
FOIP Tips for Planning a Municipal Census

As public bodies subject to the FOIP Act, municipalities must collect, use, disclose, protect, retain and dispose of personal information, including census information, in accordance with the Act. The following tips are offered for consideration in planning a municipal census.

Decide whether personal information is needed

- Only collect the personal information that relates directly to and is necessary for an operating program or activity of the municipality (**section 33(c)**).
- Review the Municipal Census form and decide which data elements are needed. Only collect the data elements necessary for a municipal program or activity.
- For example, if a new program for children is in the planning stages, you may need to collect dates of birth of residents if you need to know the distribution of children of various ages in the community. Or if the municipality is planning programs to support home businesses, you may need to collect employment location information.
- If the purpose of conducting the census is to collect the municipal grant from Alberta Municipal Affairs, collect a head count of residents per dwelling. Do not collect any personal information such as names, birth dates, gender, etcetera.

Collecting personal information

- Personal information should be collected directly from each household, not from neighbours or caretakers.
- Households should be advised how the information will be used, to meet the requirement of the FOIP Act to give notice (**section 34(2)**). The "Letter of Introduction" in Appendix B of the census manual (available from Alberta Finance and Enterprise) can be revised for this purpose. The notice should cover the use of the information, the authority for collection (**section 33(c)** of the FOIP Act) and who to call if the resident has questions.
- The notice can be given orally or in writing.
- Households should be advised that participation in the census is voluntary.

Using and disclosing personal information

- Use and disclose the personal information only for the purposes given by the enumerator at the time the information is collected; for a consistent purpose (one that has a reasonable and direct connection to the original purpose and is necessary for operating a legally authorized program of the municipality); or for a purpose authorized under **section 39** of the FOIP Act.

Protecting personal information

- Protect census information by making reasonable security arrangements against such risks as unauthorized access, collection, use, disclosure or destruction.
- Protect identifiable personal information from the time it is collected until it is properly disposed.
- Reasonable security arrangements include requiring enumerators to take the Oath of Office; keeping all identifiable information collected in locked cabinets; restricting access through the use of passwords or user verification for electronic information; and shredding the information after its approved retention period.

Retaining and disposing of personal information

- Retain for the period of time specified in the municipality's approved retention and disposition schedule for the type of record. Dispose of the information at the end of this period. If identifiable information has been collected, documents should be destroyed in a secure manner.