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British Columbians' Views on Information Management in Public Bodies

Vancouver, BC, September 26, 2024 — These are the results of an online poll conducted on behalf of the BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association (FIPA). The poll examines British Columbian public opinion with respect to information management in public bodies. Public bodies include government offices and agencies such as government ministries, municipalities, crown corporations, school boards, police boards, etc.

British Columbians have high expectations around accountability and governance, records management, and information accessibility and fees.

There is generally widespread agreement around what is expected of public bodies in British Columbia when it comes to accountability and governance, records management, and information accessibility and fees.

Public expectations around accountability and governance

- 86% agree 'I expect all political parties and their candidates to collect, protect and respect my personal information by complying with provincial privacy laws'.
- 86% agree 'I expect a public body should create and maintain full and accurate records necessary for the efficient and effective administration of activities'.
- 83% agree 'I expect public bodies to comply with and implement laws passed by the legislative assembly'.
- 82% agree 'I expect public bodies to act on the recommendations that they receive from independent oversight bodies like the Ombudsperson, Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, Representative for Children and Youth, and Auditor General'.
- 78% agree 'I expect that when a public body has the option to exercise its discretion in releasing information it will consider the public interest in disclosure'.

Public expectations around records management

- 88% agree 'I expect public bodies to maintain accurate and complete records of their activities'.
- 86% agree 'I expect public bodies to have an organization-specific set of policies and procedures about records management and open government'.
- 84% agree 'I expect public bodies to be able to readily find and retrieve records'.
- 83% agree 'I expect public bodies to maintain and regularly review organization-specific file classification plans that are used to organize records'.

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- 81% agree 'I expect public bodies to align records management systems to international standards.'

Public expectations around information accessibility and fees

- 83% agree 'I expect public bodies to respond to freedom of information requests within the 30-business day statutory timelines unless a specific, articulable, and legitimate reason can be given to extend the timeline otherwise'.
- 82% agree 'I expect public bodies to ensure that when fees are used, the applicant is paying for a large and complex request rather than poor records management on the part of the public body'.
- 80% agree 'I expect public bodies to ensure the use of fees is principled and restricted to evidence-based calculations for processing large and complex requests, rather than on arbitrary estimates'.
- 79% agree 'I expect public bodies to identify and regularly review types of documents and data that can be released without request'.
- 75% agree 'I expect public bodies to respect that fees are a barrier to access and not charge the optional \$10 application fee'.

British Columbians recognize the importance of several prospective changes aimed at improving public sector recordkeeping.

Survey respondents were shown the following information about public sector recordkeeping prior to being asked about the importance of prospective changes.

Recent research shows some public bodies are likely:

- *not complying with their legislative requirements or acting on recommendations from independent offices*
- *not operating records management systems that meet international standards*
- *not implementing organization-specific policies and procedures regarding records management and open government*
- *not responding to FOI (freedom of information) requests in a timely manner and are using fees in an ungoverned manner*
- *not exercising discretion and considering the public interest in disclosure when requested to release information*

To ensure that the highest standards of public sector recordkeeping are met and the public interest is considered, 80% or more say it is important to make the following prospective changes:

- Legislation establishing an office to hold public bodies accountable for recordkeeping, akin to an auditor for records (86% important)
- Legislation to introduce administrative monetary penalties for public bodies that unjustifiably delay processing freedom of information requests and have unjustifiable recordkeeping failures (83% important)



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- New regulations that ensure records management systems meet international standards (83% important)
- Changing organizational cultures towards accepting public interest disclosure and improving records management practice (82% important)
- Increasing resource allocation to freedom of information and records management functions in public bodies to reduce administrative burden and develop in-house expertise (80% important)

Most British Columbians are aware of BC's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Awareness of other information privacy rights is lower.

Nearly two-thirds (64%) of British Columbians say they are aware of BC's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

Awareness of other information privacy rights is lower.

- 50% say they are aware they can request access to their personal information and general information from public bodies
- 43% say they are aware of the right to file a complaint relating to the handling of their personal information
- 37% say they are aware of BC's Information and Privacy Commissioner

About the Study

These are the findings of an Ipsos poll conducted between September 12 and 16, 2024, on behalf of the BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association (FIPA). For this survey, a sample of 800 British Columbians aged 18+ was interviewed online. Quotas and weighting were employed to ensure that the sample's composition reflects that of the British Columbian population according to census parameters. The precision of Ipsos online polls is measured using a credibility interval. In this case, the poll is accurate to within ± 4.2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, had all British Columbians aged 18+ been polled. The credibility interval will be wider among subsets of the population. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error, and measurement error.

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