



National Parliament of Papua New Guinea

CHALLENGES IN RESOURCING PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEES, ESPECIALLY WHEN AD HOC EXPERT TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE IS REQUIRED.

Parliamentary Public Accounts Committees

Public Accounts Committees within the ACPAC are confronted with common challenges and they operate under very similar arrangements or environments. In comparison PAC's vary in size in the number of Membership, Committee secretariat staff and other logistics. Some legislatures have over 10 members on their PACs while others have less than 10 members. Similarly the numbers of Secretariat Staff vary in size. Some have six to eight staff while others have less than five.

When PACs are to deal with an issue of a technical nature, they may require external assistance because they do not have the kind of expertise within its secretariat.

Human Resources of the Committees

Most PACs do not have the Lawyers, Accountants, Engineers and other skilled people employed full time within their secretariats to deal with any technical issue that may confront the Committee. It is very costly to employ such people on a full time basis because their rate of remuneration is much higher than the normal salaries that are paid to

duty of the secretariat in consultation with the Clerk of Parliament to have a full and frank discussion with each secondee before he or she commences work with the secretariat. Avoiding a conflict of interest or loyalty should be the main concern for discussion.

The secondee should also be informed of the secretariat's work practices, of the need for confidentiality and discretion at all times and of the role of Public Accounts Committees. A secondee does not wear 'two hats' when working for committees. The departmental 'hat' should have been left in the department. If there is any doubt about the secondee's ability to operate as a member of the secretariat without any conflicting loyalties or interests, the arrangement may need to be terminated.

Contracts, Consultants and Advisers

There will be times when committees may decide to engage and pay for expertise, usually because of the nature of a particular inquiry.

Consultants are expensive and they charge fees on hourly or daily rates for their input to an inquiry. The agreement between the Committees and the consultant should be formalized in a contract. Short term contracts would be more preferable than a long term contracts.

Engagement of Consultants on a short term contract is cheaper than long-term or full time engagement. Short term contracts may result in work done in a rush and may lead to omission or incomplete results.

The first decision to be made is whether applications (or tenders) will be called and the consultancy thrown open to competition, or whether an individual will be invited to be a consultant. This will depend on how much time is available and on whether there is a field of experts in the area from which to make a selection.

A further possibility is to employ an expert, either by secondment or contract, for an agreed task or for an agreed period. For instance PACs holding inquiries into the spendings of a road construction may retain an officer on secondment from the Department of Roadworks (Department of Works & Transport) to advise the Committee on technical aspects on road construction for a specified period of time.

It is usual for travel expenses to be paid from the committee's budget for secondees, consultants, advisers and other categories of assistants regardless of who is paying their salaries or fees. This can be a considerable additional expense if consultants, etc attend public hearings in addition to the usual secretariat team.

Secondments can be a cheaper arrangement where salaries are still being paid by the employing organization. Some academics and other expertise may want to offer their expertise at no cost to PACs as they need the experience which will add to the list on their Curriculum Vitae (CV).