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OPEN SCHOLARSHIP POLICY OBSERVATORY



Open Government

by Caroline Winter | 3 April 2018 | English, Observations, Observations and Responses | 0 comments



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This observation was written by Kimberly Silk.

At a glance

Title	Open Government
Creators	Federal, Provincial and Municipal Governments in Canada
Publication date	2018
Keywords	open science ; open data ; Canadian government ;

Open government indicates that citizens have access to the publications, records and data of the government, in order to enable the public to observe government activity and for the government to be open to public scrutiny. Often associated with transparency and accountability, open government is widely considered to be a hallmark of the modern democracy. Open government also allows for more effective dissemination of information, which facilitates a higher level of civic engagement.

While there is not yet a single accepted definition, the description provided by the OECD is clear and succinct:

“Open government – the opening up of government processes, proceedings, documents and data for public scrutiny and involvement – is now considered as a fundamental element of a democratic society. Both greater transparency and public participation can not only lead to better policies and services, they can also promote public sector integrity, which is essential to regaining the trust of citizens in the neutrality and reliability of public administrations.”([Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2018](#)).

The Government of Canada announced its own [Directive on Open Government](#) in October 2014, which states,

“The objective of the directive is to maximize the release of government information and data of business value to support transparency, accountability, citizen engagement, and socio-economic benefits through reuse, subject to applicable restrictions associated with privacy, confidentiality, and security.” (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat 2014)

The Government of Canada’s goal for this directive is that Canadians will use the information to “support accountability, to facilitate value-added analysis, to drive socio-economic benefits through reuse, and to support meaningful engagement with their government” (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat 2014).

The open government movement at the international level is led by the Open Government Partnership, a multilateral initiative with a goal to secure governments across the globe to commit to promote open government. Launched in 2011, member countries must “endorse a high-level [Open Government Declaration](#), deliver a country action plan developed with public consultation, and commit to independent reporting on their progress going forward.” At present there are 75 participating countries, including Canada, who joined in 2011.

Open government access includes open data. [Canada’s Open Data Exchange](#) (ODX) is a partner network committed to simplifying access to open data in Canada. While ODX is focused on improving access for commercial purposes, their site is open to all. ODX recently published a [blog post describing the most popular data](#) being accessed on the Government of Canada’s [Open Data Portal](#). The post reports that there are 78, 854 datasets available on the portal as of the end of January 2018. In 2017, there were on average 117,351 visits to the portal per month. The most popular data set is Fuel Consumption Ratings, which is downloaded over 3300 times per month.

Open government is occurring in Canada at the provincial, territorial and municipal levels. At time of writing, Manitoba and New Brunswick are the only provinces without an open government program, though municipalities in those provinces – Winnipeg and Brandon, and Fredericton and Saint John – host open initiatives. Similarly, while Yukon and Nunavut do not have open government initiatives, Whitehorse hosts an open government portal and Iqaluit coordinates an open government initiative. An up to date list of Canadian provincial and municipal open government initiatives is available from the [Government of Canada](#).

For the researcher, access to government information is highly valuable. The [Canadian Association of Research Libraries](#) (CARL) supports open government, asserting that open government, like open science, “accelerates scientific discovery, enables international collaboration and coordination, and ultimately supports economic prosperity.” (Canadian Association of Research Libraries 2015). In April 2017, [Canada’s Fundamental Science Review](#), written by a panel of nine of Canada’s top scientists and chaired by former University of Toronto president David Naylor, acknowledged open science as an emerging trend that needs to be monitored. At a time when “open” is a driving force, open government information and data play important roles in the progression towards open scholarship.

Bibliography

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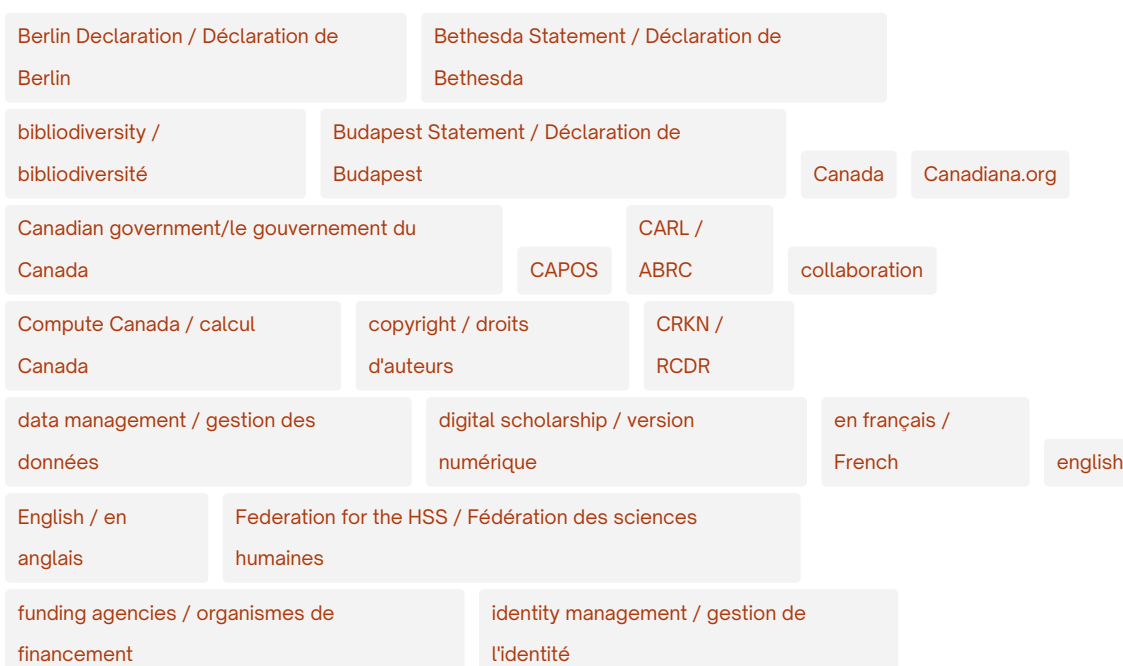
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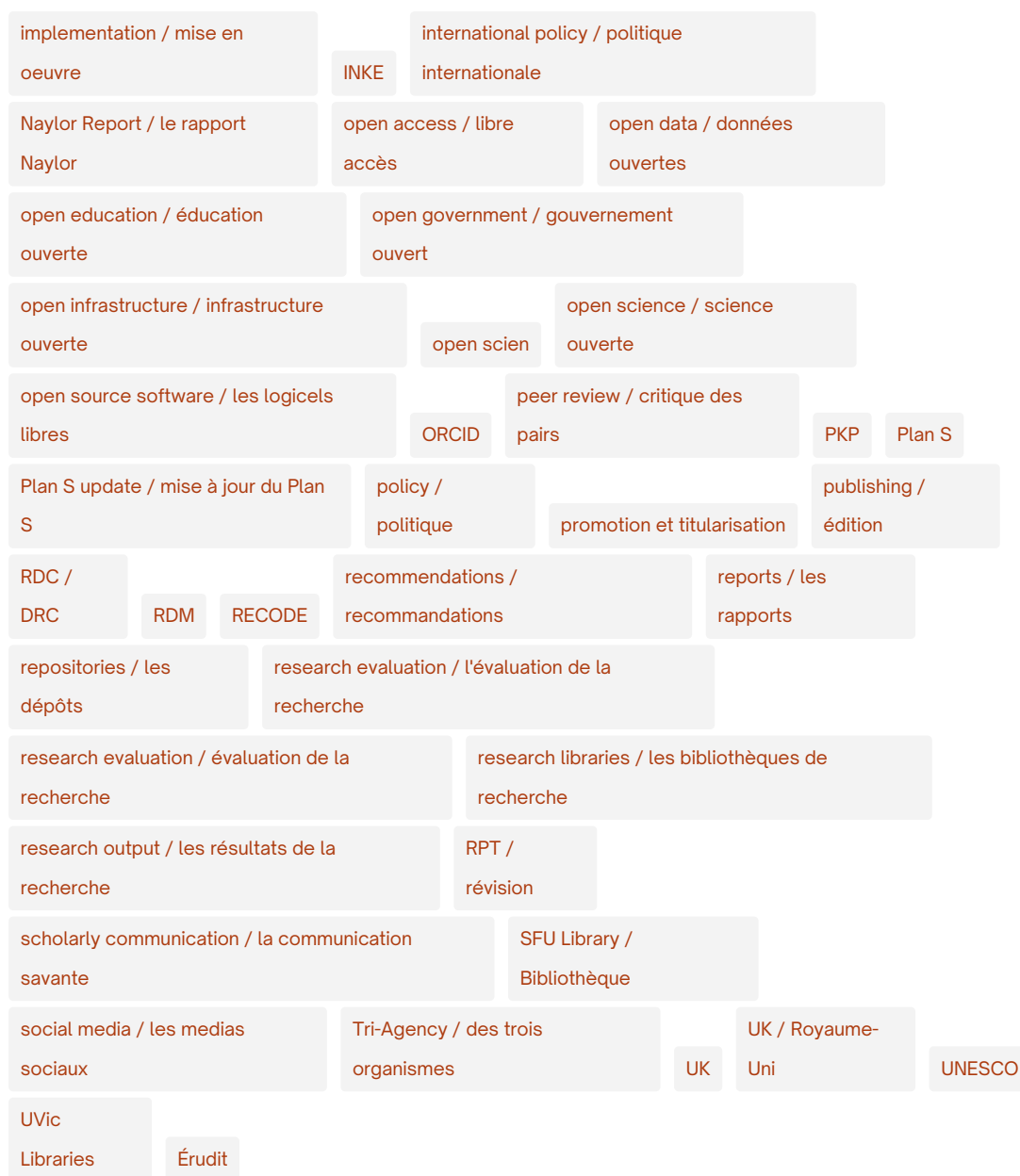
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