

BRIEFING NOTE
Advice to Minister

DATE: April 26, 2021

CLIFF#: 114916

ISSUE: Enabling Academic Researchers to Access the Data Innovation Program

BACKGROUND:

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- The DI Program brings together social data sets from across government into one place for research to support evidence-based decision-making.
- The benefits of creating the DI Program were:
 - decreased administrative burden on individual ministries to extract and provide data on an ad hoc basis; and
 - decreased privacy and security risk due to a reduction in the number of data copies shared between ministries in government.
- CITZ took a phased approach to implementing the DI Program – in year one the ministry focused solely on government-led data projects; in year two, the ministry began to allow government-led projects that included academics under contract with government.
- During this time, the ministry engaged academics in a formal consultation process to identify key requirements and needs and to establish a baseline experience.
- Currently, the DI Program is supporting two academic pilot projects. These projects are being used to test and validate the program processes, fees and documentation.

DISCUSSION:

- CITZ’s mandate letter directs the ministry to ‘continue to expand the use of cross-government data to increase evidence-based decision-making and better inform public policy.’
- The DI Program is now well-established for use in government projects. To date, eight ministries and four public bodies have contributed data to the DI Program – in total, the program holds close to 40 of government’s core social data sets.
- Thirteen analytics projects have leveraged the DI Program, including projects examining priority challenges facing BC such as poverty reduction, basic income, child and youth mental health and primary health care.
- However, demand from the academic research community is high. s.12: s.13
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- With a view to opening up the program to academic researchers, CITZ has developed the accompanying governance, fee recovery structures and operational processes required to implement support academic research projects. The fee recovery structure is consistent with the model delivered by the Ministry of Health.
- In addition, the DI Program has both standard and specific eligibility and access requirements for government and academic projects and researchers based on the *5 Safes Framework*.
 - *Safe People* standard requirements include all project team members signing an engagement agreement and completing the oath of secrecy and specialized privacy training. Government Projects must be sponsored by a core Ministry Executive, be an employee of government or on contract with a core Ministry. Academic project team member must be affiliated with a registered Canadian institution, or on contract with the institution.
 - *Safe Project* standard requirements include the project being in the public interest and demonstrating a valid statistical purpose with sound study design and methodology. Academic projects also require public funding, a valid Ethics Certificate and must be Peer Reviewed with a minimum rating score received.
 - *Safe Data* requires both government and academic projects to use de-identified data.
 - *Safe Settings* requires both government and academic projects to be conducted in a secure research environment.
 - *Safe Outputs* requires both government and academic projects to ensure that all data being exported from the secure research environment has successfully passed both the automated and manual output checking processes to ensure the de-identified data has been further anonymized.
- The DI Program has also developed a communications plan and materials to support the launch of the program, including updated web content, notifications to academic institutions and other stakeholder groups and networks.
- CITZ has consulted with the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, data providing Ministries and organizations and the DM Board on Integrated Data about academic access.
- Opening the DI Program before the summer would demonstrate a positive first step in CITZ's mandate to increase evidence-based decision-making by enabling insights generated by academic-led research using integrated provincial data to inform policy and practice. This timing would also provide certainty to academic researchers looking to submit funding grants to federal granting agencies.

NEXT STEPS:

- Continued engagement with GCPE to determine necessary communications.
- Targeted outreach to academic stakeholder groups.
- Launch of updated web content and academic specific online Data Access Requests.
- Post-launch monitoring of demand to inform Data Strategy.
- Establish service baselines and continuously improve program delivery.

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