



1st Meeting of the ParlAmericas Parliamentary Staff Network on Open Parliament

#ParlAmericasOPN

In collaboration with the National Assembly of Panama, ParlAmericas organized the 1st Meeting of the Parliamentary Staff Network on Open Parliament, creating a dedicated space for the exchange open parliament experiences and good practices that they implement in their respective parliaments. This new space, created within the framework of the ParlAmericas Open Parliament Network, recognizes the crucial role of parliamentary staff in ensuring the sustainability and effective advancement of the open parliament agenda at an institutional level.

THEME

Open parliament pillars

LOCATION

Panama City, Panama

DATE

December 4-5, 2019

PARTICIPANTS

More than 25 parliamentary staff members, parliamentarians, and civil society representatives from 11 countries in Latin America

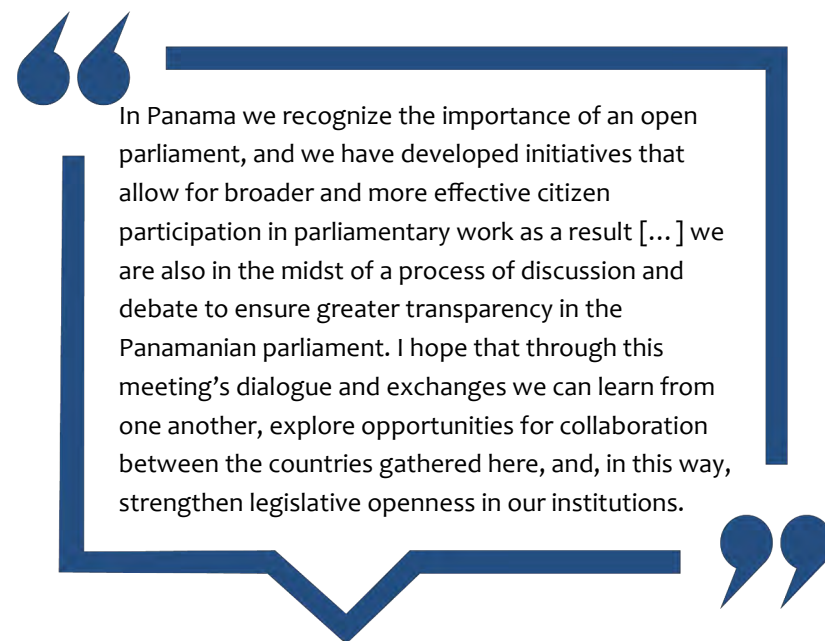


This activity is aligned with SDG 16

Welcoming remarks

The meeting opened with remarks by **Quibián Panay**, Secretary General of the National Assembly of Panama, and Member of the National Assembly **Fernando Arce** (Panama), ParlAmericas Board Member. Afterwards, parliamentary staff were invited to deliver brief presentations on good practices and challenges related to accountability in their respective parliaments. Representatives from [Brazil](#), [Chile](#), [Costa Rica](#), [Dominican Republic](#), [Ecuador](#), [Guatemala](#), [Honduras](#), [Mexico](#), [Panama](#), [Paraguay](#), and [Peru](#) highlighted forums, fairs, and public hearings, digital tools like mobile applications, and standardized reports on parliamentary travel and on the annual results of the legislature, among others, as good practices that their institutions are implementing.

During the meeting, Member of the National Assembly **Elizabeth Cabezas** (Ecuador), President of ParlAmericas, stressed the importance of efforts to ensure legislative openness as a way of restoring citizen confidence. Advancing the principles of open parliament is a duty shared by all, including legislators and public officials. It is crucial that the legislatures have highly educated and well-trained parliamentary staff, as this contributes to the institutionalization of parliament. Empowering parliamentary staff and strengthening their skills is key to implementation and sustainability of open parliament reforms, initiatives and action plans.



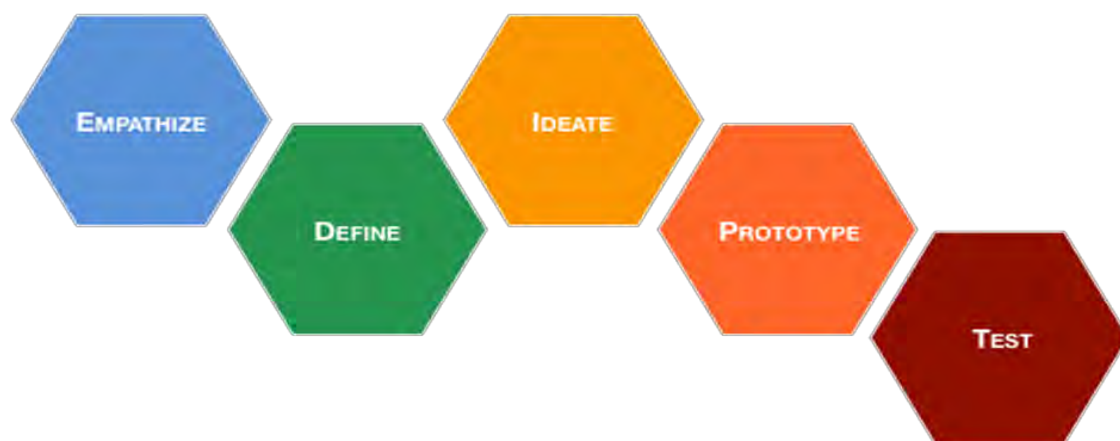
Quibián Panay, Secretary General of the National Assembly of Panama

Working sessions

The meeting's working sessions allowed for the exchange of experiences and good practices on parliamentary transparency and access to information, accountability, and citizen participation, as well as a greater understanding of the "design thinking" methodology for the creation and redesign of public services and programs provided by parliaments. The meeting concluded with an international panel on open parliament, during which the experiences of Chile, Ecuador, and Panama in implementing open parliament action plans and other related initiatives were shared. This activity served as the official launch of the ParlAmericas Parliamentary Staff Network on Open Parliament.

Working session 1: Strengthening parliamentary services for citizens

In the first session, the design thinking methodology was discussed as a tool to support the creation and redesign of parliamentary services and programs. According to **César Bazán**, Professor of Public Innovation at the University of the Pacific in Peru and General Manager of the consultancy firm Innovation for Development ([presentation](#)), this methodology has five fundamental steps: empathize, define, ideate, prototype and evaluate. These five steps seek to create a greater understanding of the needs of users, making them participants in the creation process. This session was interactive and facilitated discussions among participants, who implemented the five steps with practical cases linked to their parliamentary work. The working groups culminated with brief presentations on the discussions held.



It is naïve to think that one solution will work for every citizen of a country. There are differences between the needs of a journalist, a mom desperate to help her daughter, and a school principal. First of all, we need to identify the different types of users for whom we work, the everyday citizen. I invite you to stop thinking that everyone has to come to parliament, and that instead, the parliament goes out and familiarize itself with its country, and all the realities for which it legislates.



Cesar Bazán, Professor of Public Innovation, University of the Pacific and General Manager of Innovation for Development

Working session 2: Exploring a model of institutional accountability for parliament



Moderated by María Inés Ramírez, Project Coordinator for the Institutional Development and External Cooperation Department of the Senate of Paraguay, the second working session focused on parliamentary accountability, including identifying its most important aspects, the mechanisms for its institutionalization, relevant stakeholders, and good practices. Through a video conference, **Khemvirg Puente**, Professor at the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences of the National Autonomous University of Mexico ([presentation](#)), shared key concepts of parliamentary accountability, its relationship with the democratic system, the types of parliamentary accountability (horizontal, vertical and diagonal) and good practices, focusing on lessons from the [Consultative Council of the TV Channel of the Congress of Mexico](#), which he chairs.

This session ended with working groups, where participants discussed and contributed to a draft toolkit on the subject, highlighting relevant stakeholders and information that should be included in this publication, as well as the main challenges to be addressed. Topics discussed included the publication of the parliament's budget and expenses, public procurement rules and policies, an annual report on parliamentary work, a registry of parliamentary staff and political advisers working in the different areas and departments of the parliament, internal and external audits, standardized reports on salaries, benefits, office expenses, trips and gifts received by parliamentarians, and the need to open the meetings of parliamentary decision-making bodies to the public. This publication will be launched shortly and will be included in the [ParlAmericas Open Parliament Portal](#).



Accountability is possible in parliaments with a high degree of institutionalization, which is generally understood as the process by which parliaments build capacity and autonomy that is not limited to political affairs, but that extends to technical expertise. This is possible when we offer professional development services, and a meritocratic system that allows for the continuity of employment that is not dependent on partisan changes in the composition of parliamentary staff.



Khemvirg Puente, Professor at the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, National Autonomous University of Mexico



Contributions of Open Parliament officials to the Accountability Toolkit

The following table includes the contributions made in the working groups towards a draft Parliamentary Accountability Toolkit.



Key aspects necessary to strengthen accountability:

- Political will
- Internal regulations for its institutionalization
- Empowerment of citizens
- Independent regulatory body or entity
- Transparency
- Gender equality policy



Relevant stakeholders in parliamentary accountability:

- Board of Directors of the Parliament
- Presidency
- Secretary General or general management
- Administrative secretariat
- Access to information and transparency unit
- Internal regulatory bodies
- Citizen participation unit
- Human Resources directorate
- Internal and external audit offices or committees
- Finance directorate
- Civil society

Administrative Accountability

Actions related to **budget and spending**

- Publish the updated parliamentary budget online
- Facilitate the visualization of information on the budget, expenses and public procurement in simple and clear language
- Include information or links to these topics in the main page of the parliament's website

Actions related to **public procurement**

- Adjust national policies and platforms for public procurement in parliament
- Publish the rules and procedures established for public procurement

Actions related to **legislative reports**

- Establish or strengthen the Institutional Development or Strategic Management Unit of Parliament for the coordination and implementation of parliamentary accountability
- Publish a grievance log of citizen complaints
- Prepare a simplified and clear report for citizens on legislative work and the management of parliament, including the organizational goals of each unit
- Establish or strengthen the digitalization of documents and a historical archive organized by parliamentary period

Actions related to **parliamentary staff**

- Establish on the website a mechanism for the interactive search of an updated registry of civil servants and officials
- Identify and publish the range of salaries of officials by functions and gender

Actions related to **audits**

- Include and register open parliament action plans that seek to address the observations made in audits

Actions related to the **opening of meetings in parliament.**

- Ensure the opening of meetings of all parliamentary bodies

Actions for **greater transparency**

- Facilitate real-time public access to data related to accountability
- Establish or strengthen a system of direct access to laws, as well as real-time tracking of legislative activities
- Systematize and document the actions taken in favor of accountability

Accountability of parliamentarians

Actions related to *salaries*

- ➡ Include the remuneration of legislators, parliamentary expenses in representation tasks and other responsibilities, as well as discounts established by law
- ➡ Register the subsidies granted to parliamentarians, such as residence bonuses and transportation fares (air/land travel)
- ➡ Publish the disaggregated costs for each item that each parliamentarian receives

Actions related to *office expenses*

- ➡ Prepare a report on allocated resources such as telephone, parking costs, vehicles and other equipment
- ➡ Publish the details related to the liquidation of revolving funds and petty cash
- ➡ Include an annual report of the financial expenses implemented by each parliamentary office
- ➡ Record expenses related to parliamentary activities

Actions related to *parliamentary staff*

- ➡ Publish the financial statements of staff members

Actions related to *trips and gifts*

- ➡ Publish the financial statements of parliamentarians
- ➡ Establish or strengthen a registry of lobbyist

Action related to the *annual report*

- ➡ Publish a record of attendance to the plenary sessions and commissions
- ➡ Include conflicts of interest for each legislator



Working session 3: Good practices in citizen participation

Moderated by **Juan Carlos Chavarría**, Director of the Citizens Participation Department of the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica, this session's objective was to highlight good practices in citizen participation from the National Assembly of Panama, shared from the perspectives of parliament and civil society. From the perspective of parliament, **Eira Santamaría**, Director of the National Directorate for the Promotion of Citizen Participation of the National Assembly of Panama ([presentation](#)), presented the most relevant results from their programs, which included citizen consultations, a national youth parliament, national fairs and the process for the presentation of bills by citizens. Representing civil society, **Elia López de Tulipano**, General Coordinator of the National Forum of Women in Political Parties (FONAMUPP) ([presentation](#)), highlighted her organization's experience presenting a citizen initiative, commending the process and work of the National Directorate for the Promotion of Citizen Participation. Both speakers emphasized the opportunities for collaboration between Parliament and civil society organizations, identifying permanent dialogues and access to clear information as key to increase collaboration.



Promoting citizen participation in the law making and government oversight processes is essential in order to foster positive changes in our countries.



Eira Santamaría (Panama),
Director of the Unit for the
Promotion of Citizen
Participation of the National
Assembly

Since 1995, FONAMUPP is part of the National Commission of Electoral Reforms. Our first experiences carrying out citizen initiatives were within the framework of electoral reforms to pass the Law on Quotas for Women.



Elia López de Tulipano,
General Coordinator of the
National Forum of Women in
Political Parties (FONAMUPP)

Working session 4: Toolkit on transparency and access to public information

ParlAmericas and the Transparency and Access to Information Network (RTA), with the valuable support of EUROsociAL +, are developing a toolkit that aims to strengthen transparency and access to parliamentary information. To this end, two meetings were held in Brazil and Costa Rica with institutional representatives from the parliaments of Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica and Paraguay, to lay the foundation and structure of this publication. In this session, **María José Méndez**, EUROsociAL + Consultant ([presentation](#)), reported on the progress of this toolkit and raised questions to the participants about key aspects of transparency and access to information in parliament. The attendees had the opportunity to exchange ideas on the subject using a virtual survey that was conducted during the session. The contributions made at the meeting will be incorporated in the publication of this toolkit, which will be available on the ParlAmericas Open Parliament Portal.

The project to develop a Legislative Transparency Toolkit supports the promotion and implementation of good practices in transparency and access to information in parliaments, with the participation of legislative bodies from Argentina, Paraguay, Chile and Costa Rica, and oversight bodies from Honduras, Mexico, Uruguay and Spain.



María José Méndez,
EUROsociAL + Consultant

Support and commitment from the highest authorities in parliament is fundamental to the success of transparency and accountability projects, as well as awareness-raising campaigns to foster a culture of integrity. Sharing good practices with other countries helps us to strengthen and improve these efforts.



Patricia Letona, Director of
the Access to Information
Unit of the Congress of the
Republic of Guatemala



International Panel on Open Parliament

The meeting concluded with an International Panel on Open Parliament to share experiences from open parliament initiatives and action plans in Latin America. Member of the National Assembly Elizabeth Cabezas (Ecuador), President of ParlAmericas; Luis Rojas, Assistant Secretary General of the Chamber of Deputies of Chile; and Member of the National Assembly **Fernando Arce** (Panama), ParlAmericas Board Member presented in this panel. **Elizabeth Cabezas** ([presentation](#)) highlighted regional and global initiatives, including open parliament commitments and action plans, and presented on the actions Ecuador is taking to continue strengthening legislative openness. **Luis Rojas** ([presentation](#)) focused his presentation on the most relevant aspects of the action plans that Chile has developed and implemented, emphasizing the importance of these efforts in restoring public trust in parliament. Finally, Fernando Arce highlighted good practices in citizen participation and transparency in Panama, mentioning the most relevant results of these initiatives.

“Parliamentary staff are a fundamental part of the sustainability and effective implementation of action plans, commitments, and initiatives to advance greater transparency, accountability, citizen participation, and ethics in the legislature.”



Member of the National Assembly **Fernando Arce** (Panama), ParlAmericas Board Member

“The right to accountability means that citizens can demand accountability from authorities and public officials, who have the obligation to take responsibility for decisions made.”



Member of the National Assembly **Elizabeth Cabezas** (Ecuador), President of ParlAmericas

“Through all our action plans, we have met with civil society organizations from different fields. For the current action plan, we brought together 100 organizations, with whom we carried out working groups to develop commitments. It is important to do this together with citizens. We do not achieve anything by imposing from above.”



Luis Rojas, Deputy Secretary General of the Chamber of Deputies of Chile

Countries represented



Brazil



Mexico



Chile



Panama



Costa Rica



Paraguay



Ecuador



Peru



Guatemala



Dominican Republic



Honduras

Canada



This gathering was made possible with the generous support of the Parliament of Panama and the Government of Canada through Global Affairs Canada.

NEXT STEPS FOR THE PARLAMERICAS PARLIAMENTARY STAFF NETWORK ON OPEN PARLIAMENT:

- Create a guiding document on the Network's goals and targets to allow for the evaluation of its progress at each meeting;
- Determine a main theme for each meeting that parliaments will present reports on to facilitate understanding of how the legislative branch is advancing on these issues;
- Establish a list of parliamentary staff that includes their areas of expertise, interest, and work to encourage the sharing of experiences and good practices through the ParlAmericas Open Parliament Portal;
- Offer training by parliamentary staff who have progressed on a specific area of legislative openness to others who are beginning similar work to serve as an input to their processes and encourage collaborative work;
- Collaborate with the Latin American Network for Legislative Transparency to contribute to the new methodology for the legislative transparency index and its implementation.

ParlAmericas Podcasts

Find ParlAmericas on [iTunes](#) and [Google Play](#) to listen to the sessions of our meetings.



PARLAMERICAS



ParlAmericas is the institution that promotes **PARLIMENTARY 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 PARLIMENTS** 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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