

Freedom of Information: Exercising the right to know

A 2023 Workshop

facilitated by

Mike Larsen, Faculty, Criminology Department, KPU

on behalf of

The BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association



FIPA acknowledges with respect the Indigenous peoples on whose traditional territory we conduct activities. While striving to increase privacy protection and access to information for everyone, we recognize that colonization and associated attitudes, policies and institutions have significantly changed Indigenous peoples' relationship with this land. For many years, those same things served to exclude Indigenous peoples from the privacy, protection and access to information afforded to others. FIPA is committed to redressing those historic and continued barriers.

The BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association (FIPA) is a non-partisan, non-profit society that was established in 1991 to promote and defend freedom of information and privacy rights in Canada. Our goal is to empower citizens by increasing their access to information and their control over their own personal information. We serve a wide variety of individuals and organizations through programs of public education, public assistance, research, and law reform. We are one of very few public interest groups in Canada devoted solely to the advancement of freedom of information (FOI) and privacy rights.

<https://fipa.bc.ca> / @bcfipa / fipa@fipa.bc.ca / 604 739-9788



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44th Parliament, 1st Session (November 22, 2021 - Present)

ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND PRIVACY SYSTEMS

Report and Government Response

Report 9: The State of Canada's Access to Information System

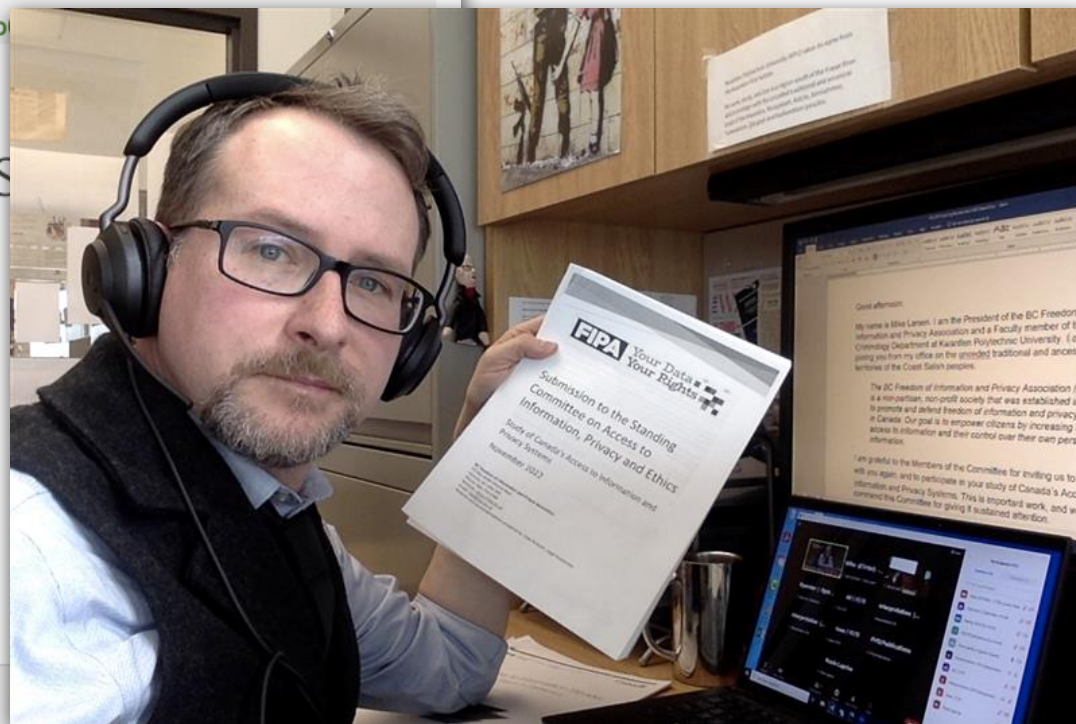
- Adopted by the Committee: [June 9, 2023](#)
- Presented to the House: June 20, 2023

<p>Report 9 Presented to the House: Tuesday, June 20, 2023</p>	<p>Government Response Presented to the House: Tuesday, October 17, 2023</p>
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INFORMATION

Briefs (12)

Witnesses (42)





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How can I support FIPA?

For more than twenty years, FIPA has worked tirelessly to defend and expand the reach of freedom of information, and to protect the information rights of British Columbians. We have fought for the public disclosure of government contracts worth hundreds of millions of dollars. We have convened dialogues, conferences, and workshops dedicated to establishing a democratic balance of power between the institutions, the citizens, and the officials who make up our society. Most importantly, we have helped countless individuals understand and act on their fundamental information rights.

Our work wouldn't be possible without the generous support of people like you. Becoming a monthly donor is a low-cost, low-maintenance way to support these projects and much more. And with governments in B.C. and across Canada aggressively pursuing data sharing practices, expanding surveillance efforts, and rolling back privacy protections and information rights, that support is more important than ever before.

We collect as little personal information as possible to allow processing of this secure transaction with this [privacy policy](#). **Please note FIPA is a non-profit but is not a charity, we cannot provide a tax receipt for your donation.**

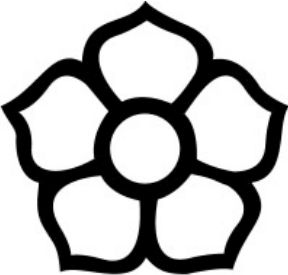
Donation Amount *

- \$5
- \$10
- \$15
- \$20
- Other

Recurring (every month)

- Check

- <https://fipa.bc.ca/get-involved/donate/>

THE  LAW
FOUNDATION
OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

BC FIPA's public education activities are made possible by the generous support of the Law Foundation of British Columbia.

Overview

Part 1: The Basics

Part 2: Before you File

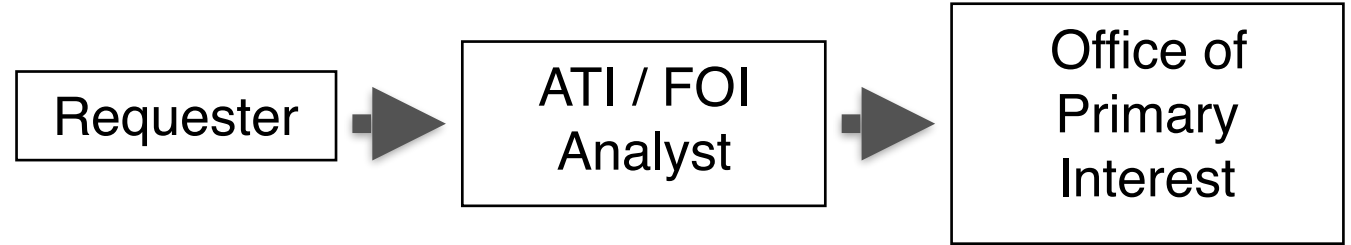
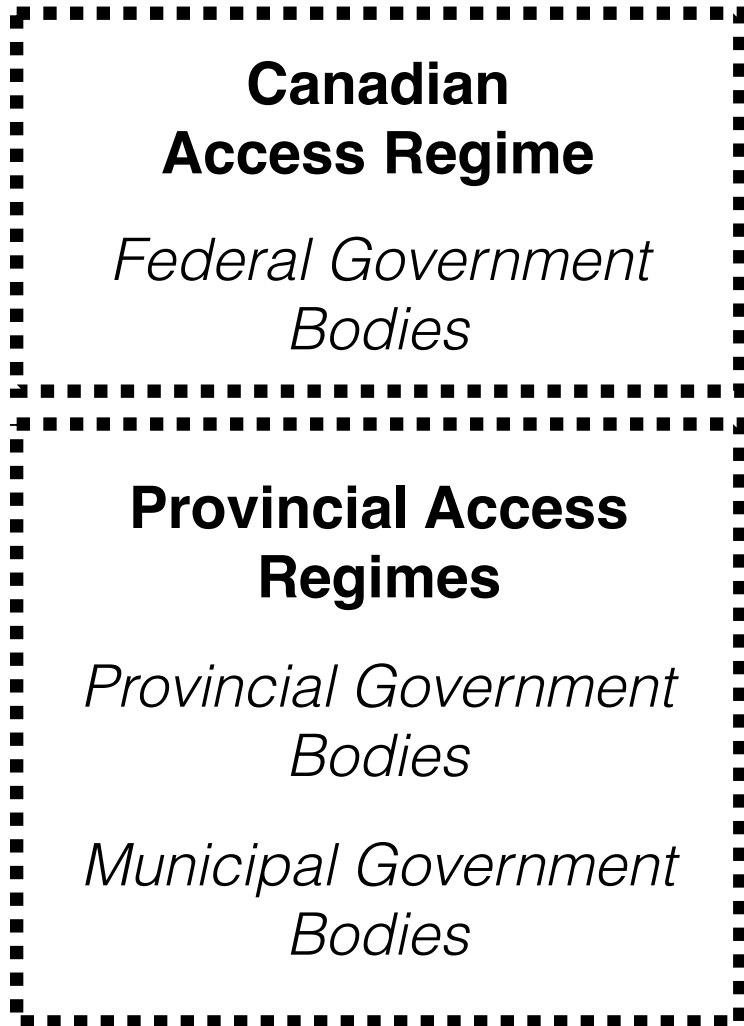
Part 3: Planning a Request

Part 4: After you File

Questions & Tips

Part 1: The Basics

The Basics



- Remember: Access to Information and Freedom of Information Laws are 'dual function'
 - They facilitate a public right of access
 - They enable government secrecy

Part 2: Before you File

Before you File

- Many governments and public bodies publish completed ATI/FOI requests on their websites.
- In addition to being a source of useful information, these websites provide examples of successful (and unsuccessful) request wording and examples of the types of records that can be obtained.
- If a public body does not publish its FOI requests online, contact the FOI Coordinator and request a list of previous FOI requests, with file numbers and summaries.

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Home > British Columbians and our governments > Initiatives, plans and strategies > Open Government > Open information > Search the catalogue >

Search the Open Information Catalogue

Find information that is released regularly or information that has been released by request.

Refine by

Type

FOI Request (424)

Year

- 2011 (12)
- 2012 (21)
- 2013 (24)
- 2014 (49)
- 2015 (42)
- 2016 (39)
- 2017 (60)
- ▼ 6 More

Month

- 1 (27)
- 2 (21)
- 3 (46)
- 4 (31)
- 5 (46)
- 6 (35)
- 7 (43)

fire

All Search Tools

FOI Request - EMC-2023-31395
Records regarding the number of people in B.C. that were asked or forced by fire or flood to evacuate from their homes in 2022. (Date Range for Record Search: From 12/1/2022 To 1/31/2023)
Type: FOI Request
Applicant Type: Individual
Ministry: Emergency Management and Climate Readiness
Fees paid by applicant: \$0.00
Publication Date: 2023-07-24

FOI Request - TRA-2021-13111
All Data/ Reports/ Meeting Notes/ Correspondence (including Internal and External Memos and E-mails)/ Criteria / Analysis that outline the reasons why MoTI does not endorse the Doral Forest Park (Doral) development in Saanich; All documentation that[...]
Type: FOI Request
Applicant Type: Individual
Ministry: Transportation and Infrastructure
Fees paid by applicant: \$0.00
Publication Date: 2023-04-28

BC Open Government

Full records of most completed requests filed with provincial ministries and the Premier's Office

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Home > British Columbians and our governments > Initiatives, plans and strategies > Open Information >

Search for Information Releases (FOI Requests)

Welcome to B.C.'s catalogue of public information. Here is a summary of information requested and processed ordered by most recently published.

Refine by

Ministry

Education (617)

Year

2011 (10)

2012 (45)

2013 (60)

2014 (67)

2015 (44)

2016 (59)

2017 (58)

5 More

Month

1 (61)

2 (55)

3 (49)

4 (48)

5 (66)

6 (67)

7 (41)

5 More

FOI

Education

All

Search Tools

FOI Request - EDU-2021-14073

Applicant Type: Political Party
Ministry: Education
Fees paid by applicant: \$0.00
Publication Date: 2022-03-07

FOI Request - EDU-2022-20016

Applicant Type: Political Party
Ministry: Education
Fees paid by applicant: \$0.00
Publication Date: 2022-03-04

FOI Request - EDU-2021-14150

Applicant Type: Political Party
Ministry: Education
Fees paid by applicant: \$0.00
Publication Date: 2022-03-03

FOI Request - EDU-2021-13896

Applicant Type: Political Party
Ministry: Education
Fees paid by applicant: \$0.00
Publication Date: 2022-03-01

BRITISH COLUMBIA

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FOI Request - CTZ-2012-00111

Applicant Type: Researcher
Ministry: Citizens' Services and Open Government
Fees paid by applicant: \$0.00
Publication Date: 2012-10-11

Request Detail History Reports from CRTS that document how libraries and archives have benefited from BC's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

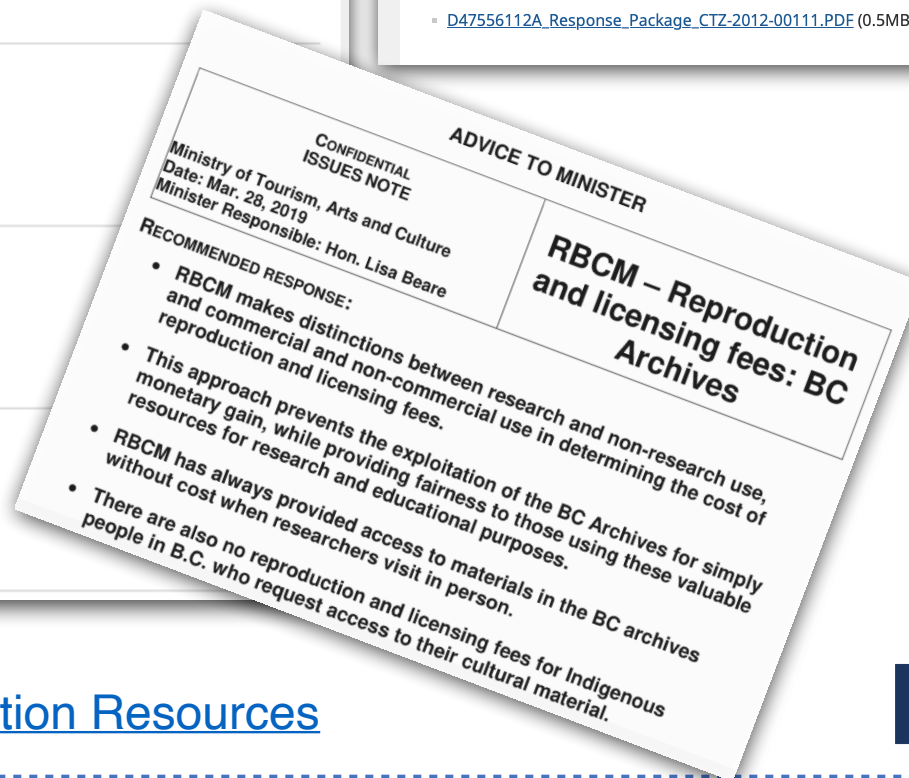
Download

Letters:

- D47557512A_Response_Letter_CTZ-2012-00111.PDF (0.1MB)

Files:

- D47556112A_Response_Package_CTZ-2012-00111.PDF (0.5MB)



Home > Your government > [Get government information](#) > Freedom of information requests and released information

Your government

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 - Investor relations
 - ▾ **Freedom of information requests and released information**
 - Make a Freedom of Information request online
 - Proactive FOI releases: current year

Freedom of information requests and released information

British Columbia's *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* allows you access to information held by the City of Vancouver. You have the right to request any record in the custody or control of the City of Vancouver. This includes records containing your personal information.

Find information online

[Data and maps](#)

Analyze and use our open data and maps to do research, discover trends, make informed decisions, and develop apps.

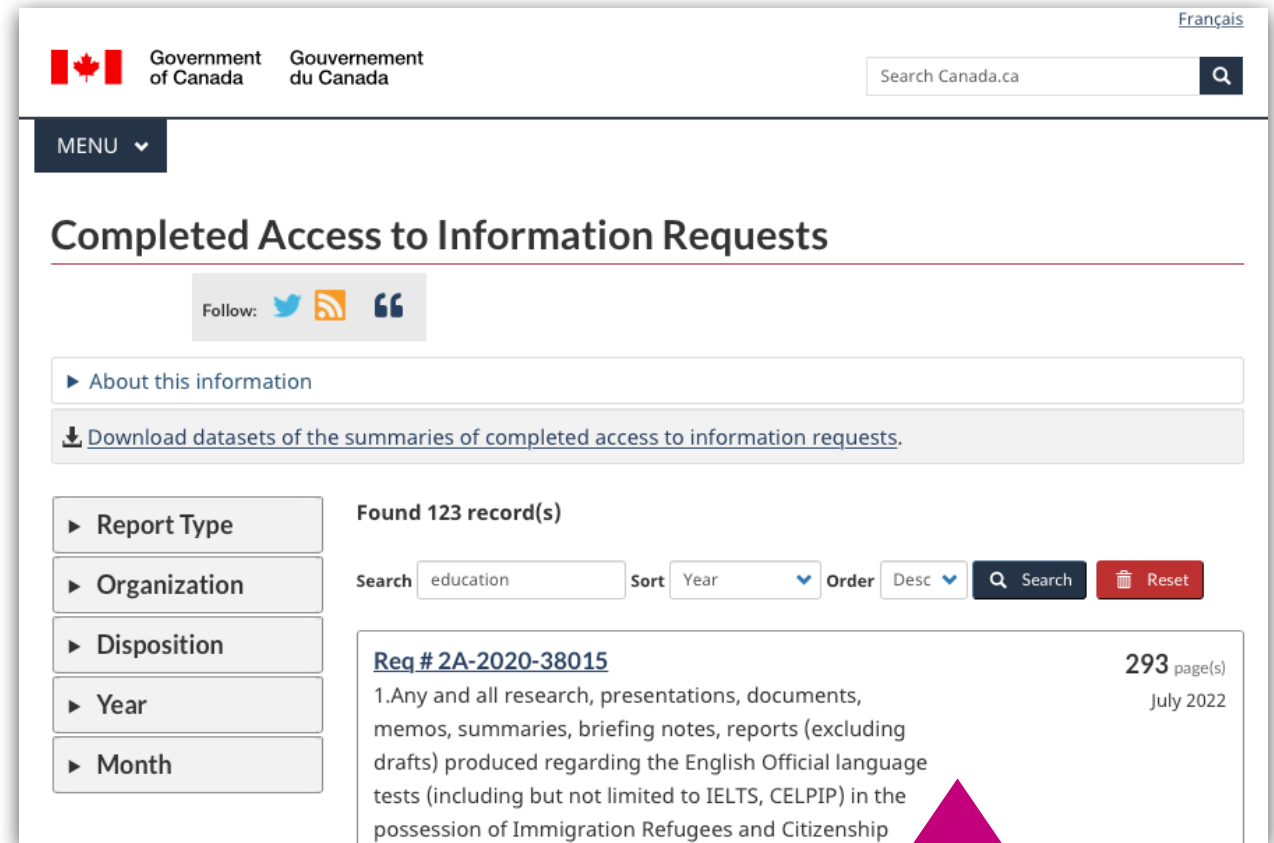
[City Manager's emails and memos to Mayor and Council](#)

Read emails and memos sent directly to Mayor and Council from the City Manager and Deputy City Manager.

Screen Capture from:
[City of Vancouver](#)

Before you File

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The screenshot shows the 'Completed Access to Information Requests' page on the Government of Canada website. The page includes a search bar, a menu, and a list of records. A pink arrow points to a specific record titled 'Req # 2A-2020-38015' dated July 2022, which contains information about research and documents related to English language tests for immigrants.




Government of Canada / Gouvernement du Canada

Search Canada.ca

Franglais

MENU

Completed Access to Information Requests

Follow:   

▶ About this information

Download datasets of the summaries of completed access to information requests.

Found 123 record(s)

Report Type

Organization

Disposition

Year

Month

Search: education Sort: Year Order: Desc Search Reset

Req # 2A-2020-38015 293 page(s) July 2022

1. Any and all research, presentations, documents, memos, summaries, briefing notes, reports (excluding drafts) produced regarding the English Official language tests (including but not limited to IELTS, CELPIP) in the possession of Immigration Refugees and Citizenship

Canada Open Government

- **Summaries of completed requests with federal government bodies**
- **You must make an informal request (no cost) to obtain previous release packages**

Part 3: Planning a Request

Planning a Request: Records and Exceptions



Getting Started

Objective: Walk through the steps that connect the identification of a new research idea with the preparation of an ATI/FOI request.

1

Identify a general research topic / idea that could be explored using ATI/FOI.

Identify one or two key research questions (things that you want to know).

2

3

Make a list of government bodies that might have information that could help you to explore your research question(s)

4

Make a list of the types of records that might pertain to your research idea.

Drafting a Request

Objective: Build on the 'Getting Started' exercise by drafting a formal ATI/FOI request.

Request Preparation Checklist

- Target agency is specified
- Records of interest are clearly described
 - Optional: Contextualizing statement is included
 - Optional: Desired record format is described
 - Optional: Document versions of interest are indicated
 - Optional: Indication of types of records that are *not* of interest
- 'Problem phrasing' is avoided
- Date range is indicated (if possible)
- Contact information is included (and preferred mode of contact, if desired)
- Request form / letter specifies preferred method of viewing records (attend government office / receive copies of originals)

Consider: Is the request too broad? Should it be split into several focused requests?

Government Body:

Description of Records:

Phrasing a Request

Essentials

- ✓ Select the target public body
- ✓ Clearly describe record types of interest
- ✓ Avoid vague phrasing
- ✓ Specify a date range

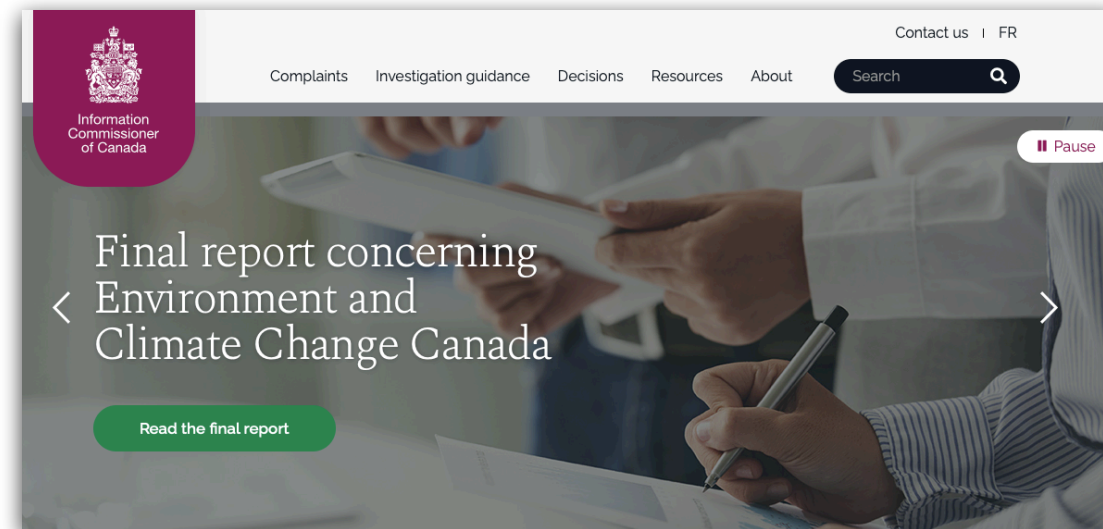
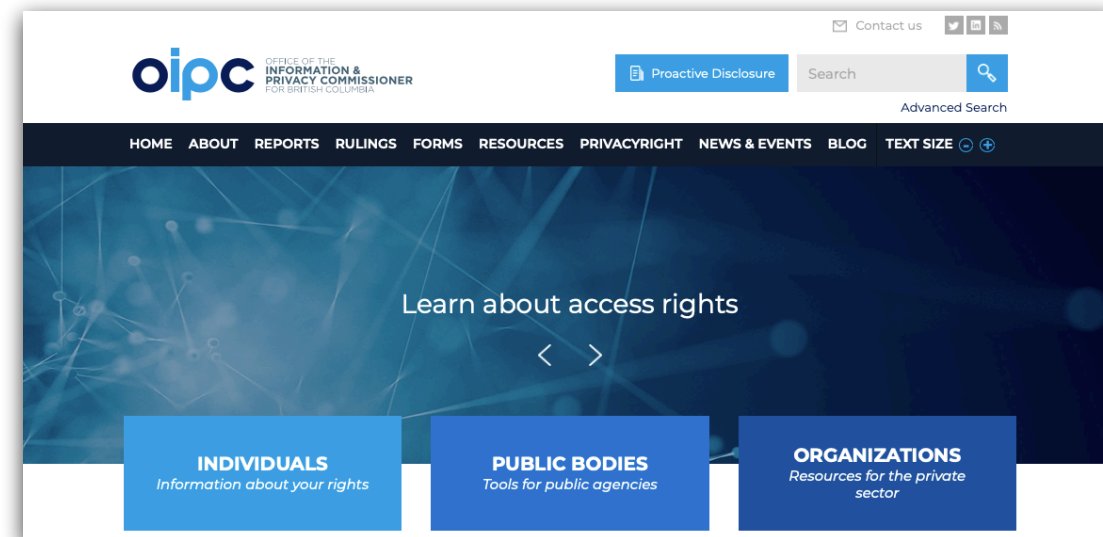
As Needed

- ✓ Provide contextualizing information
- ✓ Indicate desired record format(s) and version(s)
- ✓ Indicate record types that are *not* of interest

Part 4: After you File

After you file ...

- Keep track of correspondence
- Keep track of deadlines - and follow up
- **Correspondence and challenges:**
 - Requests for clarification
 - Extensions
 - Fee assessments
- Release packages as inspiration for follow-up requests



Final Tips

- ➔ Don't rush request modification decisions
- ➔ An ATI/FOI file will move through the system at the speed of its most complex component element
- ➔ Collaborate and ask questions (and seek advice)
- ➔ Delay / extension? Request an interim release of records that have already been processed

Questions and Discussion

Access.
Transparency.
Protection.

Latest News

• <https://fipa.bc.ca>

Privacy Management Program Training



If you're just getting started on setting up your organizations privacy management, or seeking to improve your existing privacy management program, this audio course will help you and your organization to better understand and refresh your understanding about the requirements of privacy law, and the core components you need to know when creating a compliant privacy management program for your organization.



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