

# Open Government

## Resolution of Canada's Access to Information and Privacy Commissioners Whitehorse, Yukon

### CONTEXT

Calls for greater openness and transparency are exerting increasing pressure on governments to transform their traditional, reactive information dissemination methods into a mode that facilitates proactive disclosure. Furthermore, governments around the world are recognizing the value of sharing information with the public in accessible, open formats. They understand that collaborating with citizens, businesses and non-government organizations to enrich their information resources improves communication channels, promotes citizen engagement, instils trust in government, fosters economic opportunities and ultimately results in more open and responsive democratic government.

Technology now affords public institutions the opportunity to directly engage citizens, to proactively disclose information and to support the renewal of the social contract between government and citizens.

Open government is linked to access to information legislation. However, it extends the concepts inherent in these laws to promote an entirely new way of viewing the role of government and the participation of citizens in it. While access to information provides a right of access to government information, the laws are fundamentally reactive because access is granted only after a request is made.

Access to information and privacy commissioners are advocates for open government and promote the paradigm shift from reactive to proactive disclosure, and ultimately to open government.

The basic tenets of a sound open government strategy are:

- **Commitment of governments** at all levels to lead a cultural change conducive to open government. Governments should anchor the principles in statutory and policy instruments that provide clear objectives, assign responsibility and accountability, and prescribe specific timeframes. Governments should develop robust programs to ensure that access mechanisms are built into the design and implementation stages of all new programs and services to facilitate and enhance proactive disclosure of information. The instruments should also include due consideration for privacy, confidentiality, security, Crown copyright and all relevant laws.
- Participation of the public through **ongoing, broad-based public consultations**. Governments should consult the public to determine what information they need

to assess their accountability. Consultation should become the basis for establishing priorities for the disclosure and exploitation of information resources.

- **Open, accessible and reusable information.** This means that information should be disseminated free or at minimal cost, and supported by data structures to assist in the discovery, understanding and interpretation of the information. It should be provided in open standard formats that are adaptable and reusable. Governments should also collaborate with and encourage citizens, businesses and non-government organizations to participate in the development and maximize the use of technology to enrich their information resources.

IN THIS CONTEXT, CANADA'S ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND PRIVACY COMMISSIONERS ("COMMISSIONERS") RESOLVE AS FOLLOWS:

1. The Commissioners endorse and promote open government as a means to enhance transparency and accountability which are essential features of good governance and critical elements of an effective and robust democracy.
2. The Commissioners call on the federal and all provincial and territorial governments to declare the importance of open government, including specific commitments for stronger standards for transparency and participation by the public.
3. Governments should build access mechanisms into the design and implementation stages of all new programs and services to facilitate and enhance proactive disclosure of information.
4. Through ongoing consultations with the public, governments should routinely identify data sources and proactively disclose information in open, accessible and reusable formats. Public access to information should be provided free or at minimal cost.
5. In implementing open government policies, the federal and all provincial and territorial governments should give due consideration to privacy, confidentiality, security, Crown copyright and all relevant laws.