

Maturing Open Government in Canada: Lessons Learned

Presentation for the delegation of the Government of Belize,
in support of their open government journey.

Presented by Christopher Schultz, A/Team Lead, Open Government Strategy – Feb 26, 2020

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OPEN
GOVERNMENT

“I also expect us to continue to raise the bar on openness, effectiveness and transparency in government. This means a government that is open by default”

December 2019, Ministerial Mandate Letters

Objective and Agenda

- To provide some unofficial insights on lessons learned through Canada's open government activities, in support of Belize's current efforts to develop and sustain its own open government efforts.
- Items to be discussed include:
 - Resourcing
 - Departmental engagement
 - Public consultation
 - Developing a multi-stakeholder forum
 - Creating action plans
 - Publishing open information and data

Resourcing

- Open government is a way of working, and thus it requires special care and attention on **government culture change**
- It requires sustained, full-time attention at the working level to support that change
 - Try to create teams that touch different elements of government work: information technology and management, policy, service delivery and operations, strategic planning, finance, human resources
 - Organize the team according to priorities (e.g. Canada has several technical teams to support our portal, in addition to policy, implementation and outreach teams)
- Executive and political support is critical to success
- Find the right people, who should be:
 - Enthusiastic about change
 - Open-minded and willing to share
 - Be able to influence and inspire others
 - Be flexible
 - Be able to accept and adapt to failure

Departmental Engagement

- Since it is a **way of working**, open government can be applied to any government program, policy or public service area
 - Start with work already being done, and shift it toward an open focus
 - Differentiate between projects that have a public interest, and things that are about developing better efficiency within government
- Create governance structures to allow you to share best practices across departments, consisting of:
 - Strategic groups, usually at the executive level, who help set government-wide priorities
 - Working groups, where specific problems that have been identified can be worked on
- A central authority is usually ideal for coordinating governance
- Establish clear points of contact within government, at both the working and executive level

Consulting the Public

- If the public isn't involved, it isn't really open!
- Start with defined times when consultation will occur, and try to move into creating ongoing dialogue
- Understand who are the external persons/groups most impacted by government decisions, and seek them out for your consultations
 - Academia
 - Journalists
 - Civil society
 - Private sector
- Use appropriate consultation platforms to meet public needs (e.g. digital and in-person meetings), and are easy to access and use
 - In other words, go to where the people are
- Get diverse views, and actively seek them out: government decisions affect different groups in unpredictable ways, and the whole point is to find out how

Creating a Multi-Stakeholder Forum

- A MSF is viewed as a best practice by the Open Government Partnership
- Membership in this group usually consists of a majority of civil society members, with some government officials included
 - Canada has 8 civil society and 4 government members
- The group should be as diverse as possible, to best represent a variety of perspectives
- Have clear terms of reference for the group, to set expectations on their roles and responsibilities
- Purposes of the group might include:
 - A challenge function, where they can offer constructive criticism and advice on government commitments
 - To help connect government to external stakeholders
 - To represent special interest groups to government
 - To provide direct access to government for civil society in ways not normally found
 - To draw on their expertise in areas where government may not be as strong

Creating an Action Plan

- You need a plan, both long-term and short-term, and that means creating a vision of what you are trying to achieve with open government
- We develop our OGP national action plan by starting at the end, and then reverse-engineering it based on all the key milestones. In reverse, these are:
 - Publication deadline
 - Approvals of the final plan (it goes to our minister)
 - Final consultations (MSF, department commitment leads)
 - Drafting commitments based on consultation and government priorities
 - Embarking on public consultations
 - Preparing communications, consultation, departmental and other materials
- Identify all the key deliverables needed to complete each section, and identify a specific person who will be responsible for it

Publishing Data and Information

- There are three foundational pieces that you should consider:
 - Create an open government portal, which will be your central repository for all open information and data
 - Create laws or policies that compel government departments to publish data and information, while still respecting privacy, security or other legal restrictions
 - Create your own, or allow for the use of an open licence (e.g. Creative Commons), which will allow for information and data to be reused
- Take a problem-based approach to publishing data and information right away (e.g. environmental, employment, housing, health, et al.)
 - Should be driven or influenced by public demand
- Establish strong, government-wide standards on data quality and accessibility
- Establish ways for the public to interact with data owners, ask questions, and develop communities of practice for data re-users

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