



Delegation of Authority: A Primer

Background

The Alberta Post-Secondary Learning Act (*PSLA*) assigns authority to the University of Calgary's Board and President for the overall governance and operations of the university. In turn, the Board and the President assigned powers, duties, and functions to the applicable Vice-Presidents. The fulfillment of these responsibilities is essential to realizing the University of Calgary's core mission and maintaining a high level of accountability and transparency for stewarding public resources.

The University of Calgary's Delegation of Authority policy and accompanying Appendix enable Designated Individuals¹ to share their organizational responsibilities with their subordinates.

Understanding the Delegation of Authority

A delegation of authority framework permits the transfer of authority from Designated Individuals to their subordinates. Delegated decisions empower subordinates to make commitments, use resources and act in relation to their assigned duties. Effective delegation legitimizes the exercise of authority within the structure and the rules of the organization.

A clear and well-defined delegation of authority framework is necessary for the efficient functioning of a post-secondary institution. A key element for such a framework is that the authority granted to a subordinate must be equal to the responsibility assigned to the initial Designated Individual. The result should be that the authority delegated adequately assures the ability to accomplish the results that are expected. Failure to balance responsibility with authority leads to inefficiency.

Key Elements of the Delegation of Authority

There are three central elements involved in an effective delegation of authority framework:

1. Authority

Authority is the power and right of an individual to use and allocate their resources efficiently, to make decisions, and to provide direction to achieve the organizational objectives. Due to the symbiotic relationship between authority and responsibility, authority should always be accompanied by an equal amount of responsibility if the task is to be completed successfully.

2. Responsibility

This component refers to the specifics and scope of the individual to complete the task assigned to them. While authority flows from the top-down, responsibility flows from the bottom-up. Conflicts often occur when someone is given too much authority with too little responsibility.

¹ "Designated Individual" means an Employee or Academic Staff Member with delegated or sub-delegated authority in accordance with the policy.



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3. Accountability

The Delegated Individual never surrenders their accountability. Rather, they share certain responsibilities with their subordinates and assign how much authority is necessary to complete that task.

Accountability is also the point at which authority and responsibility meet. Although responsibility may be assigned, and authority may be delegated, accountability to one's superior can neither be reassigned nor delegated.

For example, a Vice-President may have the delegated responsibility for a decision; however, the President is ultimately accountable for the outcome.

An Effective Delegation of Authority

Within the complex post-secondary environment, administrators and faculty members face unique challenges regarding their roles within their institutional governance system. Many challenges arise from misunderstandings of authority and its limitations by administrators and faculty members alike.

At times, decision-making processes in post-secondary institutions that support the academic mission are described as slow, opaque, and overly complex. To accomplish an effective delegation of authority framework at the University, it is important that all members of the University community understand the purpose of specific delegated functions and the objectives to be achieved.

Delegating responsibilities helps increase the level of speed, response, and satisfaction for all stakeholders while maintaining compliance with how the University is governed.

The University of Calgary's Delegation of Authority

On July 3, 2023, an updated Appendix of the University of Calgary's Delegation of Authority came into effect. The Appendix was redesigned to help increase usability, which in turn, will assist in reducing administrative burden across the University.

Accompanying the changes to the Appendix, a dedicated website has been created to help provide the University community with resources to search for who is responsible for certain decisions, who needs to be consulted and who needs to support various initiatives. Additionally, the website was designed to clarify delegation of authority concepts such as the difference between a signing authority and a decision authority.

Increasing the usability of the Appendix is the first phase of a broader review of how decisions at the University are made. Though the Appendix was redesigned to assist the University in supporting a culture of accountability, additional work is underway to ensure alignment of approval processes across portfolios. This next phase of the project is scheduled to commence in 2024 and will address certain approval levels, a more fulsome sub-delegation process, and new training for leaders on their delegated authority requirements.