



CLA submission to the Action Plan on Open Government 2.0 Consultation October 20, 2014

Introduction

The Canadian Library Association / Association canadienne des bibliothèques (CLA/ACB) is the national voice for Canada's library communities.

The CLA believes that access to the widest variety of information and points of view is critical to the functioning and evolution of a democratic society. Citizens, organizations, and governments make better, more informed decisions when they take part in a free exchange of ideas facilitated by open, affordable, equitable, and timely access to information.

It is with such values in mind that CLA responds to the Government of Canada's Action Plan on Open Government 2.0 Consultation, with specific recommendations to support openness, transparency, and access to and the preservation of government information in Canada.

Open Information – Web Renewal

In light of the government's plan, as stated in Canada's Economic Action Plan 2013, [“to consolidate the 1,500 individual websites into one website at Canada.ca”](#), the CLA strongly encourages the government to take concrete steps to ensure the preservation of online information. “Government information” does not simply include official reports, publications, and data; it also includes the vast amounts of web content generated by various government department and agencies on a daily basis. This online information serves as a clear record of the government's policies and vast activities. By preserving this content, through web crawls or other means, the government will ensure the preservation of important elements of Canada's policy and democratic heritage. It is important for researchers and members of the public to have the ability to explore the development and shifts that take place in government, evidenced by the government's evolving online presence.

To this end, it is recommended that the government increase resource allocation to departments, such as Library and Archives Canada, to ensure that archiving, cataloguing, and digitization activities can continue in an efficient and timely manner. Furthermore, it is crucial that archived web content be made searchable and accessible to the public. Partnering with academic institutions or non-governmental organizations could be a valuable, complementary approach to ensure that all forms of government information are preserved and remain accessible in the long-term.

Consultation processes

The CLA recommends that the Government of Canada develop a series of consultation guidelines that departments and agencies are encouraged to use. Essential components of such guidelines should include varied means of consultation, including in-person and online, should seek to proactively encourage the participation of all members of the public and specialist communities, and should provide for a clear description of how feedback and input will be integrated into planning and decision-making processes. This initiative would be a means of ensuring a certain standard of consultative practices across the whole of

government and would ensure that the public and civil society organizations know what to expect when a consultation process begins. With clear processes and defined and varied means of participation, interested parties will be more likely to engage and collaborate with government in support of both openness and transparency.

Access to Information Requests

The CLA believes that the continued development and expansion of open government in Canada should result in a reduced need for access to information requests. We are pleased to see the recommendation that government information, where appropriate, be "open by default". It is recognized that this may require a culture shift from within the government, but the outcomes of such an approach would be valuable for all Canadians. Reducing the need for access to information requests to act as a regular means of obtaining information will have the added benefit of increasing government transparency.

"Open Docs" Virtual Library

In regards to the "Open Docs" Virtual Library that is proposed as part of the current Action Plan on Open Government, the CLA strongly recommends that broad, external consultation on the initiative be undertaken and that the long-term preservation and accessibility of existing and forthcoming publications be ensured. It is recommended that the government develop a clear strategy for the digitization and preservation of historical government documents, to support free, online access to publications through the "Open Docs" Virtual Library. Preservation of digitized and born digital materials made accessible through the "Open Docs" Virtual Library is essential to supporting government accountability and openness. Given the easily changeable nature of digital content, the government should ensure that when updates or changes to documents are made, previous versions are not removed from the web. Original documents represent the historical record of government policy and activity and should therefore not be removed. Finally, concrete measures should be taken to address the digital divide that exists in Canada that may hinder the ability of Canadians to access online government information made available through the "Open Docs" Virtual Library.

There is mention of funding and tools for Canadians' digital literacy tools which is something CLA has advocated for. We are encouraged and are keen to see the details of this suggestion unfold.