

## Response to Canada's proposals for revitalizing access to information - Evidence for Democracy

*Prepared by Dr. Alana Westwood on behalf of Evidence for Democracy.*

The federal government faces a high burden with regard to Access to Information (ATI), spending in excess of \$60 million last year to answer requests. Current revitalization efforts, aligned with Open Government initiatives, aim to both reduce request volume and allow citizens to more easily obtain information. However, with regard to scientific information, existing and proposed ATI practices and protocols will be insufficient. They fail to address the unique ecosystem in which scientific research occurs, where “open by default” needs to include scientific integrity through the life cycle of the research work, and not only apply to the end products.

The existing system is fraught with problems. Evidence for Democracy (E4D) has participated in two ATI requests over three years, and our experience has been extremely long wait times, in excess of 8 months and 1.5 years, respectively (with the latter still pending). For many requestors, by the time the information is released, it is no longer relevant due to changes in governments, policies, or other circumstances. Furthermore, a citizen or organization can only query one department at a time. Particularly in science, issues often fall into the jurisdiction of multiple departments, as their researchers regularly collaborate.

Many of the aforementioned issues are likely to be addressed through the current proposal. The proposal has many beneficial aspects, including ending fees, reducing wait times, allowing the Information Commissioner to order the release of government information, and others. In addition, scientific data and results are promised to be made available to the public via Open Government Draft Plan. However, this will likely not reduce burden of science-related requests on ATI, whose volume are not determined by bureaucratic barriers.

What is required is to prevent the need for such requests in the first place, by enshrining science integrity and communication at the federal level. E4D, along with the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada, has [asked the federal government](#) to guarantee scientists the right to last

review of their research, for timely public release of scientific information, safeguards from scientific misconduct, and protection from undue commercial influence. Implementing these measures would allow for openness through the entire life cycle of research, making information available to the public that otherwise would have to be accessed through ATI. Institutionalizing open science at the federal level will be the best way to reduce science-related request burden on ATI, as well as facilitate greater public awareness.