Background

In relation to an access to information request, section 20 of the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 2015* (*ATIPPA, 2015*) states: *where the requested information is information in electronic form that is, or forms part of, a dataset in the custody or under the control of a public body, the head of the public body shall produce the information for the applicant in an electronic form that is capable of re-use where:*

(a) *It can be produced using the normal computer hardware and software and technical expertise of the public body;*

(b) *Producing it would not interfere unreasonably with the operations of the public body; and*

(c) *It is reasonably practicable to do so*

Additionally, as a matter of good practice, public bodies should work with applicants so that datasets and other machine-readable records can be understood and full use can be made of them.

What is Machine-Readable?

Machine-readable refers to a dataset published in a way that can be automatically used in a data reading application. For data purposes, PDF documents are not generally considered machine-readable as data contained in the file (even structured tabular data) will not be easily extracted while maintaining the rows and columns without further intermediary steps.

A **machine-readable record** means anything upon which information is stored or recorded such that a computer or other mechanical device can render the information intelligible. Examples of such machine-readable records include a word processing electronic document or an electronic database stored on a flash drive.

Duty to Assist

While *ATIPPA, 2015* specifically requires public bodies to provide information in an electronic format that is capable of re-use when possible, section 13 also requires public bodies to "*make every reasonable effort to assist an applicant.*"

In keeping with section 13, in cases where the information requested can be provided as a dataset, but the applicant hasn't requested it in a machine-readable format, ATIPP Coordinators should advise applicants that the information can be provided as a dataset if they would prefer. Coordinators can provide applicants with the handout "Dataset Basics" which provides a general overview of what a dataset is and why it may be preferable to a paper or PDF document. This handout is available on the ATIPP Office website at: http://atipp.gov.nl.ca/info/index.html.

What is a Dataset?

In its simplest form, a dataset is a collection of data. When people refer to a dataset, they are most commonly referring to a single data table made up of columns (fields or variables) and rows (records).

Dataset can also describe a collection of related sets of data. They are composed of separate yet related elements that can be manipulated by a computer and distributed as a collection. An example would be a collection of tables (each individually a dataset) made available as a single collection.

Role of ATIPP Coordinators

ATIPP Coordinators should be familiar with the types of records and datasets that their public body collects and stores.

When an applicant requests information in a machine-readable format, coordinators should:

o Confirm what format the information is currently in;

o Confirm whether it can be extracted into the requested format (e.g. CSV, XML);

o If the requested information cannot be provided in the format requested:

▪ Advise the applicant;

▪ Tell the applicant the format/s in which the information can be provided.