

# 2021-2026 STRATEGIC PLAN





Our office is located on the unceded traditional lands of the Lək'wəŋən (Lekwungen) People and ancestors and our work extends across the homelands of the Indigenous Peoples within what we now call British Columbia. We honour the many territorial keepers of the lands and waters where we work.

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# A MESSAGE FROM THE OMBUDSPERSON

I am pleased to present the Strategic Plan for the Office of the Ombudsperson for April 1, 2021 through March 31, 2026.

This plan was developed through consultation with staff, public servants, community agencies and members of the public who all contributed to that discussion and greatly informed our assessment of our current state, our progress during the previous five year strategic plan, and our future direction. My thanks to all of them for their time and interest in the process.

Looking back, it's remarkable to see how much our organization has grown and evolved since we last engaged in this kind of planning process in 2016. Some of that growth reflects the work done under our 2016-2021 Strategic Plan: Our pilot of a new program of preventative ombudship is now an ongoing part of our office. We also saw growth arising out of our investigative work – specifically, recommendations we made in 2017 in *Misfire: The 2012 Ministry of Health Employment Terminations and Related Matters* led to the passage of the *Public Interest Disclosure Act* in May 2018. This established a distinct additional investigative mandate for our office and requires us to oversee the public sector's implementation of the new whistleblower protection law.

As a result we have added new operational teams to reflect this broader work. With this growth has come new challenges as we find new ways of working

together as a larger staff on a broader range of roles and responsibilities.

At the same time, the last year of our 2016-2021 Strategic Plan, already a period of significant reflection with an eye to the future, brought forward new perspectives to address:

- The COVID-19 pandemic forced all of us to adapt to new remote ways of working and connecting, integrating new technology and practice into our daily lives, while also challenging our office to adapt our oversight approaches during an extended provincial and global emergency that necessitated rapid government actions with significant impacts on many public services affecting service delivery, health and safety, and individual rights and liberties.
- The development of our Indigenous Communities Services Plan commenced shortly after the start of the pandemic and we have had to adapt by utilizing online approaches to engaging with Indigenous communities.
- An expanded discourse in the public sector and broader society around racism, diversity and inclusion led us to further broaden our thinking around how we engage with and learn about diverse people and communities, as well as

how we think about our oversight role and its relationship to systemic inequity. This led to our initiation of a Diversity and Inclusion initiative that will examine both our internal and external processes to ensure that our office and our work appropriately reflects and serves the diversity of the province.

These major initiatives arising during the period covered by our prior strategic plan and already in progress are reflected widely across multiple goals in this plan and will have broad impacts across our organization over the life of this new plan. These projects will support the implementation of many of the specific strategies noted under each goal in this plan, and will also lead to the development of further recommendations and initiatives to support our goals and principles.

Additionally, given the age of our current legacy case management database we have undertaken a systems replacement project that will have significant impacts and benefits over the next year and the long-term life of the new system. This will offer us opportunities to review and optimize processes and find new efficiencies and features with the objectives of both enhancing our service and better supporting our staff.

I am proud and humbled to have the opportunity to lead this organization through the years covered by this plan and very much look forward to working with our staff

and British Columbians to achieve the goals we have set here.



Jay Chalke  
Ombudsperson  
Province of British Columbia

# OUR PLANNING FRAMEWORK

Our office uses a variety of planning tools to ensure we are delivering our services in a manner that is efficient, thorough, timely, relevant and independent.

Our **Strategic Plan** is the starting point in the framework, integrating a broad range of input with an assessment of our current environment, a renewal of our vision and guiding principles, the establishment of core goals and objectives, and identification of the overall strategies that will help us achieve the desired future over a five-year period.

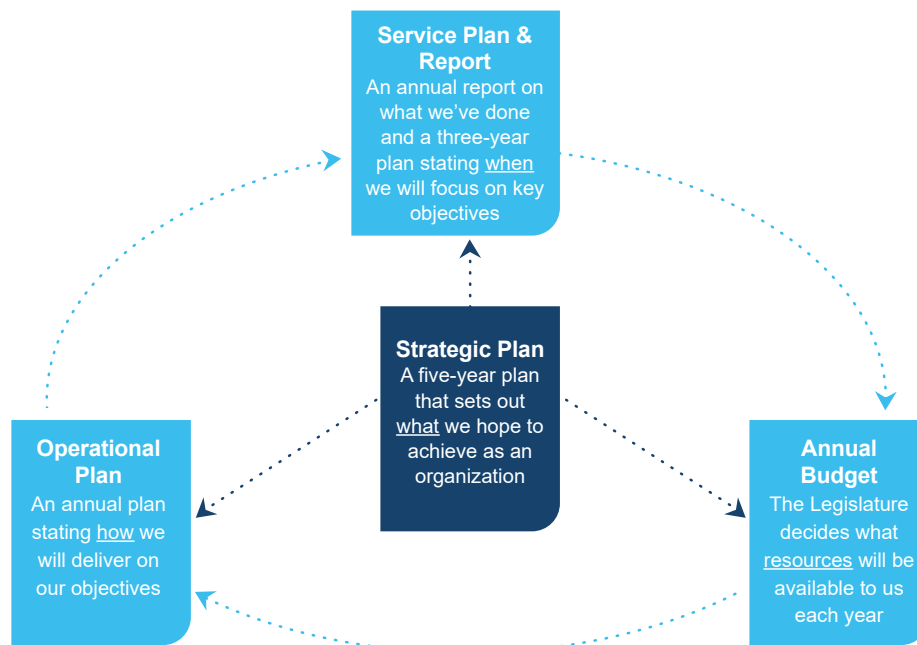
Over the five-year life of the Strategic Plan, a yearly cycle unfolds in which we set more specific priorities and activities based on our annual budget and current environment, as well as report on our performance. This cycle involves two key components - our rolling three-year Service Plan and Report and our annual Operational Plan.

Each Fall, we present our **Service Plan and Report** to the Legislative Assembly's Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services. Based on the

core goals and objectives from the Strategic Plan, this document identifies the major priorities for the following fiscal year (April 1 - March 31) along with an overall strategic direction for the following two fiscal years. It also establishes the performance measures and targets for the office while reporting on results from the past fiscal year and our strategic activities to date in the current fiscal year.

Based on our Service Plan and Report and our annual budget submission, the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services reports to the Legislative Assembly each year with a recommendation for our **Annual Budget**.

At the beginning of each fiscal year we produce our annual **Operational Plan**. The operational plan is the most detailed of the three planning documents and identifies the specific initiatives and activities that we will undertake in that fiscal year to achieve the priorities and performance targets set out in our Service Plan, based on our strategic goals and objectives coupled with our current resources, priorities and overall circumstances.

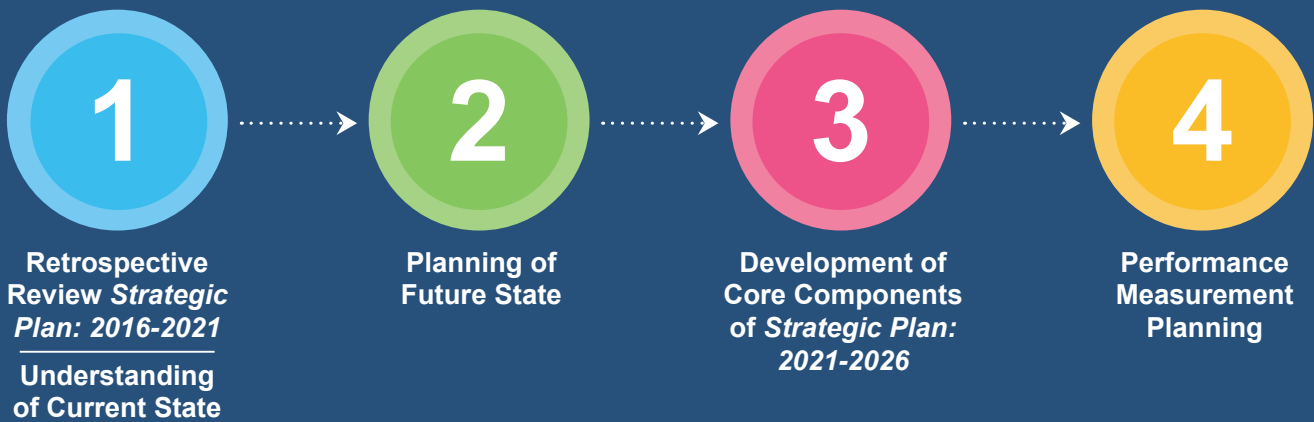


# DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

This is the sixth Strategic Plan for the office of the Ombudsperson. As the overarching plan for the office, it provides for an assessment of the current environment; a renewal of the guiding vision, mandate and principles; the establishment of new or reprofiled goals and objectives; the identification of strategies that will help the office achieve the desired future;

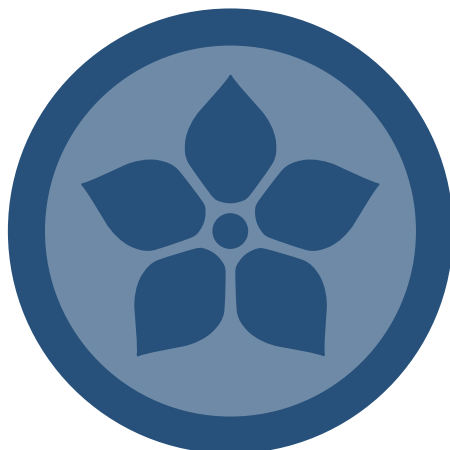
and a plan to develop and publicly release outcome-based performance measures for gauging results.

The office engaged MNP to conduct a series of internal and external consultative activities to support the development of these components of the 2021–2026 Strategic Plan. This was undertaken in four key stages:



Through this engagement-driven process, which included surveys, written submissions, and facilitated online sessions with stakeholders including members of the public, community organizations, public

agencies and employees, and our staff, we developed the following components of our new *2021-2026 Strategic Plan*:



## Vision and Mandate

Principles

Goals and Objectives

Strategies

Performance Measures Plan

## OUR VISION

*Our Vision is a description of our ultimate goal – the ideal future state our office works towards:*

**Fairness and Accountability  
in British Columbia's Public  
Services**



## OUR MANDATE

*As an independent office of the Legislature, the Ombudsperson serves the public interest under the mandates outlined in the Ombudsperson Act and the Public Interest Disclosure Act. We are:*

**BC's Independent Voice for Fairness  
and Accountability**

The Office of the Ombudsperson is responsible for overseeing the fairness and accountability of the public sector. We do this by hearing people's concerns about individual or systemic maladministration or wrongdoing, and conducting impartial investigations to identify whether steps should be taken to address them. We address the problems we find by resolving complaints through settlements, making findings and recommendations, and reporting to the Legislature and the public on our results. Through education and consultation, we also support public sector organizations to proactively strengthen fairness in their programs and services.





# OUR CORE PRINCIPLES

*These principles set out what we expect of ourselves and the public programs and services under our jurisdiction, and guide us in everything we do:*

## Fairness

Administrative fairness requires that we, and the organizations we oversee, ensure that processes, decisions and services are fair. This requires that the perspectives of all parties be considered to ensure that people are treated equitably and not marginalized by barriers, power imbalances, historical or structural inequality, race or identity when their interests are affected by public authorities. This also applies to our services.

## Accountability

Accountability requires that appropriate action be taken when an organization has made an error, acted unfairly or wrongly, or identified a structural problem. Accountable organizations welcome complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve, foster a “speak up” culture internally, and make things right when concerns are found to have merit. Accountability also compels us to apply our resources to where we have the greatest positive impact on the public through improvements to government programs and services, and that we measure and report out on our performance.

## Integrity

Integrity encompasses ethical and honest conduct and obliges organizations we oversee to act consistently and in accordance with their mandate, principles and policies. It also requires that we strive to live up to the standards we expect of others, by “walking the talk” and modeling the principles of fairness and accountability we seek to uphold.

## Respect

Treating people with respect requires accepting and embracing difference, accommodating challenges and barriers to access and communication, listening to people with humility and curiosity, and recognizing the value of every persons’ identity, dignity and privacy. A respectful organization is inclusive and welcomes diversity, works from a trauma-informed, empathetic and collaborative perspective, and fosters a culturally and psychologically safe environment.

## Impartiality

Impartiality requires that public servants not be influenced by personal interest or bias, and that they maintain an open mind, hearing all perspectives and weighing the evidence objectively. This also applies to us. Our ability to remain neutral and impartial in overseeing the public sector is rooted in our structural independence from government.

## Service

We must always be mindful that, while we are independent from government and the rest of the public service, we all serve the public. We work in the public interest and deliver timely, effective and impactful service. In doing this, we act with professionalism and with an eye to help those who contact us within the boundaries of our mandate, provide clear and useful information, and make our services easily accessible to everyone.

# OUR CURRENT STATE

## Where are we now?

Before we could plan for the future and determine what we would work towards, we needed to examine our organization’s current state. We consulted with current staff, the authorities we work with, and the public to gather their input. From the information we collected, we identified the key strengths, challenges and opportunities that form the context for our planning focus.

## External Operating Environment

Our Strengths	Our Challenges	Our Opportunities
<p><b>Reputation and Role</b></p> <p>The office has a strong reputation as an independent and impartial voice for administrative fairness.</p>	<p><b>Changing Nature of Public Services</b></p> <p>Ongoing changes in how public services are administered by public authorities, including new systems of dispute resolution and increasing use of automated decision-making.</p>	<p><b>Focusing on Impact</b></p> <p>Engaging in preventative and investigative actions most likely to broadly benefit British Columbians.</p>
<p><b>Professional Approach</b></p> <p>Staff are respectful, empathetic and thorough in their dealings with complainants and authorities.</p>	<p><b>Public Awareness</b></p> <p>Many members of the public and public authorities have limited awareness and understanding of the role of the Ombudsperson.</p>	<p><b>Supporting Diversity &amp; Inclusion</b></p> <p>Making our organization and our services more inclusive and striving to have our work support Reconciliation and the diversity of the people of British Columbia.</p>
<p><b>Working with Authorities</b></p> <p>Building relationships with public authorities through education and consultation to ensure administrative processes are fair.</p>	<p><b>Scope</b></p> <p>Our generalist Ombuds jurisdiction and geographic, demographic and cultural diversity to consider in providing services.</p>	<p><b>Reporting</b></p> <p>Sharing the conclusions of individual and systemic investigations, and the implementation of recommendations, more effectively and broadly.</p>
<p><b>Accessibility for the Public</b></p> <p>Our processes, publications and information about our office are accessible to the public.</p>	<p><b>Meeting the Volume of Enquiries</b></p> <p>Given our resources, the number and complexity of inquiries and complaints we receive contributes to longer than desirable timelines in handling some complaints.</p>	<p><b>Engaging Legislators</b></p> <p>Working effectively with legislators to address issues in public administration identified in our reports.</p>

## Internal Operating Environment

### Our Strengths

#### Staff

Our dedicated, diverse, and highly competent staff bring new ideas and energy to the organization.

#### Culture

Our organizational culture is supportive and recognized for its collegiality and teamwork.

#### Office Environment

We have an effective, modern environment that supports our work and continues to improve and adapt.

#### Administrative Policy Support

Many internal policies have been updated to better support our staff and continue to be reviewed and revised.

### Our Challenges

#### Staff Training

Breadth of public administration we oversee and unique skill requirements necessitate significant focus on training relative to our small size.

#### Retaining Organizational Knowledge

Documenting and effectively organizing our knowledge of the ever-changing policies and practices of public authorities we oversee.

#### Operational Policy Support

Some operational policies need review and renewal to better support and reflect our practice and foster clarity and consistency.

#### Organizational Growth

Our service lines have expanded, challenging us to adapt how we manage and communicate.

### Our Opportunities

#### Retention and Career Development

Supporting opportunities to develop staff to build capacity and improve retention.

#### Technology

Necessary replacement of our Case Tracking System offers opportunities to improve service, efficiency, analysis and reporting.

#### New Mandate

The *Public Interest Disclosure Act* has added an entirely new mandate and process to our operations, diversifying our work and creating new opportunities for our staff.

#### Supporting Diversity & Inclusion

We can be a more inclusive organization by striving to attract and retain people with diverse experiences and valuing and supporting the diversity that exists within our staff.

# OUR GOALS

## What are we working towards?

As an organization, we have set goals that support our Vision and our Mandate and align with our Core Principles as we look ahead to 2025/26. The goals are broad, but cover fundamental aspects of what our organization will work to achieve over the next five years.

1. Deepen our connection with the public
2. Enhance and modernize our services
3. Expand our investigative impact on fairness in public services
4. Help authorities to prevent unfairness before complaints arise
5. Support implementation of whistleblower protections across the broader public sector
6. Advance and support Reconciliation through our work with Indigenous peoples
7. Be an inclusive, supportive and engaged workplace

# 1. Deepen our connection with the public

Increase our understanding of the diverse public we serve and increase the public’s knowledge about the role of the Ombudsperson and what to expect from fair and accountable public services, including our own.

**How we will do this:**

OBJECTIVES	Reach a Diverse Public	Communicate our Value
<p><b>STRATEGIES</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Use clear, inclusive and accessible language in all of our communications with the public.</li> <li>B. Conduct targeted outreach to groups, sectors and demographics identified using evidence-based approaches to identify underrepresented communities, and groups impacted by program changes and emerging issues in public administration.</li> <li>C. Develop and implement an intersectional data collection and analysis framework to learn more about the diverse public we serve.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>D. Produce a range of materials, online tools and events that educate the public about how to have their concerns heard and addressed.</li> <li>E. Share the impact of our work more widely through media, social media, and our website.</li> <li>F. Enhance our reporting to the public and legislators on our value and impact to ensure that the breadth and depth of our work, expertise of our staff, and diverse ways that we benefit the public interest are communicated and recognized.</li> </ul>

## 2. Enhance and modernize our services

Provide fair, high quality services across all of our programs to the diverse people who seek our assistance, and all those involved with our investigations. This includes leveraging technology and refining our work processes to improve service quality.

### *How we will do this:*

OBJECTIVES	Optimize Service	Be More Accountable	Serve a Diverse Public
<p><b>STRATEGIES</b></p>	<p>A. Improve timeliness of services by identifying and implementing efficiencies that do not compromise our principles or service quality.</p> <p>B. Further develop knowledge management practices and tools to ensure that staff have ready access to the information they need about government programs, referrals, and our own policies.</p> <p>C. Develop an online platform to provide people with access to information about their case status.</p> <p>D. Expand our online “complaint checker” and improve navigation and accessibility to provide convenient 24/7 access to information about our jurisdiction and options available to people to resolve their concerns.</p>	<p>E. Use evidence-based approaches to identifying service improvements through a quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis framework that allows us to more holistically assess our productivity and service quality, including obtaining feedback from people who access our services.</p> <p>F. Implement a publicly accessible policy communicating how we handle complaints about our own services.</p>	<p>G. Ensure that our staff are supported in serving a diverse public by providing regular training on the history and ongoing impacts of colonialism, culturally safe and trauma-informed practices, and approaches to working with people with varying backgrounds, lived experiences and identities.</p> <p>H. Apply Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) to our policy and process development to ensure our services are accessible, trauma-informed, culturally safe and fair for everyone.</p>

### 3. Expand our investigative impact on fairness in public services

Make meaningful and demonstrable improvements in government programs and services through our work under the *Ombudsperson Act*. This includes our early resolution program connecting complainants with processes and people that can help, our investigation of individual complaints from the public about their interactions with public authorities, and systemic investigations and reports.

**How we will do this:**

OBJECTIVES	Optimize Investigation Issue Identification	Increase Positive Outcomes
<p><b>STRATEGIES</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Use data and research to improve the early identification of emerging issues and prioritize investigations where we can make a high impact, positive difference.</li> <li>B. Apply an intersectional lens to identify and address systemic inequity and disproportionate impacts arising from the structures, policies and practices of public bodies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>C. Increase the use of early resolution to support effective and timely responses by public authorities.</li> <li>D. Increase the number of complaint investigations we conduct to open more opportunities to seek positive resolutions.</li> <li>E. Improve how we track and report on the implementation of settlements for individual complaint investigations and recommendations from investigative reports.</li> <li>F. Work with legislators to increase opportunities for formal consideration of our public reports.</li> </ul>

## 4. Help authorities to prevent unfairness before complaints arise

Support public authorities to make meaningful and demonstrable improvements in the fairness of government programs and services before complaints arise through the proactive educational and collaborative work of our Public Authority Consultation and Training (PACT) program.

### *How we will do this:*

OBJECTIVES	Facilitate Proactive Systemic Improvements	Expand our Impact
<p><b>STRATEGIES</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Expand our voluntary consultation services so that more public authorities proactively embed fairness into their policy and program design and delivery.</li> <li>B. Use complaint data to identify opportunities for proactive engagement with public authorities so they address emerging or systemic service issues, using an intersectional lens to target any structural inequities that disproportionately impact certain groups.</li> <li>C. Provide advice and training based on complaint trends to help build capacity so that the broader public sector can respond more effectively to public complaints.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>D. Improve how we follow through, track, evaluate and report out on the implementation of outcomes from voluntary consultations with public authorities.</li> <li>E. Increase public authority awareness of and engagement with the PACT program, and expand our approaches to fostering learning and collaboration to support fairness and accountability across the broader public sector.</li> <li>F. Further expand on and evaluate the suite of training products and services offered on topics relating to administrative fairness and public interest disclosure.</li> </ul>



## 5. Support implementation of whistleblower protections across the broader public sector

We will continue to implement our mandate under the *Public Interest Disclosure Act* (PIDA) and support the implementation of the legislation across the broader public sector. This includes supporting additional public bodies as they are called upon to implement PIDA within their organizations as the scope of the act is widened. It also includes developing our own capacity to effectively manage the corresponding increase in requests for advice, disclosures of wrongdoing and complaints of reprisal we will receive as PIDA is applied more broadly throughout the public sector.

### *How we will do this:*

OBJECTIVES	Optimize Case Management	Support Effective Implementation
<p><b>STRATEGIES</b></p>	<p>A. Review and improve our procedures to support efficient and proportionate treatment of different public interest disclosure matters.</p> <p>B. Develop service standards and performance measures to sustain high standards through the growth of the public interest disclosure program.</p>	<p>C. Further develop ongoing educational curriculum, resources and outreach strategies directed to public sector employees about how to seek advice and report wrongdoing and reprisal.</p> <p>D. Develop and deliver implementation guidance to public sector bodies identified for phased expansion of coverage under PIDA including support for chief executives, designated officers and supervisors about how to carry out their roles and responsibilities under PIDA.</p>

## 6. Advance and support Reconciliation through our work with Indigenous peoples

In collaboration with Indigenous communities, develop principles and practices that embrace decolonial approaches, so we can better serve Indigenous peoples. To do this, our office will ensure that our processes are culturally safe and welcoming, that our staff understand Indigenous history, including the attempted erasure of Indigenous cultures and languages, and the lived outcomes of ongoing colonialism and structural inequity and can apply that knowledge to their work, and that our work is responsive to and aligned with the broader objectives of Reconciliation.

### How we will do this:

OBJECTIVES	Engage with Indigenous peoples	Broaden our Approaches
<p><b>STRATEGIES</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Continue to engage with Indigenous communities and organizations on the development and implementation of our Indigenous Communities Service Plan.</li> <li>B. Develop a long-term outreach strategy to build ongoing relationships with Indigenous communities and organizations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>C. Develop a recruitment and training strategy to build internal knowledge of Indigenous history and culture and the legal frameworks and institutions that impact Indigenous peoples, and enhance our staff's capacity to promote trust and safety and be responsive to the concerns and interests of Indigenous peoples.</li> <li>D. Engage in consultation and research to identify ways in which our mandate may be applied to address jurisdictional issues relating to unfair impacts of ongoing colonial structures and structural inequity.</li> </ul>

## 7. Be an inclusive, supportive and engaged workplace

As an employer we will support our employees in their work and maintain their professional development, be adaptable to changing circumstances, promote internal collaboration and transparency, build an inclusive culture to embrace difference and diversity, and ensure that all staff are treated with dignity and respect as valued members of our team.

### *How we will do this:*

OBJECTIVES	Attract and Retain the Best	Work Better Together
<p><b>STRATEGIES</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Develop strategies through the Diversity and Inclusion Initiative to promote diversity in our recruitment and staffing and further strengthen our inclusive workplace culture.</li> <li>B. Continue to support staff development and retention through training and opportunities that help them in their current and future roles.</li> <li>C. Review and update our investigative and intake policies and training to better guide staff in their work and promote internal consistency and transparency.</li> <li>D. Implement a long-term policy supporting flexible work arrangements for staff that promotes staff health, engagement, effectiveness and retention and ensures efficient leased space utilization.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>E. Enhance processes for orienting and equipping new staff across all teams and positions to ensure consistency and excellence.</li> <li>F. Promote an internal culture that supports information sharing and collaboration within and across teams to ensure service excellence.</li> <li>G. Provide modern tools that support collaboration and communication recognizing remote workers and varied working and learning styles.</li> <li>H. Apply Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) to all internal policy development.</li> </ul>

# PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

## *2021/22 and beyond*

Over the past few years we have set out to improve our performance measurement and reporting. These efforts have included engaging with an expert consultant, undertaking an interjurisdictional review of practices in the ombuds and oversight sector, and consulting with members of the Legislature’s Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services. This background will inform our approach to performance measurement and reporting over the life of this plan to provide more meaningful insight into our services, operations and impact. We want our work and our value to be well understood, and want to promote trust in our organization by demonstrating the accountability that we expect of all public services.

The purpose of this new performance measurement model is to better reflect the **impacts** of our services rather than relying mainly on output measures. This outcome-focused approach is informed by the BC Performance Reporting Principles and will be developed over multiple years.

In the first year of our plan, we will implement new survey-based approaches to learn more about





the public we serve and their perception and understanding of our office, and the experiences of people who contact us for assistance.

These survey measures for 2021/2022 will be posted on our website in September 2021. For continuity and accountability, our measures for 2021/2022 will include our previously established performance measures from 2020/2021, with some of these likely to be eliminated going forward for future years. Performance measures for 2022/23 will be finalized in the fall of 2021, and included in our 2022/23-2024/25 Service Plan and Report. A similar approach will be applied in future years.

In future years, we will clarify targets for these new survey-based measures once we establish benchmark data. We will also introduce additional measures as our *Public Interest Disclosure Act* work continues to grow, and as we explore the potential of our new case management system to provide more nuanced and effective data collection, analysis and reporting.

Going forward, we anticipate developing expanded qualitative assessments of our office’s performance measured against the Principles and Goals set out here in our Strategic Plan, as well as international standards relevant to the work of our office.

# STRATEGIC PLAN AT A GLANCE

<p><b>Vision</b></p> 	<p><b>FAIRNESS AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN BRITISH COLUMBIA'S PUBLIC SERVICES</b></p> <p>The vision describes our ultimate goal – the ideal future state our office works towards.</p>
<p><b>Mandate</b></p> 	<p><b>BRITISH COLUMBIA'S INDEPENDENT VOICE FOR FAIRNESS AND ACCOUNTABILITY</b></p> <p>The Office of the Ombudsperson is responsible for overseeing the fairness and accountability of the public sector. We do this by hearing people's concerns about unfair treatment, systemic practices, or wrongdoing, and conducting impartial investigations to identify whether steps should be taken to address them. We address the problems we find by negotiating resolutions, making findings and recommendations, and reporting to the Legislature and the public on our results. Through education and consultation, we also support public sector organizations to build fairness into their programs and services.</p>
<p><b>Goals</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deepen our connection with the public</li> <li>• Enhance and modernize our services</li> <li>• Expand our investigative impact on fairness in public services</li> <li>• Help authorities to prevent unfairness before complaints arise</li> <li>• Support implementation of whistleblower protections across the broader public sector</li> <li>• Advance and support Reconciliation through our work with Indigenous peoples</li> <li>• Be an inclusive, supportive and engaged workplace</li> </ul>
<p><b>Principles</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fairness</li> <li>• Accountability</li> <li>• Integrity</li> <li>• Respect</li> <li>• Impartiality</li> <li>• Service</li> </ul>



**OMBUDSPERSON**  
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