

## Background

In relation to an access to information request, section 20 of the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 2015 (ATIPPA, 2015)* states: *where the requested information is information in electronic form that is, or forms part of, a dataset in the custody or under the control of a public body, the head of the public body shall produce the information for the applicant in an electronic form that is capable of re-use where:*

- (a) It can be produced using the normal computer hardware and software and technical expertise of the public body;*
- (b) Producing it would not interfere unreasonably with the operations of the public body; and*
- (c) It is reasonably practicable to do so*

Additionally, as a matter of good practice, public bodies should work with applicants so that datasets and other machine-readable records can be understood and full use can be made of them.

## What is Machine-Readable?

**Machine-readable** refers to a dataset published in a way that can be automatically used in a data reading application. For data purposes, PDF documents are not generally considered machine-readable as data contained in the file (even structured tabular data) will not be easily extracted while maintaining the rows and columns without further intermediary steps.

A **machine-readable record** means anything upon which information is stored or recorded such that a computer or other mechanical device can render the information intelligible. Examples of such machine-readable records include a word processing electronic document or an electronic database stored on a flash drive.

## Duty to Assist

While *ATIPPA, 2015* specifically requires public bodies to provide information in an electronic format that is capable of re-use when possible, section 13 also requires public bodies to “*make every reasonable effort to assist an applicant.*”

In keeping with section 13, in cases where the information requested can be provided as a dataset, but the applicant hasn't requested it in a machine-readable format, ATIPP Coordinators should advise applicants that the information can be provided as a dataset if they would prefer. Coordinators can provide applicants with the handout “Dataset Basics” which provides a general overview of what a dataset is and why it may be preferable to a paper or PDF document. This handout is available on the ATIPP Office website at: <http://atipp.gov.nl.ca/info/index.html>.

## What is a Dataset?

In its simplest form, a dataset is a collection of data. When people refer to a dataset, they are most commonly referring to a single data table made up of columns (fields or variables) and rows (records).

Dataset can also describe a collection of related sets of data. They are composed of separate yet related elements that can be manipulated by a computer and distributed as a collection. An example would be a collection of tables (each individually a dataset) made available as a single collection.

## Role of ATIPP Coordinators

ATIPP Coordinators should be familiar with the types of records and datasets that their public body collects and stores.

When an applicant requests information in a machine-readable format, coordinators should:

- Confirm what format the information is currently in;
- Confirm whether it can be extracted into the requested format (e.g. CSV, XML);
- If the requested information cannot be provided in the format requested:
  - Advise the applicant;
  - Tell the applicant the format/s in which the information can be provided.