

**Integrated Quality
Management Framework**
of the **Institut de la statistique du Québec**
General Orientation Document

For any information concerning the ISQ
and the statistical data it has available, contact :

Institut de la statistique du Québec
200, chemin Sainte-Foy
Québec (Québec)
G1R 5T4
Tel. : (418) 691-2411

or

Tel. : 1 800 463-4090
(toll-free in Canada and the United States)

Website : www.stat.gouv.qc.ca

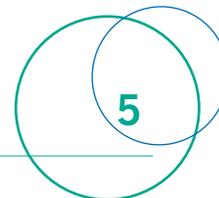
© Gouvernement du Québec, Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2006

All reproduction is prohibited
without the explicit authorization of
the Institut de la statistique du Québec.

January 2007

Table of contents

<i>Introduction</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>A. Context</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>B. Dimensions of quality</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>C. Conditions conducive to quality</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Leadership and staff</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Organization of work</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Ways of doing things</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Conclusion</i>	<i>20</i>



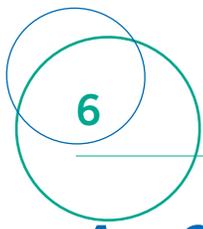
Introduction

1. The Act respecting the Institut de la statistique du Québec (R.S.Q., c. I-13.011) contains very clear provisions concerning the quality obligations the Institut must comply with in producing its statistical information. Section 2 of the Act establishes the following: “The mission of the Institut is to provide reliable and objective statistical information on the situation of Québec as regards all aspects of Québec society for which such information is pertinent”. In addition, section 5 gives the Institut the particular mandate to deal with the information it produces “in such a manner that comparisons in and outside Québec may be made”. Hence, relevance, reliability and objectivity, and comparability are the basic criteria that must guide quality management at the Institut.

In accordance with the policies agreed upon internationally in this field, the Institut defines the concept of quality on the basis of the following six criteria: relevance, reliability and objectivity, comparability, timeliness, intelligibility and accessibility.¹ This multi-dimensional approach to quality requires consideration of all the criteria that make statistical information adapted to its use.

The purpose of this general orientation document is to recall the context of the Institut’s approach to quality, present the model chosen for quality management, define each dimension of quality and indicate the main conditions conducive to quality by promoting, on the one hand, the highest production quality and, on the other, the best possible control over that quality.

1. See the General Quality Management Policy of the Institut de la statistique du Québec.



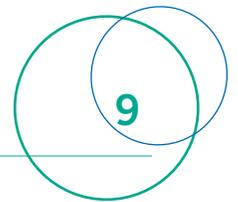
A. Context

2. “The Institut accords its highest priority to satisfying its clientele [...] The quality of its products and services is an ongoing concern of the Institut”. That is the way two of the Institut’s five management values are formulated in its *Declaration of Services to the Public*, disseminated in January 2003, which also contains the commitment to “offer statistical products and services of a very high professional and technical quality that require the use of proven statistical methods”. However, these values and that commitment are not new to the Institut’s staff. Even before the legislation creating the Institut was adopted in June 1998, the bodies that were to be integrated into the new organization had already shown in various ways their adherence to these principles. Here are no doubt the most frequently cited illustrations of this:
 - user consultation mechanisms inherent in the planning and evaluation of health and remuneration surveys, so that the information produced corresponds as closely as possible to user needs and expectations;
 - chapters devoted to methodology in most of the reports based on sample surveys, for the purpose of providing users with an assessment of the quality of the data so they are better able to interpret the results;
 - research work and recommendations concerning the quality of data on Québec produced by Statistics Canada, so that the data reflect reality as accurately as possible, particularly research work and recommendations dealing with population estimation methods and census undercount measures;
 - production of *Québec’s Quarterly Economic Accounts* and their seasonal adjustment, in order to provide decision makers with more timely data.
3. The constant concern with meeting the needs of the clientele and with the quality of products and services illustrated by the above examples has been affirmed again since the creation of the Institut. Many achievements can be cited as evidence of this, particularly:
 - the creation of new advisory committees of users and outside experts in the fields of cultural, demographic and social, and economic and sectoral statistics. These committees supplement those in the health, and labour and compensation fields, with a view to obtaining input from committee members to improve current production and better determine new needs;
 - the implementation of the Databank of Official Statistics on Québec, which makes available on the Internet, according to a standardized approach and from a single gateway, the principal official statistics disseminated by government departments and agencies and linked to their respective mandates;

- the publication, beginning with the 2003-2004 fiscal year, of the dissemination calendar for statistical information on various aspects of Québec society, so that all interested users are aware of the dissemination dates before their release;
 - the signing of medium and long-term service agreements with a number of partners within the government in order to ensure the production of new statistics that meet the partners' particular needs or those of their clientele;
 - the establishment, in Montréal and Québec City, of the Centre d'accès aux données de recherche (research data access centre) to meet the needs of university researchers.
4. The Institut marked its sixth anniversary on April 1, 2005. During its initial years of operation, beyond the pursuit and broadening of its programs, and the adoption of a number of innovations, the Institut devoted significant efforts to achieve the following objectives:
- the integration of its constituent bodies, which have increasingly learned to work together;
 - the development of the 2000-2004 business plan and of two strategic plans covering the periods 2002-2005 and 2005-2008;
 - the promotion of the new Institut's services within the government, and cooperation with the other producers of official statistics on Québec;
 - the establishment of a recurrent program of process review, with the goal of improving the effectiveness and efficiency of processes;
 - the implementation of a program evaluation function.
5. In the text on management values mentioned earlier, the Institut also affirms that it "subscribes to the fundamental principles of official statistics adopted by the Economic Commission for Europe, an agency of the United Nations". These fundamental principles are the cornerstone of the activity of all statistical agencies in democratic countries. By choosing to adopt these internationally recognized principles, the Institut confirms its determination to make official statistics available "on an impartial basis". It has chosen to "decide, according to strictly professional considerations, including scientific principles and professional ethics, on the methods and procedures for the collection, processing, storage and dissemination of statistical data". It has expressed its intention to "present information according to scientific standards on the sources, methods and procedures" it uses. These principles also state that "individual data collected by statistical agencies for statistical compilation, whether they refer to individuals or legal entities, are to be strictly confidential and used exclusively for statistical purposes". Coupled with these statements, which denote the importance the

Institut gives to impartiality, professionalism, and respect for confidentiality and neutrality, are other statements related to transparency, coherence and efficiency, which are vital for a central statistical agency like the Institut.

6. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the protection of confidentiality is a fundamental dimension for the Institut. The assurance that the information gathered or obtained will be kept confidential gives the Institut all its credibility and prompts individuals, enterprises and bodies to collaborate in its surveys in all confidence, which ensures the quality of the results. This duty to preserve confidentiality, which is incumbent upon the Institut pursuant to section 25 of its enabling legislation, compels all its employees, and all those whose services are retained to carry out a mandate, not to disclose any information that was obtained under the Institut's legislation and can be connected with a specific person, enterprise, body or association. The Institut has done everything in its power, since its creation, to assist employees in fulfilling their obligation to maintain confidentiality, while providing all the normative, administrative and technological supervision required. The following measures illustrate such initiatives:
 - the establishment, in the initial months following the creation of the Institut, of a committee for the protection of personal and other confidential information, one of the first duties of which was to develop an action plan;
 - the drafting of a policy, guiding principles and procedures designed to ensure, particularly in regard to information technologies and physical security, the protection of the confidentiality of information obtained from respondents;
 - the adoption of a policy and guidelines for controlling the risk of disclosure of confidential information from tabular data prior to their dissemination;
 - the design of a normative framework based, in particular, on the policy for the use of microdata files from Institut de la statistique du Québec surveys in order to maximize the use of the Institut's statistical products for research purposes in compliance with confidentiality, while offering researchers a wide variety of data access modes.



7. The Institut and its staff must therefore present a productive assessment as regards the values and commitment set forth in the *Declaration of Services to the Public* and its management values. Given its staff's professionalism and the accomplishments since its creation, the Institut is now able—as the national statistical institutes of most industrialized countries have done in recent years—to harness its energies towards achieving a new objective, namely, to translate its commitment to ensuring the quality of its products and services into a new, more methodical approach that is more integrated into its management, with a view to guaranteeing the highest possible user satisfaction. More specifically, the Institut is adopting a general policy for quality management in order to systematize, harmonize and improve the means already in place to ensure the quality of its products and services. Through this approach, the Institut is also responding to the recommendations made by the Auditor General in his report to the National Assembly for 2002-2003. In regard to meeting the needs of the clientele, the Auditor General recommended that the Institut improve the planning of its projects by regularly re-evaluating their content according to client needs and prioritizing them. As regards the management of quality, he recommended that a quality assurance policy be established, that mechanisms for evaluating the quality of work be applied uniformly and consistently, that the results of the evaluations be communicated to the interested parties and that follow-up be provided to ensure that any shortcomings are corrected.

B. Dimensions of quality

8. To achieve its objectives, the Institut has chosen to draw inspiration from the quality management model that has gained acceptance internationally in the field of official statistics and that essentially defines quality according to the needs to be met. The model is based on the principle that meeting users' needs is the ultimate overall criterion of the quality of a product or service. In this context, the quality of a product or service consists in all its characteristics that impact on its ability to meet a given need. In statistical organizations, whose concern for quality was focused traditionally on data reliability, adherence to that principle marks the transition from a one-dimensional to a multi-dimensional approach to quality. Such an approach implies consideration, in ensuring quality, of all the factors that tailor statistical information to the needs of users.
9. The mission of a statistical institute is to provide the society it serves with basic statistical information on the society. Such information is essential since it makes a substantial contribution to an understanding of the development of the society and its economy, and serves to fuel debates on issues that arise, to enlighten decision making by public authorities and various agents of the society, and to support research into matters of public interest. From that standpoint, and to ensure that statistical information responds adequately to the needs of its users, it must have the right mix of all the following characteristics: it must be relevant, reliable and objective, comparable, timely, intelligible and accessible. These six dimensions on which the quality of statistical information depends make operational the definition of quality as the adaptation of the Institut's products and services to their use by various clientele. Before production, they constitute the targets to be reached to assure quality. After production, they represent the criteria for tangible evaluation of quality.
10. The six-dimension definition of quality defined by the Institut is similar to the main trends observed at the international level. Three classifications are particularly worthy of note in that regard:
 - Eurostat and its national partners in the European Union have determined a total of eight dimensions: relevance, accuracy, comparability, timeliness and punctuality, accessibility and clarity, and coherence. The institutes of some countries make a few adjustments to that list; for example, Denmark replaces accuracy with reliability, and adds transferability.

- The Interagency Council on Statistical Policy (ICSP) in the United States has established that the quality of statistical products depends on a number of criteria, including—but not limited to—relevance, accuracy and timeliness. The U.S. Census Bureau uses a broader range of criteria: utility, which includes relevance, timeliness, accessibility and comparability; objectivity, which means accurate, clear, reliable, unbiased data; and transparency and reproductibility.
 - Like Statistics Canada, the statistical institutes of other countries, such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics, opt for a definition of quality with six dimensions: relevance, accuracy, accessibility, timeliness, intelligibility and coherence.
11. It can be concluded from this overview that, beyond the variations in the division and hierarchy of the facets of quality, and considering that certain terms used are synonyms or related, there is a strong convergence in terms of the essential dimensions that ensure the quality of statistical information. Considering that convergence, and reflecting the terminology used in sections 2 and 5 of the Institut's enabling legislation and reiterated in the introduction, the Institut has determined the following dimensions for its own use: relevance, reliability and objectivity, comparability, timeliness, intelligibility, and accessibility. By incorporating most of the facets of quality suggested in the reference classifications and by drawing inspiration from the definitions proposed, the meaning and scope of the dimensions determined by the Institut can be described as follows:

11.1 **Relevance** of statistical information refers to the degree to which it meets the needs meant to be satisfied. Ensuring the relevance of statistical information means that, pursuant to the general mission and particular obligations attributed by legislation to a statistical institute, the data, analyses and summaries it produces meet, as comprehensively as possible, the needs that institutional and other users deem most important. The objective is to enable users to have, on a routine basis and according to changes in their concerns, both an overview and a sufficiently detailed description of the situation and trends in society and the economy.

11.2 **Reliability** and **objectivity** of statistical information refer to the degree to which it is consistent with the reality it is to describe. To ensure the reliability and objectivity of statistical information, users must be reassured that the information generated or used by the statistical agency is as accurate as *possible*. This means that it was produced, on the one hand, so as to minimize the typical errors that normally affect data and, on the other, so as to maximize scientific rigour in the interpretations, analyses and summaries produced on the basis of the data. The objective is to ensure that the work measures, as accurately as possible, the reality it describes.

11.3 **Comparability** of statistical information refers to the possibility of it being compared or combined with other similar information (over time and space, between fields, and between data sources). Ensuring the comparability of statistical information means seeing it is based as much as *possible* on concepts, classifications, population units, measurement tools, conceptual frameworks and integration frameworks consistent with international standards in the field in question, while leaving room for justified particularities or innovations. The objective is, in the first place, to make it possible, for the benefit of users, to establish the coherence of the statistical information with other sources in the same field or between related fields. It is, in the second place, to allow comparisons over time and space, in order to highlight development trends and changes that arise, or compare the situation observed at various geographic levels or between various governments, from regional, national and international standpoints.

11.4 **Timeliness** of statistical information refers to its availability at the appropriate and anticipated time. Ensuring the timeliness of statistical information means seeing that the information is produced and disseminated within the shortest *possible* time frame or with the appropriate frequency so as to minimize the time lag with the period or moment of observation. It also means ensuring that the time when it becomes available is in keeping with the announced or agreed upon deadline.

11.5 **Intelligibility** of statistical information refers to the ease with which it is understood by the various users. Ensuring the intelligibility of statistical information means providing users, in as clear a manner but also in as adapted a manner as *possible*, with the explanations required for the adequate interpretation and use of the statistical information. The explanations must be presented succinctly in layman's terms or in a more specialized and elaborate manner, according to the types of users and their needs. The explanations may deal with, in particular, the concepts, variables, classifications, and collection, processing and estimation methods used in the case of data, and, as regards the conceptual frameworks, with the methodological approaches and hypotheses used in the case of analyses and summaries, coupled, in both cases, with indicators of quality and the appropriate caveats.

11.6 **Accessibility** of statistical information corresponds to the ease with which users can obtain it. Ensuring the accessibility of statistical information implies that the conditions under which it is obtained by users are as simple and as user-friendly as *possible*. It consists in making available to users, in various formats and through various access modes, the data most suitable for them when they need it, according to the use they want to make of it and the technical means at their disposal.

12. The expressions “as *possible*” and “the best *possible*” are used advisedly in describing the meaning and scope of each dimension of quality. The level of quality sought for each dimension cannot be absolute; rather, it is in the realm of the *possible*, since it must take two realities into consideration and adjust to them. First, there is the constraint of the interdependence of certain dimensions of quality. For example, in a given project, timeliness may conflict with accuracy to the extent that achieving a high level of accuracy requires more time. Or relevance may conflict with accuracy when more detailed information is sought but it is likely to be of lesser quality in terms of accuracy. However, beyond these potential conflicts between the dimensions of quality, the scarcity of resources means that the dimensions are often competing for a share of a limited budget. Therefore, for a given level of resources, the best possible compromise must be sought between the dimensions of quality. The constraint of limited resources arises not only for a given statistical project, but also for a program and, more generally, for the entire programming of the statistical agency. The limits imposed by the two constraints—the interdependence of dimensions and the resources for which they compete—make constant compromises necessary in terms of the relative importance to be given each dimension. The criterion that must always prevail over these compromises is the best balance between the dimensions of quality, namely, the balance that best meets the needs of users of the statistical information, according to the resources available.

C. Conditions conducive to quality

A set of conditions originating in the culture of the organization, the context in which it develops and its ways of doing things is essential to achieving quality.

13. Leadership and staff

13.1 The culture of quality must be embodied in the behaviour of everyone, particularly the administrators of the organization. **The momentum provided by senior management and the leadership of the various people in charge** are the **engines of quality** at the Institut, by promoting a unity of vision, rallying employees to achieve common objectives and creating an environment conducive to excellence. Senior managers in charge of programs and all those in positions of authority must demonstrate personal, active and visible leadership in order to produce and maintain a culture of quality at the Institut. By laying down clear orientations, giving priority to improvement and stimulating accountability and innovation, leaders put in place the conditions required for employees to carry out quality work focused on the search for ongoing improvements.

13.2 The Institut is aware that the work to achieve quality is **a requirement at all levels of the organization**. All employees, at all levels of the hierarchy, must commit themselves to quality, and receive quality-related training adapted to their duties. Some must, in fact, have special training so that they can act as agents of change in the organization. The Institut considers work on quality to be an investment, i.e. the costs of quality-related activities, which can be substantial in some instances, are largely recouped. The Institut is therefore prepared to make these investments and

it sees that adequate tools and resources are provided in the interests of quality management.

“The Institut recognizes that the competence of its personnel and its improvement are determining conditions in the achievement of its mission and its objectives.” By accepting that statement as one of its management values, the Institut affirms its conviction that its human resources are the principal key to its success. To deliver quality products and services to its clientele, it must be able to rely on a competent staff that seeks to keep its knowledge and skills up-to-date, demonstrates professionalism, and wants to know and meet the needs of its clientele. **A motivated and empowered staff mobilized to deal with quality-related issues** is therefore another inescapable condition for implementing a quality management system at the Institut. Responsibility for quality cannot be entrusted to a small group of individuals. The Institut cannot claim to be concerned with quality without the commitment of all the members of its staff, as each one acts in a manner that influences quality in one way or another. Hence, there is no true quality unless an authentic culture of quality prevails at the Institut. To attract and retain competent staff, it is essential for the Institut to meet the needs of its employees and be aware of their perceptions of the organization. It is in this spirit that the Institut has institutionalized the practice of carrying out a survey every three years on the organizational climate.

14. *Organization of work*

To capitalize as much as possible on the benefits it derives from the competence and motivation of its human resources—and given the relatively modest size of the organization—the Institut decided to opt for the **matrix management of its activities**, i.e. a number of divisions are responsible for programs in various statistical fields, and other administrative units are responsible for specialized services in the areas of methodology, data collection, computing, communication and dissemination, all supported by specialized services in the legal, resource (human, financial, informational and material) management and project management fields. This project management method, which presupposes the sharing of expertise, promotes synergy between employees and helps to ensure quality at all phases of project implementation, from planning to the delivery of products and services. It also promotes the deepening of expertise and the development of critical masses of specialists in various fields, for the greater benefit of the clientele.

Teamwork therefore has a preponderant place at the Institut. In project teams, the specialized resources of the units responsible for statistical programs contribute their knowledge of the needs and constraints of the clientele, as well as content. They ensure, in general,

coordination at the various stages of projects, and they conduct and coordinate data analysis. Methodologists are responsible for orienting and coordinating the design and implementation of the statistical methodology used in projects, quantitative control methods and data quality evaluation measurements. They are also responsible for the statistical aspects of data dissemination and analysis. Experts in collection operations define collection strategies, handle matters of a practical nature related to operations in the field and participate in collection quality control activities. Information technology specialists ensure the proper operation, integrity and security of the computer systems and applications essential to the implementation of projects. Lastly, communication and dissemination specialists see that products and services are brought to the attention of the clientele and placed at their disposal in the form most appropriate to their needs. Hence, the Institut encourages the development of an organizational culture characterized by mutual respect, recognition of expertise, communication and transparency. To guarantee the quality of its products and services, the Institut ensures that all those concerned are part of the project team from the project's start, and that all the players understand and agree on the stakes involved in the project, as well as the project's constraints.

15. Ways of doing things

15.1 The Institut defines quality “according to the needs to be met” and “meeting users’ needs is the ultimate overall criterion of the quality of a product or service”. Hence, knowledge of its clients and their needs is of strategic importance to the Institut, and its quality management must, as a priority, be “**client-oriented**”. As with all statistical agencies in democratic countries, the clientele of the Institut is characterized by its wide diversity, which stems from the fact that the statistical information produced by the Institut must meet both the permanent and fundamental needs of Québec society, and the needs of particular clients, which are sporadic but equally justified. Client relations are therefore complex, especially since the needs to be met may, in some cases, conflict. Thus, it is important for the Institut to establish an ongoing dialogue with representatives of the different segments of its clientele, and to ensure they are involved in developing its statistical programs, and defining its products and evaluating them. That is precisely the role that the Institut has entrusted to the members of the advisory committees it has set up in its various areas of intervention. It is also in that spirit that the Institut entrusted to project steering committees, composed of the principal clients concerned, the orientation of some of its large-scale projects. Moreover, in all sectors of its activities, the Institut has set up various consultation authorities or participates in them, which enables it to be in constant communication with users, to benefit from constant feedback and to accordingly adjust its products and services to the needs of its clientele. Some examples are: the steering committee of the Databank of Official Statistics on Québec, the Table de concertation

nationale en surveillance de la santé et du bien-être (the Québec health and welfare oversight table), the steering committee for the report on the environment, the Conseil exécutif’s committee on gender-based analysis, the scientific committee of the forum on families, the orientation committee of the Observatoire-Réseau du système d’innovation québécoise (observatory for the Québec innovation system network), and the task force of the employers’ and union parties on the selection of benchmark jobs. The Institut also occasionally conducts surveys on the satisfaction of its clientele.

15.2 All internationally recognized approaches to quality, be it the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) or other models that support organizations in their quest for excellence, stress the necessity of adopting a rigorous approach to **ongoing improvement** in order to ensure the delivery of quality products and services. This notion is, in fact, one of the fundamental principles of the total quality model, just as client-oriented operations, leadership, staff commitment and training, “process” orientation and teamwork are. For the Institut to stand out and hope to be among the best, it must constantly seek to improve its products so that they continue to better respond to needs and, where possible, review its ways of doing things in order to reduce costs and production times.

15.3 Being aware that the quality of its products and services depends on the quality of the processes of which they are the culmination, the Institut places great importance on the **improvement of its processes**—those that directly support statistical programs, such as conceptual frameworks, and collection, methodology and computer activities, and those that

underpin administrative functions, such as human, financial and material resources. It was in that spirit that, in 2003-2004, the Institut set up an exercise to review its processes, first focusing on three major resource-consuming activities, namely, the *Registre des événements démographiques* (the register of demographic events), the survey on total compensation, and collection activities. In its second strategic plan, the Institut agreed to make the process review exercise recurrent. Furthermore, by choosing to acquire a **program evaluation** function that focuses on each of its programs in turn, the Institut has also demonstrated its concern with constantly evaluating its activities in terms of their relevance, the effectiveness in achieving the objectives pursued, the efficiency of the means used (processes) and their impact on the clientele and the organization generally.

15.4 The Institut's management and employees also rely on an extremely varied range of **quality management tools**. They are inspired by various models of excellence, particularly the European quality management model, such as the European Foundation for Quality Management, which already guides many statistical organizations and other government organizations in European countries in their search for excellence. A compendium of good practices in each area of activity, which is now in the process of being assembled, will promote the harmonization of the Institut's ways of doing things in terms of quality. An exercise is already under way in that regard in the area of statistical surveys. In addition, a quality self-assessment questionnaire has been developed by adapting a tool designed for that purpose in Europe, known as DDevelopment of a Self Assessment

Program (DESAP), to the Institut's reality. Many management instruments, including several mentioned in this document, help the Institut to generate quality products and services: process review exercises, program evaluations, the dissemination calendar, the project office and the project management tools it places at the disposal of staff, the normative framework for access to microdata in keeping with confidentiality, guidelines for the dissemination of tables, methodological reports given to clients, and surveys on the organizational climate. Other instruments or processes, which have also been incorporated for some time into the routine management of the Institut, also contribute in that regard, including the annual activity planning process, the monitoring of the strategic plan during the year, the **Declaration of Services to the Public**, the results indicators designed by the Direction des services et des stratégies de collecte (collection strategies and services division), the management skills profile, the human resource development plan, workforce planning, the employee assistance program, the policy on health in the workplace, the continuing education assistance program, and the policy to prevent harassment.

15.5 As a producer of official statistics, the Institut cannot fulfil its mandate properly and produce quality statistics if it does not maintain **productive relations with its respondents and data suppliers**. The quality of the data it produces is directly linked to their collaboration. Among its management values, the Institut rightly affirms that it seeks to give "the highest priority to [...] the respect of the respondents to its surveys and of its other data suppliers". The attention the Institut gives to respondents prompts it particularly to use diversified data collection methods

that are constantly adapted to respondents' preferences and needs, such as data collection by mail, computer-assisted collection by telephone, and collection by fax, face-to-face and electronically, as well as collection at the time most convenient for the respondent, that is, by appointment, often in the evening or on the weekend. The Institut maintains a bond of trust with its respondents by publicly making known its commitments to confidentiality (on its Website), by assuring them that the data collected will not be used for purposes other than those anticipated at the time of collection, and by officially adhering to a code of ethics that is part of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. It is the Institut's constant concern to lighten the burden of respondents by various means: the use of administrative files as substitutes for surveys; close collaboration with Statistics Canada; the publication on the Intranet of the list of surveys provided for in the programming so as to reduce overlap and avoid gathering similar information in different surveys; the design of efficient survey plans in order to reduce sample size as much as possible; the use of specialists for the design of questionnaires in order to eliminate superfluous questions and facilitate response; and pretests in order to validate questionnaires and collection methods (ease of response, time required to complete the questionnaire, adjustment to respondents' needs, etc.). The Institut's concern for its respondents also prompts it to provide them with feedback about the usefulness of their participation by explaining to them what the information gathered from them will be used for. Lastly, it pays particular attention to following up on any complaints formulated by respondents.

15.6 The Institut realizes that good **internal documentation** contributes to the quality of its products and services, particularly by enabling new staff to become familiar with the various stages in the statistics production process or by facilitating the evaluation of improvements to be made and their implementation. The Institut has therefore agreed to adopt the internal documentation policy, which will specify, among other things, what documentation must contain and that it must cover all production phases of a product, from planning to dissemination. The Institut has also given the project office a mandate to assist project managers in that regard, for example by standardizing the types of administrative or financial documents to be produced. The project office also intends to put in place a document on management tools that will contain relevant information on projects, from the "project charter" to "lessons learned", which will be identified and documented in post mortems.

For the Institut, **metadata documentation** is another condition essential to the fulfillment of user needs, and it serves as a basis for ongoing improvements. First, such documentation enables users to clearly understand the information the Institut places at their disposal and to judge whether it is consistent with the use they intend to make of it. It must therefore be diverse in nature so that it can be adapted to the needs of a variety of users (in a general or specialized form), as well as up-to-date, readily accessible, well-structured and accurate. All the publications of the Institut, its survey reports, and the Databank of Official Statistics on Québec include sections devoted to definitions, methodology notes, data sources and other types of metadata.

The perception of quality is at the core of public trust in official statistics. Evaluation of that quality and reporting on it with full transparency are crucial to strengthening that trust. Although all the dimensions of quality cannot be measured by direct indicators or objectives, and it is often necessary to use qualitative or more subjective measurements, the Institut believes it is important to produce reports that assess quality in terms of the various aspects of the delivery of its products and services, such as data reliability, compliance with timetables, dissemination methods chosen, disparities between preliminary and revised data, the presence and nature of documentation, and clientele satisfaction. The Institut obviously must adapt these descriptive or evaluation reports to the diversity of its users.

It is not easy to measure quality and its diverse components. No indication of total quality yet exists. The Institut defines the quality of its products and services by means of a set of characteristics, and a number of these dimensions cannot be measured objectively or directly. Often approximate measurements or qualitative judgments must be applied. The Institut therefore must rely on a combination of quantitative and qualitative measurements. For example, to gauge the accuracy of its products, the Institut has various quantitative measurement tools such as the margin of error, the coefficient of variation and the coverage rate. To gauge their timeliness, it may also use quantitative measurements such as “three months after the fact”. However, to gauge relevance or accessibility, it must refer to statements or judgments qualifying user satisfaction or the dissemination means selected.

Conclusion

The delivery of quality products and services has always been at the core of the concerns of the Institut de la statistique du Québec. This document first clearly demonstrated that goal by describing the context in which the organization is developing and by quoting numerous achievements attesting to its importance. Like many national statistical institutes, the Institut has now agreed to subscribe to the commitment to ensuring the quality of its products and services, through a more methodical and integrated approach to quality management. To that end, it has chosen to emulate the quality management model now accepted internationally in the field of official statistics, which essentially defines quality on the basis of the needs to be met. Accordingly, the notion of quality is henceforth defined by a set of characteristics, described in detail in the second part of this document. Lastly, this document sets forth various conditions for quality to be truly embodied in the culture of the organization. The conditions range from the indispensable momentum provided by senior management and the required commitment of all employees at every level, to project documentation, teamwork, ongoing improvements, quality management tools, productive relations with respondents, etc.

With its experience and in light of its reflections, research and consultations on the subject, the Institut has adopted a **General Quality Management Policy** that sets forth its general orientation and presents, in a structured manner, all the management practices, procedures and mechanisms useful to the Institut in ensuring the quality of its products and services.

*Institut
de la statistique*

Québec

