Canada's Open Government Initiative

Comments on the implementation of the Open Government
Action Plan.

September 6th 2013

**Canadian Association
of Research Libraries**

**Association des bibliothèques
de recherche du Canada**

CARL ABRC

Who we are

The Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL) represents the country's twenty-nine largest university libraries. Enhancing research and higher education are at the heart of our mission. CARL promotes effective and sustainable scholarly communication, and public policy that enables broad access to scholarly information.

Summary

- CARL applauds the government's Open Government Initiative and strongly encourages its full implementation.
- We believe that Open Data and Information should be consistently applied to all government data and information. This would naturally exclude matters with privacy or clear national security concerns.
- Open Data requires reliable data. We urge the Government of Canada to reinstate the more reliable and less-expensive mandatory long-form census.
- We hope that the proposed Virtual Library will enable access to, and ensure the preservation of, government publications.

Introduction

The Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL) supports the Government of Canada's Open Government initiative. Open Government encourages transparency and accountability by providing the public with information on the state's activities.

Once implemented, these measures will provide Canadians with more information about their government's activities. For researchers, this means access to information that would otherwise be unobtainable.

The Open Data initiative is of particular importance to CARL, given our members' role in preserving and distributing information and knowledge for both research and learning.

We especially applaud the new open government licence and hope it will become mandatory for all Government of Canada publications. We look forward to the Open Government directive and its implementation. We hope that the public will have a chance to provide input on this issue.

Open Data: Access and Reliability

Open Data makes machine-readable data provided by government freely available to anyone. It fuels research and innovation beyond the value of the original data. Governments produce vast amounts of data to support service delivery in areas such as health, environment, agriculture and natural resources, much of which may have enduring value for new enquiry or application.

CARL members applaud the advances made in the Open Data initiative and encourage the government to continue in this direction. We encourage all government organizations to participate in this initiative. Easing access to government data is an excellent measure that will benefit researchers, governments, industry and curious Canadians.

Reliable data is crucial. As such, we strongly encourage the government to reinstitute the mandatory long-form census. Data collected during the last survey is less reliable, more costly and does not add any privacy protection to Canadians.

We also hope that the new data.gc.ca domain will integrate all data made available by Statistics Canada. We strongly believe that the organization's extensive experience in this field makes it the logical lead agency for this project.

Open Information: Consistent Transparency

Transparency also relates to government information. Every year, governments generate thousands of documents that are not published or accessible although they remain declassified. Considering the millions of taxpayers' dollars funding government work, we believe that the government should increase its transparency. For example, detailed analyses of foreign countries that are based on open sources can be beneficial to Canadian exporters looking at new markets.

We believe that the government must assure a comprehensive approach to Open Information. This includes centralized access (and preservation of) government documents and data sets, including access to information requests.

Additionally, the government could take inspiration from the Central Intelligence Agency's virtual reading room (http://www.foia.cia.gov/). This website brings together documents released following access to information requests and allows users to view them. Such an approach could release pressure on the Access to Information and Privacy (ATIP) program by avoiding repetitive requests. This would save government resources and increase usability for Canadians.

Virtual Library: Access & Preservation

CARL members are looking forward to the proposed Virtual Library. We believe that it is essential to have a central location that can enable access to and preserve government publications.

Such a library would play a vital role in enabling access to current Government of Canada publications. It should also ensure the preservation of these documents past the timelines established by Treasury Board Secretariat guidelines, enabling future generations to access this information. We believe that Library and Archives Canada could play an important role in this process and a single domain for both current and archived publications would ensure easy use by Canadians.

Open Dialogue: Consulting Canadians

Ensuring Canadians have their say through a comprehensive consultations portal is vital to Open Dialogue. A consistent approach submitting all government initiatives to consultations would engage Canadians and benefit government with views and information otherwise unknown.

We strongly believe that the results of all public consultations should be publicly available, adding accountability to the process.

Canadian Association of Research Libraries

Tel. 613.482.9344   600-350 Albert St.
info@carl-abrc.ca   Ottawa, ON
www.carl-abrc.ca   K1R 1B1

CARL ABRC