



## Privacy Impact Assessments (PIAs)

Every organization needs to be concerned about the potential impact of a new program or initiative on its duties, procedures, and policies for the protection of personal information. In the public sector, this process has, for some time now, been formalized with the requirement for a public body to complete a “privacy impact assessment” (PIA) in such circumstances. For these public bodies, the PIA is a written document in template form posing a number of questions and requiring information on a number of privacy-related issues. The template is composed in a “check the box” and “fill in the blank” format. Completion of a PIA is now a standard part of the project checklist for most new initiatives in the public sector. Often, the responses to PIA questions and the issues revealed by the PIA process lead to helpful modifications in project design at early stages. Also, when a problem arises after project implementation, the PIA becomes a document subject to review and analysis to assess whether proper due diligence occurred in risk management and the protection of personal information.

In the private sector, the PIA process is currently a “best practice” adopted informally by organizations on the leading edge of privacy compliance. The form and intensity of the process vary widely due to the vast array of circumstances in which projects arise, and the degree to which management and project leaders are committed to privacy protection.

The British Columbia government has indicated that it is in the process of preparing a template for private sector PIAs, which could be voluntarily adopted by organizations interested in such a compliance tool. Reacting to feedback received from users of the public sector PIA template, the government has indicated that the form of the private sector PIA template will move away from the “check the box” format to become more of an organic or iterative process in describing and assessing privacy risks and issues for private sector projects. Publication of this tool

will be a welcome addition to the existing resources published by both the BC government and the British Columbia Information and Privacy Commissioner.

For more information on PIAs, please contact [Robert Pakrul](#) of our [Information and Privacy Practice Group](#) at [rpakrul@ahbl.ca](mailto:rpakrul@ahbl.ca) or 604-484-1720.

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