



ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL EXECUTIVES  
OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE OF CANADA  
ASSOCIATION PROFESSIONNELLE DES CADRES  
SUPÉRIEURS DE LA FONCTION PUBLIQUE DU CANADA

**APEX Advisory  
Services for Executives**

# **ANNUAL REPORT**

**2022-2023**



# Table of Contents

Advisory Services to Executives (ASE)..... 3

2022-2023 Year in Review..... 4

    Key Findings..... 4

    Who is Accessing the Service?..... 5

    Client Profile – A Diversified Executive Cadre ..... 6

    Client Satisfaction Levels ..... 7

    Main Reasons for Contacting ASE ..... 8

    Results of Last Year’s Partnerships and Outreach Activities and Preliminary Priorities for 2023-2024..... 11

    ANNEX 1 - Suggestions Received to Improve the ASE Service ..... 13

## Advisory Services to Executives (ASE)

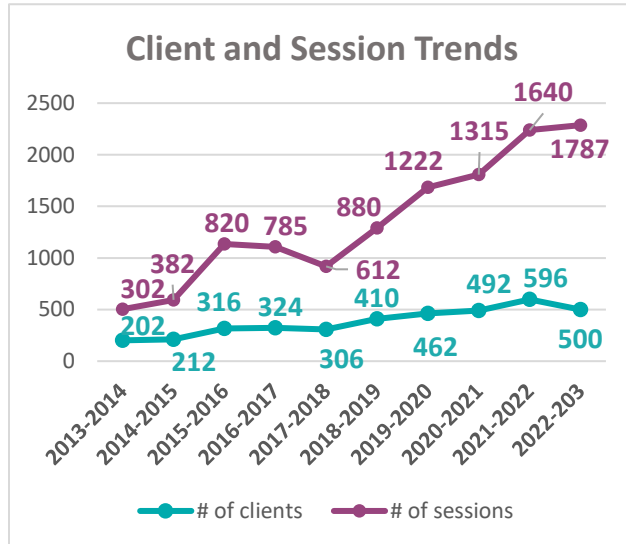
Executives should never feel alone! APEX is your professional association, led by executives for executives. We support you as an individual, and as a community; we are your active voice and advocate for more people-centric and psychologically safe approaches. We strive to provide value and ensure that executives are equipped to thrive in their roles and never feel hopeless and isolated. There is always a path forward, and we are committed to walking it with you.

Advisory Services for Executives (ASE) is a confidential, timely and easily accessible bilingual service that provides a safe space for conversations. ASE team members are seasoned executives with a broad range of expertise and lived experiences. They use a human-centric and empathic approach to build trust with their clients and explore a wide range of options and opportunities to address executives' concerns and work towards the best possible outcome. ASE shares tips and strategies on fostering healthy and psychologically safe workplaces, as part of an overall approach to inclusive and conscious leadership.



# 2022-2023 Year in Review

## Key Findings



This year, 500 executives accessed the service for the first time, and more than 50 executives continued to use the services on a regular basis from the previous fiscal year. ASE is flexible and responsive to clients' needs.

The increase in total client sessions is representative of the complexity of issues faced by the executive community. ASE helps executives unpack their issues one conversation at a time, undertakes research and helps them prepare for difficult conversations,

meetings, or interviews.

***"I recommend the service to all of you, no matter what level you are, whether you are a seasoned executive or just made the ranks. This is a professional quality service provided by PS executives who understand bureaucracy and how to navigate internal politics and difficult situations. Because they lived similar experiences and have grown from it, they leave you with a path forward and immense sense of hope that things will improve."***

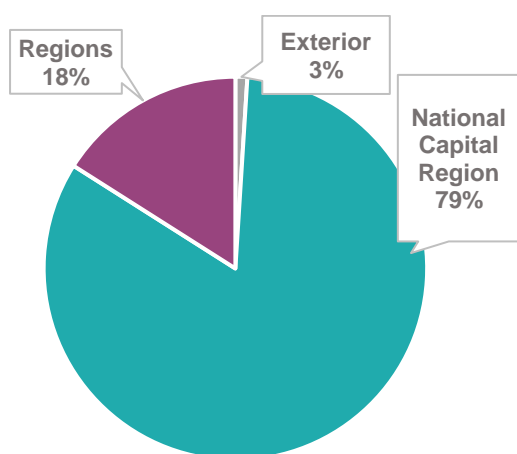
- ASE Client

## Who is Accessing the Service?

Level	
EX-01	55%*
EX-02	23.8%
EX-03	16.2%
EX-04	3.7%
EX-05	0.2%
Other (Acting Executives)	1%

*\*35% of which are new executives*

Many of ASE's clients are executives at the EX-01 level (55%). This group is largely seeking information on their terms and conditions, practical advice on networking and career management, leadership tips to help them be more effective in their role, navigating difficult situations and developing effective strategies to manage and establish healthy boundaries.



Executives at the EX-02 level and above are interested in deeper strategic conversations on career progression strategies, effective influential strategies to challenge the status quo, dealing with difficult or disruptive employees and colleagues, and how to speak their truth to power without any fear of reprisal or being labeled as difficult.

While the majority of ASE's clients continue to be located in the National Capital Region, there has been a slight increase from regional executives and executives working abroad.

While we did not officially track or formally ask clients to self-identify, our client base continues to be extremely diversified.

A higher percentage of women (68% this year compared to 62% last year), and particularly Black women, women of colour, and Indigenous women accessed our services this year in need of advice and guidance on career progression strategies,



barriers to advancement, work-life balance, and strategies to deal effectively with perceived bullying, discrimination, harassment, and micro-aggressions. Indigenous women are advocating for the decolonization of leadership styles, as they are getting demotivated with workplace cultures where urgencies, power-hoarding, and dysfunctional dynamics are the norm.

***“The conversation we need now is around organizational wellness. How are organizations dealing with one crisis after another, with workload pressures 24/7 and in the complicated and somewhat conflictual operating environments governments are functioning in?”***

- Janice Charette, Former Clerk of the Privy Council

Many confidentially disclosed their disability, whether visible, invisible, permanent or temporary, and wanted to know their rights as well as the employers’ duty to inquire and accommodate, particularly with respect to part-time work and difficulty meeting official language obligations due to their disability. People who identify as neuroatypical or manage neuroatypical teams were particularly interested in obtaining practical advice and strategies on how to overcome barriers in the workplace and accessing resources and best practices in this area.

People with disabilities are advocating for more human centric, flexible, and compassionate approaches when requiring accommodations, and facilitating a successful progressive return to work and movement between departments without having to disclose their disability and accommodation plans again.



Additionally, ASE has seen an increase of clients who voluntarily self-identify as belonging to 2SLGBTQIA+ communities wanting to receiving advice on how to constructively deal with micro-aggressions, perceived discrimination, various biases, and old beliefs in the workplace.

Maintaining second official language levels continues to be a barrier for many equity seeking groups, especially executives living and working in regional and remote areas, or working abroad, where it is very difficult to balance their daily lives and practice and maintain their second official language.

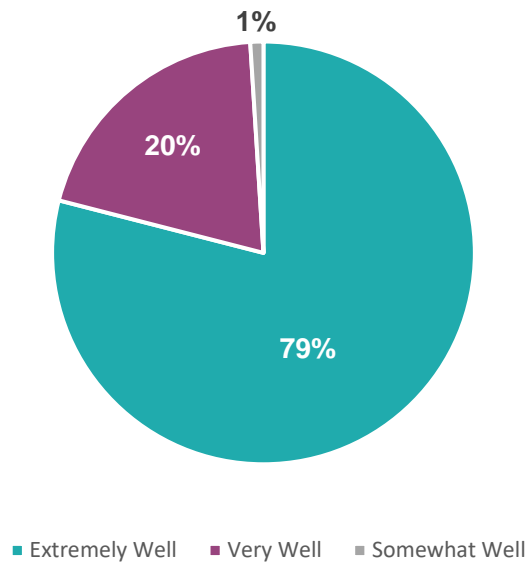
### Client Satisfaction Levels

---

Of our 500 new clients, 110 officially filled out our satisfaction survey. Other clients expressed their comments via email or directly through the client consultation process.



### How Well Did You Advisor Understand Your Situation



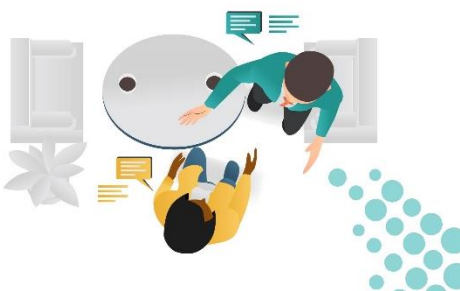
### Main Reasons for Contacting ASE

---

On top of the list in terms of reasons executives accessed ASE's services were discussions around career management, workload management and mental health and wellbeing. A significant number of executives reached out again this year to obtain advice on networking tips and strategies as they were desperately trying to leave a toxic workplace culture where abrasive leadership styles and systemic signs of incivility from senior management prevailed. These executives were all facing both physical and mental health issues associated with their work situations.

This year, due in part to our extensive outreach and partnerships with the Human Resources Council (HRC), the Canada School of Public Service (CSPS), the National Managers' Community (NMC) and the Ombuds Network, we have seen more executives reach out to ASE for practical advice to enhance their effectiveness as leaders, deal effectively with conflicts, master the art of values based

conversations and brainstorm ideas for possible ways forward to eliminate harassment and toxic behaviours in the workplace, at all levels of the organization. While there is an encouraging trend where clients proactively reach out to ASE wanting to affect current structures and systems, challenge the status quo, positively influence the workplace culture, and start changing mindsets and current beliefs systems, these are no easy





challenges, and it is taking a toll on executives' mental health and wellbeing. Executives feel very alone and ASE's services help fill the gap by providing a safe place for conversations. Executives want to empower themselves for courageous conversations, using ASE as a sounding board to test their strategies and approaches. Dealing with abrasive leaders and colleagues is causing trauma and psychological distress at all levels of the executive cadre, and ASE is determined to provide a safe space in this area by adopting a trauma-informed approach and principles of psychologically safe leadership.

***"I liked the empathetic and trauma-informed approach that the advisor used during our sessions. After many months of being gaslighted at work, it felt really good to talk to someone who understood what I was going through. Yes, there is a way forward to deal with these types of situations and you are not losing your sanity!"***

- ASE Client

## Executives Terms, Conditions and Rights

---



Over the past year, executives, and particularly newly appointed ones, have reached out to ASE multiple topics including what it means to be an executive, understanding their terms, conditions, and rights, and to discuss myths and misconceptions. They

communicated their fears and concerns with respect to total compensation, perceived lack of efficiency, transparency, consistency and objectivity with the performance management and talent management system. They are frustrated with the lack of support and resources available within their organizations where toxic cultures and abrasive leadership behaviours continue to prevail, and in some small agencies.

They brought forth many questions and concerns about hours of work, deployment agreements, the employer's duty to inquire and to accommodate, especially in cases where executives require

accommodation or require working part-time. They want to know and to understand their rights, and the impact it can have on their career progression and reputation if they advocate for their needs to succeed.

Another common area of concern is how various departments are dealing with C-65 complaints (harassment and violence prevention regulations). Executives are turning to ASE wanting to know their rights, and to discuss recourse options, and resources available to them. There is a strong perception of a lack of procedural fairness, especially when investigations are done internally. Investigators are perceived as having a favourable bias for the complainant. Executives across the federal government feel unsupported and often spend a huge amount of money on legal fees to defend themselves. In many cases when investigations are conducted internally, they have expressed their frustration with the overall process and the lack of knowledge, expertise, and impartiality of the investigators.



Additionally, executives feel very alone, are denied advancement opportunities the minute a notice of occurrence is sent, and firmly believe their career progression is at risk. The biggest frustration is the lack of support following an investigation where allegations were deemed frivolous or not founded. They want to see restoration measures put in place to correct the perceived injustice, financial hardships incurred, and damage done to their reputation.

Lastly, executives, at all levels, are extremely worried, especially in times of budget constraints, forced career transitions, constructive dismissal, and involuntary career moves, where any executive can be deployed to another position without their consent, and without being a great fit. Executives remain vulnerable as they are not represented by a union and want to know their rights and their potential recourses and options, without the risk of jeopardizing their reputation. Many ASE clients report being a victim of constructive dismissal and are looking for advice on a possible way forward. They wish APEX played a bigger role in working with departments and central agencies in helping them suitable positions or offer some opportunities to connect with peers with similar lived experiences. This was in reference to the new Informal ADM Peer Support Pilot Initiative for Associate Deputy Ministers forced into career transition launched in October 2022. Two senior executives accessed this initiative in 2022-2023.

## Results of Last Year's Partnerships and Outreach Activities and Preliminary Priorities for 2023-2024

ASE's focus in 2022-2023 was put on empowering recently appointed and acting executives with practical tips and strategies to help them navigate difficult and complex issues and feel better equipped to embrace their new role as people-centric leaders.

In addition to [APEX's ongoing learning and programming](#) events targeted at new and aspiring executives, a [comprehensive and holistic practical guide](#) was developed using an inclusive and collaborative approach with key stakeholders and partners.

APEX was very pleased with the level of support we received from various departments who confirmed they have integrated our practical guide into their existing onboarding packages for new executives and aspiring leaders.

Thank you to Library and Archives Canada, Natural Resources Canada, StatsCan, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, the Canada School of Public Service, the Parole Board, Public Service and Procurement Canada and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

In 2023-2024, APEX will explore how it can continue to improve services offered by ASE based on comments received, add more value and continue to be responsive to the needs of feeder groups to the executive cadre and newly appointed executives.

To this effect, APEX was extremely proud of its partnership with the National Managers' Community on the development of an [essential guide for aspiring executives](#). The content was designed to suit the broader needs of the middle management community, with a special focus on leadership assessment and readiness for an executive role, as well as tangible tips and advice on how to prepare for competitions at the EX-level.



In addition, ASE developed a comprehensive [Reflections and Best Practices Guide](#) which was shared with more than 2,500 executives across departments via outreach presentations to senior management. ASE also helped shape the content of a few additional APEX initiatives like the Mentoring Circles with 100+ new executives.

ASE leveraged its ongoing relationship with the federal ombuds network to join forces and develop additional strategies and recommendations to present senior management with a way forward including concrete practical strategies to affect systemic change and challenge the status quo. ASE now sits as a permanent observer at the quarterly meeting of the Organizational Ombuds Council, and is determined to regularly exchange information on trends, systemic issues, best practices, and areas of improvement.

ASE will continue to be a strong ally when it comes to APEX's overall advocacy and outreach efforts to the Deputy Minister's community and central agencies with respect to people-centric leadership competencies and key leadership attributes required for the future, and ensuring executives are aware of the various support available to help them on their health and wellness, and leadership development journey.

In 2023-2024, ASE will continue to build knowledge and expertise in the areas of psychological health and safety, inclusive leadership, and trauma-informed approaches, and will look at developing new guides for more relevance to the needs of the community.

It has been a true privilege and honour for the ASE team to be of service to the executive community and we'd like to thank all our clients for their ongoing support and confidence in our ability to provide sound and practical advice, and to look for creative and collaborative solutions to very complex and challenging situations. We will continue to strive to improve the quality of the service and added value. We will review suggestions from our ASE client satisfaction survey, continue to stay on top of key people management policy and leadership development initiatives and trends inside and outside the federal public service, continue to leverage existing partnerships and develop opportunities for new ones.

## ANNEX 1 - Suggestions Received to Improve the ASE Service

---

The following are suggestions received by clients who filled in the ASE Client Satisfaction Survey:

“More targeted marketing outreach would be helpful, especially to new executives.”

“With all the current demands, it would be very helpful for ASE to have more resources to provide clients with more assistance.”

“Perhaps additional thought could be given to highlighting ASE specifically and the support that can be provided/available to executives related to targeted issues that can have a direct impact on them, such as the new Workplace Harassment and Violence Prevention Regulations.”

“Some services are missing: representation, intervention, lists of replacement positions, to name a few.”

“Make sure you have resources available to speak to people, get involved with departments to see if you can help place executives when they are not in a good place in their current department - become a resource and promoter of executives to the GC.”

“Common trends or issues executives are experiencing should be raised to the senior ranks in the PS with the objective of improving the executive work environment for all.”

“I think there needs to be more legal/labour law guidance available so that executives can understand their rights and privileges better.”

“I wish you had an employment lawyer on site or regular *Ask Me Anything* sessions.”

“I feel that APEX should be able to advocate on showcasing ratings of departments that have better EX posture over others in light of the fact that they probably need to be transparent on which organizations need better support for EXs over others. This transparency will help executives make informed decisions on where they wish to grow and apply to and allow deputies to be accountable for taking action in response to what APEX is seeing and hearing.”

“The services provide a good sounding board for executives dealing with issues. I would like to know or see more advocacy for executives. The sole responsibility always falls on the employer/executive to do more, no matter the situation. It feels like we are always exposed no matter what we have done and there is little we can do to actually manage performance without being at risk of spending even more time facing complaints. There are no repercussions / or addressing parts of complaints that are lacking in actual facts or are direct insubordination as per the employee's own account of the situation. It leaves the executive with little motivation to address situations. I would like to see more advocacy for addressing performance issues / support in those situations from APEX.”

“Offer a formal network of contacts to help executives who need such information.”

“Since we are unable to reach them directly through MS Teams, have their phone numbers and other contact information added to the APEX website. It just has their names and titles.”