

TORONTO, Sept. 27, 2017 – Over the past 12 years, the News Media Canada's Freedom of Information audits have identified government institutions that demonstrate a strong commitment to transparency and those that are unwilling to pull their files from the shadows. Like its predecessors, the 2017 audit is no different.

This year, the audit has a special focus on the performance of the federal government led by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, and performance was even worse than in the latter years of the former Stephen Harper government. Just a quarter of requests sent to federal government departments, agencies and crown corporations were answered within the normal 30-day time limit. A third of the requests had not received a response by the end of the audit, which means those requests were outstanding for three months or more. The federal government received an F for disclosure of information in the audit.

The 2017 audit found progress on the elimination of fees charged for information, but a continued reluctance to provide electronic data in machine-readable formats—particularly at the federal level. This is despite Trudeau's own commitments to making data available in such formats.

The federal audit reveals an access system that is bogged down to the point where, in many cases, it simply doesn't work. The system continues to be far slower and less responsive than provincial and municipal FOI regimes, and now the government seeks to introduce new measures that would allow it to reject requests for a variety of reasons.

A bill now before Parliament would give the federal information commissioner long-sought power to order the disclosure of records. The government, however, appears to prefer having those records stay secret. This proposed power is being tempered by an automatic right by federal government bodies to challenge any aspect of those orders before the Federal Court.

The audit also found trouble spots at the provincial, municipal and territorial levels, including instances of high fees, refusal to release data in machine-readable formats, and delays. But none is as thoroughly gummed up as the federal system.

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News Media Canada is the voice of the print and digital media industry in Canada. We represent over 800 trusted titles in every province and territory. News Media Canada was created in late 2016, as a product of the agreement by its members to merge the Canadian Newspaper Association (CNA) and the Canadian Community Newspaper Association (CCNA) into a single board of directors. Prior to this change, our organization was known as



Newspapers Canada. By combining resources and collaborating on a variety of different projects News Media Canada provides relevant services to all member media organizations. These services are concentrated in three major areas: Public Affairs, Marketing and Research, and Member Services.

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