Re: Your request for access to information under Part II of the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act [Our File #: FIN-48-2016]

On August 5, 2016, the Department of Finance received the following request for access to information:

"Copies of instructions pertaining to the processing of payment to "one time vendors" "Sundry vendors" "infrequent suppliers" or whatever other label is applied to small suppliers / vendors. I don't even know what they are called any more. Labels change. Copies of policies and procedures pertaining to the assignment of supplier identification numbers so that Government is aware how much money is payable or paid to a supplier and in a position to enforce a Court ordered intercept. I am not looking for the Dead Sea Scrolls here. Just something to indicate that there are procedures in place for Government to be able to track payments to a particular supplier who may have multiple addresses and variations of names. The Exchequer Office of the Department of Finance used to pay considerable attention to this task. Now it seems not to be able to even assemble the information. If a taxpayer wanted to know how much a particular vendor received in payments from Government would they have to contact each and every Department of Government. That would seem to be an incredible waste of time, more particularly so considering that line department staff would not necessarily have the training to fully understand how to access this information. Can this request be processed as one item or do you want me to make up a request for each and every component of my request. I asked the Comptroller of Finance and got a blow off response. I don’t want volumes of paper, just enough information to get my head around what is in place.

I think I could be answered in an email setting out what procedures are in place. But if this is too time consuming? mail out the pertinent sections of written policies and procedure."

The Department is pleased to advise that access has been granted to the above request and is provided below.

General Policy & Procedures for Vendor Set up (Unique Identifier):

- The Comptroller General is responsible for the maintenance of vendor accounts in the Government’s Financial Management System (FMS). The vendor account set up assigns a unique identification number to each vendor for the purpose of issuing payments.
To set up a vendor into FMS, departments submit a written request to the Financial Systems Control Division (FSC) using the prescribed form, a Supplier Setup and Maintenance Form, which includes information such as:

- Vendor/Supplier type
- Vendor/Supplier name (if an individual, the name at birth and date of birth are required)
- Business number (if applicable)
- Address
- Contact information
- Financial information to set up electronic payments – if applicable.

Once the above information is entered into FMS, the system will generate a vendor number as a unique identifier.

Please note a vendor may have multiple payment addresses (sites) as well as multiple shipping addresses. Under these circumstances, the Supplier Setup and Maintenance Form, completed by Departments, identifies the vendor number and any changes required to the multiple address sites of that vendor. Departments then forward the completed form to the FSC.

Policy & Procedures for One Time Vendors (ONETs):

- The above process is not the same for one time vendors (ONETs).
- The FMS Accounts Payable module (Oracle Payables) provides for the processing of invoices to vendors without having to request the setup of such vendors within the master vendor file (referred to as One Time Payments or “ONET’s”).
- The ONET facility effectively bypasses certain system controls inherent in having a vendor number assigned via a master vendor file. As such this compromises the ability to access and report on associated transactions.
- The ability to view payment details within FMS related to ONET vendors may be restricted due to the sensitivity of the information processed on the related invoices (e.g., income support invoices).
- The ONET facility is restricted to those situations meeting the following criteria:
  - involves time-sensitive payment streams comprised of a large number of individual vendors; and
  - payments to such vendors are not expected to occur again in the future.
- Departments must not proceed with using the ONET facility without first obtaining written approval from the Director of Government Accounting. In requesting such approval, departments must make a written request to the Director of Government Accounting, such requests include the following information:
  - nature of the initiative;
  - estimated volume of payments required by the initiative;
  - estimated number of vendors to be paid via the initiative;
  - indication of the time constraints in processing the payments;
  - description of the form of payment supporting documentation to be forwarded to the Office of the Comptroller General; and
  - summary of the controls the department will implement and exercise to ensure accuracy, integrity and completeness of invoice/payment processing.
- Departments should ensure that the ‘one time vendor’ is only utilized for those payees not expected to have multiple payments. However, this would not be the case if it involves time-
sensitive payment streams comprised of a large number of individual vendors being paid through individual departmental programs that require confidentiality.

- The setup of ONETs receiving payments through departmental programs is the responsibility of that department. All vendor information is entered at the departmental level through departmental systems and integrated into FMS.
- As such, if changes have to be made to a particular payment, the respective department will request Finance to remove that invoice; changes would be made by the individual department and re-submitted (integrated into FMS) for processing.
- In submitting payments to be processed via the ONET facility, departments must exercise due caution over the accuracy of the name, address and bank account information appearing in the Accounts Payable payment data as much of this information will be included in the payment issued to the vendor.
- To process invoice payment of ONETs, the invoice number must have three components:
  - Three letters which identify the department
  - Four letters which identify the departmental program
  - A six-digit number uniquely assigned to the invoice (at the departmental level). This number must be unique because, although the payee may be different, the vendor is the same for all one time payments. As such, individual departments must maintain a record of invoice numbers assigned to one time payments for follow up purposes.
- The Department of Finance does not have policies or procedures in place for tracking one time vendors because the setup and maintenance of one time vendors is the responsibility of individual departments.
- Due to confidentiality restrictions relating to particular departmental programs, not all one time vendors are processed in the FMS system. For example; some payments are issued from the Long-Term Assistance Bank Account that is maintained by the Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour (AESL). These payments are processed via AESL’s Client Automated Pay System (CAPS) and are not interfaced with or processed in FMS. The Department of Finance via the Office of the Comptroller General (OCG) issues the payments from this system for AESL either by printing cheques or issuing electronic file-to-bank for direct deposits, but OCG does not have access to or maintain any information on the invoices processed through CAPS. For information on the transactions processed through CAPS please contact AESL.

Please be advised that you may ask the Information and Privacy Commissioner to review the processing of your access request, as set out in section 42 of the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (the Act). A request to the Commissioner must be made in writing within 15 business days of the date of this letter or within a longer period that may be allowed by the Commissioner.

The address and contact information of the Information and Privacy Commissioner is as follows:

Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner
2 Canada Drive
P. O. Box 13004, Stn. A
St. John’s, NL A1B 3V8

Telephone: (709) 729-6309
Toll-Free: 1-877-729-6309
Facsimile: (709) 729-6500
You may also appeal directly to the Supreme Court Trial Division within 15 business days after you receive the decision of the public body, pursuant to section 52 of the Act.

Please be advised that this letter will be published following a 72 hour period after it is sent electronically to you or five business days in the case where records are mailed to you. It is the goal to have the letter posted to the Completed Access to Information Requests website within one business day following the applicable period of time. Please note that requests for personal information will not be posted online.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact the undersigned by telephone at 709-729-2082, or by email at bethbartlett@gov.nl.ca.

Sincerely,

Beth Bartlett
ATIPP Coordinator