
Quebec National Assembly's Communication Plan

by Vincent Auclair, MNA and Alexandre Bourdeau, MNA

This past spring the Office of the National Assembly of Quebec adopted its Public Communications Plan for 2005 to 2009. This article summarizes the objectives of the Plan, as well as the means to be used in achieving them.



Since the end of the 1970s, the National Assembly has acquired various communications tools to create closer ties between the public and its elected representatives. We are thinking here of the televising of House proceedings, the “mock parliaments” held at the National Assembly, the publications we produce and the Assembly’s website.

More recently, this objective of creating closer ties has been pursued by MNAs through the parliamentary reform projects introduced by the Government House Leader, Jacques P. Dupuis, and Speaker Bissonnet. One of the four main sections of my own document on this reform is entitled “Rapprocher l’Assemblée nationale des citoyens” (Bringing Parliament to the People). This document suggests concrete measures full of promise for the future.

Despite these efforts, the public, and particularly young people, have little knowledge of the role and workings of the National Assembly: 30% of Quebecers who responded to a survey we conducted in May 2004 said they were not familiar with the Assembly. This figure rose to 44% for students, and 53% for young people aged 18 to 24. These results have prompted us, over the

past two years, to design a communications plan that proposes concrete actions for the four-year period ahead.

To ensure that the plan would be built on solid foundations, we first carried out a series of consultations with parliamentarians and the personnel of the National Assembly. In addition, we reviewed our communications activities of recent years, and noted the positive potential of some of our actions. For example, since 1992 our educational activities have attracted more than 12,000 people, mostly young people, who come away with a greater appreciation both of parliamentary institutions and of the crucial role played by MNAs.

In addition, for the past three years the Speaker has spoken in secondary schools across Quebec, in the hope of encouraging young people to become more involved in democracy.

Lastly, the televising of parliamentary business has been extended over the past few years to include committee proceedings, press conferences and various special events, which means that the public can now become acquainted with all facets of their MNAs’ work.

On the other hand, a number of weaknesses were also noted. Our website, launched in 1995 with 200 files, now contains close to 45,000, its technological and informational limits have been reached. Expanding the site, with so many web projects planned for the future, will require sophisticated site-management and updating solutions.



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Some of the documents we distribute free of charge to the public are more than 20 years old. They were often produced in response to particular circumstances, and could well be updated to provide more unified, comprehensive information.

Finally, there is a definite need for a readily recognizable visual symbol to serve as a link between the National Assembly's main communications media, that is, its television channel, website, intranet portal, publications and so forth.

The next step was to remedy these deficiencies. Three objectives were formulated to guide and focus our efforts. Our first objective is to raise public awareness of the Assembly's mission. Specifically, this means letting people know that the Assembly exercises the legislative power – one of the three powers of the State – and that it oversees the actions of the Government. Issues of public interest are debated in the Assembly, and the laws of the land are made there. It is therefore through the Assembly that Quebecers affirm their identity and decide how they want to live as a society.

Our second objective is to enhance public understanding of the role and work of MNAs, with emphasis on the fact that MNAs pursue the public interest. The following facts about MNAs will be emphasized: that they represent their constituents, acting as intermediaries between them and the public administration; that they make the laws which shape the future of society, engaging in committee work that is fundamentally important in this regard; and that they play an important “watch-dog” role as scrutinizers of government action.

Our third objective is to encourage greater public participation in parliamentary proceedings and activities. Here we will focus on the Assembly as a unique forum for people to participate in the democratic life of their society. To this end we will encourage the public to visit the Parliament Building and to participate in our activities.

To achieve these objectives efficiently, we defined five target clienteles:

- Teachers and young people, to counter young people's lack of knowledge about their parliamentary institutions and reverse the trend toward low voter turnout among the younger generation.
- Members of Quebec's cultural communities, to increase their understanding of Quebec's parliamentary institutions and of the role and duties of their elected representatives.
- Public servants, lawyers and specialists in government relations. This clientele needs high-quality information to do their work, particularly information on bills.

- National, regional and ethnic media, because they are excellent channels for relaying information on the work of MNAs.
- Visitors to Quebec City. This is a particularly interesting clientele since it consists of tourists who are on the spot, easy to reach and likely to be interested in learning about the main institutions of the capital city.

To achieve these objectives and deliver our message to the public, we have developed a nine-point strategy that employs the entire range of the National Assembly's communications tools.

We will adopt a message and visual image that are readily identifiable with the National Assembly and thematically consistent with our communications objectives.

We will increase the visibility of MNAs and of the National Assembly and its services by creating special activities and becoming involved in major public events, such as the 400th anniversary of the founding of Quebec City.

We will increase the National Assembly's visibility among young people aged 12 to 17. Teachers will be given more extensive support in the area of democracy education, notably through a completely revamped website. Secondary school participation will be increased by the creation of school parliaments, in collaboration with the Fondation Jean-Charles-Bonenfant, one of our chief partners.

We will ensure that our messages are consistent and geared to the clientele we wish to reach. Promotional campaigns will raise awareness about our communications and consultation tools, stimulating public interest in parliamentary business and in the work MNAs do from day to day.

The Assembly channel's programming will be augmented with new productions, and prime time scheduling will be more stable. A scrolling news ticker will keep viewers informed of current parliamentary business and announce upcoming broadcasts.

Our website will be entirely revamped with the latest technologies, graphics and data bases. This ambitious project will take three years to complete, but will make it much easier for web users to find and gather information relating to a particular topic or Member. Improved coordination and cross-referencing between our website and television channel is also part of the plan.

We will provide a better welcome for visitors to the Parliament Building. Among the changes to be made are a new reception area and welcoming policy; a dedicated youth zone, and easier access to the gift shop, which also stocks National Assembly publications. An exhibition on

Quebec with emphasis on its MNAs and its regions, will be inaugurated next fall in the Parliament Building.

We will rethink the contents and layout of our publications. Brochures for the public will be adapted to the needs of each target clientele. The new brochures will place more emphasis on the work of MNAs and contain a section on public information services. We also intend to develop communications strategies to help raise awareness about the work done by MNAs in the House, in committee, and in the international arena.

Finally, we will make more frequent and intensive use of publicity to promote our activities. A broader and

more comprehensive advertising strategy will be developed to help publicize the Assembly's mission and the work of MNAs.

We are convinced that this ambitious and exciting communications plan will help prepare the Assembly to meet the information challenges of contemporary society. In a world of fast-paced change, parliamentary assemblies like ours must find ways of standing out from the crowd and affirming their distinct personalities. A comprehensive plan of the kind we have just described is definitely a step in the right direction.