

OPEN MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT TOOLKIT



FEDERATION
of
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND
MUNICIPALITIES



Open Municipal Government Toolkit

Openness and transparency are the cornerstones of good governance. The Federation of Prince Edward Island Municipalities (FPEIM) has developed this Open Municipal Government Toolkit to help PEI municipalities implement practices that reflect the following broad principles of open government:

- **Transparency:** Having information open and freely available for public review and discussion. In a practical sense, this includes holding meetings in public, pro-actively sharing Council agendas and reports prior to meetings, publishing and sharing the annual budget, regularly posting Council minutes and making other records open for public inspection.
- **Engagement:** Involving residents and stakeholders in the decision-making process. This can include proactive disclosure through the municipality's website, holding forums during budget time, appointing residents to council committees or boards, seeking input from residents on important decisions early in the process, and acknowledging and responding to public complaints in a pro-active manner
- **Accountability:** Making decisions for the community as a whole and being answerable to the public for decisions and actions. For Councillors, this may include signing a Code of Conduct declaration, abiding by Conflict of Interest requirements, making decisions that comply with bylaws, policies and procedures and upholding a high ethical standard.

FPEIM supports these principles and encourages PEI municipalities to embrace them. The toolkit will also assist municipalities as they work to implement some of the requirements in the new Municipal Government Act (MGA).

Each section of this toolkit addresses a topic that relates directly to open municipal government. An introduction to each topic is provided below with a link to additional information and resources. [Click here](#) for additional information on using the toolkit.

Access to Information and Protection of Privacy

Access to information is a key concept associated with open government. By routinely disclosing municipal records, information is open and available for public review and discussion. By sharing bylaws, policies and procedures, Council demonstrates transparency and accountability which increases citizen confidence in decision making. Limiting access to municipal records may raise public questions about accountability and transparency in municipal operations or Council decision making.

While it is recommended that Councils make every effort to proactively disclose municipal records, some records and information must remain confidential.

[Click here for additional information and resources on Access to Information and Protection of Privacy.](#)

Public Engagement

A key pillar of open government is two-way communication. Councils must not only keep citizens informed but should also seek public input in many cases. While this is important in generating public support and gathering citizen input for decisions, the process must also be managed to ensure false expectations are not set up.

[Click here for additional information and resources on Public Engagement.](#)

Accountability and Transparency

Many municipalities recognize accountability and transparency as principles of good government. Councils accept that they have a responsibility to their citizens, community organizations, businesses and taxpayers to act for the greater good and to ensure that their decision-making process and actions are open and accessible.

[Click here for additional information and resources on Accountability and Transparency.](#)

Code of Conduct

Section 107 of the Municipal Government Act requires that a Code of Conduct Bylaw brought into effect to govern the conduct of council members. This bylaw must be in place within 12 months of the Municipal Government Act coming into effect.

[Click here for additional information and resources on Code of Conduct.](#)

Conflict of Interest

Conflict of Interest is an important concept with open government, and is frequently cited. Councillors must know what exactly is considered a conflict of interest, and how to handle conflicts of interest when they arise. Division 4 of the Municipal Government Act is entirely dedicated to conflicts of interest.

[Click here for additional information and resources on Conflicts of Interest.](#)

Complaints

One way that a municipality can demonstrate its commitment to Open Government is to establish a process for receiving and responding to complaints. A Complaints Policy outlines a consistent and uniform process to respond to complaints about programs, facilities, services, employees or operational procedures. A Complaints Policy allows a municipality to address concerns as well as learn from experience to improve services.

[Click here for additional information and resources on Complaints.](#)

Meetings

Municipalities have a long history of making decisions at meetings that are open to the public. In Prince Edward Island, the Municipal Government Act requires municipal councils to hold meetings that are open and accessible to the public. Holding open meetings ensures that decision making is transparent and accessible to the public. Open

meetings provide an opportunity for citizens to observe and understand the decision-making process as resolutions and actions are debated and discussed in public.

[Click here for additional information and resources on Meetings.](#)

Policies and Procedures

Establishing procedures or processes is another way that a municipality can demonstrate its commitment to the principles of open government. These procedures and processes may be incorporated into a municipal policy. Policies provide guidance to Council and staff when carrying out duties on behalf of residents.

[Click here for additional information and resources on Policies and Procedures.](#)

Open Data

Open Data is the term used to refer to government data that is freely shared and can be used without restrictions. Usually this is raw data that is available for download via the internet. This data may be available as GIS map layers, as a dataset, in a spreadsheet or in another format. As a best practice, open data should not be released in a report or a PDF – the data should be in a format where it can be analyzed by the user.

[Click here for additional information and resources on Open Data.](#)