

THE OPEN GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP

*An Overview for
Parliamentarians in
the Americas and
the Caribbean*



Legislative
Openness
Working
Group



This publication is an adaptation of the [Open Government Partnership Brochure](#), which has been tailored for parliamentarians of the Americas and the Caribbean by ParlAmericas and the National Democratic Institute.

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Canada 

What is the Open Government Partnership?



Launched in 2011

75 Participating Countries

2,500+ Commitments

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) is a multilateral initiative that aims to secure concrete commitments from governments to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance.

At the heart of each country's participation is a National Action Plan (NAP) developed in collaboration with civil society. These action plans translate the political will demonstrated when a country joins OGP into concrete action. Each NAP contains specific commitments to enhance transparency, accountability, and public participation in government. The commitments are then subject to independent review. OGP encourages reformers to use innovations in public policy and new technologies to transform the culture of government and better serve the public.

OGP's model is unique. As a voluntary partnership that emphasizes collaboration, OGP places its trust in the power of ideas. It does not prescribe standards for openness that countries should follow, nor does it specify sectors to target. Instead, its deliberate, context specific approach is designed to bring government and citizens of each country together to define their own priorities for reform. Governments and citizens are encouraged to experiment with bold changes that address urgent public policy challenges, learning from and inspiring each other along the way.

In the spirit of multi-stakeholder collaboration, OGP is overseen by a [Steering Committee](#) including representatives of governments and civil society organizations, and managed by a [Support Unit](#).

How can an Open Government facilitate the work of parliament?

- Access to government information in an open format can expedite analysis by parliamentarians, parliamentary staff or third parties (academia, think tanks, industry-based research groups, etc.) and aid parliamentarians in their role of overseeing government policy and expenditures
- Access to meaningful government data allows for evidence-based decision-making and improved legislation
- Proactive disclosure of meaningful government data has the potential to reduce the amount of inquiries received by parliamentarians, by proactively answering frequently asked questions
- Citizens' trust in our governmental institutions can only be gained through efforts across all branches of government (executive, legislative and judicial) as citizens often do not make the distinction; improving citizens' trust in the Executive structure can also benefit the parliament

What is an Open Government?

A government that is sustainably more transparent, more accountable, and more responsive to its own citizens, with the ultimate goal of improving the quality of governance, as well as the quality of services that citizens receive. Moving towards an open government requires a shift in norms and culture to ensure genuine dialogue and collaboration between governments and civil society.

How can governments join the OGP?

To participate in OGP, governments must:

1. Meet OGP's eligibility criteria in four key areas, as measured by objective indicators and validated by independent experts. Countries that earn 75% of the applicable points or more are eligible to join.
2. Send a letter of intent to join to the [OGP Steering Committee Co-Chairs](#), including a commitment by the government to the principles of the [Open Government Declaration](#).
3. Identify a lead ministry and begin developing a National Action Plan.
4. Commit to OGP's [Independent Reporting Mechanism \(IRM\)](#) process.

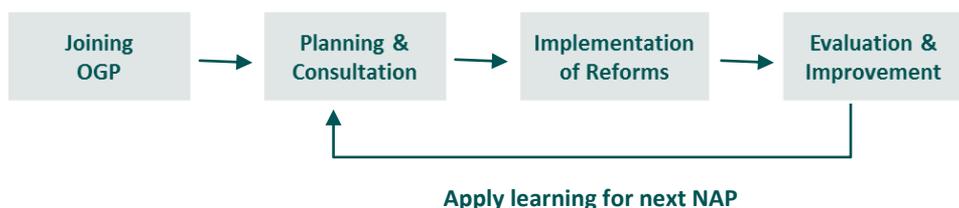
Key Areas of [OGP Eligibility Criteria](#):

- **Fiscal Transparency:** The timely publication of essential budget documents forms the basic building blocks of budget accountability and an open budget system.
- **Access to Information:** An access to information law that guarantees the public's right to information and access to government data is essential to the spirit and practice of open government.
- **Public Officials Asset Disclosure:** Rules that require public disclosure of income and assets for elected and senior public officials are essential to anti-corruption and open, accountable government. It is also important to make the data publicly available.
- **Citizen Engagement:** Open Government requires openness to citizen participation in policymaking and governance, including basic protections for civil liberties.

What is the National Action Plan cycle?

To join OGP, governments must co-create a National Action Plan (NAP) with civil society. NAPs follow a 2-year cycle and generally contain 5 to 15 specific, ambitious commitments meant to enhance transparency, accountability, and public participation in government - commitments designed to tackle genuine problems and create positive changes in citizen's lives.

OGP encourages countries to develop a permanent dialogue mechanism between government and civil society so that they actively collaborate throughout the full national OGP cycle: first by co-creating the action plan, then by supporting and carrying out implementation, and finally by monitoring and evaluation.



1. **Joining OGP:** Submission of a letter of intent once eligibility criteria are met
2. **Planning & Consultation:** Several rounds of open consultations in which all interested parties are invited; definition of prioritization process with input from civil society and government departments
3. **Implementation of Reforms:** Continuance of active collaboration between government and civil society to monitor and support implementation
4. **Evaluation & Improvement:** Consideration of recommendations from the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) to inform the next action plan

Success stories in the Americas

Open Budget Transparency Portal of Brazil

The Brazilian Federal Government has developed a tool that aims to increase its fiscal transparency through open government budget data. As the quality and quantity of data on the portal have improved over the past decade, the [Transparency Portal](#) (link available in Portuguese) is now one of the country's primary anti-corruption tools, registering an average of 900,000 unique visitors each month. Local governments throughout Brazil and three other Latin American countries have modeled similar financial transparency initiatives after Brazil's Transparency Portal.

T3010 Charity Information Return Data in Canada

In 2013, the Charities Directorate of the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) opened all [T3010 Registered Charity Information Return data](#) since 2000 via the government's data portal under a commercial open data license. The resulting data set has been used to explore the state of the non-profit sector, improve advocacy by creating a common understanding between regulators and charities, and create intelligence products for donors, fundraisers and grant-makers.

Lobby Law in Chile: Democratizing Access to Public Authorities

A 10-year campaign to regulate influence peddling was given a boost by an explicit commitment included in the first Chilean action plan to introduce legislation to regulate lobbying – a commitment since fulfilled. The resulting [Lobbying Act](#) and [InfoLobby](#) (links available in Spanish) were designed to address two critical issues: first, reducing influence peddling by creating a system of comprehensive transparency of authorities' and elected officials' agendas, travel, and donations; second, providing mechanisms and opportunities to improve citizen's access to authorities. They shed new light on the relationship between officials and influence groups and are beginning to democratize access to authorities.

Success stories in the Americas

Empowering Indigenous Populations in Costa Rica

Exclusion from decision-making processes has placed indigenous populations among the most underrepresented and underserved in the country; for example, they were only granted the right to vote in 1991. The Bribri-Cabecar Indigenous Network (RIBCA, in Spanish), is an organization formed by the indigenous communities in the Costa Rican Atlantic representing about a third of Costa Rican indigenous territories to empower and strengthen their participation in the decision-making processes that affect them. Through the OGP they were able to accelerate the co-creation of a standard consultation mechanism for indigenous people with resources and a neutral entity to apply it in a fair way, a process that was halted for 23 years. Today, more than 20 public institutions are engaged with RIBCA, and results have similarly multiplied to improve public service delivery.

Project “Improve Your School” in Mexico

For years, education in Mexico has generally lagged behind standards in other, comparable countries, while a larger portion of its budget on education than any other member of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development. To address this issue, [Improve Your School](#) (link available in Spanish), a public, independent, non-profit initiative was adopted by the Mexican Institute for Competitiveness with support from Omidyar Network, premised on the belief that education would improve only with the active commitment of all members of the educational community, including parents. An online platform was created targeting parents, allowing them to get to know, compare, grade and improve their schools. A second component focused on public policy highlighting issues of transparency and corruption. This has provided parents with previously inaccessible information, improved accountability and brought to light many cases of corruption within the educational system, leading to policy changes to prevent this.

Peer exchange and working groups

The OGP has established six thematic working groups that contribute to peer exchange and learning across the partnership. This working group structure is currently being revised by the OGP.

- [LEGISLATIVE OPENNESS WORKING GROUP](#) led by the National Democratic Institute and the Congress of Chile
- [OPEN DATA WORKING GROUP](#) led by World Wide Web Foundation and the Government of Canada
- [ACCESS TO INFORMATION WORKING GROUP](#) led by Carter Center and Mexico's Federal Institute for Access to Public Information and Data Protection
- [FISCAL OPENNESS WORKING GROUP](#) led by the Global Initiative for Fiscal Transparency, the Federal Secretary of Budget and Planning of the Government of Brazil, and the International Budget Partnership
- [OPENNESS IN NATURAL RESOURCES WORKING GROUP](#) led by Natural Resources Governance Institute, the World Resources Institute, and the governments of Indonesia and Mexico
- [ANTI-CORRUPTION WORKING GROUP](#) led by Transparency International, Open Society Foundations and the governments of UK, Georgia, and Brazil
- [OPEN CLIMATE WORKING GROUP](#) led by the World Resources Institute and the Government of France



ParlAmericas contributes to the efforts of the Legislative Openness Working Group by promoting legislative openness in the Americas and the Caribbean through its [Open Parliament Network](#). This Network provides workshops, facilitates peer to peer exchanges and produces tools for legislators, such as this [Road Map towards Legislative Openness](#).

Role of parliaments in the OGP

Parliaments play a critical role in the achievement of OGP objectives and in ensuring the sustainability of this initiative throughout electoral cycles and changes in governments. It is important for legislators to be aware of the open government agenda, the role of the OGP, the benefits of these initiatives for the work of the legislature and for citizens' lives, and to build cross-partisan support to continue prioritizing and monitoring this work. Legislators can directly contribute to these efforts in a variety of ways:

Enacting Legislation on Openness

By some counts, around 15 percent of OGP commitments require legislative action. Oftentimes, this includes enacting legislation that would alter the country's governance or integrity framework, such as freedom of information laws, lobbying and political finance regulations, and open data laws. Through advancing such legislation, OGP can also provide a fruitful opportunity for dialogue between the executive and legislative branches. For example, the Chilean Congress has initiated meetings with the executive branch to strategize over legislative priorities to be included in the national action plan.

Conducting Government Oversight

According to the OGP Support Unit, several parliaments have received testimony from OGP's Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) researchers, including: Canada, Dominican Republic, and Guatemala. The IRM reports aim to serve as an independent, objective review of government effectiveness in implementing OGP commitments. These objective, external reviews can be an extremely useful input to legislatures as they conduct oversight and seek to ensure that NAP commitments are effectively implemented.

Submitting Commitments to NAPs

Some parliaments have participated in OGP by submitting commitments as part of the NAP. Including legislative commitments in the NAP helps ensure that they are consistent with OGP values, developed collaboratively with civil society, and subject to the IRM process.

Creating Open Parliament Action Plans

A number of parliaments have instead chosen to develop their own action plans on legislative openness in consultation with local civil society, in many cases following a very similar process to the national action plan. The legislatures of Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala and Paraguay have adopted this approach. These plans can now be incorporated as a chapter of the country's National Action Plan and be subject to the IRM process.

Advocating for OGP Participation

Parliaments can be help advocate for a country to join OGP by raising awareness and expressing support for membership. Additionally, when a country does not meet OGP's eligibility criteria, parliament can play an important role in helping to advance the needed reforms.

Communicating OGP Commitments to Citizens

Given their representation function, parliamentarians are in a unique position to raise citizens' awareness of the open government commitments undertaken by their respective governments. Through communicating this information, they can contribute to building momentum for these reforms within the population, encourage citizens to participate in these processes and enable them to hold their governments accountable to these commitments.

Additional Resources



[Open Government Partnership Brochure](#)

To find out more about the OGP, its structure, processes and how national and subnational governments can participate.



Parliaments as Partners for Open Government Reform

For examples where OGP has successfully partnered with parliaments to date and how such partnerships could be deepened to develop and implement more ambitious open government reforms.



[A Toolkit for Advancing Legislative Openness](#)

To enrich the efforts of parliaments and their civil society counterparts to engage in collaborative processes aimed at developing and implementing openness commitments.

Parliamentarians collaborating with civil society at a regional level

ParlAmericas' [Open Parliament Network](#) fosters collaboration between parliamentarians and civil society representatives through dialogue at regional gatherings and co-creation sessions to develop parliamentary resources. To strengthen this relationship, ParlAmericas signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the [Latin American Network for Legislative Transparency](#) at its 2nd gathering in March 2017 in Costa Rica.

OGP Status of Countries in the Americas and the Caribbean



Antigua and Barbuda
Not participating



Argentina
Participating since 2012
2 Action Plans



The Bahamas
Not participating



Barbados
Not participating



Belize
Not participating



Bolivia
Not participating



Brazil
Participating since 2011
3 Action Plans



Canada
Participating since 2011
3 Action Plans



Chile
Participating since 2011
3 Action Plans



Colombia
Participating since 2011
3 Action Plans



Costa Rica
Participating since 2011
3 Action Plans



Cuba
Not participating



Dominica
Not participating



Dominican Republic
Participating since 2011
3 Action Plans



Ecuador
Not participating



El Salvador
Participating since 2011
3 Action Plans



Grenada
Not participating



Guatemala
Participating since 2011
3 Action Plans



Guyana
Eligible but not
participating



Haiti
Not participating



Honduras
Participating since 2011
3 Action Plans



Jamaica
Submitted letter of
intent in 2016



Mexico
Participating since 2011
3 Action Plans



Nicaragua
Not participating



Panama
Participating since 2011
3 Action Plans



Paraguay
Participating since 2011
3 Action Plans



Peru
Participating since 2011
3 Action Plans



Saint Kitts and Nevis
Not participating



Saint Lucia
Not participating



**Saint Vincent and the
Grenadines**
Not participating



Suriname
Not participating



Trinidad and Tobago
Participating since 2013
1 Action Plan



United States
Participating since 2011.
3 Action Plans



Uruguay
Participating since 2011
3 Action Plans



Venezuela
Not participating



ParlAmericas is the institution that promotes **PARLIAMENTARY DIPLOMACY** in the **INTER-AMERICAN SYSTEM**



ParlAmericas is composed of the 35 **NATIONAL LEGISLATURES** from North, Central and South America and the Caribbean



ParlAmericas facilitates the exchange of parliamentary **BEST PRACTICES** and promotes **COOPERATIVE POLITICAL DIALOGUE**



ParlAmericas mainstreams **GENDER EQUALITY** by advocating for women's political empowerment and the application of a gender lens in legislative work



ParlAmericas fosters **OPEN PARLIAMENTS** by advancing the principles of transparency, accountability, citizen participation, ethics and probity



ParlAmericas promotes policies and legislative measures to mitigate and adapt to the effects of **CLIMATE CHANGE**



ParlAmericas works towards strengthening democracy and governance by accompanying **ELECTORAL PROCESSES**



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