



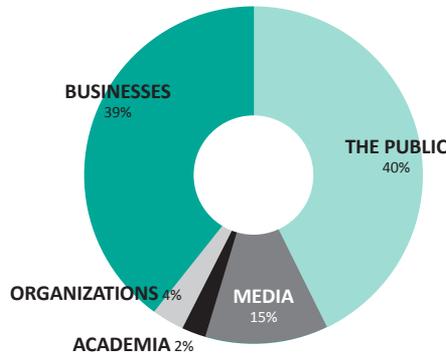
# What You Need to Know to Get What You Need

## ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Your Right to Know: How to Use the Law to Get Government Secrets by Jim Bronskill and David McKie was invaluable in the creation of this infographic

### The Laws

- 1. The Right to Information:** Canadians have the right to information that has been collected using taxpayers' money. This right is important in ensuring that a government is held accountable to its citizens.
- 2. Balancing the Right to Know with Certain Protections:** The most sensitive records, such as those involving national security, are often withheld.
- 3. Privacy:** Access-to-information laws are just half of the equation; the other half is privacy. Citizens should reasonably expect that details about their personal lives stay private.
- 4. Fees:** There is usually a small fee for access-to-information requests.
- 5. The Right to Complain:** If there is a problem, you have the right to complain to a commissioner or ombudsman who can speak for you.

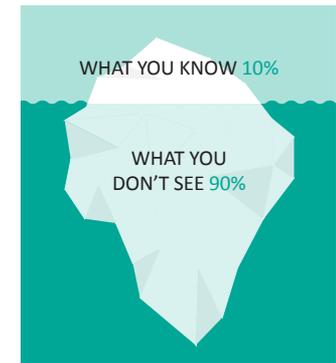


### Who Uses Access to Information?

**REQUESTS COME FROM:**  
 THE PUBLIC (40%)  
 BUSINESSES (39%)  
 MEDIA (15%)  
 ORGANIZATIONS (4%)  
 ACADEMIA (2%)  
 (Source: Treasury Board/ Info Source Bulletin 2013)

#### USE VISIBLE PUBLIC INFORMATION TO HELP FORMULATE YOUR REQUEST

Before making your request, do your research. Work out what you know and what you don't know. Check to see if the information is already in the public domain. Next, check **Info Source** ([infosource.gc.ca/index-eng.asp](http://infosource.gc.ca/index-eng.asp)). It's a catalogue that provides a complete list of government records listed by name, description and category number that the department uses to identify the information.



**"Deciphering access records is a little like reading tea leaves."**

— Jim Bronskill and David McKie



### What's in a Request?

#### A REQUEST MIGHT INCLUDE:

- specific types of records (e.g., briefing notes, reports, audits)
- a clear and short time frame: longer requests can lead to delays and additional costs
- scope: what information you are looking for
- exceptions (e.g., exclude records that are obviously cabinet confidences)
- request for a fee waiver: give a reason, such as "this is a matter of public interest"

### Next Steps



- You should receive an acknowledgement letter.
- The access analyst or coordinator has a duty to assist you. Follow up!
- Although federal institutions are supposed to answer within a 30-day time frame, frequently a government department may take additional time, known as an extension.

### Useful Tips



- Ask for statistical information in a searchable database format such as a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. You don't want PDF files.
- Try piggybacking on existing requests. You can ask the agency's coordinator to check if there are relevant requests already in the system.
- Look for previously released records. The Access to Information Act requires government institutions to post summaries of completed requests on their websites.

### Did You Know?



- Canada's Access to Information Act came into effect in 1983.
- Canada's act sits in 59th place on a list of freedom-of-information laws from 98 countries.
- Sweden was the first country to pass an access law in 1766.



For more information, go to [self-counsel.com/your-right-to-know.html](http://self-counsel.com/your-right-to-know.html). Other good information sources include the Office of the Information Commissioner of Canada ([oic-ci.gc.ca](http://oic-ci.gc.ca)) and the Global Right to Information Ranking ([rti-rating.org/country-data](http://rti-rating.org/country-data)).