



Canadian Library Association
Association canadienne des bibliothèques

For Immediate Release

CLA Statement on Social Media Monitoring of Canadians

OTTAWA (December 19, 2013) The Canadian Library Association is concerned by a [Public Works and Government Services Canada](#) procurement request seeking a commercial firm to provide real-time monitoring and analysis of social media content, including Twitter, Facebook, blogs, chat rooms, message boards, social networks, and video and image sharing websites. The mandatory functional criteria include, amongst other capabilities, the ability to provide up-to-the minute analysis, the ability to graphically illustrate demographics, geographies, digital tracking of specific key words, the ability to target key influencers, the ability to analyze tone, and the capacity to perform historical searches for a minimum of 30 days.

The stated aim of this government monitoring program is to serve as a “critical function” in the support of departments to identify and track current and emerging public issues and trends as reported in the media. In this view, social media monitoring can serve as an early awareness system for public policy considerations.

While it is recognized that such monitoring targets conversations, posts, tweets, videos, etc. that are posted publicly on the open web, the Canadian Library Association is concerned because this type of monitoring is viewed as a form of “communications surveillance” as defined by the [International Principles on the Application of Human Rights to Communications Surveillance](#) (2013). As such, many questions must be addressed regarding this Canadian government program.

The original purpose of democratic governments is to ensure that citizens' interests are served and that their rights are protected. Canadians need to know:

- What transparent mechanisms are in place to ensure citizens are not being monitored inappropriately?
- Is there an independent body providing oversight to ensure transparency and accountability?
- Will anonymous messages retain their anonymity?
- What is the intended use of the data?
- Who will have access to the data? In particular, will police and intelligence bodies have such access and if so how will they use it?
- How long will the data be stored beyond the government stipulated requirement of 30 days? Where will it be stored and how will it be protected?
- Will individual citizens have the right to gain access to the reports and analyses of the information the government has on file about them?

- How much will this program cost Canadian taxpayers?

The Canadian Library Association submits that the Government of Canada should provide specific and persuasive evidence of how departments and citizens will benefit from this monitoring program. We hold that the monitoring of citizens' use of social media is unacceptable until a legitimate and overriding need is demonstrated, such as improved response times to natural disasters.

Most deeply concerning about social media monitoring is the capability to track the “tone” of key influencers. Many democratic governments have developed “enemy lists,” and in a time when private social media platforms have become citizen arenas for robust political debate and activity, citizens must be assured that officials with power over our digital lives are not abusing that power. Recent events around the world confirm there is legitimate reason to worry about the way in which citizens’ digital lives are being shaped by politicians serving special interest groups and trying to maintain political power, and by companies seeking to maximize profit. The proposed monitoring program contains vast potential for manipulation and abuse of the digital networks and platforms that citizens have come to depend upon. Having access to this information also enables the prospect of a sophisticated program of proactive manipulation of public discourse.

Canadian libraries have a longstanding commitment to privacy, intellectual freedom, and helping citizens develop information literacy skills. Librarians play an important role with students, clients, customers, and citizens in ensuring that they are aware their social media activity is being actively monitored by government so that this knowledge is factored into their decision-making about what they wish to share and how they choose to use media tools and platforms. The Canadian Library Association’s *Position Statement on Access to Information and Communication Technology* states that “Consent should be required for the collection of personal information and the subsequent use or disclosure of this information,” that such data should not be traded or sold “without the express written permission of the individual affected,” and that individuals should have the right to examine their own personal information collected by government, public bodies and corporations.

The Canadian Library Association calls for a public *and legislative* dialogue on privacy and encourages Canadian librarians and allies to advance the library community’s core principles by engaging communities in grassroots work to provide information, to promote education, to protect the civil liberties and privacy of law-abiding citizens, and to enable dialogue on how these issues affect democratic life.

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The Canadian Library Association/Association canadienne des bibliothèques (CLA) is the national voice for Canada’s library communities, representing the interests of libraries, library workers, and all those concerned about enhancing the quality of life of Canadians through information and literacy.

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