Opening Government to Canadians
OPENING GOVERNMENT TO CANADIANS

The Liberal Party of Canada is committed to democratic renewal – and that means a commitment to open government.

While progressive governments in other countries have deployed digital technology to advance transparency and unshackle information to fuel knowledge and innovation, Canada has been held back by the most secretive government in its history.

A Liberal government will adopt a new approach to information, starting with a government-wide directive that the default position for all departments and agencies will be to release information to the public, both proactively and responsively, after privacy and other legal requirements are met.

To create a new level of accountability for government spending and to spur innovation and economic growth, a Liberal government will open government to the public through four specific measures.
THE LIBERAL OPEN GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE WILL:

- Immediately restore the long-form census;
- Make as many government datasets as possible available to the public online free of charge at opendata.gc.ca in an open and searchable format, starting with Statistics Canada data, including data from the long-form census;
- Post all Access to Information requests, responses, and response times online at accesstoinformation.gc.ca; and
- Make information on government grants, contributions and contracts available through a searchable, online database at accountablespending.gc.ca.

OPEN GOVERNMENT: A LIBERAL APPROACH

A Liberal government will launch the single largest effort of government openness and transparency in Canadian history.

To mark a clean break with the current government’s approach of limiting information to Canadians, a Liberal government will start by directing all federal departments and agencies to adopt a principle of open government when it comes to sharing information. Where there is room for debate about the necessity of releasing information, after privacy and other legal concerns are met, the default position should always be to provide information to the public.

Open government is also about having accurate information. The Harper Conservatives have demonstrated their disdain for accurate information by eliminating the long-form census, a move that upset hundreds of groups across the country and harmed Canadians’ ability to manage the economy, build communities and neighbourhoods, and help the most vulnerable. A Liberal government will immediately restore the long-form census, so that Canadians can access the information necessary to manage the economy, build communities and neighbourhoods, and help the most vulnerable.
FREE AND OPEN DATA

The federal government collects and stores a lot of data, from air traffic information and public health data, to household and crime statistics. This information can be used to spur innovation and economic growth, but it is largely sitting idle. The public has additional resources and ingenuity to take advantage of this information in ways that government cannot.

Many Canadian municipalities are leading the way with open data, including Vancouver, Edmonton and Toronto. Thousands of government datasets have been released by other countries to spur innovation, including the United States (data.gov), the United Kingdom (data.gov.uk), and Australia (data.australia.gov.au). Independent studies in the UK have estimated that open data could contribute as much as £6 billion to their national economy.

A Liberal government will unleash a wave of economic and social innovation by launching opendata.gc.ca, where as many departmental datasets as possible will be freely available to the public in an open and standardized format, taking into account our privacy laws. We will begin by making all Statistics Canada information – including information collected in the long-form census – available to the public for free.

Open data will allow Canadians to use government information to create new and exciting web-based services and applications. It will also increase accountability by making transparent what information the government collects, and allowing Canadians to better hold the government to account.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

The Liberal Government under Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau passed the Access to Information Act – and today’s Liberal Party remains committed to ensuring Canadians’ “right to know” is respected. Last spring, the Information Commissioner released a damning report that documented systemic and unacceptable delays under the Conservative government when it comes to responding to Access to Information requests.

A Liberal government will bring the Access to Information regime into the digital age through a new online portal, accesstoinformation.gc.ca, where:

- All Access requests will be posted online so that government processing times for requests can be publicly scrutinized;
- Canadians will be able to submit Access requests directly online; and
- All documents released under the Access to Information regime will be made available online to avoid duplication and encourage the sharing of information.
ACCOUNTABILITY FOR GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Taxpayers have a right to know how the government is spending their money. That means providing information on government spending proactively and in usable formats.

Discretionary spending information is often published in formats that are hard to search through or analyze. Without access to usable and searchable government information, it is impossible for Canadians to know where their tax dollars are going or if government is getting value for money. Liberals support making government spending information easier to find and searchable for amounts in line with current proactive disclosure practices – for contracts valued over $10,000 and grants and contributions valued over $25,000.

Canada cannot continue to lag behind the rest of the industrialized world when it comes to the transparency of government spending. The United States, for instance, has established two websites for accountable spending. Recovery.gov provides a geographic breakdown of all stimulus projects with information on the grant recipients, spending amounts, and the number of jobs created – all searchable by zip code. USASpending.gov provides a searchable database of all federal discretionary spending contracts.

To make information about government spending open to Canadians, a Liberal government will launch accountablespending.gc.ca, where:

- Government grants and contracts will be posted online in an easily searchable database; and
- Key information such as the names of grant and contract recipients and the amount of money disbursed will be available.

This initiative will significantly increase transparency and accountability, and offer the public a powerful tool to report potential fraud, waste and abuse.