



# Developing a Canadian policy agenda for administrative data sharing

Coalition-Building and Research Plan

**POWERED**

**BY**

**DATA**

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## Context

In February 2017, Powered by Data hosted Transform the Sector, Canada's first national conference on the digital data needs of the social sector. Building on the insights that emerged from that conference, we identified increasing access to administrative data for the nonprofit sector as a high-impact intervention. Sharing and linking administrative data can provide rich information about communities, and the services they use—creating opportunities for impact evaluation, integrated service delivery, social research, and evidence-based advocacy in Canada's social sector.

In the Canadian context, there has been no coordinated policy agenda for increasing social impact through administrative data use. In exploring the possibility of such an agenda, we need to explore what different use cases could look like, address important questions around privacy, security, autonomy and consent, and draw on best practices for mitigating these risks.

In early 2018, Powered by Data convened 50+ civil society organizations (funders, service providers, and advocacy groups) to consult on the need for a shared Canadian policy agenda to increase nonprofit access to administrative data. These groups articulated a clear desire to move forward as a coalition to develop such an agenda.

## Project Overview

Over the coming year, Powered by Data will: (1) build a civil society coalition and work with sector experts to research the policy changes required for increased administrative data-sharing, and (2) conduct research on the feasibility of making these policy changes, as well as the risks and risk mitigation strategies associated with these policies.

This coalition-building process will result in a cohesive group that is well-equipped to develop a shared policy agenda, and strategy for moving that agenda forward. This project is as innovative as it is ambitious, and we are committed to documenting and sharing our learnings. We expect that future phases of this work would include strategic data-sharing pilot projects, policy dialogue with government, and public outreach activities .



## TOPIC OVERVIEW

### What is administrative data?

Government agencies and social services collect information about the people they serve. This administrative data is typically used for operational, rather than for research purposes. Examples of administrative data could include: physician visit records, high school completion records, birth and death records, and tax returns.

### Administrative data-sharing

Administrative data from different ministries—or even different services within the same ministry—are often collected, stored, and accessed separately. **Data sharing** is the practice of allowing more than one agency or organization to access and use administrative data for new purposes. Sharing could occur between ministries within government, as well as between government agencies and nonprofit partners.

### To learn more:

For more information on the topic of administrative data-sharing, please download our issue brief, which can be found at: [bit.ly/admindata-issuebrief](https://bit.ly/admindata-issuebrief)

## Building a civil society coalition with a robust governance framework

**WHY?** Planning and decision-making around digital policy often excludes communities at the margins, who carry the greatest privacy and security risks posed by such projects. An equitable policy agenda for increased administrative data use must be informed not only by comprehensive research, but also by an ongoing, collaborative process involving a diverse civil society coalition.

**HOW?** Powered by Data will facilitate such a process for this coalition, drawing on our own expertise in multi-stakeholder governance and working in partnership with our four co-conveners: Philanthropic Foundations Canada, the Ontario Nonprofit Network, Colour of Poverty - Colour of Change, and Dr Janet Smylie of Well Living House (sharing information regarding approaches to Indigenous data governance and management).

Developing a shared policy agenda among 50+ diverse civil society groups requires a governance model that effectively channels member energy into ongoing, effective collaboration. We will define terms of reference for a steering committee, stakeholder caucus groups, and overall coalition membership. We will also align on a clear decision-making process that equitably balances consideration of all voices with an orientation towards action.

## Research base on policy models for administrative data sharing

**WHY?** Current policies prohibit the linking of administrative data across Canadian government databases, with fragmented privacy legislation presenting a further layer of complexity. In the United States, a recent federal Commission on Evidence-based Policymaking recommended a review of relevant laws to create a more enabling policy environment for administrative data sharing. Here in Canada, realizing the benefits of administrative data-sharing will likewise require significant - and complex - policy changes.

**HOW?** Drawing on the broad expertise of our coalition members, we will define the use cases for administrative data sharing that are seen as highest priority by civil society stakeholders. We will then research in detail the policy changes necessary to enable these use cases, along with an analysis of their associated risks, risk mitigation possibilities, and political feasibility.

Equipping coalition members to take informed leadership on this issue will require significant ongoing knowledge translation and stakeholder education, given the unfamiliar and technical nature of this subject area. In addition to our primary project goals, see this kind of capacity-building in data policy dialogue among a diverse range of civil society leaders as a valuable initiative in and of itself.

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## About Powered by Data

Powered by Data's mission is to maximize the availability and impact of data for public good. Through an approach that blends data policy and data strategy development, Powered by Data helps establish infrastructure and governance frameworks that will enable the social sector to better share, use, and learn from data. Powered by Data works with nonprofits and civil society groups, government, funders, and global data initiatives.

Powered by Data operates on Tides Canada's shared platform, which supports on-the-ground efforts to create uncommon solutions for the common good.

To learn more, visit our website at: [www.poweredbydata.org](http://www.poweredbydata.org)



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Powered by Data would also like to thank the four co-convening partners that are helping design this coalition: Philanthropic Foundations Canada, the Ontario Nonprofit Network, Colour of Poverty - Colour of Change, and Dr Janet Smylie of Well Living House.

