



P A R A

Professional
Association of
Residents of
Alberta

2009 Communications and Strategic Planning Survey Executive Summary

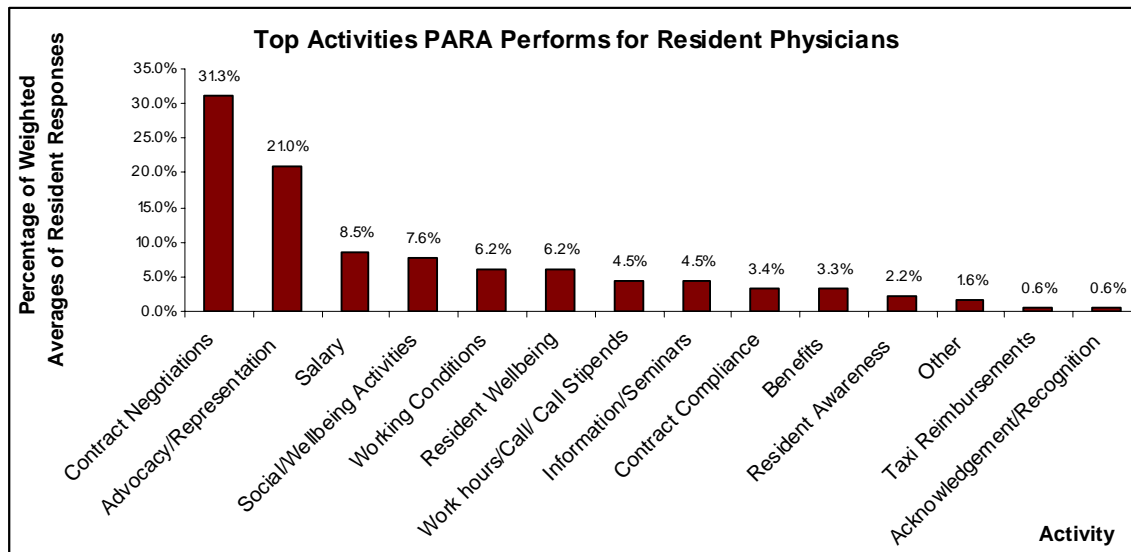
The survey sample who responded to PARA's request for feedback on the organization's communications and performance consisted of 25% of its membership. These respondents significantly prioritized the organization's top functions as contract negotiation, contract compliance, and advocacy—areas where most feel that PARA performs well. PARA's communications were considered to be effective and respondent recommendations revolve largely around increasing the ease of website navigation and establishing it as a resource for all aspects of residency life. In terms of services, a continuation of current seminars and social events was desired, along with increased communication about and greater accessibility to these opportunities. Respondents felt that additional information about PARA initiatives, the negotiation process, and changes from contract to contract would be useful. Tied in with effective negotiations is the need for a reliable consistent presence at stakeholder meetings and discussions to encourage resident physician visibility in healthcare and aid in effective advocacy.

Results

In total, 25 percent of PARA's membership responded to the 2009 Communications & Strategic Planning Survey. Approximately 26 percent of both Calgary and Edmonton urban resident physicians responded. The response sample also included 20% of Calgary rural resident physicians and 19% of Edmonton rural resident physicians.

By far, the top two areas in which PARA is perceived by its membership as performing well are contract negotiations and advocacy. In fact many, if not most of the smaller activities at which residents concluded PARA executed well were specific instances of the function or results

of negotiation or advocacy. For instance, salary, working conditions, work hours, call, call stipends, and benefits are all aspects of contract negotiation, while contract compliance and resident awareness are aspects of resident advocacy and representation.



1

As PARA’s primary function will always be to negotiate the contract of resident physicians in Alberta, the fact that PARA’s membership considers negotiations to be one of the organization’s strengths is a very positive outcome; members feel that PARA is delivering on its core mandate.

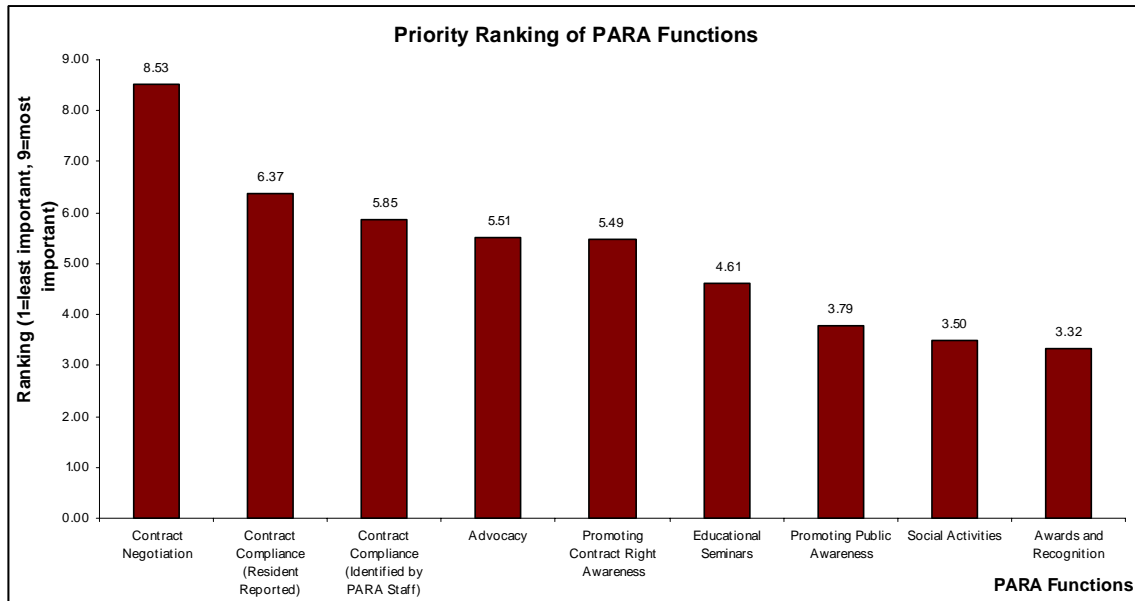
In terms of areas where PARA’s membership feel it could expand its scope of influence, the dominant response was that PARA should continue delivering and enhancing services in the areas where the organization is already currently active. Resident physicians suggested that PARA should focus on the following (in order of resident support):

- Increasing public awareness of the role of resident physicians
- More advocacy on behalf of residents
- Maintenance and enhancement of current services.

The remaining respondents also indicated a desire for an increased number of social events and workshops/ seminars and increasing PARA’s activity at the national level.

¹ Weighted average of responses provided to the question, “What are the top 3 things PARA does for resident physicians?”

To determine how residents prioritize PARA’s current activities, respondents were presented with a list of nine activities and asked to rank their relative importance. The list of activities included services that PARA offers, but could potentially be expanded. A ranking of these activities in order of resident-established importance follows:



2

Contract negotiation and compliance remain the most significant functions that PARA members feel the organization performs. These tasks are followed closely by advocacy on the part of residents, ensuring residents are aware of their contract rights, and providing educational seminars. The least prioritized functions in relative terms were promoting public awareness of residents, organizing social activities, and recognizing exceptional residents and preceptors. Even these functions were not considered unimportant as none of them produced an average rank of less than three. Member priorities are fully in line with PARA’s stated mission and critical success factors.

² This graph is based on weighted averages of respondent priority rankings and illustrates the relative importance to respondents of each of these tasks.

Recommendations by Critical Success Factor

1. Member Engagement and Transparency:

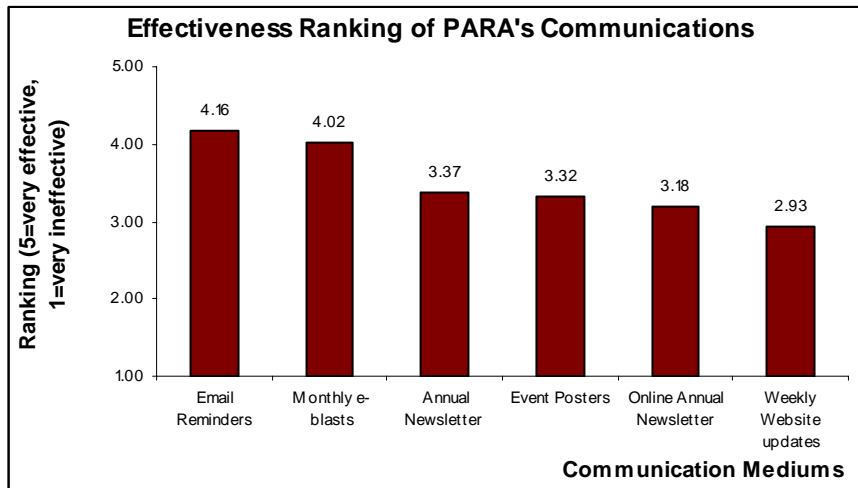
PARA will provide regular and consistent interaction with its members. Membership engagement will be twofold: one, to inform residents about PARA programs and services dedicated to resident well being and education; two, to garner input from the General Membership on setting direction for the organization. Membership engagement will be supported through the PARA staff and board of directors.

Communication Survey Results:

In an attempt to measure how well PARA is performing in terms of transparency and member engagement, the survey also looked at the effectiveness of PARA’s communications.

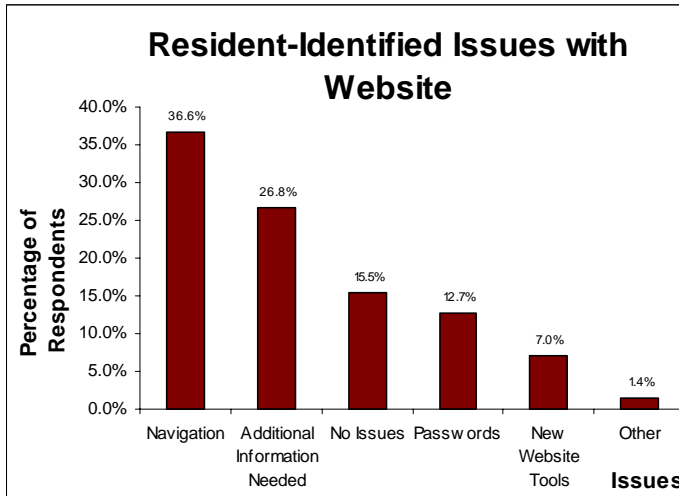
Residents were asked to rate the various communication methods on which PARA relies: monthly eblasts (short

newsletter-like emails), weekly updates on the website, the annual PARA newsletter (July), the online annual newsletter (January), event



posters, and email reminders. Overall, PARA’s communications were all considered to be effective. In relative terms, however, email reminders were ranked as the most effective means of communication while weekly updates on the website were ranked as the least effective. Email reminders and eblasts received the highest positive rankings (effective/very effective) at 79 and 72 percent respectively. These methods are also the most frequently used of PARA’s communications strategy. Respondents were more neutral toward both PARA’s online and regular annual newsletters.

When asked what changes or additions, if any, PARA’s members would like to see to the website, respondents offered many good suggestions. Thirty-six percent of those who responded



requested better navigation, readability, and user friendliness. A little over a quarter of responses requested additional information on the site. (The specifics of these responses will be addressed later in this report.) Problems with passwords and the password system was an issue raised by 12.7% of

respondents. Other respondents suggested the possibility of adding new online tools to the website including forums³, links to a PARA Facebook page, and an online form to update personal information⁴.

Passwords were mentioned as a website issue largely due to the inconvenience of finding and remembering them. Residents felt that this inconvenience could at least partially be addressed by password issued by email at the time of membership activation, a “Forgot Your Password?” option that allows residents to recover their password, and limiting the areas for which password protection is necessary.

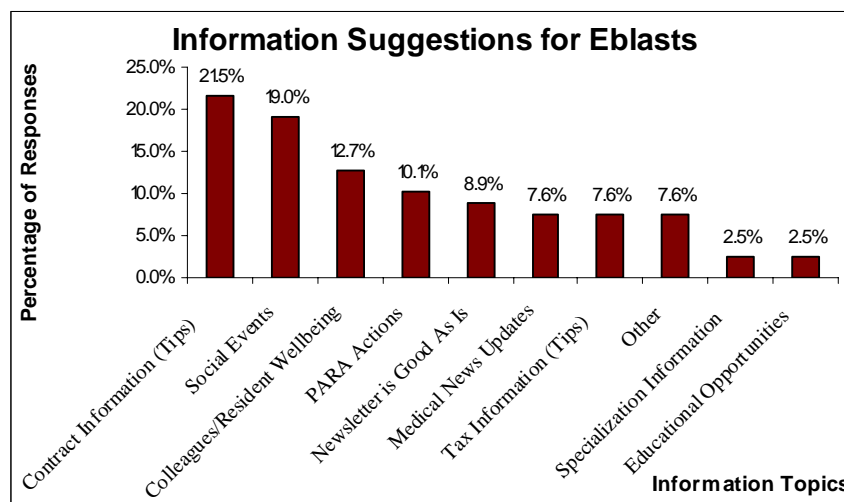
There were many suggestions on useful information that should be added to the website and eblasts—short monthly newsletter emails through which a majority of PARA’s membership

³ The Professional Association of Residents of BC (PAR-BC) makes successful use of several forums as well as offering members the ability to privately message other members (<http://www.par-bc.org/>). However, forums need to be actively integrated into an organization’s communications arsenal or, like the forum of Canadian Association of Internes and Residents (CAIR), it will remain unused (<http://www.cair.ca/tools/forum/index.cfm>).

⁴ The PAR-BC website offers such a form through its contacts menu. This form can be found at <http://www.par-bc.org/updateaddress.php>

communication occurs. The information that respondents most frequently identified as potentially useful website and eblast material follows:

- More contract information
- Dates and event information and more of it⁵
- Resident physician stories
- What PARA is up to
- Tax and financial information
- “Frequently Asked Questions”
- Directions for PARA’s “Spot the Stethoscope”⁶
- Current medical news and events
- Exam and locum advice and guidance for fellowship programs



Responses suggested that better coordination between eblasts and website would make both communications more effective.

Recommendation:

Continue to ensure that PARA staff members are available to act as resources for contract and general residency questions and that residents are aware of their contract rights and how PARA can serve as a resource. Based on resident physician suggestions, make website more user-friendly and offer more online tools and information useful to residents including information on contract interpretation, residents and resident activities, and PARA actions and policy.

⁵ One respondent suggested that PARA should incorporate Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons and College of Family Physicians of Canada dates. Additionally, specific program dates was also a possibility. This respondent acknowledged that this information who require a lot of additional work and noted that PARA might find it worthwhile to add a “webmaster” to its staff who would be responsible for this information and act as intermediary with these programs to obtain this information.

⁶ Another two residents suggested that this contest should be expanded by offering more prizes and allowing a larger number of residents to win by ensuring that no resident can win two months in a row.

Actions:

- **Current and Ongoing Actions:**
 - Current news page – located on PARA website home page.
 - *Know Your Contract* webpage.
 - Inclusion of a link after the “Contract Tip” on each eblast to this page to encourage resident awareness of this site (Ms. Wakal).
 - Encourage board and executive members of PARA to provide the “What PARA does” presentation to program on Academic Half Days to increase awareness of how PARA functions and what it does/can do for its members (including as a resource and support on contract compliance issues).
 - Provide residents with free copies of their current contract in both electronic and hardcopy form. Hard copies are provided at resident orientation or by request to the PARA office.
 - PARA staff remain available to answer questions either by phone or over email.

- **Short-term (3 to 6 months):**
 - Website modifications:
 - Provide contract html form as well as .pdf; provide a table of contents for the contract that allows users to link directly to specific articles (PARA Staff).
 - Reformat *Know Your Contract* page with list of contract tip links in alphabetical order (PARA Staff).
 - Menu bar on website for locating frequently used PARA forms (PARA Staff).
 - Rules and regulations will go up on website. Future eblasts will include the caveat that no resident can win “Spot the Stethoscope” two months in a row⁷ (PARA Staff).

- **Mid-term (6 months to 1 year):**
 - Frequently Asked Questions Page (PARA Staff) covering a variety of topics:
 - Financial information
 - PARA involvement
 - Contract interpretation
 - Stipend and Payroll information
 - Medical and Dental benefit details
 - Etc.
 - At conclusion of contract negotiations, provide list of changes/advances from last contract on website and in eblast (PARA Staff).
 - Post alerts on changes in benefits and administration on website and in eblasts (PARA Staff)
 - Website redesign (PARA Staff):
 - Move top menu bar below PARA title to facilitate ease of navigation.
 - Drop down menus when mouse hovers over menu buttons instead of list at bottom of screen.
 - Facilitate login process by limited the number of password protected pages and providing a password prompt for those who have forgotten it.
 - Quick search function.

⁷ “People should not be allowed to win the spot the stethoscope 2 months in a row”—Survey respondent.

- Link contract to relevant contract tips.
- **Long-term (1 to 3 years):**
 - Additional online tools (PARA Staff with input from Board):
 - Consider provision of forum/message board only if there is a plan for ensuring that these features are actually used. Consider adding link to a facebook page.⁸
 - Provide an online form similar to PAR-BC's to allow residents to more easily update their contact information.⁹
 - Additional online information (PARA Staff with input from Board).
 - More resident visual content: pictures of resident physicians, activities, multimedia.¹⁰
 - Every second year, professional photographer has a photo shoot with resident physicians.
 - These pictures uploaded to website.
 - Residency resource section with financial information, transition to residency information, and transition to practice information.¹¹
 - Develop a timeline of contract negotiations and contract and policy changes over time so membership can more easily identify improvements.
 - Expand *Know your Contract* Section.
 - New eblast content to consider: medical news, tax tips, and new policy information, resident stories/anecdotes/publications, pictures, PARA Board of Directors Meeting initiatives/outcomes (PARA Staff with input from Board).
 - Performance evaluation surveys should be offered on a regular basis.

⁸ Questions about how active PARA should be on this page and what relationship the organization will have with the page will need to be addressed.

⁹ An example of such a form can be found on PAR-BC's website at <http://www.par-bc.org/updateaddress.php>

¹⁰ PAR-BC has videos of some of their residents discussing what a resident is and what they do (<http://www.par-bc.org/>)

¹¹ Similar to what can be found on the PAIRO website:

- Financial Primer <http://www.pairo.org/Content/Default.aspx?pg=1359>
- Transition to Residency <http://www.pairo.org/Content/Default.aspx?pg=1340>
- Transition to Practice <http://www.pairo.org/Content/Default.aspx?pg=1002>

2. Member Services and Programs

PARA will provide residents with a comprehensive package of up-to-date and relevant programs and services that will support personal well being and professional development.

Recommendation:

Continue offering and developing educational seminars and social events for all residents, increasing awareness of those events, and attempting to make them easier to attend.

Actions:

- **Ongoing:**
 - PARA Calendar
 - There should always be a link after the “Upcoming Events” section in each eblast to this calendar to increase resident awareness of this feature and the seminars and workshops which PARA offers (Ms. Wakal).
- **Short-term (3 to 6 months):**
 - No short-term actions.
- **Mid-term (6 months to 1 year):**
 - Develop the functionality of PARA’s online calendar (PARA Staff). Consider adding the following features:
 - previous/next month buttons
 - print function
 - colour highlighting of events based on type of event
 - events listed in calendar square, not simply in a numbered list below¹²
 - Attempt to offer events for a broader range of residents (PARA Board):
 - Rural events
 - Children-friendly events¹³
 - Trial smaller seminars at non-centralized sites¹⁴
 - PARA offers funding for social/wellbeing events hosted by residents for residents. Policy, application process, and funding criteria required.
- **Long-term(1 to 3 years):**
 - More staff resources will be required for contract compliance issue identification and resolution¹⁵ (HRC Committee and PARA Staff)

¹² The cheapest (free) and simplest means of establishing a PARA calendar of events with these features would be to use Google Calendar.

¹³ “Making events for residents more family friendly - going to bars, not so much... Movie night late at night, not so kid friendly. If I am going to get out of the house, I don't want to leave my family behind, as I already do not see them enough. Maybe have a family friendly alternative, like potlucks or picnics where residents feel comfortable bringing significant others and children and can relax.” –Survey Respondent

¹⁴ “Events like MD management seminars should be held on site at FMC. It is VERY inconvenient to have to go to main campus, pay for parking, find the buildings and rooms etc. I didn't attend U of C so do not know my way around.” –Survey Respondent.

¹⁵ With three fulltime staff, PARA still has less staff than either PAR-BC or the Professional Association of Residents in the Maritime Provinces, both of which have fewer residents. PAR-BC has five fulltime staff (although one of those is a co-op research student) working for its 929 residents (Pria Sandhu, Executive Director, PAR-BC). PARI-MP has four full-time staff members for its 491 residents, but also receives government funding (Sandi Carew-Flemming, Executive Director, PARI-MP).

- Develop a policy for PARA program review (External Affairs Committee).

3. Contract

PARA will negotiate a collective agreement that secures competitive compensation, benefits, workplace conditions, and will ensure its consistent application by Regional Authorities and both Postgraduate Medical Education offices.

Recommendation:

Continue to focus on sustaining and creating good relationships with negotiating bodies and individuals. Attempt to ensure continuity on PARA's side of the table so the organization can continue to take advantage of negotiating experience and well-established, positive relationships. As well, develop public awareness of role of resident physician to potentially generate public support to influence negotiations.

Actions:

- ***Current and Ongoing Actions:***
 - Establish and sustain relationships with individuals and groups with whom we negotiate:
 - Meeting attendance
 - Volunteer activities
 - Policy/initiative cooperation
 - Etc.
 - Continue to facilitate and expand Residents in the Legislature event to generate awareness and support for residents in government.
 - Continue providing leadership/negotiations training for those residents involved on the PARA Negotiations Committee and Board of Directors.
 - Provide residents with free copies of their current contract in both electronic and hardcopy form. Hard copies are provided at resident orientation or by request to the PARA office.
 - Membership survey in advance of negotiations to determine resident contract priorities.
 - Provide support for provincial Medical Student Associations (MSA) to encourage future participation in PARA:
 - MSA representation on PARA Board.
 - Stipend support for MSA advocacy events.
- ***Short-term (3 to 6 months):***
 - Develop a web-based process to gather future contract issues raised by residents constantly, not just prior to each negotiation round (PARA Staff).
- ***Mid-term (6 months to 1 year):***
 - No mid-term actions.
- ***Long-term (1 to 3 years):***
 - Develop a timeline of contract negotiations and contract and policy changes over time as a resource for negotiators and membership (PARA Staff).

- PARA should consider more events/communications that involve encouraging public awareness of the role of Resident Physicians in healthcare and helping residents to more effectively advocate for themselves (PARA Staff and Board).

4. External Relations

PARA will foster meaningful and long term relations with the Alberta Government, Postgraduate Medical Education, the Alberta Medical Association, the Canadian Association of Internes and Residents, the public, and other associated stakeholders in both health care and medical education to advance and respond to issues relevant to Resident Physicians in Alberta.

Recommendation:

The quality of PARA’s external relations impacts our negotiations, our ability to advocate and mediate compliance issues successfully. PARA must ensure that staff and volunteers are trained to communicate well and build and develop successful relationships.

Actions:

- **Current and Ongoing Actions:**
 - Continue to facilitate and expand Residents in the Legislature event to generate awareness and support for residents in government.
 - Continue providing leadership/negotiations training to better equip resident physicians to communicate and cooperate effectively with outside organizations.
 - Consistent representation on external committees with meeting reports submitted to PARA.
- **Short-term (3 to 6 months):**
 - No short-term actions.
- **Mid-term (6 months to 1 year):**
 - Organize a media release and public exposure during Resident Awareness Week (PARA Staff and External Affairs Committee):
 - Radio morning show appearance
 - Letters to editor of smaller papers
- **Long-term (1 to 3 years):**
 - PARA should consider more events/communications that involve encouraging public awareness of the role of Resident Physicians in healthcare and helping residents to more effectively advocate for themselves¹⁶ (PARA Staff and Board).
 - For example: pamphlets to give out in emergency rooms (PAIRO’s “You look too young to be a doctor” campaign).

¹⁶ PAR-BC has videos of some of their residents discussing what a resident is and what they do (<http://www.par-bc.org/>)

5. Human Resources Development/Financial Operations

PARA will develop and implement financial strategies that are responsible to the membership and sustainable for the organization. PARA will invest in improving the skill set of staff and volunteers in order to meet the long term goals of the organization.

Recommendation:

Ongoing training for resident physician volunteers and PARA staff to ensure and enhance their abilities to function in their representative roles.

Actions:

- ***Current and Ongoing Actions:***
 - Continue providing leadership/negotiations training to better equip resident physicians to represent PARA and their fellow members in contract negotiations and with other organizations.
 - Ensure continuing PARA staff training to enhance advocacy, communication, policy-development, negotiations, and management skills.
 - Quarterly internal review of PARA's actual vs. projected budget.
 - Annual audit of PARA's finances by PARA's director of operations with final advisement from a chartered accountant.
 - Annual financial statements approved by the PARA Board of Directors at the Annual General Meeting.
 - Annual review of investments and financial holdings.
 - Annual board and staff evaluations aligned with position expectations.
- ***Short-term (3 to 6 months):***
 - No short-term actions.
- ***Mid-term (6 months to 1 year):***
 - PARA human resources internal review (HRC Committee).
- ***Long-term (1 to 3 years):***
 - Attaining staff resources to support the long-term goals of the organization.
 - Human resources external review through outside consultation (HRC Committee and PARA Staff).
 - Development of reference manual for Human Resource Committee (PARA Staff with input from HRC Committee).

References

CAIR Website. <http://www.cair.ca/>

Carew-Flemming, Sandi. Executive Director, PARI-MP. Telephone conversation, April 3, 2009.

Conn, Robert. Executive Director, PAIRO. Telephone conversation April 6, 2009.

PAIRO Website. <http://www.pairo.jibby-jab.com/>

PARA Website. <http://www.para-ab.ca/>

PAR-BC Website. <http://www.par-bc.org/>

Sandhu, Pria. Executive Director, PAR-BC. Telephone conversation, April 4, 2009.