

IV. Challenges

Both the number of access to information requests and requests to the Department for personal information have continued to increase rapidly, as have the number of consultation requests from other departments and foreign governments. It is anticipated that interest in information held by the Department will continue to grow as public awareness also increases.

Implementation of Treasury Board's policy on Personal Information Assessments, which came into effect on May 1, 2002, has already begun to have a significant impact on many parts of the Department and on the ATIP office, and it is likely that this impact will continue.

The Department also faces certain challenges that may not affect other federal departments, including:

1. the need to obtain documents held at diplomatic missions overseas in order to respond to requests
2. the high volume of cases requiring consultation with third parties and other governments and international organizations or multilateral bodies
3. the complexity and sensitivity of requests received

Furthermore, given the nature of the Department's work, employees must often deal rapidly with urgent international crises. Thus, the Department must regularly balance the competing priorities of response to an urgent situation on the one hand with requests for access to information on the other.