

*Chronicling the Use of Transparency and Accountability as
Political Buzzwords, and as Drivers Ensuring the Standard of
Access to Public Records in Canada is Best Practice*

**Interim Report 1.
Using Interim Reports as Part of the
Pilot Study Research Design**

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A. Realities of Survey Research Involving Politicians

This investigation includes surveys of municipal, provincial, and federal politicians about their positions on providing citizens free, easy, timely, and direct online access to public records.

As a result of the characteristics of the survey group (politicians) and the subject matter of the survey (citizen access to public records), it is taken as a given that the survey will not be graced by prompt, informative responses.

And, repeating a theme common to investigations involving communications with politicians, it is taken as a given that the research flow will be interrupted for such reasons as:

- Personal trials and tribulations, including social media indiscretions;
- Shifts in portfolios;
- Involvement in election campaigns;
- Refusal to act as individuals, and waiting for instructions;
- Real and manufactured local, regional, and national crises; and,
- Whatever else comes along which can be labelled “urgent” and, hence, a priority which cannot be set aside in order to decide whether to support citizens having free, easy, timely, and direct online access to public records.

These and other nuances of the political scene, plus the multi-stage nature of this investigation, make it imperative for the research design to ensure that the research process is not unduly stalled during the survey phase.

In particular, the standing of transparency and accountability as political buzzwords, and as drivers ensuring the standard of access to public records in Canada is best practice, can only be ascertained to a limited degree from responses to survey questions.

The bulk of evidence regarding their use is far more likely to reside in the explanations obtained from by politicians about their survey responses.

B. Research Design Strategy

As indicated, it is most likely that there will be differences in the timing of responses to the survey, and in the timing of pursuing and receiving responses to questions asked after the survey has been administered.

Using the interim report approach, we can document the leading edge of the investigation as it moves forward, while documenting the trailing edge of the

investigation at a slower pace. And, of course, it is highly possible that interim reports on leading edge matters can serve as a stimulus which persuades laggards to “pick up the slack” to put it politely.

Prior research projects involving all levels of government provide a model upon which to base this investigation.

That is, and as learned during seven years as a senior civil servant, Government of Canada, and as a consultant to governments in Canada, the U.S., and abroad, it is prudent to report significant findings as they arise rather than wait until the entire study is completed.

In addition to being a methodologically sound procedure for an informal pilot study, the interim report approach expedites the presentation of findings, which serves such specific purposes as;

- Presenting information on key topics to members of the IRB’s Citizen Access to Public Records Advisory Panel (CAPRAP);
- Creating a forum for feedback on pilot study design;
- Informing interested parties of ongoing discoveries and developments;
- Providing a basis for obtaining feedback on pilot study design; and
- Stimulating the development of spin-off projects, including those that administer the survey questions to politicians in other municipal and provincial governments, as well as to additional federal politicians.

C. Dealing with “Ifs and Unforeseens”

A final note about interim reports is that they can be introduced into the research design with relative ease, and are especially valuable for addressing what might be termed “ifs and unforeseens”.

For example, with respect to “ifs”, matters that warrant investigation are often identified during the scoping phase, but are set aside for reasons of resource constraints. The understanding is that investigating such matters could be undertaken if circumstances permit, with the findings to be presented in an interim report.

On the other hand, “unforeseens” include research questions, concerns, issues, supports, etc., that were not identified during the scoping phase. And, as frequently happens, unforeseens also arise as by-products of an ongoing investigation.

The compelling feature of interim reports, therefore, is that they serve the purpose of incorporating findings about unforeseens into the research documentation process,

without having to re-tool the entire research process. The value of this in-course correction capability cannot be over-stated.

D. Public Participation in Chronicling the Use of Transparency and Accountability as Political Buzzwords, and as Drivers Ensuring the Standard of Access to Public Records in Canada Is Best Practice

Future interim reports which come to mind involves obtaining assistance in documenting usage of the terms **transparency** and **accountability** in speeches, campaign materials, media interviews, press releases, etc., by politicians, their agents, and/or their parties.

For resource reasons, the scope of the literature search into usage of the terms transparency and accountability is limited, even by pilot study standards.

However, the literature search can be expanded by readers providing links to publications, videos, or other digital productions in which references are made to transparency and accountability by or on behalf of politicians.

Readers are therefore invited to send links to these digital productions to wellar.barry@gmail.com for inclusion in interim reports

Further, in the spirit of promoting a culture of free, easy, timely, and direct online access to records of public interest, readers are encouraged to compile their own digital documents containing the links to politicians' use of transparency and accountability, post them, and to send the links to wellar.barry@gmail.com for inclusion in pre-planned and/or *ad hoc* interim reports.