Technology*

We employ technology in an effective, respectful and sensitive manner to:

- facilitate investigations and administrative processes;
  - manage information;
  - identify trends and systemic issues;
  - improve communication and business practices; and
  - facilitate research and training in order to acquire knowledge and develop skills.
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# KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

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**Key Success Factors are the measures we use to assess progress towards achieving our vision and goals.**

## *Fulfilling Statutory Mandate*

- Quantitative and qualitative assessment of:
  - adherence to statutes, policies and procedures;
  - investigative work;
  - work load;
  - timeliness of work completion;
  - sound analysis of issues;
  - resolutions of complaints; and
  - recommendations and reports.

## *External Recognition and Satisfaction*

- Survey of authorities:
  - to determine satisfaction with the Ombudsman Office; and
  - to recognize improvement in authority fairness.
- Survey of complainants:
  - to determine satisfaction with the Ombudsman Office; and
  - to recognize improvement in authority fairness.

## *Internal Recognition and Satisfaction*

- Assessment of progress in:
  - establishing sound policies;
  - identifying, investigating and reporting on systemic issues; and
  - improving access to our Office.
- Survey of staff:
  - to determine adherence to the Guiding Principles;
  - to measure morale; and
  - to determine satisfaction with allocation of resources.

# CURRENT STATE ASSESSMENT

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***To achieve our vision, it is important first to recognize the strengths, areas to improve, opportunities and challenges facing us today as an organization. This Current State Assessment is based on an internal staff survey in the summer of 1997.***

*We identify our strengths as:*

- the diversity, talents and commitment of our staff;
- the team structure of our Office organization;
- strong, committed leadership;
- the ***Ombudsman Act***;
- our computer support systems;
- safe, functional and pleasant Office facilities;
- respect for the Office of the Ombudsman by authorities; and
- our ability to deal with a large volume of complaints.

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*We identify the following areas for improvement:*

- the use of internal and external communication tools;
- providing training opportunities, especially for new staff;
- handling work load and backlog that result in delays;
- maintaining morale and a sense of well-being;
- establishing internal quality assurance measures;
- handling the impact of staff turnover on recruitment and training; and
- broadening authorities' understanding of the role of the Ombudsman.

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*We identify our opportunities as:*

- technological advances that make communication and investigations easier;
- national and international growth of Ombudsmanship that improves general knowledge of the role of the Ombudsman;
- development of internal complaint remedies by authorities that reduce the work load for the Office of the Ombudsman;
- collaboration with other Ombudsman offices for sharing ideas, procedures and systems;
- enhanced public profile that builds understanding of the Ombudsman's role;
- education of public and authorities that improves understanding of administrative fairness; and
- continued internal learning that increases staff effectiveness and satisfaction.

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*We identify our challenges as:*

- budget restrictions and government downsizing that increase complaints;
- population growth that increases complaints;
- poor understanding of the Ombudsman's role;
- service challenge that arises from cultural and ethnic diversity;
- public distrust of government that increases complaints;
- growing complexity of government regulation and complaints that make investigations more time consuming;
- adapting to the change or potential change of Ombudsman; and
- increase in number of complaints that can lead to delay in our handling of complaints.

# CORE STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

*The Core Strategies represent the major ongoing initiatives to be implemented or improved in order to achieve our vision and goals. Specific actions are listed to carry out each of these Core Strategies. Year One of the Strategic Plan is 1997, which is when our process began and we started work on our Short-term Actions.*

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## Core Strategy 1 - Ombudswork

*To manage work load in the most efficient and fair manner possible, having regard to our statutory mandate and limitations on resources.*

### *Short-term Actions*

- Develop and implement consistent policy to ensure files are handled in the order they are received unless priority criteria are met:
  - advise complainants of expected delay at the outset and tell them about the priority system.
- Monitor work backlog and report backlog to management:
  - develop a strategy to address delays in work.
- Develop maximum use of available remedies. Keep an active list of available remedies and incorporate them into the policy manual.
- Assess the need for development of a threshold for complaint investigations.
- Install an office-wide electronic calendar.
- Refine closing categories.
- Further improve the ability to identify problems through regular consultation with authorities in order to reduce complaints and seek resolution.

### *Longer-term Actions*

- Utilize database to minimize research time on investigations.
- Explore opportunities for transferring tasks from Ombudsman Officers to the intake team.
- Clarify the role of the authority in collecting and providing information.
- Provide training for staff in management of time, stress and workload.
- Ensure timely investigative file closings.
- Develop a policy re: secondment and leave backfills.
- Provide opportunities to practicum students to learn Ombudswork.
- Use technology to reduce repetitive tasks.
- Identify and eliminate administrative requirements that are out of proportion to the time spent on assessing a specific complaint.

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## Core Strategy 2 - Ombudsmanship

*To broaden and enhance our understanding of Ombudsmanship and to generate creative approaches to the application of these principles in collaboration with Ombudsman offices in other jurisdictions.*

### *Short-term Actions*

- Develop and support staff exchanges with other Ombudsman offices including Ombuds-like positions in authorities.
- Establish and support consultation with colleagues in other Ombudsman offices who may have information, insight or strategies for dealing with specific types of situations.
- Work together with other Ombudsman offices and Ombudsman associations to establish Ombuds offices in areas where there are none. Maintain and support membership in the International Ombudsman Institute and the United States Ombudsman Association. Participate in development of the Canadian Ombudsman Association and the North American Region.
- Work in partnership with an educational centre and with other Ombudsman offices to develop a training package on administrative fairness.

### *Longer-term Actions*

- Sell case tracker system and policy manuals.
- Hold video conferences with other Ombudsman offices.
- Explore additional sponsorship and funding possibilities.
- Promote and support establishment of a centre of Ombudsman studies.



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# Core Strategy 3 - Continuous Quality Improvement

*To develop and implement actions to achieve high-quality service on a continuous basis.*

## *Short-term Actions*

- Document the components of our quality assurance programs:
  - develop clear policies and procedures;
  - support continuous development of skills for all staff;
  - review one another's work;
  - implement an internal review policy for complainants; and
  - conduct regular planning and review of performance.
- Establish a means to obtain measurable feedback from authorities and the public.
- Improve training:
  - continue to design and implement a comprehensive orientation program;
  - clarify work expectations;
  - have individuals and teams identify training needs in their work plans; and
  - have legal and systems teams consult with other teams regarding training and resources needs.
- Develop a means to assess the accessibility of the services of the Office of the Ombudsman.
- Train all staff on issues of equality, diversity and accessibility and on what resources are required to achieve these goals.

## *Longer-term Actions*

- Establish incentives to encourage staff to suggest ways of continuously improving service delivery.
- Use Guiding Principles as a more comprehensive mechanism for continuous quality improvement.

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# Core Strategy 4 - Systemic Approach to Investigations

*To enhance fair public administration by actively employing a systemic approach to the investigation and resolution of complaints.*

## *Short-term Actions*

- Further develop the concept of a systemic approach to investigations:
  - develop the concept through consultation between management strategic team and staff;
  - incorporate the definition into all Office policy manuals;
  - train all staff in how to employ a systemic approach and how to identify a systemic issue;
  - amend all policy manuals to ensure staff are aware that a systemic approach is encouraged; and
  - develop a means to assess the effectiveness of a systemic approach.
- Provide Office-wide training in systemic approaches to investigations:
  - consolidate available and necessary resources in the Office library; and
  - engage guest and in-house speakers.
- Identify one to three systemic issues per team over the next year:
  - have each employee work plan identify which systemic issue she or he is responsible for.
- Modify case tracker to enable:
  - identifying whether there is a systemic issue;
  - identifying what systemic approach or resolution is to be adopted;
  - tracking systemic issues identified; and
  - tracking the implementation of recommendations.
- Ensure that successful systemic approaches are shared:
  - provide a confidential intranet site for staff.

## *Longer-term Actions*

- Revisit systemic issues on an ongoing basis by reviewing closings:
  - use a case-conferencing approach.
- Assist authorities to develop approaches for identifying and resolving systemic problems and complaints.
- Invite authorities for regular in-service sessions to discuss and present initiatives and programs within government – include the practice in each team's annual work plan.
- Identify a process to recognize systemic change initiated by the Office and implemented by authorities.

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## **Core Strategy 5 - External Education and Communication**

*To broaden the public profile and improve external understanding of the role of the Ombudsman and administrative fairness through well-planned initiatives directed towards both the public and authorities.*

### *Short-term Actions*

- Post all public reports on our web site and regularly update information about available remedies.
- Enhance and support the role of volunteers especially in the Office and in schools.
- Promote and support establishment of a team-focused strategy to meet with authorities, at all levels, to discuss with and inform them about the role of the Office of the Ombudsman and administrative fairness.
- Develop and build a liaison with ethnic cultural groups and service agencies.
- Incorporate an education component into casework.
- Maintain a public presence at special events.
- Provide qualified interpreters as required.

### *Longer-term Actions*

- Develop a program aimed at schools in collaboration with the Knowledge Network.
- Update and maintain multilingual brochures.
- Promote and support the interest of staff in other languages and cultures.
- Establish a specialist for press releases.
- Establish liaison and develop an outreach program to First Nations groups and, in particular, make a presentation to the First Nations Summit.
- Establish an annual forum for authorities to discuss administrative fairness issues with the Ombudsman.
- Develop a video on the role of the Ombudsman's Office for general public presentation that will be posted on our web site.

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## Core Strategy 6 – Well-being

*To promote well-being in the workplace through effective communication and adherence to our Guiding Principles.*

### *Short-term Actions*

- Maintain our employment equity plan.
- Ensure that the Ombudsman or her delegate notes ongoing initiatives, significant cases, etc. through regular e-mails to staff.
- Foster greater recognition of achievements.
- Ensure that management decision making is clear and consistent.
- Establish an internal staff grievance procedure.

### *Longer-term Actions*

- Encourage staff to identify their training needs.
- Hold regular security and safety meetings.
- Hold regular staff meetings, including meetings between Vancouver and Victoria Offices (once or twice a year).
- Clarify management's expectations about work load and backlog.
- Encourage staff development opportunities within the Office.
- Offer variation in tasks, duties and/or responsibilities for all staff.
- Include a review of the Guiding Principles in performance reviews.
- Clarify what decisions will include management discussion with staff and which will not, and commit to consulting where appropriate.
- Ensure that management recognizes and explains the need for change.
- Hold regular celebrations and recognitions, such as meetings and social events.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Schedule**

#### ***Authorities***

1. Ministries of the government.
2. A person, corporation, commission, board, bureau or authority who is or the majority of the members of which are, or the majority of the members of the board of management or board of directors of which are,
  - (a) appointed by an **Act**, minister, the Lieutenant Governor in Council,
  - (b) in the discharge of their duties, public officers or servants of the government, or
  - (c) responsible to the government.
3. A corporation the ownership of which or a majority of the shares of which is vested in the government.
4. Municipalities.
5. Regional Districts.
6. The Islands Trust established under the ***Islands Trust Act***.
7. Improvement Districts as defined in the ***Municipal Act***.
8. The Capital Improvement District under the ***Capital Commission Act***.
9. Boards, committees, commissions or similar bodies established under the ***Municipal Act*** or ***Vancouver Charter***;
10. The Resort Municipality of Whistler and the Whistler Resort Association.
11. A local trust committee, the Trust Council, the Trust Fund Board and the executive committee and persons to whom their powers are delegated under the ***Islands Trust Act***.
12. Library boards as defined in the ***Library Act***.
13. Regional Parks Boards established under the ***Parks (Regional) Act*** and the Cultus Lake Park Board.
14. A greater board as defined in section 872 of the ***Municipal Act***.
15. Development districts, water users' communities, comptroller and regional water manager under the ***Water Act***.
16. The commissioners of a district defined in section 58 of the ***Drainage, Ditch and Dike Act*** and an engineer, commissioner, inspector of dikes or land settlement board acting under that **Act**.
17. The British Columbia Diking Authority and a Diking authority under the ***Dike Maintenance Act***.
18. The Okanagan Kootenay Sterile Insect Release Board.
19. Regional transit commissions established under the ***British Columbia Transit Act***.

20. A corporation
  - (a) more than 50% of the issued voting shares of which are owned by one or more of the authorities listed in section 4 to 19 or this section, or
  - (b) that is controlled by one or more of the authorities listed in section 4 to 19 and, for the purposes of ascertaining control, a corporation is controlled by one or more of these authorities if a majority of the members of the corporation or of its board of directors or board of management consists of either or both of the following:
    - (i) persons appointed as members by the authorities;
    - (ii) officers or employees of an authority acting as such.
21. Schools and boards as defined in the **School Act**.
22. Universities as defined in the **University Act**.
23. The University of Northern British Columbia.
24. Royal Roads University.
25. Institutions as defined in the **College and Institute Act**.
26. Hospitals and boards of management of hospitals as defined in the **Hospital Act**.
27. Governing bodies of professional and occupational associations that are established or continued by an **Act**.
28. Regional Health Boards and Community Health Councils established under the **Health Authorities Act**.
29. Regional Hospital Districts under the **Hospital District Act**.
30. Technical University of British Columbia.