FINDINGS OF THE ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT INFORMATION SERVICES TASK FORCE

The Canadian Historical Association has endeavored to help Library and Archives Canada (LAC) shorten the time needed to review requests made under Access to Information and Privacy legislation (ATIP). In the recent past, researchers have had to wait sometimes eighteen to twenty months for material to be made available after submitting their requests. Between November 2004 and January 2005, the CHA partici-pated in a series of meetings, detailed in a previous issue of the *Bulletin*, as part of a User Advisory Group to the Access to Government Information Services Task Force. Its mandate was to address the underlying causes for the backlog and propose systemic, innovative, and durable solutions consis-tent with ATI legislation and appropriate for the needs of the researchers and age of the records. Most of the backlog was eliminated by 31 October 2005, as promised by LAC Assistant Deputy Minister, Doug Rimmer, at the CHA's Annual Meeting in London.

Below is a summary of the Task Force's key findings designed to ensure the backlog and wait times remain manageable:

1. The Task Force recommends that Management Board assign or delegate clear responsibility to oversee and coordinate across LAC the implementation of the Task Force's approved findings.

2. The Task Force recommends that ongoing strategies to improve the access process build on the philosophical underpinnings of the new institution and be linked to existing transformation initiatives wherever possible.

3. The Task Force recommends that LAC develop and implement corporate level policies and guidelines to govern the processes and interactions through which it releases government information to users.

4. The Task Force recommends that the ATIP Division develop and implement an internal procedures manual as part of a review of its workflow and processes.

5. The Task Force recommends that the full benefits of existing planned information technology solutions be brought to bear on how access to government records is managed across the institution.

6. The Task Force recommends that LAC undertake to improve the quality and consistency of the specific access-related information it provides to users and develop the necessary tools to provide researchers with a better understanding of the research and access process.

7. The Task Force supports the development of the new Government Archives Division (GAD) Accessibility Strategy for government records and recommends that access and privacy considerations be included as a required component of that exercise.

8. The Task Force recommends that as LAC continue to play a leading role in Information Management (IM) across the Government of Canada, it must work specifically to ensure that ATIP accessibility issues remain part of the larger IM agenda. As well LAC should further efforts to communicate with creators about the diminished sensitivity of records once they are transferred to LAC custody and control.

9. The Task Force recommends that LAC continue to develop and implement triage processes which facilitate the access process wherever possible and ultimately decrease the demand placed upon the ATIP Division.

10. The Task Force recommends that the improvements to various access mechanisms identified by the Task Force be refined and implemented.

11. It is recommended that a risk management framework for access to government information under the control of LAC be developed and implemented as part of the corporate risk management plan currently being coordinated by the Corporate Services Branch.

12. The Task Force recommends that LAC puts in place mechanisms to provide statistical and other information profiles related to the volume of access requests in order to permit the establishment of baseline indicators and allow for the development of such tools as trend analysis reports, specialized guides, and block review projects.

13. The Task Force recommends establishing the mechanism necessary to better integrate the ATIP function and staff into the larger community of information professionals-both at LAC and across the Government of Canada as a whole.

A copy of the full report is available on the Canadian Historical Association website http://www.cha-shc.ca/. The CHA's Graduate Student Liaison will continue to post updates on H-Canada of the progress made by the ATIP Division, as they become available, and the CHA will continue to monitor developments.

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