

BENCHMARKING AND CANADIAN FEDERALISM
May 13, 2011

Mowat Centre for Policy Innovation – School of Public Policy and Governance
3rd floor Boardroom, Canadian Building
14 Queen's Park Crescent West, Toronto

Background:

Benchmarking arrangements are being increasingly adopted in federal systems. All federations face the issue of balancing the interests of the central government in key areas of public policy with the desire of constituent units to have autonomy or at least flexibility in terms of how they manage major programs. Benchmarking is emerging as a way of escaping some of the rigidities of traditional conditional grant programs, injecting a new dynamism into federal practices, and shifting the focus to outcomes achievement and 'best practice'.

The move toward benchmarking raises, however, a number of questions for federal systems. How do benchmarking arrangements affect intergovernmental relations and the functioning of the federal system? To what extent might benchmarking practices enhance federalism and what form of benchmarking is most conducive to effective federal practice? What are the challenges in moving from performance monitoring to active policy learning? Does benchmarking actually lead to improved outcomes?

To address some of these questions, the Forum of Federations has a project underway on "Benchmarking in Federal Systems." Academic leadership is being provided by Alan Fenna, a leading scholar of comparative federalism from Curtin University (Australia). In 2010, Prof. Fenna wrote a working paper (see separate attachment) covering established federations.

As part of this project, the Forum of Federations in cooperation with the Mowat Centre for Policy Innovation is holding a one-day by-invitation workshop in Toronto to discuss the applicability of benchmark in the Canadian federal context and what Canada could learn from international experiences.

Specific questions to be addressed at the workshop:

- What broad lessons can we learn from international and Canadian experience of benchmarking in a federal context?
- How could federal-type benchmarking be applied in Canada, to what subjects and with what organizational approaches?
- How do benchmarking methods relate to public service reform and delivery in particular jurisdictions, and how do they best connect to the other instruments of public service improvement?
- Can benchmarking be applied to fiscal transfers? If so, in what ways?
- How can governments that choose to apply benchmarking optimize its value, facilitate the transfer of good practice and shorten the learning curve?

Program

8:45 Welcome

- **Matthew Mendelsohn**, Mowat Centre for Policy Innovation
- **Felix Knüpling**, Forum of Federations

9:00 Benchmarking and Federalism – International experiences

- **Alan Fenna**, Curtin University, Perth (30 min)

10:15: Break

10:30: Case Study: Health

- Chair: **Richard Simeon**, University of Toronto
- **Jeremy Veillard**, Canadian Institute for Health Information (20 min)
- **Patrick Fafard**, University of Ottawa (20 min)

11:30: Case Study: Labour Market

- Chair: **Nadia Verrelli**, Queen's University
- **Donna Wood**, University of Victoria (20 min)
- **Peter Graefe**, McMaster University – commentary (10 min)

12:30: Lunch

13:30: Case Study: Education

- Chair: **David Cameron**, University of Toronto
- **Andrew Parkin**, Council of Ministers of Education (20 min)
- **Jennifer Wallner**, University of Regina (20 min)

14:30 Break

14:45 Panel Discussion: Challenges and opportunities of benchmarking in Canada

- Chair: **Leslie Seidle**, Forum of Federations
- **Josh Hjartason**, Mowat Centre for Policy Innovation
- **Julie Simmons**, University of Guelph
- **Alan Fenna**, Curtin University, Perth

16:15: Wrap-up:

- **George Anderson**, Forum of Federations
- **Matthew Mendelsohn**, Mowat Centre for Policy Innovation

16:30: End of Conference