INFORMATION MANAGEMENT TO SUPPORT EVIDENCE-BASED GOVERNANCE IN THE ELECTRONIC AGE

A PUBLIC POLICY FORUM DISCUSSION PAPER
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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by Andrew Lipchak

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About the Author

Andrew Lipchak is an independent consultant based in Toronto.

This paper was prepared in the context of a project sponsored by the Public Policy Forum in the context of its work on governance and public sector reform. The project team was led by David Brown, Director, Special Projects, at the Public Policy Forum and also included John McDonald. The team was assisted by Geneviève Lépine, Research Associate at the Public Policy Forum.

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The Public Policy Forum (PPF) is a non-profit organization aimed at improving the quality of government in Canada through better dialogue between government, the private and third sectors. The Forum's members, drawn from businesses, federal and provincial governments, the voluntary sector and the labour movement, share a common belief that an efficient and effective public service is a key element in ensuring our quality of life and global competitive position. Established in 1987, the Public Policy Forum has gained a reputation as a trusted, neutral facilitator, capable of bringing together a wide range of stakeholders in productive dialogue. Its research program provides a neutral base to inform collective decision-making.

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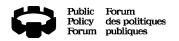Archives nationales du Canada

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Preface

The electronic environment is dominating the agenda of modern governments including those in the developing world where the application of information and communications technologies (ICT's) are seen as a major catalyst to economic and social advancement. The potential is rising for greater citizen participation in governmental processes through the innovative use of ICT's and the adoption of e-government strategies. The growing intimacy between the citizen and the government is accelerating the need for effective strategies, tools and techniques to help citizens and governments transact business in trustworthy environments based on records that are authentic, reliable, accessible, understandable, and usable.

Based on discussions with the International Records Management Trust and subsequent funding from the National Archives of Canada, Public Works and Government Services, and the Treasury Board Secretariat, the Public Policy Forum (PPF) undertook a study of the relationship between governance and recordkeeping. The findings of this study are described in the report, "Information Management to Support Evidence-Based Governance in the Electronic Age" and an earlier research report entitled, "The Financial Capability Model and the Records Management Function: An Assessment".

The second report presents a critical analysis of the issues democratic governments face as they turn to the electronic record as the de facto form of decision-making and government program and service delivery. The first report describes the results of an investigation into the feasibility of using a maturity model developed for the financial management community as the basis for a similar model for use as a roadmap by the records management community. The first report was used as input to an initiative led by the National Archives of Canada to produce a more rigorous *IM and Records Management Capacity Check* (http://www.archives.ca/06/0603_e.html) for use within the Canadian federal government. It is currently being reviewed for use at the international level.

Both reports represent a key milestone in the development of a shared understanding of the role information plays in support of good governance. They are also designed to contribute to the further development of strategies and tools that will permit public sector organizations to manage information as an asset similar to any other valued asset.

The Public Policy Forum is grateful for the support provided by the National Archives of Canada, Public Works and Government Services, and the Treasury Board Secretariat. The Forum is also grateful to Andrew Lipchak and John McDonald who wrote the two reports while under contract with the PPF.

Executive Summary

The intent of this study is to explore the relationship between information management and good governance and to identify key issues which governments in both developed and developing countries should consider in assessing and improving their *recordkeeping* (or records management) programs. Specifically, the study focused on the following themes:

The nature and form of governance are changing as a result of many factors, most notably the rise of new technologies and their impact on the availability and distribution of information.

Good governance is built on a foundation of democratic values supported by appropriate goals, institutions, resources and management processes. New technologies, increasing interdependence and globalization are redefining governance and altering the roles and relationships among traditionally discrete sectors of society.

The greatest stimulus for change in the nature and form of governance has been the rise of new technologies and their impact on the availability and distribution of information. An interdependent, collaborative governance model depends on a cross-boundary flow of high quality, accessible information. This information flow tends to further dissolve boundaries between organizational structures, between management systems, between professions, between those who govern and those governed, and between the technologies themselves. The operative model or image for this interconnected environment is the *network* and *convergence* is its predominant direction. In this environment, the key management traits are: managing horizontally as well as vertically; managing through partnerships and teams; and managing by results, not processes. Unfortunately, older hierarchical and bureaucratic ways co-exist with progressive efforts to understand and embrace interdependence and build new collaborative governance models upon it. As well, globalization and a "digital divide" are complicating the information landscape and raising significant governance issues that affect the prospects of both developed and developing countries.

A focus on technology as the solution to all problems often obscures the critical information issues on which real government transformation depends (*e.g.* program / service restructuring and greater participation of citizens in democratic governance). This is called the *emperor's clothes syndrome* where the outer clothes of Internet portals and websites are removed to reveal a fragile and inadequate information infrastructure – one unable to ensure the integrity of government-held information or to support the deeper dimensions of *e-governance*.

Information is the *defining resource* of governance and critical governance issues and choices hinge on fundamental information management questions: What information needs to be created and acquired? For what purposes? Who will have access to it? Will information be shared, combined and integrated to solve increasingly interconnected problems? Will it be used to promote political and public debate and genuine stakeholder participation? Who will own and control the information? How will its security, integrity and value be protected? Who will be responsible for making decisions about these issues?

Good recordkeeping is a core component of good governance, especially in an increasingly information and technology-intensive environment.

Authentic and trustworthy *records* – and convenient access to them – provide the fundamental means by which the transparency, accountability and effectiveness of government and its partners in governance can be accomplished, demonstrated and measured. Governments keep records as a fundamental basis for conducting business, serving the public, measuring progress and outcomes and protecting their own and others' rights. Records enable programs and services, public access to them and the availability of information about them. The records of government must be carefully managed to provide the legally verifiable *evidence* needed to support good management, fulfill public policy objectives and protect fundamental values on which the society is built. Records make modern governance possible.

The relationship between recordkeeping, accountability, transparency and public trust lies at the heart of democratic governance. Good records are essential to the establishment of trust *within* government and trust *in* government. Unless government can ensure the integrity and accessibility of its records, the confidence that citizens have in representative democracy itself will wither.

Access to information laws, where they exist, are based on the principle that the public's *right to know* is a fundamental element of democratic governance. The extent to which government balances access and privacy concerns (and ensures good recordkeeping on which access and privacy depend) is a measure of the extent to which it is committed to trust, transparency and accountability in the conduct of its affairs. Although access and privacy laws offer important protections, the most effective guarantee of access and privacy is the informed and ethical conduct of politicians and public servants (supported by good recordkeeping practices). An information *management* culture is more effective than an information *legislation* culture.

Based on financial, political, technological and other pressures, new alternative service delivery options are available within government and through arrangements with other government and non-government bodies. The success of these efforts depends on the availability of reliable information and data on which to base the changes and through which their impacts can be measured.

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Recorded memory is an essential component of governance. Archival records support a variety of functions and help government and society exploit the value of individual and collective experience. Unless this knowledge is captured and preserved as a matter of course, departments are forced to re-invent wheels and duplicate the lessons – and often the failures – of the past. Because of their concern for the long-term integrity of the public record, archival institutions often play a leading role in developing and supporting government records management programs. The prospect of identifying, selecting and preserving a comprehensive and credible archival record of governance depends on how well the records have been managed over their life cycle.
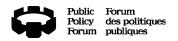
A learning culture and strong infrastructure of laws, policies, standards, practices, systems and people are required to support information management for both traditional and e-governance needs.

The degree to which information and knowledge are captured and used to support good governance depends on whether a strong underlying information management infrastructure is in place. The infrastructure consists of information-related laws and policies, program governance and accountability frameworks, information management (IM) standards and practices, technology-based systems and necessary staffing and other resources. It provides governance-related institutions and individuals with the *mandate, direction, responsibility, tools* and *capacity* to create, use and preserve information effectively in all forms. This infrastructure must be developed and sustained by a knowledge-centred *learning* culture. This culture and infrastructure need to be based on a strong *vision* of information-enabled governance and a set of fundamental information *principles*.

Serious gaps and weaknesses in the recordkeeping practices and infrastructure of government are common in all jurisdictions, however. As modern governments downsize, they are often left without knowledgeable records and information management staff to help guide and support good recordkeeping. Where this and other gaps are found, a variety of negative governance impacts and risks occur. Poor recordkeeping reduces the effectiveness of programs and services; impedes the achievement of social, economic and other goals; and reduces the confidence that citizens and others have in their governance. Good records management programs, however, provide important benefits that support and sustain effective governance, citizen participation and public trust.

The creation, use and preservation of electronic records pose special challenges requiring new techniques and tools but based on traditional information management principles and goals.

As governments embrace the tremendous potential of information and communication technologies, there are particular problems in managing information in electronic form

(*e.g.* e-mail and web-based information). Electronic information systems are complex, fragile and quickly changing. The long-term preservation of electronic records is a special concern for archivists, lawyers and others concerned about the integrity and authenticity of information required for governance, legal, e-commerce and other needs. Although electronic systems are becoming the primary medium of information creation and exchange, the paperless office remains unachieved. Governments must manage their information in all forms in this hybrid environment. To support the shift from *paper mountain* to *data stream*, traditional records management goals need to be married to new standards, systems, tools and skills. New tools include an expanding range of electronic document and records management applications. A new breed of information professional, supported by effective training, is needed in which traditional and new skills and perspectives converge. In time, "records managers" will be absorbed into a more mature multi-media information systems environment in which business, accountability and related information management needs drive technology deployment.

To move in this direction, organizations need to assess their current IM strengths and weaknesses. A carefully considered plan and *strategy* for IM infrastructure development are required that include generating a shared vision for information management, a strong case for action and wide awareness and support on the part of key stakeholders.

Valuable initiatives in support of these directions are being undertaken in Canada and elsewhere which provide models for enhancing public sector information management.

Canada is demonstrating leadership in recognizing the importance of information management and in putting into place stronger IM programs and infrastructure. This leadership is being shown by the Chief Information Officer (CIO) Branch of the Treasury Board Secretariat and the National Archives of Canada, with strong support being expressed by the Information Commissioner of Canada and others. A variety of current and new strategies, frameworks, standards, guidelines and tools are being established to help government institutions assess and improve their IM capacity. Effective steps are also being taken in other countries, particularly in Great Britain, Australia, and the United States. Other important IM-related programs are being developed by the European Union, the World Bank (in collaboration with the International Records Management Trust), UNESCO and the G8 group of nations intent on stimulating improvements in governance in developing countries. As well, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) has adopted a standard for records management in 2001 that provides a strong foundation for records management programs in all countries.

Although governments are increasingly recognizing the relationship between governance and recordkeeping, they are struggling to ensure that the related

infrastructure of policies, standards and practices, systems and technologies, and people is complete, effective, and relevant, especially in an electronic environment. The struggle has been exacerbated by the absence of frameworks and tools (e.g., assessment tools, model policies and standards, etc.) to help them measure the adequacy of their existing recordkeeping infrastructures and to provide them with a road map to help guide them in enhancing records management capacity. This road map would respect their need to take steps that fit their resources, capabilities and conditions – particularly important in developing countries.

Those steps need to reflect an IM development strategy that includes:

- Generating awareness, partnerships and support;
- Identifying gaps, priorities, resources and participants; and
- Planning and building needed elements of the IM infrastructure.

In conclusion, good governance based on transparency, accountability and trust (and similar values) is becoming a shared goal among governments around the world. Achieving this goal requires a common approach to the establishment of recordkeeping programs – programs that enable and support effective democratic governance. There is increasing momentum towards this objective and rich opportunity for new and effective collaboration, with Canada playing a leading role.

An intimate and interdependent relationship exists between recordkeeping and governance. Records, when well managed, are *instruments* for achieving accountability, transparency and trust; *evidence* of that achievement (or lack thereof); and authoritative *sources of information* that can be used to support decision-making and the delivery of government programs and services. The effective creation, use, and preservation of records are integral and essential components of a government's ability to provide good governance. The relationship between society and its government is based on trust. Citizens and a variety of bodies expect their governments to manage "in trust" the records that document their interactions with government and the full range of government activities, decisions and transactions.

New initiatives involving Canadian federal departments, the International Records Management Trust and others are part of the growing momentum for improving information management to support evidence-based governance.

These collaborative efforts must continue and increase. Based on its own experience and expertise, Canada can play a leading role in developing and sharing effective strategies, methodologies and tools that can benefit its own public sector as well as other governments.

In conclusion, this report is intended to contribute to a better understanding of the inter-relationship between governance and recordkeeping, and to encourage further study in this area. Even more important, it is hoped that the discussion of these issues will help stimulate strategies that permit governments to develop and implement recordkeeping infrastructures that respond to the imperatives of the emerging *e-world*. While Canada is playing a leadership role in these and related areas, there is a rich opportunity for more collaboration to develop international models for the management of information to support democratic governance.

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