

Round-up: 2013 GovInfo Day

By Chris Burns, Gail Curry, Rebecca Dowson, Carla Graebner, Linton Harrison, Susan Huber, Susan Paterson, Shelley Wilson-Roberts

Annual GovInfo Day was held April 26th at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver.

Introduction

This year's GovInfo Day was organized around the theme of access. Darrell Evans, Executive Director of the Canadian Institute for Information and Privacy Studies, argued persuasively for a citizen's right to know, however the Government of Canada's planned changes to how it disseminates information may undermine rights citizens currently have. Anyone wishing to access government publications may have to exercise more diligence and patience than they have in the past.

The Government of Canada (GoC) has announced that it will cease distribution of print publications effective July, 2014.¹ All content will be born digital. Further, the GoC will be streamlining how it delivers this information. A leaked document outlines plans to reduce the number of GoC domains first to six and then to one central portal.² In anticipation of this migration, federal departments and agencies have been tasked to eliminate "redundant, old, trivial" content from their websites.³ Unofficial sources estimate that upwards of 60% of website content will be removed by July, 2013.

The migration to electronic only publications will affect the mandate of Canada's Depository Services Program. As well, those wishing to access government information will have to first know what they are looking for and request the document directly from the issuing department/agency, or they will have to file an Access to Information (ATI) request. As Dr. Mike Larsen demonstrated in his discussion "Barriers, Doors, and Windows," there are

potential impediments, both actual and perceived, to obtaining information through ATI.

So how do we secure the "right to know"? This was the theme of the GovInfo roundtable. How we can concretize our concerns and capitalize on what we do best. As librarians it is in our DNA to provide access to information and assist others in pursuing access. It is imperative that we put aside any reticence about speaking up and educate our colleagues and our constituents on what is at stake. We do have a right to know and we should start demanding it. [Carla Graebner]

Should we have a constitutional right to the truth? Presented by Darrell Evans, Executive Director for the Canadian Institute for Information and Privacy Studies

Opening Remarks for GovInfo Day 2013 were presented by Darrell Evans, Founder and Executive Director for the Canadian Institute for Information and Privacy Studies (CIIPS). In addition to his work with CIIPS, Darrell is on the Board of Advisors for the Freedom of Information and Privacy Association (FIPA) and was responsible for helping draft the Province of British Columbia's first Freedom of Information Act in 1992.

Darrell Evans gave an informative talk about the culture of freedom of information in British Columbia politics over the past 20 years.

The FIPA Act was passed in 1992 and Evans says that "it's been downhill ever since." He explains that there has been a reassertion of political and bureaucratic government secrecy and as a result, "it's a strange time for FOI."

He spoke about government having a moral and ethical right to provide citizens with correct and accurate information as well as the truth. Unfortunately, Evans explains, "despotic secrecy" has been the historic norm for governments, and government secrecy is at an all-time high.

He emphasized that we as citizens can orchestrate change and build upon public democracy for the truth. He encouraged the audience to join open government projects and open data movements

¹ <http://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/news/2012/2012-006-eng.html>

² Gogolek, Vincent, "Harper Government Centralizing, Slashing Federal Web Info," *Huffpost British Columbia*, March 10, 2013. http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/vincent-gogolek/harper-government-websites-access-to-information_b_2838916.html

³ <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/ws-nw/wu-fe/rot-rid/index-eng.asp>

and become active and engaged citizens. He illustrated that information rights, access and control are some of the most important tools that we can use to assert our political rights.

In an age where we are forced to rely on leaks to know what government is doing, Evans suggested several new and innovative ways that we can help create openness and transparency in government.

Among his suggestions were:

- Establishing a Bill of Information Rights
- Creating an Information and Record Management Act (with Standards) and an Archives Reform Act
- Creating an Archives Act to protect our historical record which is currently unprotected
- Depoliticizing the open data movement and moving it away from political lines
- Creating a Whistle Blower Protection Act

[Susan Paterson]

Federal Government Information Preservation Initiatives Panel;

Presented by Gay Lepkey, Manager, Public Works and Government Services Canada, Publishing and Depository Services; and Amanda Wakaruk, Government Information Librarian, University of Alberta and Chair, Steering Committee, Canadian Government Information Private LOCKSS Network (CGI-PLN)

Gay Lepkey and Amanda Wakaruk spoke to the sweeping changes that we are seeing in the world of government publications and to the library community's efforts to preserve access to these publications. Lepkey summarized important changes to the DSP, to federal government publications, and to federal government web content.

DSP distribution of print publications: This will cease by April 2014 as a result of decisions taken under the Government of Canada's Deficit Reduction Action Plan (DRAP). Phase out of operations is expected to begin no later than January 2014. After tangible distribution operations cease, libraries will have to request print publications from individual federal organizations, likely with varying degrees of success.

Cessation/reduction of print publications: Some government organizations have announced that they intend to cease production of print publications in favour of electronic publications. Others anticipate scaling back the production of print publications. This cessation/reduction of print production by government organizations is likely to significantly reduce DSP distribution of publications in tangible format well before 2014.

End of Depository Library Agreement: The various changes will mean that Publishing and Depository Services (PDS) and depository libraries will no longer be able to comply with several terms of the Depository Library Agreement. This means that the agreement will be null and void as of 2014.

Cessation of Weekly Checklist: The plan is to replace the Weekly Checklist with a dynamic, user-configurable database report.

Loss of federal government web content: In preparation for the implementation of the Action Plan for the Renewal of the Government of Canada Web Presence,⁴ government organizations have begun reviewing their web content under the ROT rubric (redundant, outdated or trivial).⁵ It is estimated that approximately 60 percent of content will be removed. Some organizations have asked the DSP to re-host content in the DSP E-Collection. The DSP has agreed in cases where the documents are actual publications.

Virtual Library: The Government announced its intention to develop an "online, searchable repository of published Government of Canada documents" in "Activity Stream 1" of Canada's Action Plan on Open Government.⁶ The DSP is well positioned to develop this database but has not yet received the mandate to do so.

Preservation: A copy of the DSP E-Collection has been harvested for the Canadian Government Information Private LOCKSS Network (CGI-PLN). Regular updates will be provided.

In the meantime: The DSP E-Collection, and the use of this collection, continues to grow at a steady pace, while the number of tangible publications shipped to depository libraries declines. As of May 2013, the PDS publications web site has a new look. No major changes have been made to the content of the site and the URLs remain unchanged.

PDS short-term plans: The PDS plans to establish contracts for data conversion and to implement a MARC-based ILS from which libraries will be able to

⁴http://fipa.bc.ca/library/Government%20Documents/GoC_web_plan_Part1.pdf;

http://fipa.bc.ca/library/Government%20Documents/GoC_web_plan_Part2.pdf

⁵ <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/ws-nw/wu-fe/rot-rid/index-eng.asp>

⁶ <http://open.gc.ca/open-ouvert/ap-patb-eng.asp>

download MARC records. The anticipated launch date is April 1, 2014.

Amanda Wakaruk reviewed the history of Lots of Copies Keep Stuff Safe (LOCKSS) and how LOCKSS is being used in Canada to strategically preserve government publications.

LOCKSS is a distributed digital preservation system, based on open-source, standards-based peer to peer (P2P) software in which identical data is reproduced on a variety of geographically distributed servers. LOCKSS is based on five principles:

- Local control of assets
- Guaranteed perpetual access.
- Preservation of original authoritative versions.
- Decentralized and distributed preservation.
- Affordable.

LOCKSS began in 1999 and is based at Stanford University. With the Government Publication Office (GPO), there are 37 partners in the US network, including two Canadian libraries: the University of Alberta and Simon Fraser University.

The Canadian Government Information Private LOCKSS Network (CGI-PLN) began with a call for participation at the June 2012 CLA Government Information Network meeting in Ottawa. There are now 11 partners with operational LOCKSS boxes: the University of Victoria, the University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University, Stanford University, the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, the University of Saskatchewan, the University of Toronto/Scholars Portal, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, McGill University, and Dalhousie University.

According to Wakaruk, the purpose of the organization is to provide a "secure environment for electronic government information in Canada." The criteria for selection of material for preservation are listed on the CGI-PLN [wiki](#). The focus is currently on federal government publications due to ongoing Government of Canada information policy changes.

In addition to the harvesting of the DSP E-Collection, the CGI-PLN plans to move to a "bright archive" in order to allow for content access, ingesting to the Internet Archive, identifying additional collections for preservation, and expanding the partnership.

GovInfo Day participants gave a warm round of applause to Gay Lepkey, who retired on June 21, 2013. [Gail Curry]

Barriers, Doors, and Windows; presented by Mike Larsen, Kwantlen Polytechnic University

Dr. Larsen described a senior course⁷ he recently taught at Kwantlen Polytechnic University which required students to file provincial Freedom of Information (FOI)⁸ or federal Access to Information (ATI)⁹ requests. As students documented and shared their experiences, several themes emerged which were collectively described as Barriers, Doors, and Windows.

Students' experiences confirmed previous findings¹⁰ that Canada's FOI/ATI systems are complex and frustrating to use; they seem designed to exclude neophytes and to discourage regular use. Some of the obstacles faced include:

- Technical issues
- Fees
- Staff upheaval
- Negotiations re: wording and scope
- Fear of repercussions
- Frustration
- Lack of communication

Students identified some best practices for effective use of FOI/ATI legislation which helped to open the door:

- rapport-building
- persistence
- collaboration

Students learned that ATI/FOI is a powerful, though underused, research method and a window into the operations of governments.

Very few courses engage students in the active use of FOI as a research method, due to the time required. Indeed, most of Dr. Larsen's students had not received the requested information before the end of the term. This was not a problem, since the focus of the class was on the application process rather than the completion of the request. It

⁷ CRIM 4900: Investigative Research & Secrecy

⁸ BC Ministry of Citizens' Services and Open Government. *Freedom of Information*. <http://www.gov.bc.ca/citz/iao/foi/process/index.htm>

⁹ Treasury Board of Canada. *Access to Information and Privacy*. <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/atip-aijpr/index-eng.asp>

¹⁰ Larsen, Mike and Kevin Walby, eds., *Brokering Access: Power, Politics and Freedom of Information Process in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012).

empowered students to learn about the structures and functions of government.

Dr. Larsen also spoke of his recent work on the additional FOI obstacles faced by people with visual disabilities, which include the nature of the application forms, and the resulting documents that are usually provided in an image-only PDF form that cannot be decoded by text readers. [Chris Burns]

Democratic communication and the Imperative of Transparency; presented by Michael Markwick, Capilano University

Michael Markwick began his presentation by drawing on both current and proposed Canadian federal legislation dealing with the possible connection of Canadian citizens to terrorist activities.

According to Markwick, Canadian citizens suspected of terrorism can be arrested and held but not charged; also, they may be denied:

- access to a lawyer
- knowledge of the evidence against them and information on the possible charges against them

Private member's bill C-425 (currently before Parliamentary committee for study) would give the government the power to strip immigrants with multiple nationalities of their Canadian citizenship if they commit any act of treason against Canadian Forces. Although a private member's bill, it has the strong support of Immigration Minister Jason Kenney. Markwick highlighted the potential of this bill to become a dangerous tool, for example "treason" could be expanded to include many actions that are deemed by the government as not in agreement with Canadian values; the affected immigrant would have no right of appeal.

Markwick then discussed a current BC provincial issue highlighting the need for transparency in democratic communication: the recent "ethnic vote scandal." The use of private emails by the Premier's staff and verbal discussions (with no record) prevents access to information that is crucial to a citizen's understanding of government actions and whether these actions fit with our vision of a democratic society.

He then outlined three critical steps in maintaining transparency in communication:

- Preserve data (no private emails or verbal discussions with no record)
- Preserve data unmodified (no editing)
- Preserve scientific research (no editing)

[Susan Huber]

Courthouse Law Libraries BC Updates; presented by Janet Freeman and Nate Russell

Janet Freeman and Nate Russell gave an update on BC Courthouse Libraries' programs for the public. Freeman illustrated the importance of accurate legal information to the public by noting the distinct rise in the number of questions that the Courthouse Libraries receive from the public: from 30% of their total questions in 2007 to 43% of their total questions in 2012. This rise underscores how important the Courthouse Libraries' programs are in providing quality legal information to the public, and how essential their efforts are to strengthen public library legal reference collections.

Their programs consist of **ClickLaw**¹¹ (a plain language legal information website); **ClickLaw WikiBooks**¹² (resources that can be updated frequently and printed on demand); **LawMatters**¹³ (a grant program that provides all 240 public libraries in BC with grant funds and advice on enhancing their legal reference collections since 2008), and **Courthouse Libraries**¹⁴ (through their website and through public legal reference work). LawMatters grants have helped BC public libraries hold community legal forums at their libraries, as a way for libraries and local service agencies to understand what is offered in their own communities. There is also a LawMatters blog¹⁵ where readers can access information on updated legal resources and publications.

As Freeman indicated in her presentation, information stops legal problems before they start. Here are some of the publications and resources that public libraries can make use of to provide legal information to their patrons.

Clicklaw

The Clicklaw website has been a very popular

¹¹ LawStart: <http://www.lawstartbc.ca/> Retrieved May 24, 2013

¹² Clicklaw WikiBooks: http://wiki.clicklaw.bc.ca/index.php/Main_Page Retrieved May 24, 2013

¹³ LawMatters: <http://www.courthouselibrary.ca/training/ForThePublic/LawMatters.aspx> Retrieved May 28, 2013

¹⁴ Courthouse Libraries: <http://www.courthouselibrary.ca/> Retrieved May 28, 2013

¹⁵ BC Law Matters Blog: <http://bclawmatters.blogspot.ca/> Retrieved May 24, 2013

resource, especially with self-represented litigants. This plain language portal has information from 26 legal organizations and is a collaborative effort. Users can search by keyword and find a variety of resources, including website and pdf links. Freeman highlighted a recent update that resulted from public library feedback regarding patron difficulties finding court form names and numbers. A guide to court forms online is now available at <http://clicklaw.bc.ca/content/forms>. Clicklaw also includes a HelpMap, where you can find legal information by city – a great feature when you have a patron looking for services in his or her home community.

Wikibooks

ClickLaw Wikibooks evolved from the need to provide current, accurate legal information in a format that respects public libraries' stated preference for print materials. It facilitates updates by multiple contributors without the need for reprinting. There are currently four titles in this format: *Legal Help for British Columbians*, *JP Boyd on Family Law*, *Consumer Law WikiBook*, and *A Death in Your Family*. All titles are completely integrated with ClickLaw, so results from the wikibooks appear within ClickLaw search results. Wikibook users can also easily see the date of last update on the page. All of the wikibooks are print-friendly, and one great feature is the book creator, where you can create a custom book of pages you've selected, and either save it in a variety of formats for printing later, or order a printed copy. MediaWiki, the platform used to publish these books, is especially useful for publications with multiple authors.

Although **Legal Help for British Columbians**¹⁶ first came out as a print publication, it has become a wikibook, with plain language answers to questions in over 40 legal areas, and includes rollover definitions throughout. **JP Boyd on Family Law**¹⁷ is a new wikibook that covers all the updates to family law questions since the changes to BC's Family Law Act came into force on March 18, 2013. It has the same great features as **Legal Help for British Columbians**. JP Boyd is well known for his blog **JP Boyd on Family**

¹⁶ Legal Help for British Columbians:
http://wiki.clicklaw.bc.ca/index.php?title=Legal_Help_for_British_Columbians Retrieved May 24, 2013

¹⁷ JP Boyd on Family Law:
http://wiki.clicklaw.bc.ca/index.php/JP_Boyd_on_Family_Law Retrieved May 24, 2013

Law.¹⁸ The changes to the Family Law Act created an opportunity for a more collaborative, user-friendly resource on Family Law that involved both senior and junior lawyers, and meant that J.P. Boyd did not have to toil in solitude in order to make his blog compliant with the new legislation!

Freeman and Russell emphasized that the collaborative nature of these wikibooks benefits everyone from the legal profession to the end user. We were also informed that they will be working with the Peoples Law School to experiment with using the wiki platform for some of their publications. At time of writing, **Consumer Law** and **A Death in Your Family** were listed as being available. [Shelley Wilson-Roberts]

Update on the BC Government Documents Digitization Initiative (GDDI); presented by Caron Rollins, University of Victoria, and Susan Paterson, University of British Columbia

The British Columbia Research Libraries Group (BCRLG) task group responsible for the Government Documents Digitization Initiative (GDDI) had previously identified its top three priorities for the pilot project as the first 10 years of the *BC Sessional Papers*, the *Government Gazette* and the *BC Newspaper Index*. Having now evaluated these projects further, and completed the digitization at the University of Victoria Library, the following recommendations have been made:

- 1) Digitization of the *BC Newspaper Index* created by the Legislative Library has been removed from the list of priority projects. It was found that this would be an enormous task to undertake, and it would be better suited to development as a database.
- 2) A proposal was submitted to the BC History Digitization Program in December of 2012 for funding the digitization of the first 10 years of the *BC Sessional Papers*, from 1876 – 1886. In March, 2013, the task group learned their proposal was accepted. Further, they were also advised to aim bigger with a more substantial proposal for the following year.

It is hoped that digitization will begin in the summer of 2013. Any concerns regarding legal or copyright issues have been allayed. Although an earlier digitized version of the *Sessional Papers*

¹⁸ JP Boyd on Family Law:
<http://bcfamilylawresource.blogspot.ca/> Retrieved May 24, 2013

exists, it is a paid service and doesn't have the accessibility the GDDI is striving for. Further, the holdings are incomplete and the *Sessional Papers* had been treated by the vendor as monographs instead of serials.

- 3) The *Government Gazette* from Volume 1, January 1863, to Volume 10, December 1871, contains many stories of the province's formative years that have remained largely unseen in print. The most difficult part of this project thus far has been assembling the materials. Hardly any copies of the first ten volumes still exist, and there is only one copy of Volume 1. The BC Archives very kindly lent that volume for inclusion, and some others have been put together piecemeal from a variety of sources.

Following the long road of assembly and of obtaining the relevant rights, the first ten volumes were digitized initially to a basic standard, and have since been redone in colour with OCR enabled. They will be made available on all participating libraries' websites.

As these and other projects continue into the future, two questions are being considered – will there be a centralized web portal developed for access to all documents generated by the GDDI, and can the public be engaged to help index and develop finding aids on a volunteer basis? [Linton Harrison]

Roundtable Discussion on Continued Access to Federal Government Information; facilitated by Carla Graebner

To provide context for the discussion on challenges to continued access to federal government information, Graebner provided background information on drivers behind the Government of Canada's "Common Look and Feel" initiatives and the current situation.

Starting in the 1990s, the GoC attempted to streamline web based information by ensuring each governmental website would be immediately identifiable by a "common look and feel." Their attempts to incorporate accessibility for the visually impaired were not successful and they were subsequently sued into compliance (*Jodhan v Canada*).¹⁹ In order to ensure accessibility by July 31st 2013, the GoC has undergone a massive exercise in content reduction. As mentioned, the rubric ROT

¹⁹

<http://recueil.cmf.gc.ca/eng/2011/2010fc1197.html>

(Redundant, Old, Trivial)²⁰ is being used to guide the process. While anyone can understand and appreciate the importance of good housekeeping, there appear to be no consistent guidelines to assist departments in culling their websites. In the rush to adhere to the court imposed timeline, good content, along with the ROT, is likely being removed.

In addition, the directive to eliminate print publications in favour of born digital documents by 2014, along with the GoC's drive to reduce the number of government domains from 1300+ to six and then to one, is causing additional concern. Where is all of that content going? Not to federal libraries, surely, which have experienced significant winnowing along with dispersal of experienced staff.

Challenges for Discussion:

- Migration/stability issues
- Fugitive materials (not everything is distributed)
- Moving target (political literacy)
- Cost
- Space
- Commitment to make sure content remains accessible in an ongoing format

Roundtable Tabulations: What can we do?

- Advocate for the continuation of the DSP network in some form
- Identify avenues for harvesting GoC content: Archive-it, CGI-PLN (provincially, diversity in partners, not just big research universities)
- Interdisciplinary Open Government forum: Support for ATI, guidelines/support for coherent and consistent implementation of GofC curatorial activities (ROT), public education
- Concretize our concerns into action
- Clickitivism – Twitter has been used fairly well for some of this, interesting to see pattern of connections/connecting with journalists to get the big picture out there. Distributing factual information, but also through satire (#tellviceeverything, LACboss parody twitter account)
- Build connections with journalists – get your writing recognized as something that will appeal to public interest. Keep an eye out for issues that can generate a lot of public interest and communicate that to journalists
- Reach out to likeminded organizations (Faculty Associations, CAUT), and funnel information to larger/different groups to get the message out to a broader interested audience

²⁰ <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/ws-nw/wu-fe/rot-rid/index-eng.asp>

- Write-in during open access week. During OA week have a table to get students to make personal information requests (FOI requests), and partner with Student Associations to raise awareness

Librarians have a responsibility to advocate for access to information. We can:

- File ATI requests for the ROT guidelines for each department. We can then provide feedback and guidance once we have these.
- Educate the public – we need to personalize the issues and show the impact on people's everyday lives. For example, how elimination of the long form census will impact services.
- Reach outside the library world by telling neighbours, colleagues, MLAs and MPs. Keep telling them by publicizing it through a variety of channels and media. Only through repetition will people begin to process this information.
- Ask for help. Librarians are exceptionally collegial. Archivists aren't so shabby either. [Rebecca Dowson and Carla Graebner]

Gail Curry is the Instruction and Data Librarian at the UNBC Library.

Chris Burns is the Research Support & Data Services Librarian at Kwantlen Polytechnic University.

Rebecca Dowson is the Liaison Librarian for English and History at Simon Fraser University

Susan Huber is the Information Specialist, InfoAction at Vancouver Public Library.

Carla Graebner is the Liaison Librarian for Economics and Government Information and Project Manager for the Research Data Repository at Simon Fraser University.

Linton Harrison is the Head of Reference & Information Services at Burnaby Public Library.

Shelley Wilson-Roberts is a Reference Librarian at New Westminster Public Library.