

ACTION REQUESTS

INTRODUCTION

Information requests from the Minister or Deputy Minister often come in the form of Action Requests (ARs). You can identify an AR by the Action Request number and stamp attached to the form. All ARs also have a deadline attached to them.

This policy addresses:

- the Action Request process;
- the Board's approach to handling ARs; and
- issues to consider when generating a response to an AR.

ACTION REQUEST PROCESS

Action Requests are generated from the Minister's or Deputy Minister's Office. ARs require a response within a specific time period. Whoever assigns the AR gives it a number and due date through the ARTS (Action Request Tracking System).

If an AR is assigned by the Minister's office, the original background material for the AR is forwarded to the Chair. The "action" of the request (e.g., briefing, memo, letter, etc.) and the due date are given in the ARTS coversheet.

ARs created by an MLA information requests are normally due within five business days. ARs stemming from other correspondence is normally due within 10 business days. Pressing issues may require immediate attention.

Occasionally, an AR will require a response from more than one program area. In this case, the Deputy will designate a lead program area. Other involved areas work with the lead area to generate a response. This happens infrequently with ARs received by the Board.

Once an AR is completed by a program area, it is returned to the Deputy's office for approval and then is sent on to the Minister. Significant revisions may result in an AR being returned from the Minister or Deputy Minister's office.

HANDLING ARs AT THE BOARD

All ARs are sent to the Chair. The Chair may then delegate responsibility for drafting a response to a staff member.

Developing a response to an Action Request may require Board staff to review files, discuss the matter with other staff or liaise with program areas in the [Ministry](#) such as Mediation Services.

Normally, Action Requests require the Board to draft:

1. a one-page letter from the Minister to whomever has inquired about an issue addressing the concerns raised in the correspondence; and
2. a one-page briefing memo from the Chair to the Minister explaining the issue.

The Chair must review and approve all responses prior to sending the response on to the Minister or Deputy Minister. Staff must allow enough time for this review and any changes that may be required by the Chair. Once a response is complete, an electronic version is provided to the Chair's Assistant. The Assistant then forwards it on to the originator for review.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Responding to an Action Request may require significant amounts of work and tact. Some things to consider when generating a draft response are:

- **Political sensitivity:** ARs often centre upon politically sensitive issues. The Chair will often draw such issues to the attention of staff charged with completing an AR. It is important that the Board avoid further inflaming any issue through a tactless reply or by divulging sensitive information.
- **Tone:** The language used in any response must be courteous, neutral and business-like even when the inquiry is not. A Minister's response may become public and the tone of any response must not become an issue of contention. A response always begins with thanking the other party for writing.
- **Clearly framing the issue:** It is important to clearly frame the issue(s) in question early in any response. This delineates the scope of the response and focuses the attention of the recipients upon the salient issue(s) and facts.
- **FOIPP:** It is important to be conscious of the constraints placed upon the Board and the Minister by the [Freedom of Information and Protection of Personal Privacy Act](#). This Act prohibits government from divulging a third party's personal information without the prior consent of the third party. This does not preclude discussing an event or proceeding where third parties were involved, but it does place some constraints upon what information the response can reveal. See: [[Protection of Personal Privacy Under FOIPP, Chapter 5\(c\)](#)].
- **Board impartiality:** The Board is an impartial tribunal charged with administering and interpreting the [Labour Relations Code](#). Board decisions are often controversial and this may generate letters of inquiry or complaint to the Minister. A response does not comment on matters currently before the Board. Further, a response does not indicate the Minister will

interfere with Board decisions. In these cases, the response explains the purpose and powers of the Board to the person writing and may provide information about appropriate Board processes (e.g., reconsiderations, judicial reviews, becoming an intervenor). Responses do not comment upon or attempt to interpret Board decisions.

- **Education:** Some ARs indicate the author does not fully or correctly understand Alberta’s labour laws or the Board’s processes. It may be appropriate to provide information about labour law or processes in a response. This educative approach may be a part of framing an issue. For example, it may be useful to explain the Board is an “impartial and independent tribunal” and that it is inappropriate for the Minister to interfere in its deliberations or decisions. It may also be appropriate to explain the mechanisms under the Code for appealing the Board’s decisions—a reconsideration or a judicial review.
- **Never commit the Minister:** Individuals often request the Minister take specific action (e.g., make or change a decision, meet with them). No response should commit the Minister to any action. If the Minister decides to act, the Minister should be the one to make that decision and communicate it to the individual(s) in question.
- **Never surprise the Minister:** No Minister likes to be surprised, particularly in public. The briefing memo that accompanies all ARs should clearly explain to the Minister any relevant background information and highlight areas of potential concern. A Minister’s response may become public and the Minister should be aware of any potential issues or problems before the Minister issues a response.