

## FACE TO FACE

### Up close and personal with Jane Cochran

by Catherine Morrison

Jane Cochran is the new senior director of the Procurement Policy Division of Treasury Board's Comptrollership Branch. She wants you to know that *who* she is means a lot to the job she will do.

"Who she is" relates not to whom she knows, where she is in the hierarchy or what her résumé says about past achievements. It relates to being someone who seeks to bring the sense of balance that she strives for in her home – as "somebody's mom" and a wife – and her professional life, to the realm of procurement reform. She stresses values, ethics and respect. "At the heart of the procurement reform exercise," says Cochran, "is respect: for departments, for contracting officials, for the supplier community; for ministers, for Parliament and, above all, respect for the Canadian citizens, on whose behalf the exercise is carried out."

But who Jane Cochran is goes far beyond these attributes. Armed with a Master's degree in public administration from Carleton University, she joined the federal government in 1984 at Statistics Canada, where she did social policy research. Her first procurement-related job was with Industry Canada in 1985, as an industrial benefits officer, where she pulled together administrative policy in support of the Industrial Mutual Benefits Program. As Cochran saw it, "it's about how we use procurement to grow the economy, to create jobs and to create technology transfer opportunities that will result in new investment in Canadian industry." Moving on, she became an operational officer in industrial and regional benefits, which gave her the opportunity to work on some major crown projects within inter-departmental project teams. She credits this experience with "strengthening my skills in terms of being a team player and contributing to moving a process forward, because you have to do that in acquisitions."

While at Industry Canada she gained exposure to a wide cross-section of private sector corporations in the defence, electronics, IT and aerospace fields. A key part of her work involved dealing with the challenges of advancing the government's jobs and growth agenda in partnership with other federal departments, the private sector and unions. In 1997, as director for aerospace, she successfully steered the Aerospace Branch through program review – Industry Canada went through major restructuring and faced the loss of personnel, expertise and corporate memory – initiating a transformation from a program delivery organization to a provider of information products and services.

Cochran then did a stint at the Privy Council Office. As part of the federal negotiating team responsible for the Social Union Agreement signed with the provinces in 1999, she gained invaluable lessons in “how you create constructive partnerships with the provinces and other stakeholders to achieve shared goals and objectives on behalf of Canadians.” Sarah Hurman, a consultant with Interface Strategies Inc., works on a lot of high profile, issues management files where people are under a lot of pressure and worked with Cochran on the negotiations. Hurman says that the Social Union negotiation was a very stressful group task with a high potential for catastrophe. “Jane Cochran,” she recalls, “is an inherently constructive person, smart as a whip, who was able to retain a human perspective that allowed her to be supportive of her colleagues and contributed in no small measure to the group staying committed to its task.”

In the fall of 1998, Cochran went to the Expenditure Management Group in the Management Strategies Division of Treasury Board, where she became involved in business planning renewal. There she exercised and reinforced her view that “business planning is a critical part of setting up the acquisitions process. You have to know what it is you want to buy, what it has to achieve and whether you can afford it, before you can go out and buy it.”

In January of this year she was assigned to the Procurement Policy Division as senior director, to work on the procurement reform initiative initiated by Treasury Board in June 1999. The purpose of the initiative is to review all existing procurement policies and related procedures across the federal government and the mandate is “to modernize procurement to help departments better serve the public, maintaining opportunities for Canadian suppliers and the integrity of the system.”

Cochran’s job, to date, is to oversee the achievement of several commitments outlined in an Accountability Accord developed by her predecessor, Bob Kelly, now retired. Kelly’s are “tough shoes to fill” says Cochran. She can report success in shepherding the various processes along: working on the interdepartmental development of a strategic overview setting out key challenges related to the management of procurement policy across government; working with the Materiel & Project Management Division on the implementation of professional training and certification for contracting personnel, something very high on Cochran’s agenda; the drafting of intellectual property policy; and the aligning of procurement policies and practices under global trade agreements. The latter is one area where deliverables are somewhat behind schedule, due to the derailing of the WTO meetings in Seattle in the fall of 1999.

Globalization is probably one of the greatest challenges facing governments, in Cochran’s view. In an era of galloping globalization, “one of the key ways we can respond is by investing in our people – the training and certification program is an important part of that. We have to take stock with our community and know better what their strengths and weaknesses are and how this ties in with training and certification; what you have to be looking for is whether people have the skills and resources to manage in an increasingly complex world.”

“Jane has a way of reminding you of what really matters,” says Hurman. She brings humanity to her work in government. In an environment where brains are often equated with cynicism,

Cochran “smashes the paradigm by being both wide-eyed and optimistic, as well as highly strategic and effective.” In an era dawning with the decline of deference, the flattening of hierarchies and the ascendance of the team approach, Cochran brings 21st century leadership qualities to the procurement reform exercise. As Hurman puts it, Cochran knows “how to bring female values into the workplace and make them work. She’s the kind of leader the public service needs more of.”

[Catherine Morrison](#) is a writer based in Chelsea, Quebec. Her work is also published in the *Ottawa Citizen* and the *Globe and Mail's* print and online editions. She was a full-time writer/broadcaster for CBC Network Television and CBC TV and Radio, Winnipeg, a contributing editor and columnist for *Winnipeg Magazine*, and has had freelance work published in *Canadian Consumer*, *Asia Pacific Magazine*, the *Edmonton Journal* and *C.A.R.P. Magazine*. She is also Managing Director of [Morrison&Associates](#), which supplies communications and public affairs services to government and the high-tech sector.