



Research Branch  
Direction de la recherche

Corporate Development  
Développement organisationnel

**Role of the Research Branch**



# Role of the Research Branch

Prepared By:

Frank J. Porporino

This report is also available in French. Ce rapport est également disponible en français. Veuillez vous adresser au Secteur de recherche et développement, Service Correctionnel du Canada, 340 avenue Laurier ouest, Ottawa (Ontario), K1A 0P9. Should additional copies be required they can be obtained from Correctional Research and Development, Correctional Service of Canada, 340 Laurier Ave., West, Ottawa, (Ontario), K1A 0P9.

March 1989

**Research Report No. R-05**

# Table of Contents

<b>ROLE OF THE RESEARCH BRANCH</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Historical Background</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Defining Applied Corrections Research</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Role of the Research Branch</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Developing a National Research Plan</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Regional and National Research Committees</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Communication and Dissemination of Research</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Annual Cycle for Development and Monitoring of a National Research Program</b>	<b>10</b>

## **Introduction**

This paper presents a general strategy for development of the research function in the Correctional Service of Canada, and proposes a particular role and mandate for the Research Branch in the Communications and Corporate Development Sector. It outlines a process for development and approval of an Annual National Research Plan, suggests a mechanism for periodic review of progress and revision of priorities if necessary, and describes a multifaceted approach for the effective communication and dissemination of research findings.

In an organization as large as the CSC, with issues as varied and complex as those that confront corrections, research has to attempt to inform and influence in different ways and at different levels. With limited resources that are exclusively dedicated to the conduct of research, and with an ever-expanding set of questions or concerns that can be addressed, priority setting and coordination of efforts, and effective integration and communication of research findings, become of paramount importance.

The Mission Document and Corporate Objectives provide an essential framework to guide our research efforts. To date, the activities of the Research Branch have been focussed generally in this fashion and a number of major research projects have been initiated at the request of Senior Management at NHQ, and because of their obvious relevance to important operational initiatives. More formalized procedures are needed at this stage, however, to bring together the efforts of the Regions and NHQ in developing a useful and targeted program of applied research on an annual basis.

Following some brief historical background on the development of corrections research in the Ministry of the Solicitor General, a proposed role for the Research Branch in organizing and coordinating the research activities of the CSC will be outlined.

## **Historical Background**

Corrections research as a formal activity in the Ministry of the Solicitor General has evolved considerably since the Department was established in 1967. A brief review of this history provides an important context for defining an appropriate role for the research function in the Service, and an appropriate strategy to sustain it.

In response to the need for a better coordinated program of social and behavioural science research in criminal justice, a Research Division was created within a Research and Systems Development Branch of the Ministry Secretariat in 1974. The Research Division included a small Correctional Services section which was to be "client" oriented in its approach and service "the Agencies of the Ministry, the Branches of the Secretariat and other

organizations of the Canadian Criminal Justice System” (Treasury Board Submission, p.2; April 5, 1974).

The Research and Statistics function of the MSG Secretariat supported the growth of a number of academic centres of criminology, assisted in the establishment of the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, and was instrumental in promoting a research based orientation in policy and legislative areas as diverse as gun control, juvenile justice, crime prevention and victims.

Corrections research remained as one small, albeit relatively active area within a more broadly focused research and development branch. In time, however, difficulties were encountered. Consensus in setting research priorities became increasingly difficult to reach and the dual mandate of responding to the operational needs of the CSC and NPB and the broader correctional policy role of the Ministry Secretariat became increasingly difficult to manage. As disagreement over the issues that research should address increased, the Agencies became more distanced and difficult to involve, and research initiatives were criticized in various quarters within the Ministry from opposing perspectives as being too diffused and not relevant or timely, too narrowly preoccupied with short-term concerns and not adequately oriented towards more basic longer-term issues, too focussed on the operations of the agencies and not enough on the wider influences on the correctional system, too academic and not responsive to the operational concerns of the agencies.

Debate as to the proper role for corrections research in the MSG perhaps attests most singularly to its recognized importance for policy and program development. It also highlights the simple fact that applied research fails, if it fails in promoting what it can do. It cannot risk becoming too aloof or distanced from the practical issues that it should deal with it. It must maintain its links with operational and policy directions and continually confirm its relevance for the managers who are held accountable.

The establishment of a Research Branch within the Service marks the beginning of a new era for corrections research in the MSG. The CSC can now begin to address research concerns in a more concerted and directed fashion, more closely tied with the development of our corporate objectives and policies. More attention can be given to identifying and responding to the research needs of operational managers, and to supporting local research-based analyses of both community and institutional programs and operations. A greater sense of ownership of research activities should result, generalizing in time to a greater readiness to apply the findings of research.

Our ability to work with the MSG Secretariat in setting the broader research priorities of the Ministry should also improve. With the recent restructuring of the MSG Secretariat, the research functions in corrections and in police and security have been separated and moved into two respective policy branches. The role of research in the Secretariat has therefore become more specifically tied to the Secretariat mandate of providing broad policy advice to the Minister. For the first time, the research functions in the MSG Secretariat and the CSC can

complement and support each other towards development of an integrated program of research in corrections.

## **Defining Applied Corrections Research**

It is difficult to provide a precise definition of what is encompassed by applied research in corrections. The research that is conducted should be obviously relevant in an operational sense; it should also clearly relate to some policy issue, either current or emerging.

At the most general level, applied research in corrections should strive to gather systematic quantitative knowledge or qualitative analysis, that is readily applicable and useful, and from which maximum benefit can be derived for improvements in correctional policy and practice. The ability to derive maximum benefit from applied research implies, at a minimum, that the research should be:

- responsive to current or anticipated priorities (i.e., relevant and action-oriented);
- executed according to the best possible standards of scientific rigour; and
- communicated effectively ( i.e., so as to be easily understood and assimilated by staff and management).

In this sense, applied corrections research is defined more as a process than as a product. It should not be rooted in any single discipline, nor oriented only towards a narrow set of easily researchable issues. Stated simply, it should encompass all types of investigation with a scientific basis that is considered useful by those who manage the correctional process.

## **Role of the Research Branch**

To maintain a standard of quality and relevance, the conduct of applied research requires a particular combination of technical expertise and experience, an intimate knowledge of the organizational context, an ability to analyze and assess issues from a broader knowledge base of existing research in a given field, and finally, a continuity of effort that derives from fundamental commitment to scholarly excellence and the applications of research knowledge to real-world problems.

A useful program of applied research cannot be conducted piecemeal; it must be sequential and build consistently on previous efforts. In many instances, it must also be iterative, with preliminary issue and data analysis leading to more precise definition of further issues and data requirements. It is the creative aspects that give it its special flavour <197> asking the right questions, designing and applying the best methodologies, developing research data bases that can serve multiple purposes, and integrating and interpreting findings in the best ways to communicate with specific audiences.

This leads to the conclusion that a critical mass of expertise is needed to develop and coordinate any applied program of research. Although contracting out can be useful, particularly for large data collection efforts, research staff are essential to give continuity to the process, to make the most effective use of existing information that can potentially feed into research analysis, to develop mutually supporting relationships with operational managers, and to learn how to integrate and communicate research findings so as to be most useful and appealing.

To remain vital and current, an applied research function must also be forward-looking, connected to developments in the research community, and able to assess the relevance and significance of new findings in an ongoing fashion. With limited resources available for the conduct of large-scale original studies, the gathering of new research data should be balanced with an emphasis on the integration and communication of existing knowledge. A network of cooperation and collaboration with other researchers is essential, both to remain well informed and up to date, and to benefit from the increased level of activity that is possible when working in partnership with others.

To ensure the continued relevance and contribution of the applied research activities of the Service, the Research Branch at National Headquarters will be organized and managed to:

Develop and coordinate an applied program of research that flows from our Mission, and that

- a) responds to current corporate or operational objectives but also anticipates new areas of concern;
- b) links Regional and National efforts;
- c) encourages active collaboration with the academic research community; and
- d) balances the conduct of research with the effective communication and dissemination of findings.

In achieving this objective, the Research Branch will be responsible for:

- Coordinating the development, and the Senior Management Committee approval of, an Annual Research Plan for the Service that addresses priorities flowing from our Corporate and Operational Objectives;
- Executing that portion of the Annual Research Plan that relates to the analysis of policy, program or administrative issues with Service-wide implications;
- Advising on the development of regional plans so that research initiatives are complementary, linked cross-regionally where possible, and informed by the findings of related research conducted both within the Service and in other jurisdictions;
- Providing advice on approaches for gathering research data and analysis of statistical and research-based information to others within the Service;

- Developing an ongoing and active relationship with the broader criminal justice research community, particularly with the MSG Secretariat, the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics and the Department of Justice, and with other federal departments, academic research centres, provincial agencies, the private and voluntary sector, and correctional agencies and organizations in other jurisdictions.
- Developing approaches for the dissemination of research findings, throughout the Service in ways that can be easily understood and assimilated by staff and management, and throughout the broader national and international criminal justice communities in ways that will gain credibility and respect for our contributions to the field; and
- Publishing a quarterly magazine that would communicate research findings to a management readership, follow recent developments in the field of management studies and assess implications for new approaches to correctional management.

## **Developing a National Research Plan**

To make research a truly corporate endeavour, a process is needed to involve Regions in the review of research findings and the development of a National Research Plan. A proposed annual cycle that would involve all levels of the organization in identifying research issues and establishing priorities is shown in the attached chart.

The cycle would begin with an annual review of corporate objectives from the perspective of implications for R & D.

This would be initiated with the convening of an Annual National Research Forum, bringing together a cross-section of NHQ and Regional staff involved in research, to review progress on research initiatives, profile ongoing research activities in the Service, and discuss future directions and priorities.

Regional Research Committees would then meet to summarize and assess specific research activity in their Regions, agree on issues that should be addressed through research and identify regional resources to support research. Regional reviews would be consolidated by a National Headquarters Research Committee to assist the Research Branch at NHQ in preparing a draft national research plan. This plan would:

- identify priority research areas and outline specific projects that would be conducted by the Service, both Regionally and Nationally; and
- identify areas for potential collaboration with the Ministry Secretariat and the National Parole Board, and with other correctional agencies and academic research centres.

The Research Plan, with timeframes for the completion of particular projects, would be submitted to SMC for approval in May. An update on progress would be provided after six months to inform SMC and to suggest revision of priorities if

necessary. The cycle would end with an annual report to SMC in April outlining research and development activities that have been completed.

## **Regional and National Research Committees**

The need to address and respond to both regional and national viewpoints on research activities is seen as crucial for the future development of the CSC research function. The involvement of regional research committees, however, is predicated on their active and ongoing functioning. There has been considerable diversity in the role these committees have played in the past and it is suggested that to enhance regional involvement in development of R & D initiatives, each Region establish a structure for research committees that would include regional senior management, institutional and community representatives, and one or two academic research advisors with appropriate knowledge of correctional issues. The committees would be responsible for:

- coordinating and monitoring regional research activities, and the funding of those activities, and developing new opportunities for collaboration with academic research centres, the voluntary sector and provincial correctional jurisdictions;
- reviewing the findings of research conducted by the Service and assessing how they can be applied regionally;
- screening research proposals and obtaining appropriate approvals for access to personal information to ensure compliance with the Privacy and Access to Information Acts; and
- assisting the NHQ Research Branch in the identification of research issues and the annual planning process for development of a Research Plan.

At National Headquarters, a National Research Committee would have broad senior level representation from both the Correctional Programs and Operations and the Corporate Management sectors.

The National Research Committee would review projects included in the Annual Research Plan and approve submission of the plan to SMC.

To generally assist the Service in the identification and elaboration of potentially fruitful directions for research, and to establish a base for a network of strong linkages with the academic research community, an external Research Advisory Committee would include the range of academic disciplines with senior level representatives from the major universities across the country.

For major projects managed by the Research Branch, efforts would also be made, whenever possible, to involve Regional staff with specific expertise or areas of responsibility. Research advisory groups will be established to coordinate and focus operational input. This approach has already been helpful in working on the development of a new security classification model for the Service, and in assessing the research needs for future development of case management strategies.

In order to provide appropriate guidelines for the work of Regional Research Committees and clarify procedures for the review and approval of research projects, the Research Branch at NHQ will undertake the preparation of guidelines for the conduct of research in the Service. The current Commissioner's Directive on Research will also be reviewed to ensure its consistency with the Mission.

## **Communication and Dissemination of Research**

To exert influence and encourage action on the applications of research, research findings have to be communicated and widely disseminated.

The Research Branch proposes a number of mechanisms to promote the research activities of the Service.

1. A quarterly research magazine will be published, beginning in May of 1989, primarily for a management readership in mind, to convey research findings in a non-technical fashion that emulates the style of popular periodicals. Each issue would include one or two topical reviews of the research literature on a relevant corrections issue, provide short summaries of important research findings published in professional journals, and profile ongoing research in the Service. The magazine would also provide general information on research activities in other jurisdictions and hopefully serve, as well, as a forum for CSC staff for the discussion and debate of research issues and concerns.
2. Copies of research Bibliographies will be distributed periodically to inform CSC staff of recent research in particular areas and information on ongoing and planned research projects will be gathered and retained in a form of "central registry" for research. As the registry develops, the feasibility of broad computerized access through the CSC mainframe will be assessed.
3. All Research Reports and Research Briefs (shorter reports emphasizing review and integration of research findings from various sources) will be presented to SMC for information and then distributed widely throughout the Service. The standard distribution outside the Service will include Provincial Heads of Corrections, U.S. and international heads of correctional agencies and other national and international organizations with an interest in corrections, academic centres of research with some interest in corrections research, the Research Branches of various government departments (Ministry Secretariat, Justice, Health & Welfare), and the MSG Regional Consultation Centres (as information to respond to local regional requests for research on corrections issues). Each Report and Brief will also be abstracted for inclusion in the Criminal Justice Reference Service coordinated by the National Institute on Crime and Delinquency.

## Annual Cycle for Development and Monitoring of a National Research Program

Responsibility	Action	Expected Completion
S.M.C.	Annual Review of February Corporate Objectives	February
Regions, N.H.Q.	National Research forum Assess research contributions during F.Y.	March
Regional Research Committees N.H.Q.	Development of Regional Operational Plans for R&D Consolidation of an Annual National Research Plan	March April
S.M.C.	S.M.C. Approval of National Research Plan	May
Regional Research Committees N.H.Q. Research Branch N.H.Q. Research Branch	Review of Ongoing and Completed Research  Update on Annual Plan for S.M.C.	May-September  October
Regional Research Committees N.H.Q. Research Branch N.H.Q. Research Branch N.H.Q. Research Committee	Review of Onfoing and Completed Research  Annual Report to S.M.C.	October-February  March