

Summary of the Evaluation of Statistics Canada's Communications and Dissemination

The Strategic Engagement Field (Field 4) was created in 2019 as part of Statistics Canada's modernization agenda to help foster synergies and horizontal collaboration across the agency and to ensure integration of cross-cutting activities pertaining to the way statistical data and information were conveyed to Canadians. In this field, communications, dissemination, and microdata access activities were organized into two branches: the Communications Branch and the Data Access and Dissemination Branch. Following the agency's recent organizational realignment exercise, which aimed at streamlining operations and better aligning resources, a decision was made to move the functions of Field 4 to other areas of the organization to enable greater synergies throughout the agency, as part of its evolving modernization journey.

The evaluation was conducted in accordance with the Treasury Board Policy on Results and Statistics Canada's Integrated Risk-based Audit and Evaluation Plan 2022/2023 to 2026/2027. The objective of the evaluation was to provide a neutral assessment of the design, delivery and relevance of the communications and dissemination activities of the Strategic Engagement Field (Field 4). The evaluation also identified some of the key risks, opportunities and lessons learned to consider moving forward during the restructuring. Data access and internal communications activities were excluded from the evaluation scope.

Given that the decision to restructure Field 4 was announced during the conduct phase of the evaluation, the recommendations are focused on addressing the foundational elements of the reorganization, leveraging the

lessons learned from Field 4 to help support the transition of communications and dissemination activities to the new structure. The report also provides areas of consideration to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of both the communications and dissemination functions.

Key findings and recommendations

Since the creation of Field 4, communications and dissemination activities have shifted to a greater focus on engagement and user-centric service delivery. The field's structure enabled operational effectiveness within each of the units in the divisions, but in some instances, the lack of integration across divisions hindered overall efficiency. Despite some initial growth in capacity, Field 4 has experienced a substantial rise in workload burden since 2019, which has impacted both the well-being of its employees and the effectiveness of its service delivery.

Communications and dissemination activities were a shared responsibility between Field 4, subject matter areas (SMAs), and regional offices (ROs). However, the lack of understanding around the roles of Stakeholder Relations and Engagement Division and Strategic Communications and Planning Division hindered the effectiveness and efficiency of some communications activities. Opportunities remain to improve integration between Field 4, SMAs and ROs through early involvement; better coordination tools; and a mutual understanding of and agreement on roles and responsibilities, including the role of the Communications Branch as the agency's functional authority for all communication activities.

Performance indicators have been developed for all Field 4 divisions. Metrics for access indicators were used by Field 4 to assess the effectiveness of its activities. While media monitoring reports were also used, the lack of awareness of some SMAs around metrics and limitations in demographic data lessens their usefulness for decision-making.

Performance metrics were not always updated nor monitored consistently, and gaps were also noted in the use of certain operational and availability metrics. While service standards were established for each division, not all divisions monitored whether their service standards were met.

Communications and dissemination services supported the priorities of the agency and the initiatives of SMAs. While the Engagement Playbook provided guidance to SMAs in undertaking engagement activities, some wanted further support from Field 4. Overall, most internal users interviewed were satisfied with the communications and dissemination services provided by Field 4; however, some opportunities for improvement were identified.

Given that capacity, integration and coordination will remain key challenges, the restructuring of communications and dissemination presents an opportunity to reassess their core functions, redefine their roles and explore new ways to generate efficiencies. Change management, including ongoing communication, will be essential during the transition period. Performance measurement is also another area that could be strengthened in the future.

The evaluation proposed three recommendations:

Recommendation 1

The Assistant Chief Statistician (ACS) of the Corporate Strategy and Management Field (Field 3) should ensure that the core functions of the Strategic Communications Branch, including the extent of its role going forward, are clearly determined by

- a. defining communications activities that each core function will, fully or in part, undertake itself, while

- engaging key internal partners, including all SMAs with Information Services (IS) positions, for input.
 - Considering factors such as (but not limited to) value added, risk exposure and capacity of internal partners that could be leveraged
- b. developing a formal framework (e.g., directives, guidelines, gating process, roles and responsibilities of internal partners) to guide communications activities, and sharing it with internal partners.

Recommendation 2

The ACS of Field 3, in collaboration with the ACS of the Census, Regional Services and Operations (Field 7), should ensure that

- a. regular updates on the progress of the transition are provided to all employees
- b. employees directly impacted by the change are informed of the new direction of communications and dissemination and engaged for input during the transition period through various channels (e.g., townhalls)
- c. communications and dissemination services, including key contact information, processes for service requests, and related service standards are updated periodically and promoted through various channels

Recommendation 3

The ACS of Field 3, in collaboration with the ACS of Field 7, should strengthen the performance measurement of their respective communications and dissemination activities by

- a. reviewing their respective performance measurement framework (e.g., performance information profiles, dashboards, strategic roadmaps) to ensure it aligns with the new structure

- b. leveraging existing data to enhance business intelligence and decision-making, including providing guidance to internal partners (e.g., SMAs) to effectively use available information
- c. incorporating more operational efficiency metrics
- d. implementing a process to monitor service standards and satisfaction of internal users.

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