

**FOLLOW-UP TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES  
Minister of Digital Government  
May 25, 2020**

**1. Date of last updates to Government of Canada privacy policies and guidance (OCIO)**

**(CPC) Mr. Ziad Aboultaif:** In light of this whole thing, since this is happening because of COVID-19, so that at least Canadians, and even policy-makers on the opposition side, can understand where the government is headed with this, when was the last legislation or policy put forward by the ministry?

**Hon. Joyce Murray:** I'll ask my official, the acting chief information officer, Marc Brouillard, to answer that question.

**The Chair:** Monsieur Brouillard, respond very briefly, if you could.

**Mr. Marc Brouillard** (Acting Chief Information Officer of Canada, Treasury Board Secretariat): I'm sorry. Is the question, when was the last time the privacy policy was updated?

**Mr. Ziad Aboultaif:** Yes.

**Mr. Marc Brouillard:** I don't have the exact date, but it has been a while. I'm hoping to get that—

**The Chair:** Only because we're out of time, could you get the exact information that Mr. Aboultaif has asked for and submit it in writing to our clerk as soon as possible?

**Mr. Marc Brouillard:** I'd be happy to.

**The Chair:** We appreciate that very much.

**Mr. Ziad Aboultaif:** Thank you.

## **Response**

Federal privacy policies were most recently updated in 2018. Changes to the [Directive on Personal Information Requests and Correction of Personal Information](#) that took effect on October 1, 2018 established new requirements for institutions to provide a written explanation to a requester when a request for personal information would take longer than 30 days to fulfill; to provide more detail on the reasons for time extensions in annual reports to Parliament; and to share information about reasons for extensions

with the Office of the Privacy Commissioner. These changes aimed to improve service for Canadians and increase transparency and accountability.

Changes to the [Policy on Privacy Protection](#) that came into force on July 1, 2018 updated format and nomenclature (“privacy request” became “personal information request”) and clarified the Secretary of the Treasury Board’s authority to issue, amend or rescind directives, standards and mandatory procedures, forms and other guidance for the operation of the *Privacy Act*.

## 2. Guidance from the Information Commissioner (OCIO)

(CPC) **Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Thanks. I have just a last question on that. She lists tips on her website, the nine email tips for maintaining information. Have you rolled that out to the departments, or are you just waiting for departments to look at her website on their own? Again, Treasury Board is responsible for this. If you let it go... We've seen this repeatedly from Treasury Board on human resources, whistle-blowing and departmental plans. Treasury Board is responsible but always says that it's the departments, and then nothing gets done.

**Mr. Marc Brouillard:** I haven't personally—

**The Chair:** Mr. Brouillard, I'm going to ask you to provide that answer—in writing, as I've mentioned before—to the clerk as soon as possible. I'm sure you want to give a fulsome answer to Mr. McCauley's question. I'll give you the opportunity to do so as quickly as possible, sir.

### Response

#### *Access to information requests*

Openness, transparency and accountability are guiding principles of the Government of Canada.

Most federal employees, including ATIP Office staff, are working from home, without full access to all of the documents and information systems that they would use to respond to requests. As well, in many cases ATIP Offices have had to suspend consultations with outside businesses concerning the release of records that they have provided to government, since those businesses are also affected by the crisis.

While the public health measures established to curb the spread of COVID-19 and to protect the health and safety of federal employees have affected capacity to process access to information requests, the Government remains committed to making best efforts to respond to access to information requests and to continue to proactively publish key information.

TBS continues to engage with the offices of the Information Commissioner and Privacy Commissioner to ensure that these essential oversight bodies are aware of the operational constraints facing the government and the government's current approach. Minister Duclos appreciates the Information Commissioner's recommendations on measures the Government could take to address this situation and we will continue to work with her and her office in this regard.

On March 20, 2020, the Treasury Board Secretariat issued an [Access to Information and Privacy Implementation Notice](#) advising institutions to make best

efforts to respond to requests and to meet proactive publication requirements, in accordance with operational realities and the need to comply with direction from public health authorities. The Implementation Notice also asked institutions to notify requesters of their reduced capacity to respond to requests and the potential for delays. TBS also posted a notice on the [ATIP Online Request Service](#) to advise of potential delays in meeting access request and proactive publication deadlines.

Institutions are progressively working to increase their request-processing capacity. TBS collects data weekly on the status of ATIP Offices.

As of June 16, 2020:

- 46 institutions indicate that they are operating at full capacity (full list provided in Annex)
- Canadian Heritage indicates they have no capacity to respond to requests at this time.
- The remaining institutions have partial capacity to respond to requests.

Despite the challenges, institutions are finding ways to move forward on requests, within their individual circumstances, such as:

- offering to provide electronic-only records to requesters
- establishing new digital processes to replace paper-based business processes
- accessing the network afterhours to be able to advance the work on requests packages
- utilizing e-post where possible to provide responses to requesters.

TBS is hosting discussions with institutions to support them in sharing and implementing best practices, as well as to identify measures that would support them to deal with a backlog of requests once institutions are able to resume more regular operations.

To assist requesters and institutions, development work is underway to add additional tools and functionality to the ATIP Online Request Service to make the request process more efficient and secure, and to avoid responses on paper and compact discs. This will improve the resiliency of the process.

At the same time, the Government is undertaking a procurement process for new ATIP request processing software to help ATIP offices be more efficient.

## *Ensuring transparency*

Proactive publication of information is an important tool for our Government to provide transparency and accountability to Canadians during the COVID-19 pandemic. In line with the Commissioner's suggestions, the Government has committed to making information related to COVID-19 and the Government's response proactively available, including on the Open Government portal.

As announced by the Prime Minister on April 17, 2020, the [Open Government Portal](#) will host open data related to the applications received and processed under the Canada Emergency Response Benefit. As of May 25, 2020, the [open.canada.ca](http://open.canada.ca) portal provided 143 open information and open data records related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The President of the Treasury Board, in his capacity as designated Minister for the administration of the *Access to Information Act* across the federal government, and as a member of the Cabinet Committee on the federal response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), has written to Cabinet colleagues encouraging Ministers to have institutions proactively publish as much information as possible as well as remind them of the importance of ensuring best practices in information management.

On April 29, 2020, the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) published [guidance](#) on information management practices while working remotely for all public servants. This guidance is meant to reinforce employees' awareness of their collective responsibility to document decisions of business value and to ensure that government information is managed securely and effectively with respect to legislative and policy requirements, including the requirements of the *Access to Information Act* and *Privacy Act*.

To support the Government's commitment to make more COVID-19 information and data available to Canadians on the Open Government Portal, on June 11, 2020 TBS is hosting an online workshop for government institutions on how to proactively publish information and data on the Open Government Portal.

## **ANNEX - Institutions operating at full capacity, week of June 16, 2020**

Administration portuaire de Trois-Rivières  
Administrative Tribunals Support Service of Canada  
Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency  
Atlantic Pilotage Authority  
Atomic Energy of Canada Limited  
Business Development Bank of Canada  
Canada Council for the Arts  
Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions  
Canada Energy Regulator  
Canada Foundation for Innovation  
Canada School of Public Service  
Canadian Commercial Corporation  
Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services  
Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation  
Canadian Museum for Human Rights  
Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency  
Canadian Space Agency  
Canadian Tourism Commission (dba Destination Canada)  
Civilian Review and Complaints Commission for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police  
Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces  
Export Development Canada  
Financial Consumer Agency of Canada  
FinDev Canada  
First Nations Tax Commission  
Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada  
Infrastructure Canada  
Les Ponts Jacques Cartier et Champlain Incorporée  
Military Grievances External Review Committee  
Military Police Complaints Commission of Canada  
Nanaimo Port Authority  
National Battlefields Commission  
National Research Council of Canada  
Office of the Auditor General of Canada  
Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages  
Office of the Correctional Investigator  
Office of the Information Commissioner of Canada  
Public Sector Pension Investment Board  
Sept-Îles Port Authority  
Shared Service Canada  
St. John's Port Authority  
Standards Council of Canada

Toronto Port Authority  
Vancouver Fraser Port Authority  
Veterans Review and Appeals Board  
Western Economic Diversification Canada  
Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board

### 3. Metrics on “dropped” calls (SSC)

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Just to close it out, in terms of the improvement you've identified, I'm very happy to hear that. I think our constituency offices might have a different anecdotal perspective. Could you just give us a sense of, when this unprecedented wave happened for dropped calls until now, what it would have been at its peak?

**Mr. Paul Glover:** We'll provide that through the clerk. I don't want to estimate. I do know that there have been a number of steps too. There were problems with calls that weren't dropped, but frankly, simply never got answered. That was another issue. People would get in and the call would never get dropped; it would just never get answered and the business would shut. The departments have been adding on. They've virtually doubled the number of agents they've brought on, so we've handled that. The other thing, in addition to the dropped call issue, is that we tried to stand up more channels so that people can use voice response. They can still phone in, but rather than speaking to an agent, they can ask frequently asked questions, they can enter their information if they don't have access to a computer and they can still enrol in the benefit. We've expanded the number of channels, and that has also made an improvement. We'll get you a full breakdown of the progress from the outset to where we are today.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** That's helpful. Mr. Chair, thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

### Response

For the past 2 years, Shared Services Canada (SSC) has delivered a Hosted Contact Centre Service (HCCS) that is a modern, secure, state-of-the-art contact centre solution supporting seven of the most complex contact centres in government, including those most impacted by the COVID pandemic: ESDC Employment Insurance (EI) and CRA Individual Tax Enquiries (ITE).

CRA migrated to the HCCS platform in 2018, and the EI call centre joined on March 7, 2020, which enabled thousands of agents to work from home. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, SSC has increased the capacity of critical contact centre infrastructure to manage unprecedented call volumes and to support an increase in the number of CRA and ESDC agents as they transitioned from Government of Canada offices to telework.

SSC issued over 7,000 cellular devices and adjusted back-end systems to ensure a seamless transition for agents to telework. SSC worked with telecommunications vendors to ensure that increased cellular traffic would not cause a failure within telecommunications infrastructure or on the cellular network. Over the past 2 months, the concurrent call volumes managed on the platform have increased more than 300 percent and the highest number of calls handled at the same time reached a peak of



30,000 concurrent calls. For the month of April, HCCS received close to 31 million calls representing a monthly capacity of more than 1,000 percent, which is higher than was previously managed. Even with the increase, the platform was able to support the sustained high call volume. As well, HCCS supported 5,000 concurrent agents in April and the platform was expanded to support a workforce double that size as ESDC and CRA plan to on-board more agents.

Canadians can experience dropped calls for various reasons, including from a technical incident on the platform. Since March 15, 2020, there have been 3 days where an incident led to dropped calls which represented less than 2%, or 18,450 dropped calls, of the total incoming call volume for those days. Total incoming call volumes for the 3 days were 534,386 for ESDC and 635,283 for CRA. Individual departments also have the ability to establish business parameters on the platform to manage the number of calls waiting due to factors such as the number of staffed agents or time of day.

To better support Canadians throughout this crisis, SSC has enabled a new, automated channel for individuals to apply for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB). The interactive voice response (IVR) phone line gives Canadians the opportunity to quickly and easily submit requests for income support payments. Since its launch on April 6, 2020, this solution has handled over 10.5 million incoming calls.