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Requesting Federal Government Records

A Client Guide to Access to Information (ATIP) Requests

For individuals regulated by the Canadian federal government, obtaining internal records, correspondence, or decision-making documents can be critical for compliance, legal strategy, or operational clarity. Under the Access to Information Act, you have the right to request records held by federal government institutions.

This guide provides a streamlined process for preparing and submitting your request using the Government of Canada's online portal.

Phase 1:

Preparing Your Request

Before submitting a formal request, taking a few preliminary steps can significantly increase the likelihood of receiving the exact documents you need and reduce the risk of the request being refused for being "too broad."

1. Search Existing Releases

The Government of Canada publishes summaries of previously released ATIP requests. It is highly recommended to search these records first, as the information you seek may already be public. You can find these resources on the [Make a Request](#) page.

2. Identify the Correct Institution

Ensure you are directing your request to the specific government department or agency that holds the records (e.g., Health Canada, Transport Canada, or the Canada Revenue Agency).

3. Define Your Scope with Precision

The government cannot fulfill requests that are overly vague. To avoid delays or rejection, your description should include:

- **Keywords:** Specific terms used in the documents.
- **Date Ranges:** A narrow time frame (e.g., "January 1, 2022, to December 31, 2023") rather than "the last few years."
- **Specific Documents:** If you know the name of a report, the title of a policy, or the specific subject of a correspondence, list it explicitly.
- **Relevant Participants:** Mention specific offices or roles if you are seeking correspondence between particular parties.

Phase 2: Submitting Your Request Online

The most efficient way to lodge a request is through the ATIP Online Request Service. This eliminates the need for physical mailing and allows for better tracking of your application.

Step-by-Step Submission Process:

1. Access the Portal:

Navigate to the [ATIP Online Request Service](#).

2. Verify Eligibility:

Confirm that you meet the eligibility criteria. Requests may be made by:

- Canadian citizens.
- Permanent residents.
- Individuals present in Canada.
- Corporations present in Canada.

3. Select the Institution:

Choose the government institution that holds the records you are seeking from the provided dropdown menu.

4. Provide Your Information:

Enter your contact details accurately to ensure the government can communicate the status of your request and deliver the records.

5. Describe the Records:

In the description field, insert the precise scope you developed in Phase 1.

- *Example:* "All correspondence between the [Department Name] and [Your Company/Name] regarding [Specific Regulation/Case Number] between June 2023 and December 2023."

6. Submit and Save Confirmation:

Submit the form and save a digital copy of the confirmation receipt and your request ID for your records.

Important Considerations

- **Timelines:** While the government has statutory deadlines to respond, complex requests may result in extensions.
- **Fees:** While the request itself is generally free to submit, the government may charge fees for the processing of records (e.g., copying or searching costs) if the volume of pages is significant.
- **Redactions:** Be aware that the government may redact (black out) certain information based on legal exemptions, such as third-party commercial confidentiality or national security.

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes and does not constitute legal advice. If you require assistance in drafting a highly technical request or wish to challenge a government refusal, please contact your counsel at A.P. Strom & Associates.