Enterprise and Advanced Education— Collaborative Initiatives Among Alberta's Post-secondary Institutions

SUMMARY

What we examined

The Government of Alberta wants Alberta's 26 post-secondary institutions[1] to collaborate and they have done so in several cases. We audited three non-academic collaborative initiatives to assess if the institutions had well-designed systems to plan, govern, implement and sustain the initiatives:

- Apply Alberta[2]—an online system that allows undergraduate students to apply to any institution and to request and transfer transcripts
- Lois Hole Campus Alberta Digital Library[3]—an online repository of commercially licensed electronic learning resources that gives students at participating institutions access to the same resources
- IT management (ITM) control framework—a set of IT policies, procedures and templates to help institutions implement effective controls over their information technology systems

We assessed how the three initiatives fit into the minister's plans for institutions to work together to provide learning opportunities for Albertans in a cost-effective and sustainable way. Campus Alberta is a coordinated and integrated system approach wherein institutions collaborate to develop and deliver high quality learning opportunities.[4] We identified lessons and critical success factors to improve future Campus Alberta initiatives.

What we found

The department and institutions implemented all three initiatives several years ago, with significant effort from staff at the institutions. However, we concluded that the department and institutions do not have well-designed systems to plan, govern, implement and sustain collaborative initiatives. With better systems and processes for collaboration, service to students will improve and make the advanced education system more efficient, effective and sustainable.

We have findings at two levels:
- collaboration generally
- specific collaborative initiatives

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[1] 21 public post-secondary institutions and five private colleges. Private colleges were not included in the scope of our audit.
[2] https://www.applyalberta.ca/pub/
[3] www.lhcadl.ca
[4] *Post-secondary Learning Act,* pages 6-7.

Key findings on collaboration generally

The root causes of several problems with the initiatives relate to the overall systems for collaboration. Senior management at institutions lack a clear understanding of the department's strategic direction for Campus Alberta and of how specific initiatives fit into it. That is because:

- the department and institutions do not have a clear structure for mandates, roles and responsibilities, accountability and relationships among collaborating partners
- the department and institutions do not have a collective strategic plan or a business plan for collaboration

The department and institutions lack clarity on the mandates, roles, responsibilities, accountabilities, and interrelationships of collaborative entities and committees. For some initiatives, institutions created separate legal entities to collaborate, but these entities are not accountable to the minister. These new entities seemingly do not have to meet the same accountabilities, legislation, policies and directives that institutions and other provincial agencies must meet, even though institutions' senior management are on these entities' boards and committees, and the department and institutions also fund these entities.

Without a clear, complete understanding of who does what and who accounts to whom, the department and institutions risk further duplicating their efforts, paying more than necessary and not effectively managing the risks, resources and benefits of collaboration. For example, the ITM control framework steering committee learned, about six months after starting its project, that another sub-committee of academic officers in the sector was also developing IT governance policies.

The department and institutions lack a collective strategic or business plan for collaboration. Such a plan would identify clear outcomes, strategic initiatives to achieve them, budgets to implement and operate the initiative, funding sources, performance measures and targets, and public reporting. Instead, they have developed initiatives on a case-by-case basis. That precludes effectively evaluating, ranking and approving initiatives and providing adequate resources to implement and sustain them. In 2012, for example, the online learning resources in the Lois Hole Campus Alberta Digital Library were reduced from 65 to nine, because funds were lacking to sustain the initiative. The Government of Alberta created the initiative to give students at all institutions, including private and First Nations colleges, access to the same resources. Without funding to sustain it, the digital library may not continue to provide all students with access to the same resources.

Key findings on specific initiatives

In the three collaborative initiatives we examined, the institutions could have improved their systems to plan, govern, implement, monitor and report on the success of these initiatives.

Planning—The institutions generally had clear plans for the ITM control framework and digital library, setting out what they hoped to achieve, how to achieve it and the cost to do so. They lacked such plans for Apply Alberta, which was implemented two years late, with significant problems during the planning and development. In addition, the institutions did not identify funding at the start to sustain these three initiatives.

Governing—Generally, the institutions had defined roles and responsibilities to govern individual initiatives. However, they used complex governance structures to implement and operate the initiatives, which in turn complicated their efforts to communicate with each other and hold each other accountable.

Monitoring and reporting on initiatives—The institutions developed performance measures for the ITM control framework and digital library. However, they did not set targets for the measures, which made it

impossible to know if they had met or could sustain their goals. No performance measures or targets exist for Apply Alberta. The department and institutions have not publicly reported the measures, results and cost to implement and sustain the three initiatives.

What needs to be done

The Department of Enterprise and Advanced Education, working with institutions and the Campus Alberta Strategic Directions Committee, should:

- develop and communicate a strategic or business plan that clearly defines:
  - the outcomes the department expects Campus Alberta to achieve
  - the initiatives needed to achieve those outcomes
  - the resources and funding needed to carry out the plan
- develop relevant performance measures and targets to assess if outcomes are met
- publicly report the results and the cost of the initiatives
- review and clarify the accountability structures to govern collaborative initiatives
- develop processes and guidance to ensure institutions effectively manage collaborative projects and their risks

Why this is important to Albertans

Alberta's 21 public post-secondary institutions spend about $4.8 billion annually. They contribute to the government's priorities of building a knowledge-based economy and improving the social well-being of Albertans. The government wants these institutions to collaborate[5] in an effort to improve services to students and to make the advanced education system more efficient, effective and sustainable.

AUDIT OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE

Our objective was to assess if the department and public post-secondary institutions collectively have well-designed systems to plan, govern, implement and sustain collaborative initiatives. We audited the following collaborative initiatives:

- Apply Alberta—an online system that allows undergraduate students to apply to any institution, and to request and transfer transcripts
- Lois Hole Campus Alberta Digital Library—an online repository of commercially licensed electronic learning resources that gives students at participating institutions access to the same resources
- IT management (ITM) control framework—a set of common IT policies, procedures and templates to help institutions implement effective IT controls over their information technology systems

We assessed how these three initiatives fit into the department's broader strategy, plans and systems to achieve the outcomes it expects from Campus Alberta initiatives. We did not audit the department's policy framework for Campus Alberta. We also did not audit the governance and systems of individual entities that institutions created as a way to collaborate.

We surveyed senior executives from public post-secondary institutions on their understanding of Campus Alberta's objectives and the systems for collaboration to achieve them. We received 72 responses to the survey, an overall participation rate of 59 per cent. Two institutions submitted a single response for their executives; two other responses were from Campus Alberta entities.

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[5] The department has several policy frameworks that highlight the importance of collaboration among institutions: Campus Alberta – A Policy Framework; A Learning Alberta; and the Roles and Mandates Policy Framework.

We also wanted to identify lessons that the department and institutions can apply to improve future collaboration.

Our field work was from October 2011 to February 2013. We substantially completed our audit on May 1, 2013. Our audit was conducted in accordance with the *Auditor General Act* and the standards for assurance engagements set by the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants.

BACKGROUND
Why collaboration among post-secondary institutions is important

The department's policy framework for Campus Alberta, released in 2002, was a major development for Alberta's post-secondary institutions.[6] The framework views Alberta's public post-secondary institutions from a holistic perspective—a Campus Alberta. Under Campus Alberta, the minister envisions institutions working together, as well as individually, to meet students' needs and reduce the overall cost of Alberta's post-secondary sector.

In 2006, the government proposed a 20-year strategic plan for the advanced education system.[7] The plan, A Learning Alberta, highlights the importance of collaboration among institutions to achieve its objectives. The government released a policy framework for roles and mandates[8] in 2007. The framework established a resource, now called the Campus Alberta Planning Resource, which provides provincial and regional data on demographics, high school to post-secondary transition rates, affordability of education, the Alberta economy, post-secondary participation rates, educational attainment levels, and immigration and interprovincial migration rates.[9] Institutions use this data to prepare their comprehensive institutional plans, which the minister requires to show how each institution will meet the ministry's goals for access. In 2012, the department used the Campus Alberta Planning Resource to identify three priorities for post-secondary education:
* support Alberta's economic and social progress
* focus on outcomes
* enhance system collaboration and partnerships among institutions

The government believes that collaboration among institutions is key to providing accessible and affordable learning opportunities for students, to avoid duplication and reduce the overall costs for post-secondary education. For example, 16 Alberta institutions are collaborating through eCampus Alberta to provide online learning opportunities for students using a common IT infrastructure. Working alone, each institution would need to implement its own IT infrastructure to provide online learning. This individual approach could lead to relatively higher costs for the sector, compared to the cost of collaborating to implement a common IT infrastructure.

An example of post-secondary institutions in Canada collaborating to provide administrative services is Interuniversity Services Inc.,[10] a not-for-profit company incorporated in 1984 by four independent universities in Atlantic Canada. ISI currently provides administrative services to 19 post-secondary institutions in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland.

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[6] http://eae.alberta.ca/media/134142/campusalbertframework.pdf
[7] http://eae.alberta.ca/post-secondary/policy/alearningalberta.aspx
[8] http://eae.alberta.ca/post-secondary/policy/roles.aspx
[9] http://eae.alberta.ca/media/343180/capr2012fulltext.pdf
[10] http://www.interuniversity.ns.ca/

How institutions collaborate and who is involved

Universities, colleges and technical institutes are the main participants in Campus Alberta, but institutions also collaborate through other committees and separate legal entities. We prepared the following diagram to understand how they collaborate and who is involved in collaborative initiatives. The lines in the diagram indicate involvement in various committees and sometimes may also indicate accountability. It illustrates the complex environment in which collaboration occurs. This list might not include all committees and entities, because neither the department, nor institutions have a comprehensive list of committees and entities.[11]
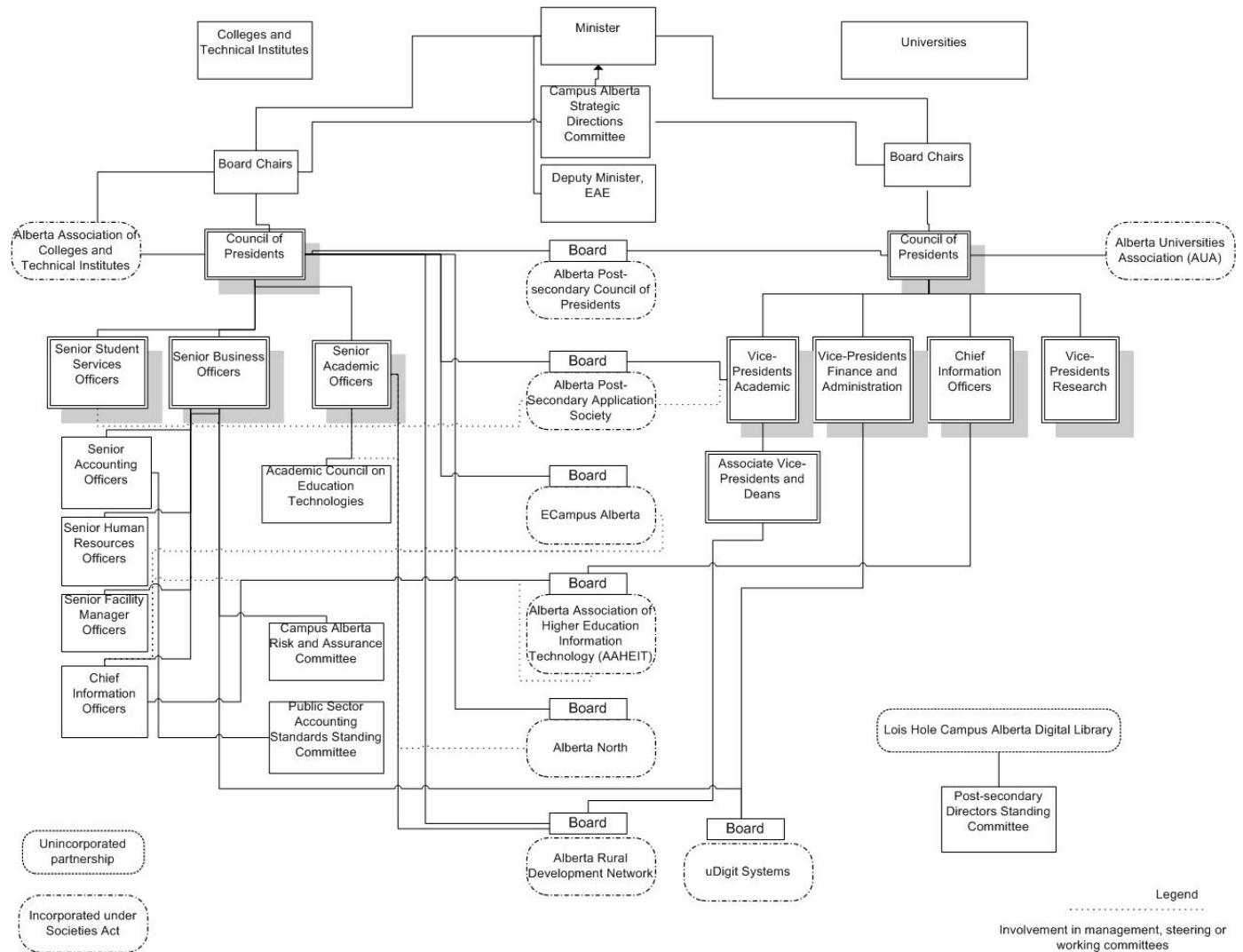
Note: Alberta North merged with eCampus Alberta in July 2011

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[11] See our recommendation in the *Report of the Auditor General of Alberta—October 2012*, no. 17, page 102.

Background on the specific initiatives we reviewed

Apply Alberta

In 2005, the Government of Alberta passed the *Access to the Future Fund Act,*[12] which required Alberta's post-secondary institutions to develop an online system that lets students apply to any post-secondary institution. They developed Apply Alberta to also allow for the electronic transfer of student transcripts between institutions and between Alberta Education and institutions without charging students. The project had an initial budget of $4.5 million. The department provided $16 million to develop the Apply Alberta system and to help public institutions adapt their systems to interface with it. Institutions contributed about $4.5 million towards the project's $20.5 million budget.

Institutions initially planned to implement the online system by October 2007. The website was officially launched in February 2010. Although some institutions implemented it in the fall of 2009, most implemented it in the fall of 2010. Institutions created the Post-secondary Application Society to operate and maintain the Apply Alberta system. Institutions fund the society based on number of applicants for each institution. Students can also apply to three private institutions through the Apply Alberta system.

Lois Hole Campus Alberta Digital Library

The government announced the Lois Hole Campus Alberta Digital Library in the 2005 Speech from the Throne. The speech highlighted a vision for "an Alberta-wide digital library that will allow all students and faculty, wherever they are located in the province, to access the resources and knowledge currently held in the individual libraries of our post-secondary institutions."[13]

Before the launch of the digital library, some institutions were members of The Alberta Library, or TAL, a not-for-profit consortium of public, post-secondary, special, government and regional libraries. TAL also receives operating grants from the Department of Municipal Affairs to operate the Alberta Public Library Electronic Network and from the Department of Education to operate the Online Reference Centre.

The digital library consists of the following:
* digitized material previously held in university libraries, such as monographs, journals, manuscripts, art, maps, artifacts and specimens
* licensed learning resources and other specialized information resources

This digital collection allows students at all institutions, including First Nations colleges and private institutions, to access the same learning resources. By the end of 2008, the digital library had obtained licences for 65 products to support learning in science and technology, medicine and health, business, education, fine arts, humanities and social sciences. Institutions reported that instructors had also incorporated some of the resources into their courses.

Alberta's post-secondary institutions collaborated with TAL to establish the digital library. The department provided $5.3 million to the University of Alberta in March 2006 to support the initial operating costs and licensing of electronic resources. The university forwarded the funds to TAL, which incurred expenses for licences and administrative costs. The department provided about $5 million annually in 2008 and 2009, $2.8 million for 2010 and $1.9 million for 2011, for the University of Alberta to administer. In a separate but related initiative, the department provided funds to give First Nations colleges' access to the digital library.

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[12] http://www.qp.alberta.ca/1266.cfm?page=A01P5.cfm&leg_type=Acts&isbncln=9780779728190
[13]http://www.assembly.ab.ca/ISYS/LADDAR_files/docs/hansards/han/legislature_26/session_1/20050302_1500_01_han.pdf, page 9.

To reduce annual administrative costs of about $500,000 it transferred to TAL, the University of Alberta took over the administration of the digital library in September 2009. The university agreed to cover the library's administrative costs. Up to December 31, 2010, a grant from the department paid for a core group of licences for resources under TAL. After that date, only members of TAL would have access to those digital resources. To maintain access, institutions had to pay the TAL membership fees themselves because no funds for the digital library were available to pay those fees.

ITM control framework

The department and institutions started the ITM project in response to our recommendation[14] that the department provide guidance to institutions on using a framework to implement effective IT controls. The initiative consisted of 12 sub-projects to develop draft policies, processes and controls in areas such as IT governance, security, change management and enterprise IT architecture. Institutions can then customize these draft policies, processes and controls to suit their environments. The initiative also provided training to institutions' IT staff on the policies, processes and controls. Each project relied on collective institutional expertise supplemented by external expertise when required.

During the first year, the project team held several sessions with institutions' senior management to raise awareness of the need for an ITM control framework. They involved people from IT, finance, records management and academic areas. The department provided a $730,000 grant to the Alberta Association of Higher Education Information Technology Society (AAHEIT)[15] to develop the framework. The department also entered into several contracts totalling about $240,000 to support the development of the framework. Institutions contributed funds for this initiative and provided staff to participate in various sub-projects.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Strategic planning and accountability for collaborative initiatives

Background

The Government of Alberta's strategic priorities include building a knowledge-based economy and improving the social well-being of Albertans. Post-secondary institutions play a key role in this. Several policy frameworks[16] highlight the importance of collaboration among Alberta's public post-secondary institutions to provide seamless, accessible and affordable learning opportunities to Albertans. The department uses the Campus Alberta Planning Resource to identify potential areas for collaboration, such as administrative systems, learning services and curriculum development. However, these policy frameworks or resource do not identify specific initiatives to undertake, timelines, resources required or funding sources.

With so many institutions, committees and entities involved and potential initiatives to undertake with limited resources, the ministry needs strategic planning and systems to carefully plan, implement, govern and sustain not only individual initiatives, but all initiatives collectively.

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[14] *Report of the Auditor General of Alberta—April 2008*, no. 8, page 195.

[15] A society created by institutions to initiate and manage IT contracts and projects for institutions. See https://www.nait.ca/portal/server.pt/community/aaheit/377.

[16] Campus Alberta–A Policy Framework; A Learning Alberta; and Roles and Mandates Policy Framework.

RECOMMENDATION 6: DEVELOP STRATEGIC PLAN AND ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK

We recommend that the Department of Enterprise and Advanced Education, working with institutions and the Campus Alberta Strategic Directions Committee:

- develop and communicate a strategic plan that clearly defines the minister's expected outcomes for Campus Alberta, initiatives to achieve those outcomes, resources required and sources of funding
- develop relevant performance measures and targets to assess if the outcomes are being achieved
- publicly report results and the cost of achieving them
- review and clarify the accountability structures for governing collaborative initiatives

Criteria: the standards for our audit

The department and institutions should have a clearly defined governance and accountability framework for collaboration among post-secondary institutions. This includes:

- clear plans for initiatives, the costs to implement and sustain them, funding strategies, timelines, deliverables, risks assessments and mitigating strategies
- relevant performance measures and targets to assess if the outcomes are being achieved, and to report the results
- accountability, roles and responsibilities for overseeing the planning, implementation and ongoing operation of initiatives

Our audit findings

KEY FINDINGS

- The department and institutions have no collective strategic or business plan for collaboration among institutions; thus, projects are done on a case-by-case basis.
- Institutions do not clearly understand what the minister wants Campus Alberta to achieve or how to achieve it.
- The department and institutions have not identified sustainable funding sources for collaborative initiatives.
- The department and institutions have no performance measures and targets for financial and non-financial reporting on whether collaboration is working.
- Generally, the institutions have defined roles and responsibilities for initiatives, but have set up complex governance structures.

As we audited the three initiatives and assessed how they fit into the department's Campus Alberta framework, we identified certain root causes of issues identified in the project management and accountability for collaborative initiatives section and other issues with the broader systems for achieving Campus Alberta goals.

The following problems may hamper the department and institutions' efforts to achieve the minister's intended outcomes for Campus Alberta to improve services and learning opportunities for students, save costs and achieve value-for-money through collaborative initiatives in the post-secondary sector.

Strategic planning is lacking

The department and institutions lack clear collective strategic planning processes to decide which initiatives to undertake, with limited resources. The department and institutions have no clear long-term strategy or plan to guide what initiatives to choose, what resources will be required or where the funding will come from to implement and sustain collaborative efforts.

Senior management from half of the institutions that responded to our survey said they didn't clearly understand what Campus Alberta was trying to achieve. More than two-thirds said it was unclear how they could achieve the Campus Alberta goals in a coordinated and cost-effective way. Among the respondents, 79 per cent said it is very important or critical to have a clear strategic plan for Campus

Alberta with measurable goals, objectives and identified initiatives; 72 per cent said such a plan did not exist, or partly existed but needed significant improvements. We found that such a plan did not exist.

The lack of strategic planning means that the minister's desired outcomes may not be achieved or sustained. For example, eight institutions identified an opportunity to implement a common enterprise resource planning system that could save them and the government money. However, funding has not been approved to proceed with the initiative.

The department provided funding to implement the Lois Hole Campus Alberta Digital Library, to give students and instructors at smaller and First Nations institutions access to the same resources available to students at larger institutions. However, the lack of funding for the digital library reduced these learning resources from 65 to nine in 2012. Students may no longer have access to resources that instructors incorporated into the curriculum based on their initial availability through the digital library.

Performance measures and public reporting are missing
The department and institutions lack clear performance measures and targets to know if they are collaborating effectively to eliminate duplication, save costs and improve services for students. They do not publicly report progress towards achieving the outcomes, the associated costs and savings.

Governance and accountability structures are overly complex
Beyond the 21 public post-secondary institutions themselves are many committees and separate legal entities that the institutions created for collaborating. Institutions' senior management and staff sit on various boards, management and operating committees of these separate entities. As previously discussed, the department and institutions do not have a complete list showing the mandates, roles, responsibilities and accountabilities for all committees and entities that may have been created.

Further, each initiative we reviewed had complex governance and accountability structures—see project management and accountability for collaborative initiatives section. These structures complicate effective planning, risk management, resource allocation, coordination and accountability across multiple initiatives. Complexity also works against the department's goal of a more efficient and cost-effective post-secondary system.

Solution attempted but abandoned—The department and institutions recognized these problems, so introduced the concept of Campus Alberta Administration in 2009—a single entity envisioned to provide project management expertise, administration and a more collaborative approach to achieve Campus Alberta outcomes. The department used the 2010 Campus Alberta Planning Resource to identify the need to streamline the system. However, the department shut down the idea of Campus Alberta Administration in June 2012, due to insufficient support from institutions and lack of funding.

The underlying problems persist—The entities that institutions created are not accountable to institutions' boards or the Minister of Enterprise and Advanced Education. In fact, there may be duplication of efforts to and increased costs to administer each entity, which is the opposite of what the department had hoped collaboration would do. The department has not comprehensively reviewed the mandates, roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of these committees and entities. The department believes that institutions do not need approval of the minister or the Lieutenant Governor in Council to jointly incorporate an entity, since no single institution controls the entity. However, the *Financial Administration Act*[17] and *Post-secondary Learning Act*[18] require each institution to get that approval when they incorporate an entity.

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[17] Section 80

What needs to be done—The department, through the Campus Alberta Strategic Directions Committee should review the mandate of the entities and the cost-effectiveness of the structures for planning, governing and implementing collaborative initiatives.

Questions that need to be answered—The department should consider the following questions when they review these entities and their structures:

- Individual institutions must submit business plans and annual reports to the minister for approval. When several institutions create an entity to support Campus Alberta outcomes, should the entity also have to submit business plans and annual reports to the minister? If so, should the entity's reports be published publicly, as in the case of institutions' business plans and annual reports?
- Should institutions follow Alberta Governance Secretariat policies[19] and processes to review the purpose, mandate and cost-effectiveness of entities and to decide whether to form them?
- Institutions' expense policies must comply with government policies. If institutions collaborate through informal structures, employees are reimbursed through institutions' expense policies. However, when institutions collaborate through a separate legal entity, should that entity have to follow the same expense policies and other restrictions as the institutions themselves?
- Institutions must comply with legislation, such as the *Post-secondary Learning Act, Financial Administration Act* and the *Elections Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act* when they collaborate through informal structures. When they collaborate through separate legal entities, does that legislation still apply to the entities? Should the legislation apply to the entities?
- What are the legal and other human resource management risks for institutions' staff serving on boards, management and operating committees of these separate legal entities, and are these risks appropriately managed?

Implications and risks if recommendation not implemented

Lack of strategic planning; unclear roles, responsibilities and accountabilities; and ineffective systems for collaboration all increase the risk that the department's goals for Campus Alberta may not be achieved cost-effectively or at all.

Project management and accountability for collaborative initiatives

Background

The *Access to the Future Act*[20] required institutions to develop a common application system, which led to the Apply Alberta initiative. The Lois Hole Campus Alberta Digital Library was announced in the 2005 Speech from the Throne. The ITM control framework was developed in response to our recommendation[21] that the department provide guidance to institutions on using an IT control framework that will allow them to implement effective controls.

Project management is the discipline of planning, organizing, managing, leading and controlling resources to achieve specific objectives and outcomes. Projects need a clearly defined accountability

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[18] Section 77
[19] http://www.finance.alberta.ca/business/agency-governance/
[20] Section 2 (2) (a) of the *Access to the Future Act*.
[21] *Report of the Auditor General of Alberta—April 2008*, no. 8, page 195.

framework to achieve their objectives. To be accountable, entities should follow this cycle:

- plan what needs to be done, by identifying specific deliverables, costs, funding sources, timelines and responsibilities
- do the work
- monitor progress against plans and report the analysis to those responsible
- evaluate progress and adjust plans and actions as required

RECOMMENDATION 7: DEVELOP PROCESSES AND GUIDANCE TO PLAN, IMPLEMENT AND GOVERN COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS

We recommend that the Department of Enterprise and Advanced Education, working with institutions and the Campus Alberta Strategic Directions Committee, develop systems and guidance for institutions to follow effective project management processes for collaborative initiatives.

Criteria: the standards for our audit

The department and institutions should have an effective project and risk-management system to plan, govern, implement and report on collaborative projects.

Our audit findings

KEY FINDINGS

- Generally, the department and institutions had good business and implementation plans for the ITM and digital library projects, but not for Apply Alberta.
- The department and institutions did not identify sustainable funding sources at the start of each collaborative project.
- Generally, the institutions had defined roles and responsibilities for all three projects, but set up complex governance structures.
- Institutions developed performance measures for the ITM and digital library projects, but not for Apply Alberta.
- For all three projects, institutions did not compare actual against expected costs and progress for work performed.
- For all three projects, institutions did not publicly report financial and non-financial results.

Below are the findings of our audit of the three initiatives and the lessons we want the department and institutions to take from what we found.

Planning

Lesson to learn: Planning matters—The digital library and Apply Alberta were announced in the 2005 Speech from the Throne and the *Access to the Future Act*, respectively. Consequently, business cases were not prepared for them, because the decisions to proceed with these initiatives were already made. Regardless, when institutions collaborate, they should develop detailed project plans to clearly define their objectives and outcomes, alternative ways to achieve them, the costs to implement and sustain initiatives, the resources required, the funding sources, risks and management plans. Also, the department and institutions should clarify how savings generated from collaborative initiatives can or should be used.

Planning should extend beyond implementation, to include ongoing operations, costs, funding sources and operating structures. This level of planning requires better communication among institutions about what initiatives are to achieve, how much they will cost, who will provide funding to implement and sustain the initiative and its possible benefits and risks.

ITM and digital library—Institutions generally followed good planning processes for both initiatives. They developed business and implementation plans that set out the objectives, risks assessments, timelines and costs to implement and sustain the initiative. They also developed measures to assess the success of initiatives.

However, the department and institutions did not identify funding sources and strategies to sustain their initiatives. Nor did they establish targets for performance measures, to know whether they had achieved their objectives.

Apply Alberta—The department and institutions did not develop clear and comprehensive business and implementation plans to implement and sustain this initiative. Nor did institutions develop clear measures and targets to measure the success of the initiative. This resulted in inefficiencies and confusion for institutions about the intended result and how to achieve it.

Governing

> *Lesson to learn: Overly complex structures are problematic*—For collaborative initiatives that involve many institutions, the institutions must start by clearly defining and communicating roles, responsibilities and accountabilities for implementing and operating initiatives. It must be clear who does what and who accounts to whom. Institutions must keep it simple and align each initiative with other strategic initiatives, to ensure effective oversight, risk management, communication, funding and resource allocation—not just for individual initiatives, but across multiple initiatives.

Institutions generally defined their roles and responsibilities for overseeing and monitoring all three initiatives. However, the structures for governing and operating the initiatives were complex, which complicated governance, communication and management of initiatives.

Apply Alberta—The department funded the Alberta Association of Colleges and Technical Institutes[22] to act as the administrative agent to plan Apply Alberta (NAIT provides administrative support to AACTI). An Apply Alberta task team was established to govern the initiative. Institutions later created the Alberta Post-secondary Application System under the *Societies Act*, to finish implementing Apply Alberta and to operate and manage it. AACTI then transferred all Apply Alberta assets to APAS.

Institutions are the members of APAS and appoint its board of directors from among their senior executives. Institution staff also participate on various board and management committees of APAS. Before Apply Alberta was implemented, institutions decided that none of them could host, operate and maintain it. APAS then contracted with the department to operate and maintain Apply Alberta. The department and APAS developed a governance model involving the department, APAS and institutions to manage changes to the Apply Alberta system.

Digital library—The board of The Alberta Library was responsible for this initiative. The department provided grants to the University of Alberta to administer and advance funds to TAL for common licences. TAL established a steering committee, resource selection committee and other committees to implement and operate the digital library. Institution staff participated in these committees. In 2009, responsibility for the digital library transferred to the University of Alberta, which now operates it. The university also continues to work with TAL, including the Library Steering Committee and the

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[22] A society created by all colleges, technical institutes, MacEwan University and Mount Royal University. See www.aacti.ca.

Post-secondary Directors Standing Committee. The Post-secondary Directors Standing Committee was created in 2010 to share information and collaboratively plan library initiatives for institutions and the digital library.

ITM—The department and institutions established a steering committee consisting of the department's chief information officer, the executive director of AAHEIT and several senior IT and finance staff from institutions to oversee the framework. The department hired a project manager and provided a grant to AAHEIT to hire contractors to work on the control framework. AAHEIT established several working groups with institution staff to develop the components of the ITM control framework with the contractors.

The project manager oversaw the other contractors' work and updated the steering committee on their progress. Several months after the project started, while developing the IT governance policies and procedures, the steering committee learned that the Advisory Committee on Educational Technology was also working on an IT governance project. ACET is another committee that reports to the senior academic officers sub-committee.

The steering or oversight committees received regular reports on the progress of the initiatives. This included actual costs and high-level progress, but did not report costs against specific expected deliverables and timelines (in other words, is actual work in line with expected work for cost incurred). Regular monitoring and reporting occurred to steering committees, but it was unclear how the committees reported their progress to senior management at all institutions.

Monitoring and reporting

> *Lesson to learn: Targets and performance measures provide evidence of results*—Institutions and the department should develop clear performance measures and targets at the start of every collaborative project, to assess if the initiative has achieved and can sustain its objective. They should report this information and the cost of the initiative to Albertans.

ITM and digital library—Institutions developed measures to assess the success of the initiatives, but did not develop targets for the measures. As a result, it is unclear if the initiatives met and sustained their objectives. For example, institutions were surveyed about the benefits of the ITM, but it may be too early to see if the outcomes were achieved because some institutions are still having trouble implementing effective IT policies, procedures and controls.

Apply Alberta—The *Access to the Future Act* requires institutions to implement an application system, which they have done for undergraduate programs. In 2008, institutions also established a vision for APAS that it should:
- provide information that the department and institutions can use for strategic planning, on the number of successful and declined applications
- link to the Student Aid Alberta system to allow students to determine the type of financial assistance available to them
- link to the Alberta Learning Information System to provide a career guidance tool that allows students to plan their career

However, APAS has not achieved these outcomes, mainly because the institutions have not identified or provided the funding needed to implement them.

Neither the department, nor institutions or separate entities have publicly reported the measures, results and costs to implement and sustain the three initiatives and the outcomes achieved.

Implications and risks if recommendation not implemented

Ineffective project management systems to plan, implement and govern collaborative initiatives increase the risk that the initiatives will not achieve their outcomes cost-effectively or at all.