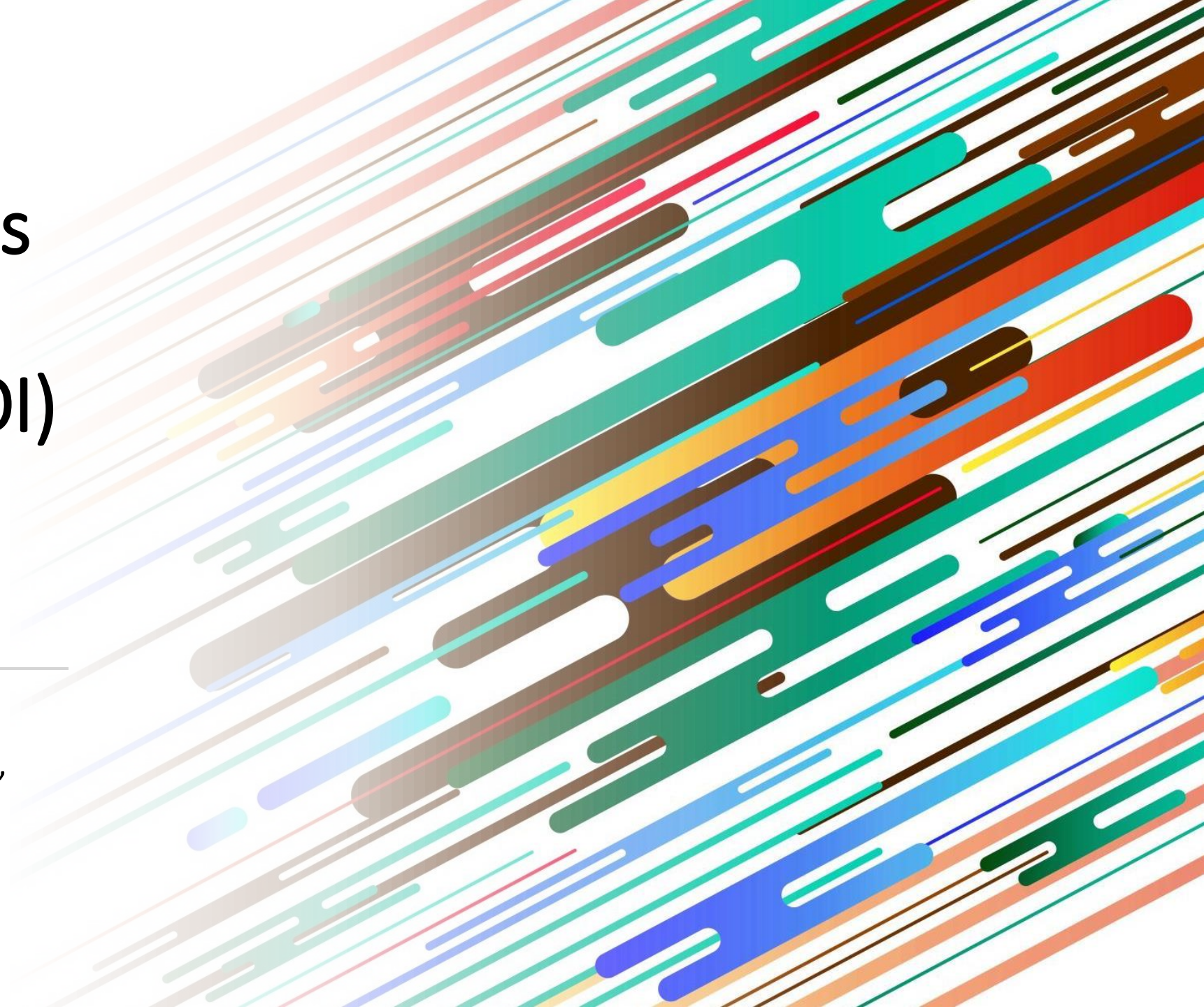


Equitable access to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests in Ontario.

Nicholas Worby, Government
Information and Statistics Librarian,
University of Toronto
December 14, 2023



Where do academics fit in?

Total FOI requests completed by source and jurisdiction

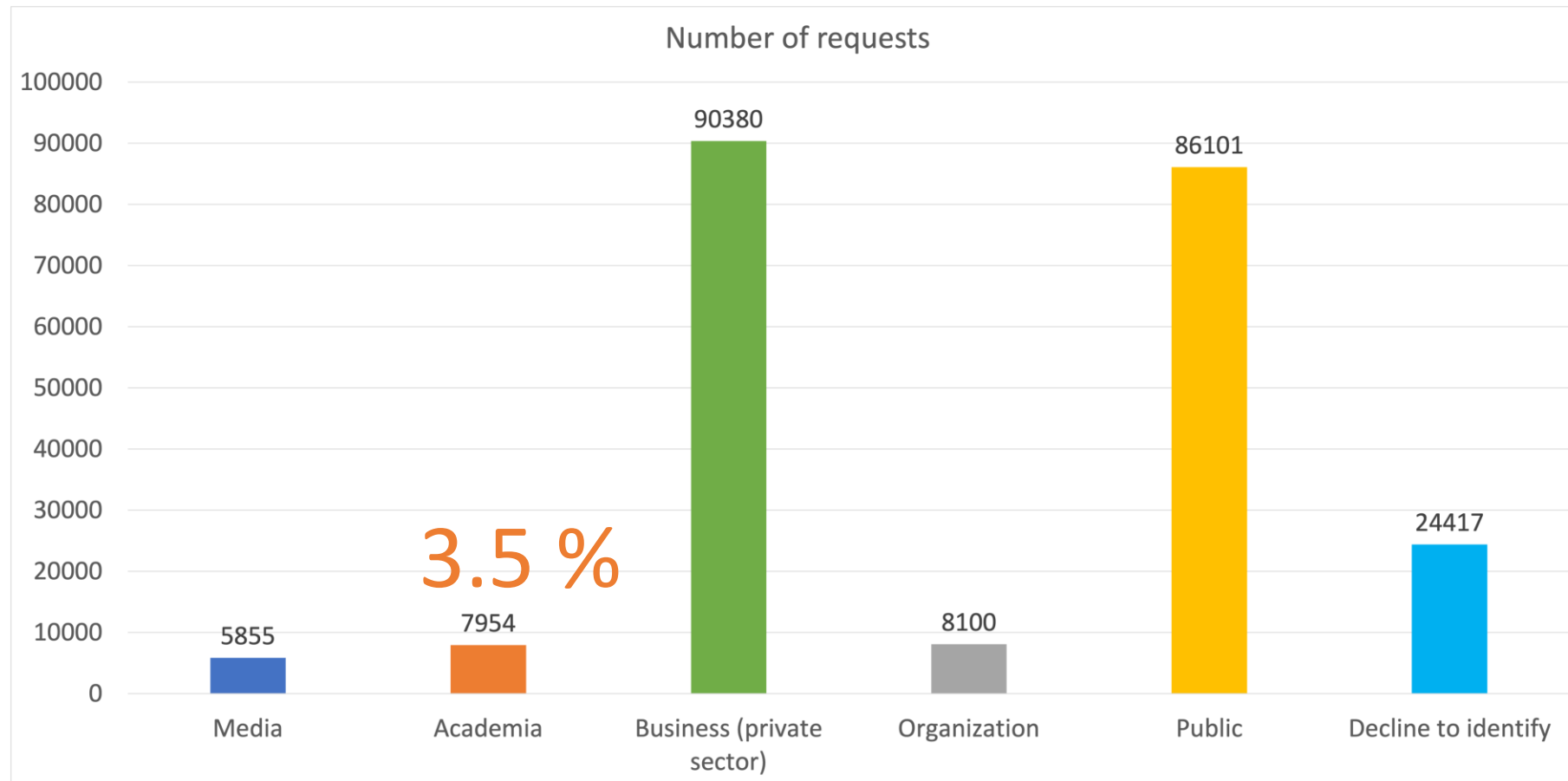
Source	Municipal	Provincial	Total
Individual/public	20,459	5,701	26,160
Individual by agent	6,549	5,659	12,208
Business	3,323	16,181	19,504
Academic/researcher	158	165	323
Association/group	453	404	857
Media	379	717	1,096
Government (all levels)	1,031	171	1,202
Other	463	137	600
Total	32,815	29,135	61,950

0.5 %

Information & Privacy Commissioner Annual Statistical Report 2022:

https://www.ipc.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/ar-2022-statistical-report_acc.pdf

Where do academics fit in?



Source: Access to Information and Privacy Statistics - 2021-22, Access to Information

<https://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/236294e1-bc74-486f-ab97-422227bc8832/resource/f33892e4-2ee1-4702-a768-19c324ca1639>

Barriers experienced by academics using FOIs

- Lack of training
- Long timelines
- High research & processing fees (often due to poorly crafted requests)
- Unnecessary duplication of requests
- Limited ability to build on previous disclosures

Where do I fit in?

- Search for Ontario government information often leads to FOI as a last resort
- Anecdotally, less being released as a matter of course (*see current government's Mandate Letters*)

Inspiration

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

► Report Type

▼ Organization

- Accessibility Standards Canada (42)
- Administrative Tribunals Support Service of Canada (50)
- Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (306)
- Asia-Pacific Foundation of Canada (43)
- Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (137)
- Atlantic Pilotage Authority Canada (14)
- Atomic Energy of Canada Limited (66)
- British Columbia Treaty Commission (15)
- Business Development Bank of Canada (10)

Found 54358 record(s)

Search Sort Year ▼ Order Desc ▼

Req # 2023 0042148	0 page(s)
Request for incident investigation report.	November 2023
Organization: Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety	
Nothing to report this month	November 2023
Organization: Port of Belledune	
Nothing to report this month	November 2023
Organization: Trans Mountain Corporation	
Req # A-2023-00014	50 page(s)
Every workplace assessment (for harassment and violence) completed for the period of January 2, 2020 to June 30, 2023. These assessments are prepared in accordance with section 5 (1) of the Work Place	October 2023

Search the Open Information Catalogue

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

Refine by

Type

FOI Request (22524)

Year

- 2011 (456)
- 2012 (1184)
- 2013 (1462)
- 2014 (1665)
- 2015 (1376)
- 2016 (1695)
- 2017 (2081)
- ▼ 6 More

Month

- 1 (1873)
- 2 (1994)
- 3 (2417)
- 4 (2071)
- 5 (2057)
- 6 (1674)
- 7 (1693)

FOI Request

All

FOI Request - PSS-2023-32544

Records regarding fines imposed on trainers at Hastings Racecourse in Vancouver BC. (Date Range for Record Search: From 9/15/2022 To 9/11/2023)

Type: FOI Request
Applicant Type: Individual
Ministry: Public Safety and Solicitor General
Fees paid by applicant: \$0.00
Publication Date: 2023-11-24

FOI Request - PSA-2020-04585

Regarding OIC No. 299, signed April 23, 2020: the total dollar amounts of severance, separation payments, and/or settlements for Dave Nikolejsin as well as any other documents relating to severance, separation payment, or other payment types; And, Copy of

Type: FOI Request
Applicant Type: Political Party
Ministry: BC Public Service Agency

Summaries of completed Access to Information Requests, Federal government

BC FOI request summaries

Objectives

- Produce a dataset of General FOI requests (i.e. not personal information requests) including summaries of requests, dates, disclosure status, and key metadata to facilitate "piggy-back requests"
- Serve up dataset in searchable interface on low or no-code platform
- Preserve data

Scope:

- Only "general records"
- All Ontario Government Ministries, TBS, and Cabinet Office
- 2014 to present

Process



Data challenges

- Records released as PDF printouts from databases rather than spreadsheets
- Layouts and encoding made for complex extraction
- HEAVY redaction
- Terminology, completeness, and quality of data varied highly between organizations
- Size of dataset made using many free tools to serve up data unfeasible

Interface challenges

- I'm not an app developer and we have no money
- Balancing functionality with ease of maintaining
- Each tool tested had a learning curve
- Low and no code platforms not very customizable
- Not everything under consideration integrated with back-end tool (Supabase)

https://tinyurl.com/ONFOI

Ontario FOIS Summaries

Request ID G-2023-0142

SUMMARY SEARCH (OPTIONAL)

FILTER BY ORGANIZATIONS (OPTIONAL)

Choose ▼

FILTER BY YEARS (OPTIONAL)

Choose ▼

REQUEST ID	SUMMARY	DATE	DISPOSITION	NUMBER OF RESPONSIVE PAGES	ORGANIZATION	YEAR
G-2023-0144	1. All documents (including draft copies) relating to th...	---	---	Institution does not track or did not provide this infor...	MINISTRY OF TRANSPORTATION	2023
G-2023-0143	Please consider this a request for continued access u...	---	---	Institution does not track or did not provide this infor...	MINISTRY OF TRANSPORTATION	2023
G-2023-0142	WA18076644 - waterloo regional police	03/07/2023	---	Institution does not track or did not provide this infor...	MINISTRY OF TRANSPORTATION	2023
G-2023-0141	If you should happen to have video camera footage a...	03/06/2023	Transferred to another institution	Institution does not track or did not provide this infor...	MINISTRY OF TRANSPORTATION	2023
G-2023-0139	Property: 0 Tahoe Blvd, Mississauga (comprised of Pl...	---	Transferred to another institution	Institution does not track or did not provide this infor...	MINISTRY OF TRANSPORTATION	2023
G-2023-0138	Access to 401 camera footage, going Westbound in th...	03/06/2023	All information disclosed	Institution does not track or did not provide this infor...	MINISTRY OF TRANSPORTATION	2023
G-2023-0137	Data from RWIS stations ER-2 (Ashton Overpass), and ...	---	---	Institution does not track or did not provide this infor...	MINISTRY OF TRANSPORTATION	2023
G-2023-0136	On Wednesday, February 8th there was a safety incid...	---	---	Institution does not track or did not provide this infor...	MINISTRY OF TRANSPORTATION	2023

One week from launch ...

SECRET CANADA

Search the database Guide to FOI News

A PROJECT FROM
THE GLOBE AND MAIL

It's your right to know

Accessing information in Canada has been too difficult for too long. Explore what records Canadians are seeking from their [police](#)

Q Search over 300,000 FOI summaries

SUGGESTED SEARCHES: [Expense reports](#), [Contracts](#), [Briefing notes](#)

Explore the database Browse public institutions

www.secretcanada.com

Ways forward...

- Merging projects?
- Parallel projects?
- Deposit an open dataset ?
- Reposition focus on long term access and preservation

A Public Record at Risk: The Dire State of News Archiving in the Digital Age

MARCH 28, 2019

By SHARON RINGEL AND ANGELA WOODALL



https://www.cjr.org/tow_center_reports/the-dire-state-of-news-archiving-in-the-digital-age.php

More questions...

- What does "open data" mean across professional cultures?
- Whose data are these? Is it a public good?
- How sustainable can these projects be?