Maturing Open Government in Canada: Lessons Learned

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

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“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
Contact Us

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