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1. ACCESS OVERVIEW

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IPC Practices

PUTTING ONTARIO'S INFORMATION AND PRIVACY LEGISLATION TO WORK

INFORMATION AND PRIVACY COMMISSIONER/ONTARIO

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Routine Disclosure/Active Dissemination (RD/AD) of Government Information

Routine Disclosure (RD) is the routine or automatic release of certain types of administrative and operational records in response to requests made informally, or under the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* or the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (the *Acts*). *Active Dissemination (AD)* is the periodic release of general records in the absence of a request.

RD/AD can create an efficient, cost-effective means of providing the public with greater access to government information. When general records are classified for RD/AD, and front line staff are aware of the RD/AD classification, the result should be less work for institutions when responding to requests for information, and better customer service.

Institutions should review established directories or listings of records to determine which records can be classified for RD/AD. Freedom of Information and Privacy Co-ordinators should review general records and talk to staff to discuss which records would be good candidates for RD/AD. They should:

1. Look for trends in the type of information requested on a regular basis.
2. Review any class of record that is released regularly, without exemption.

3. Determine information that must be made available because of a statutory requirement. (For example, the *Assessment Act* requires that certain assessment information be made available to the public.)
4. Determine whether records can be modified by removing information subject to the *Acts*' mandatory exemptions, so that the remaining record can be released, routinely.
5. Determine whether a record is subject to RD/AD based on the nature of the record and not on the identity of the requester or proposed use of the record.
6. Evaluate all newly-created records to determine if they should be subject to RD/AD.

Once an RD/AD list of records has been created, institutions should ensure that all staff are familiar with the list and know which records can be released without consultation.

When asked how they have entrenched RD/AD into the day-to-day operations, Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Co-ordinators advised that an essential first step is solid, demonstrated, and unwavering commitment from the organization's Head to make access an integral part of strategic objectives. Other tips were:



1. Sell RD/AD as good basic common sense. It reduces workload and increases efficiency; it is quick and simple because the records can be located almost at one's fingertips. It may take some time initially, but the payback is significant.
2. Decide up-front that RD/AD are key components to a good access strategy. Do regular system-wide reviews to keep increasing the number of documents that can be routinely released.
3. Involve staff from all areas of your organization in the development of an access strategy. Be access-conscious when designing forms. For example, where possible, design two-sided forms with releasable information on one side and personal information on the other side — the releasable information side can then be easily photocopied without severing the personal information.
4. Study, examine, and review FOI requests. Identify trends. Look for clues. Observe patterns and identify records that can be routinely disclosed rather than released through the FOI process.
5. Employ good records management practices. Classify existing records and new records with an RD/AD designation as part of the retention schedule and the procedural guidelines of your organization.
6. Use training situations as an opportunity for staff to identify areas where information can be routinely disclosed or actively disseminated.
7. Through ongoing staff awareness, orientation, training, and education, dispel myths and reduce the fear about making information routinely available.
8. Think about "partnering" with a colleague/counterpart in another government organization so that you can regularly share ideas and gain from each other's experience/expertise.

For additional information, the papers *Routine Disclosure/Active Dissemination (RD/AD)*, and *Enhancing Access to Information: RD/AD Success Stories* are available from the IPC Communications Department.

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