



**THE GOVERNMENT OF JAMAICA**

**THE ACCESS TO INFORMATION**

**POLICY**

**&**

**RECOMMENDED PRACTICES**

*“The Great democratising power of information has given us all the chance to effect change and alleviate poverty in ways we cannot even imagine today. Our task... is to make that change real for those in need, wherever they may be. With information on our side, with knowledge a potential for all, the path to poverty can be reversed”*

- Kofi Annan, Secretary General, United Nations

# GOVERNMENT OF JAMAICA

## Access to Information

### **Policy & Practices**

The following represents official Government Policy on the administration of the Access to Information Act and also details mandatory and recommended practices:

#### **Policy**

- i. These Guidelines should be included in such Customer Service instructions and programmes as there may be in Public Authorities;
- ii. **Where necessary, individual Access to Information Protocols** may be developed in conformity with these Guidelines and be included in such Customer Service instructions and programmes as there may be in each Public Authority;
- iii. Public Authorities should ensure that a team of individuals is selected for the purposes of reviewing and making recommendations, on a regular basis, on the treatment of applications under, and the general administration of the Access to Information Act
- iv. Application Forms for access to official documents and for amendment and annotation of personal records must be posted on the websites of, and otherwise made readily available by, Public Authorities;
- v. Each Public Authority must make public the existing and reasonably possible ways in which official documents are or may be reproduced at that Public Authority;
- vi. Information contained in official documents as may be of interest to the general public and as is not exempt, must be identified, published and made readily available to the Public

through Ministry websites, publications and public relations strategies;

- vii. Information that is known to be already in the public domain should be published and made readily available to the public as far as possible. The use of websites as “electronic reading rooms” has been shown to be highly cost effective in the administration of the ATI process;
- viii. To ensure proper management of resources, Public Authorities should ensure that where an Applicant has made an identical request to more than one public authority, that the responses be coordinated to avoid providing identical documents;
- ix. The **Access to Information Road Map** (a Directional Guide) containing subject matter, personnel, location, contact and other vital information on each Public Authority be published in whole or such parts as are relevant to each Public Authority, made widely available in all entities and brought to the attention of customers of the Public Authority;

The information in this Directional Guide will point Applicants for Access to Information in the right direction and quite likely reduce the potential for misdirected applications and inordinate numbers of transfers;

- x. Initial and continued in-house training on Access to Information, using the **Access to Information Training Manual as a standard**, should be provided on a structured basis to current and new staff of Public Authorities;
- xi. The fulfilment of ATI obligations should form part of Performance Evaluations;
- xii. Ministries and affiliated Entities which are not under the operation of the Access to Information Act at any point in time, must treat with customers requesting official documents in the spirit of the Act and as if they (the Ministries and affiliated Entities) were in fact legally obligated to assist and observe the timelines prescribed under the Act;
- xiii. Public Authorities should ensure that the negotiation of government contracts addresses and finalises:

- the government's ownership of copyright (whether in whole or in part) in such works as may derive from the services being contracted; and
- the degree of confidentiality to be attached to the information contained in such contracts.

The Attorney General's advice should be sought in both respects.

- xiv. Leave for ATI Staff should be coordinated in such a way as to ensure a maintained presence at any given time of ATI personnel at designated ATI Centres;

## **Regulated Procedures**

- xv. Public Authorities must ensure that Responsible Officers are appointed pursuant to the Access to Information Regulations;
- xvi. Every Public Authority shall advertise in a widely circulated newspaper the publication of its Initial and subsequent Statements of its Organisation and Functions in the Jamaica Gazette and in a newspaper circulated island wide;
- xvii. Every Public Authority must publish in the Jamaica Gazette a notice of the issue of a Certificate of Exemption, not later than fourteen (14) days after its issue;
- xviii. If an organisation has been deemed to be a Public Authority under S. 5 (3) of the Act, then that body shall identify a person to be a Responsible Officer as soon as possible who shall then be liable to carry out the required functions under the Act and the Regulations.

Lastly, but by no means least..... ***“The Balancing Act”***

***A great part of whether we succeed or fail is underpinned by how we treat with our Applicants.***

***In attempting to strike the happy medium between protecting sensitive information and making government information as accessible and available as possible, we must also be mindful of the importance of quality service.***

How many times have we been pleasantly surprised when someone with whom we attempt to do business of whatever nature promises to get back to us.....and actually does?

How many times have we had to wait for extended periods for something we desired from a service provider, but because the customer service was so excellent, we almost did not mind the wait or were willing to “work with the programme”, so to speak?

**LET US DO LIKEWISE.....**

**LET US BEAR OUR RESPECTIVE CUSTOMER SERVICE CHARTERS IN MIND;**

**LET US CALL PERSONS BACK WHEN WE PROMISE TO DO SO;**

**LET US TREAT PLEASANTLY WITH THE MOST TRYING SOULS;**

**LET US MAKE A PARTNERSHIP OF THIS ATI INITIATIVE;**

**LET US NOT CREATE UNNECESSARY ENEMIES .....**

It is our country and we all have a fundamental right to know

***A new day has dawned!***

**These Guidelines are to be read in the context of the Access to Information Act and Regulations.**

**The Access to Information “Training Manual for Public Officers” should also be utilised as a further aid to comprehension.**