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**Planning and Implementing Electoral Management Boards' (EMB) Activities:  
Structuring the EMB Secretariat**

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BY

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**ABSTRACT**

*An EMB without a strategic plan is like a pilot without a compass. The EMB secretariat is the policy implementation component in all EMB models. In EMBs under the Governmental Model, the secretariat is almost always the EMB, and may also assist in making policy under the direction of the executive branch of government. The EMB can be organized under three models of electoral management. In EMBs under the Independent Model, the EMB secretariat is the structure below the policymaking/supervisory EMB member level and encompasses the officials in the EMB who are responsible for electoral implementation; both the membership and the secretariat of the EMB are institutionally independent. Where the Mixed Model is used, the component governmental EMB is the secretariat, which has responsibility for implementation. The component independent EMB will also have a secretariat to service its own administrative needs. Equally, where the Governmental Model is used, the membership (where it exists) and the secretariat are both part of the executive branch.*

**KEYWORDS: Planning and Implementing, EMB Activities, EMB Secretariat, Public Service**

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**Introduction**

According to Atkeson, Bryant, Hall, Saunders & Alvarez (2010), the EMB secretariat is the policy implementation component in all EMB models. In EMBs under the Governmental Model, the secretariat is almost always the EMB, and may also assist in making policy under the direction of the executive branch of government. In EMBs under the Independent Model, the EMB secretariat is the structure below the policymaking/supervisory EMB member level and encompasses the officials in the EMB who are responsible for electoral implementation. Where the Mixed Model is used, the component governmental EMB is the secretariat, which has responsibility for implementation. The component independent EMB will also have a secretariat to service its own administrative needs.

Where the Independent Model is used, both the membership and the secretariat of the EMB are institutionally independent. Equally, where the Governmental Model is used, the membership (where it exists) and the secretariat are both part of the executive branch. Where the Mixed Model is used, the policymaking level is usually independent from the executive, while the implementation level is part of the executive branch, and usually lies under the Ministry of Interior or the Ministry of Justice.

**Table 1: The Policymaking and Implementation Components of the Three Models of Electoral Management (Atkeson & Saunders 2007)**

|   | <b>Independent Model</b>                               | <b>Mixed Model</b>   | <b>Governmental Model</b>  |
|---|--|--|--|
| <b>Policymaking Component</b>             | Independent of the executive branch of the government. | Independent of the executive branch of the government.               | Institutionally part of/ arranged/set up under the executive branch. |
| <b>Electoral implementation component</b> | Independent of the executive branch of the government. | Institutionally part of/ arranged/set up under the executive branch. | Institutionally part of/ arranged/set up under the executive branch. |

The staff of the secretariat in EMBs under the Governmental Model and component governmental EMBs under the Mixed Model may be temporary appointments, undertaking other duties when there is no electoral activity. In EMBs under the Independent Model, a full-time administrator, who has a title such as director of elections (Tanzania and Zambia), secretary-general (Burkina Faso, FYROM and Thailand), chief electoral officer (Afghanistan) or electoral commissioner (Australia), generally heads the secretariat. In some countries, for example Australia and Tonga, the head of the secretariat is also a member of the EMB.

### **The EMB Secretariat and the Public Service**

Procedures for appointing EMB secretariats vary. In countries that use the Governmental or Mixed Model, elections are implemented by the executive through a ministry or local authority. EMB secretariat staffs are normally public servants, appointed by the executive through the same rules and regulations that apply to all public service appointments, and subject to public service policies on rotation, training and dismissal. There is commonly no mention in the electoral law of these issues (Atkeson & Saunders, 2007). Such public servants may be engaged in electoral administration full time, as in the Czech Republic, Greece, Morocco and Norway, or have other duties during electoral off seasons and can only be engaged in electoral work during elections. They are then deployed or seconded to the electoral office to assist with various tasks such as boundary delimitation, voter registration, voter education and information, political party candidate registration, voting and counting. Ideally, such staff will have had previous relevant electoral experience, though turnover of personnel is likely to mean that this cannot be guaranteed. Similar arrangements are used in countries such as Bermuda, Cyprus and the Republic of Ireland.

Alvarez, Ansolabehere & Stewart (2005), in some countries that use the Independent Model, the EMB secretariat staff are directly appointed by the EMB under staffing structures and conditions that are determined by the EMB (as in Cambodia), while in other countries they are public servants and their salaries and conditions of service are linked to those of the public service. Even where secretariat staffs are public servants, they may hold statutory appointments under electoral law. External control of EMB staffing by a government department or body such as a Ministry of Administration (Indonesia) or a Public Service Commission (Nepal) can give rise of a range of challenges. The EMB may have little or no control over secretariat staff selection. Policies requiring rotation of staff at fixed intervals or specifying limits on how long a public servant may remain at a senior level before compulsory retirement, may constrain the development of institutional capacity and memory and in most extreme cases could prevent senior staff from managing more than one election.

Deadlines associated with such policies may well fail to take into account the electoral cycle, which could lead to the departure of key staff at critical times. The extent to which an EMB is empowered to hire and fire its public servant staff can be an indication of its independence from the government. According to Andrews, Boyne, & Enticott (2006), EMBs have this power in India, Mexico, South Africa and Uruguay. In other countries, such as Antigua and Barbuda, Botswana, Tanzania and Yemen, the president appoints the head of the secretariat.

In Georgia, the EMB staffs are all public servants. Except for the head of the secretariat, the staffs of the Namibian EMB are also all public servants. The government approves the creation of EMB positions, and all EMB appointments are linked to public service salaries and conditions of service. The EMB determines the conditions of service for temporary election staff, such as polling station staff, but the treasury must first approve their remuneration.

In Canada and Kenya, the EMB's returning officers (managers) at the electoral district level for national elections were, until comparatively recently, appointed by the government rather than the EMB. That practice was regarded as a weak link in electoral administration, since it had the potential to compromise the EMB's overall authority in the conduct of elections, and to call the neutrality of the returning officers into question. For federal elections in Canada, returning officers have been appointed on merit by the chief electoral officer since 2007, while in Kenya such appointments have been made by the EMB since 2011.

**Table 2: Possible Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Public Servants as EMB Secretariat Staff (Andrews, Boyne & Walker, 2006)**

| <b>Advantages</b>   | <b>Disadvantages</b>   |
|---|--|
| May not be regarded as neutral or impartial, thus reducing the credibility of the electoral process.                                      | May not be regarded as neutral or impartial, thus reducing the credibility of the electoral process. |
| Knowledge of general public administration issues may reduce EMB training needs.  | May lack specific electoral skills.  |
| May have networks within the public service that assist electoral activities (e.g. in procurement of materials, use of state facilities). | May not be accustomed to the time-critical nature of electoral tasks.                                |
| Offers a clear career path, even if not in the EMB.   | May transfer/be transferred out of the EMB with little notice, resulting in critical skill losses.   |
| May be cost-effective and provide a pool of staff that can be used flexibly to meet staffing needs.                                       | Pay scales may be insufficient to motivate performance or loyalty.                                   |
| Job security may promote continuity of staffing and organizational learning.  | May be working second jobs due to low pay, thus affecting commitment at critical times.              |

Ansolabehere & Stewart, (2005), critical issues to consider when determining whether to use public servants as EMB secretariat staff are those of political neutrality and 'job fit' or skill levels. Public servants may be publicly regarded as associated with or easily influenced by the government—on which they depend for their appointment, promotions and salaries—which may jeopardize the EMB's credibility. Strong independent EMBs under the Independent or Mixed Model can overcome this perception.

In many countries, public servants may not be highly trained because they only work infrequently on electoral matters or due to public service rotation policies, not technically skilled in electoral tasks. Blending skills that are available within the public service with outside appointments and the use of consultants or advisers can help raise skill levels. In a number of countries, including Indonesia, Tonga and Timor-Leste, the EMB has successfully employed or worked with consultants and/or contractors for voter's information and information technology (IT) tasks, and transferred skills to the EMB's public service staff.

### **Structuring the Secretariat**

According to Atkeson & Saunders, (2007), Regardless of the model of EMB used, budgetary restrictions provide an overall constraint on the number and types of positions that an EMB can afford to fund. EMBs following the Independent Model that have the authority to hire and fire staff may be best placed to determine their own structure. Even in such cases, however, the law or government regulation may have already determined key elements of the organizational structure, such as senior executive positions and required functional divisions.

All EMBs that rely on public service staffing for their secretariat may face constraints on their ability to determine their organizational structure. General laws and practices for the public service may require approval for all organizational structures from a central supervisory body; set rigid standards for how departments, sections, subsections and other work units must be structured; or restrict the use of non-public service contractors or experts. The staff of governmental EMBs under either the Governmental or Mixed Models, all or most of who works within public service departments, may have even greater constraints, as they may have to fit not only the structure of a temporary electoral organization but also the continuing work structure for their department or authority's other tasks. EMBs under the Independent Model that have control over their staffing may have more structural flexibility.

Developing' is a key term for EMB organizational structures. Devising an initial structure is the first step but maintaining a structure that continues to meet the evolving legal framework, the rapid advances in electoral information and communications technology, and stakeholder expectations is a real challenge. It is harder to be flexible enough to meet these demands when the organizational structure is partially or wholly defined by law or regulations of bodies other than the EMB, or where the EMB's structure and staffing are subject to general public service rules. While constant organizational change is unsettling, including structural reviews in major evaluations and giving the EMB powers to make changes or additions to organizational structures can enhance the effectiveness of electoral management (Bhasin & Gandhi, 2012). Temporary task forces or project teams drawn from different parts of an EMB can be a more effective short-term response to evolving challenges than major changes to organizational structures, especially when rapid action is required and when the disruption of major restructuring may outweigh any immediate benefits.

### **Organizational Structure Charts**

Birch (2011) opines that determining the internal working relationships of the EMB entails creating an organizational structure chart (organigram) that facilitates effective integrated planning, service delivery and management control. The EMB may design its own organizational structure if it has in-house expertise, or it could hire an expert consultant or organization or another EMB to help. It is important for an EMB or its agents to consult broadly on the development of its organizational chart in order to promote stakeholder involvement in its operations. Stakeholder involvement can ensure that the EMB considers

external service delivery expectations, rather than merely internal management needs, when developing or reviewing the organizational structure. The number of staff positions to be created, their levels of seniority and their management relationships will be determined by what is required to effectively fulfill the EMB's mandate. Ideally, the structure will wholly reflect the EMB's objectives and functions rather than be tailored to the staff skills available, although this approach may be more difficult in EMBs that are completely reliant on more inflexible frameworks of public service staffing.

Maintaining the continuity of electoral work is a major consideration when developing an organizational chart. The timing of EMB functions may be as important as the functions themselves. There are basic administrative, review and evaluation, and electoral event planning and preparation tasks that are almost always thought to require a base level of permanent staff. The EMB may also have other powers and functions that require ongoing implementation, such as voter and party registration, oversight of funding, and voter education and information. Even if there are relatively few continuous tasks, the EMB may benefit from maintaining a strong and broadly based permanent management team across all functions to effectively handle peaks of activity (Boyne, 2002).

Creating too many positions on the EMB organizational chart is likely to promote public criticism, especially during the period between elections, when it is difficult for the public to visualize what, if anything, EMB staffs are doing. Equally, maintaining too lean a structure may increase efficiency during periods of low activity but may undermine progress and continuity. Before implementing a 'lean' staffing plan, the potential availability of additional staff for peak workload periods and the in-house capacity to train new staff have to be carefully assessed. In this respect, EMBs that can draw on additional public service resources to handle peak workloads, particularly Governmental and Mixed Model EMBs, may be better placed to operate continuously at peak efficiency.

### ***How to Develop an Organizational Chart***

According to Bhasin & Gandhi, (2012). The task of developing an organizational chart requires an EMB to identify:

- the powers, functions and tasks that the electoral legal framework gives to the EMB;
- the timing of implementation of those tasks;
- the number of permanent staff required to perform each function or task;
- the number and types of consultants and temporary staff required to deal with peak period activities;
- the level of qualifications and experience required to perform each identified function and task;
- who is answerable to whom in the EMB's management hierarchy; and
- The relationships among various EMB layers, including the need to create permanent or temporary positions at regional locations, and the hierarchy and structure of accountability within and between EMB locations.

### ***Model Secretariat Structures***

EMB structures have to be robust enough to deal with real-world conditions that may be disorganized or conflictual. Despite the multiplicity of possible organizational structures for an EMB, there are some general concepts worth considering when developing the secretariat's structure (Boyne, 2002):

1. Flatter organizational structures (fewer management levels) can deliver services faster, often more effectively, and reduce inefficient empire building.
2. Structures are most effective when they are clearly linked to the EMB's strategic plan.
3. Outward-looking structures focused on service delivery to stakeholders are better than inward-looking ones focused on management or support functions.
4. Structures need to facilitate both vertical and horizontal communication within the EMB.
5. Clear work output expectations and accountability for services should be designed for each organizational unit.
6. Structures should promote support of operational areas by corporate service (e.g. finance and personnel) areas.
7. Given the prominence in the electoral cycle of the functions of monitoring, evaluation, review and reform, it is appropriate that they are reflected in and supported by the EMB's structure.
8. In conjunction with that, an independent internal audit function that bypasses the secretariat structure and reports directly to the head of the secretariat or EMB members can help ensure integrity and probity.

Decentralized EMBs need to determine the accountability structure for regional offices. Do they report directly to the EMB members, or to the chief of the national secretariat, which is the more usual route? The situation becomes more complex if the legal framework defines a structure in which there are appointed members of regional EMBs and EMB secretariats at both regional and lower levels. This has been the case in Indonesia, where the appointed regional EMB members report hierarchically to the EMB members at the next-highest geographical-level EMB, and the regional-level secretariat reports to the head of the EMB secretariat at the next-highest level. Such complex and divided reporting arrangements may confuse staff about who ultimately directs them.

According to James (2011), where Independent or Mixed Models are used, there must be clarity regarding the way in which individual members of the policymaking/supervisory EMB are to deal with the secretariat and its staff. If the policymaking body reaches collective decisions that are communicated to the head of the secretariat for action, this minimizes the risk of confused lines of authority. If, however, members of the policymaking body are given separate responsibility for particular key activities, there is a danger that their roles will overlap with those of the heads of components of the secretariat. Such a situation can be especially problematic if the policymaking body consists of or includes political party representatives.

According to James, some EMBs are structured into two main divisions:

1. Electoral operations: Covering subdivisions such as voter registration, boundary delimitation, organization of voting and vote counting, party and candidate registration, electoral training and development, research, information services and publications, and legal affairs; and
2. Corporate services: Covering subdivisions such as financial management, human resources management, knowledge management and IT infrastructure management.

However, some functions that do not fit easily into either of these two divisions—such as stakeholder relations, international relations and support for EMB members—may be attached directly to the head of the secretariat's office. It is preferable that audit and evaluation functions report directly to the chair or members of the EMB for independent

EMBs under the Independent Model and component independent EMBs under the Mixed Model, and to the EMB's chief executive officer for governmental EMBs under either the Governmental or Mixed Model (James, 2012). This two-division structure may not, however, necessarily fit specific electoral environments. There is great variety in structures deemed appropriate by EMBs, some of which are presented in the case studies. Judgment on an appropriate structure has to be made by each EMB, bearing in mind its environment, functions, priorities and strategy.

### **Strategic Planning**

Developing a strategic plan is a basic step in focusing an EMB's efforts on achieving a set of agreed objectives based on its legally defined responsibilities. The strategic plan is the management tool from which fundamental decisions on EMB activity flow—operational planning and prioritizing, resource allocation and service standards. The strategic plan provides the EMB with a blueprint for service and organizational strengthening, integration and improvement. It helps the EMB operate in and understand its changing environment. The strategic plan is also a public document that serves as a record of what the EMB stands for, what it does and why, and what it intends to achieve. It is a road map that guides and motivates the EMB for a defined period of years and plays an important role as a marker against which stakeholders can measure its performance (Kelly & Swindell, 2002).

An effective EMB strategic plan sets out a vision of an open, democratic and accountable institution. It is also consistent with the EMB's mandate and implemented within the framework of the constitution and the electoral law. It takes into account all known factors that could affect the EMB's performance, such as the regulatory environment, technology, the likelihood of conflict, stakeholder participation or voter apathy, and EMB-government relations. It would be unusual for an EMB's strategic plan to cover more than one national electoral cycles as post-electoral event reviews may result in significant changes to the electoral administration environment. A strategic plan is not set in concrete: it is a practical, strategic guide, and must evolve if significant changes in the external or internal environment require a revised strategy.

Yet it is also important for a strategic plan to take account of environmental factors such as the increasing use of the Internet worldwide or rising demands for out-of-country voting, which over several election cycles can significantly alter the context in which elections are conducted. Figure 8 on page 160 is an example of a succinct summary strategic plan, developed by the Australian EMB.

Basic elements of the strategic plan according to Lai, (2013) are:

1. Vision: what the EMB aspires to be;
2. Purpose, objective or mission: the fundamental focus of the EMB;
3. Values: the ethical concepts on which the EMB's activities are based, such as impartiality, accountability, independence, professionalism, effectiveness, equity and service-mindedness;
4. Outcomes and focus areas: what the EMB aims to achieve;
5. Key results: the effects that the EMB wants to have on its environment;
6. Indicators: measurable targets that help determine how well the EMB has achieved its intended results;
7. EMB data: the establishment, structure and composition of the EMB; and

8. Performance management strategy: how the EMB will promote the improvement of individual, team and organizational performance in a holistic, systematic and sustainable way.

An analysis by the EMB of its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats may be an important tool in facilitating the development of a strategic plan. Identifying the contextual elements on which the intended outcomes of the strategic plan are based is necessary in order to make valid evaluations of achievements. The assumed context could include specific levels of stakeholders' participation, adequate infrastructure to support the strategic plan, and the recruitment and retention of qualified and experienced staff. Each country is likely to have a unique context, such as the EMB's efforts to deal with, for example, inter-ethnic conflict or the effects of HIV/AIDS on its employees.

According to O'Leary, C. (1962) cited in Lai (2013), it is important that the EMB consult with its stakeholders in the development, monitoring and review of its strategic plan. This promotes stakeholders' awareness and appreciation of the EMB's challenges and strengths and may boost their confidence in the electoral process in general. It also promotes the EMB's awareness of its stakeholders' expectations and priorities.

### **Operational Planning**

Lodge & Wegrich, (2012), the operational concept provides the framework for operational planning under the strategic plan. It is important to integrate the operational concept with the electoral cycle, and to link operational planning with each phase of the cycle. The operational concept takes account of the establishment of a proper legal framework, and the nature and scope of the electoral processes. It needs to acknowledge any constraints on the EMB's planning and be realistic in its assumptions about issues such as security and stability, and any unforeseen circumstances that could affect electoral management and the preparation and conduct of elections. The importance of stakeholders' full participation should be stressed in the operational concept.

For the purposes of detailed planning and effective administration, the operational concept may divide an electoral process into several phases, for example, the establishment of the legal and administrative framework; the preparations for voter registration; the conduct of voter registration; preparations for polling and counting; candidate registration; the political campaign; polling; the counting and announcement of results; and post-election activities. Each operational activity needs to be targeted at the objectives stated in the strategic plan.

Operational planning is most effective when the staff implementing the activities are involved in their planning. Operational plans may set yearly or longer-term operational targets and be broken down into half-yearly, quarterly, monthly and weekly segments, taking into account the availability of resources and the legal and operational deadlines for effective electoral service delivery. Operational plans for each EMB activity need to be split into divisional workloads and may be harmonized through a committee of senior secretariat staff, possibly with EMB member involvement. The EMB membership's formal approval of operational plans emphasizes the significance of the plan. Divisional plans need to be broken down to the work unit and individual level, to reinforce the importance of each EMB staff member meeting the organization's objectives and performance targets, and to provide a monitoring mechanism for staff and work unit performance (Mahoney & Thelan, 2010).



## **The Electoral Calendar**

According to Neufield (2013), the primary purpose of an electoral calendar is to help an EMB keep its planning and preparation on schedule in order to meet its statutory or administrative deadlines. The calendar will also inform the public, political parties and the media about key dates, thus enhancing transparency and the EMB's public image. Electoral calendars convey the range and sequence of EMB activities. An EMB may produce calendars with different levels of detail for internal use (e.g. dates for receiving election forms from printers) and for different stakeholders. A political party may only be interested in dates for voter and candidate registration, campaigns and campaign funding, voting, vote counting and determination of the results.

A simple summary calendar, can enhance media and public understanding of electoral processes, whereas publicly distributing a highly detailed document may be confusing. However, in the absence of security concerns, there is no reason why the EMB could not give stakeholders, such as political parties, candidates, election staff, NGOs and donor agencies, access to copies of its internal administrative calendar, if requested. Project management software can help an EMB develop a comprehensive election calendar that functions as a sophisticated electoral operations plan with clear milestones, time frames, individual staff responsibilities and interdependences of activities. This type of calendar can be shared with stakeholders and among staff as the basis for managing their progress and completing tasks (Norris, 2014).

An electoral calendar is especially helpful for ensuring the timely procurement of voter registration and polling supplies and materials. It is also a useful guide to political parties in countries such as Kenya and Nigeria, where political party primaries or other internal candidate selection processes have to be undertaken before nominating candidates for election, and where such political party events have a bearing on the election timetable. A thorough review of the electoral calendar after each election or other electoral event will help identify where changes to the organizational structure, resource allocations, or the legislative or regulatory frameworks would improve electoral operations.

## **Conclusion**

EMBs may have more effective control over electoral activities if they are empowered to directly hire and fire, and set the conditions of service for, their secretariats. Yet many EMB secretariats are drawn from public service staff and are subject, to a greater or lesser degree, to common public service rules that may limit both the EMB's human resource flexibility and its ability to develop continuity in the professional electoral service. An EMB's strategic plan is the basis for all of its activities, defining for a fixed period the EMB's vision, purpose, values, target outcomes, result outputs and performance indicators. Stakeholder involvement in the development, monitoring and review of an EMB's strategic plans focuses the planning on service delivery, and can boost confidence in the EMB. An EMB also needs operational work plans, based on the strategic plan, which detail individual work processes and their integration, deadlines and responsibilities. These are usefully developed into a detailed electoral calendar, a simplified version of which is an important source of information and transparency-enhancing tool for public distribution.

### **Recommendation**

1. An electoral calendar is especially helpful for ensuring the timely procurement of voter registration and polling supplies and materials. It is also a useful guide to political parties in countries where political party primaries or other internal candidate selection processes have to be undertaken before nominating candidates for election.
2. In order to develop an effective EMB organization, the EMB structures have to be robust enough to deal with real-world conditions that may be disorganized or conflicting.
3. Each EMB needs to develop an organizational structure that facilitates cost-effective achievement of its strategic objectives by designating the necessary numbers of skilled staff at appropriate locations and levels of seniority who are subject to effective lines of accountability.

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