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Summary report on open government consultations October 2017 – August 2018

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Octobre 2017 à août 2018

What We Heard – Summary Report

From Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat

Summary report on open government consultations October 2017 – August 2018

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About this report

Canada releases National Action Plans on Open Government every two years. These plans outline specific actions, developed through dialogue with stakeholders, to advance open and transparent government. This report explains the dialogue process, summarizes what Canadians told us, and details our analysis process.

Public participation is a pillar of open government, and is incredibly important to us. We want to be a model for effective and transparent citizen engagement, so we are capturing our process, results, and lessons learned as thoroughly as possible. We are also continuously trying to raise the bar for our development process, so we welcome your feedback.

- To review the final commitments, read the [2018-2020 National Action Plan on Open Government](#)
- To review and analyze the raw data, download the [datasets of all consultation input](#)
- To learn about the process and our summary of what we heard, please continue through either the [executive summary](#) or the full report

Executive summary

▼ In this section

- New or notable
 - Digital meets open
 - Evolving open data use cases
 - Protecting healthy democracy
- From insight to action
- Acknowledgements

National Action Plans on Open Government set direction for the open government movement in Canada and in more than 70 countries around the world. These plans are a way for the government to communicate to citizens about the ways we are responding to their priorities and concerns. National Action Plans also allow citizens to hold us accountable for our progress.

Plans are built through months-long discussions with our stakeholder community. This process takes place in a number of phases:

- Planning and priority-setting
- Generating ideas for commitments
- Commenting on, debating, and refining ideas for commitments
- Drafting potential commitments
- Publicly reviewing draft commitments
- Finalizing the plan

Open Government Engagement Cycle



▼ Figure 1: Text version

The Open Government Engagement Cycle consists of 6 different phases:

1. **Planning**
September to October 2017
Solicit involvement and community suggestions on priorities and approach. Establish partnerships.
2. **Shaping**
October 2017 to April 2018
Generate ideas and refinements. Gather and analyze data. Develop potential commitment list. Digital and in-person engagement aligned with third party events.
3. **Drafting**
April to June 2018
Integrate results and co-create commitments. Prepare comment disposition. Confirm delivery partnerships.
4. **Reviewing**
July 2018
Cabinet and digital public review of draft plan.

5. Finalizing

August 2018 – September 2018

Integrate comments from public. Collaborate as required to accommodate changes. Publish final plan, What We Heard report and comment data.

6. Implementing

October 2018 – November 2020

Facilitation, project management and reporting as commitments go live.

These 6 phases are arranged around a core of listening, responding and learning:

- Ongoing social media, email, onsite comments.
- Categorization, analysis and reporting of what we are hearing and doing.
- Ongoing review of process and continuous improvement.

The public is involved in each phase. For example, during the planning phase we heard:

- requests for the open government team to attend particular community conferences
- priorities for thematic sessions
- recommendations for specific outreach channels, like Reddit.

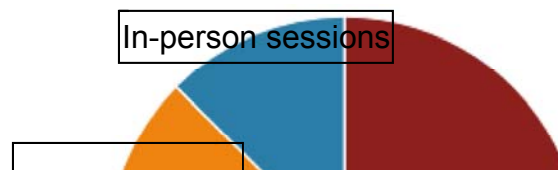
We incorporate public feedback into the plan development process at every opportunity.

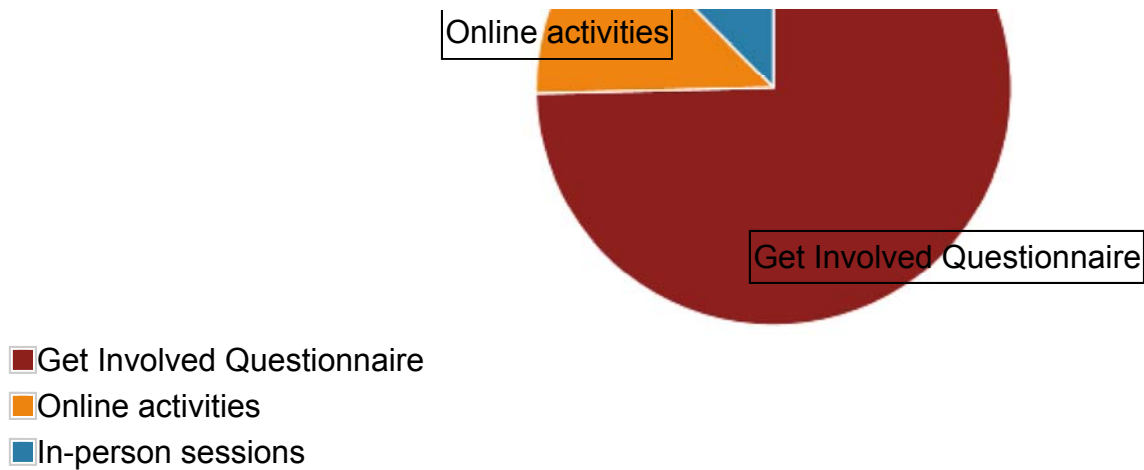
We designed the development process for Canada's 2018-2020 National Action Plan on Open Government to be broad, inclusive, and multi-channelled. We wanted to learn and experiment with new techniques, particularly for inclusive engagement. We also wanted to ensure that long-time followers and stakeholders had ample opportunity to shape Canada's 4th Plan. Here's a summary of the process:

- 8,214 participants responded to our Get Involved questionnaire to set broad priorities for the plan
- 1,384 participants attended one of 49 online and in-person events across the country to share and develop ideas for commitments. These events included workshops, webinars, conference sessions, kiosks at community events, meetings, and teleconferences
- 1,414 participants shared ideas or commented on others' ideas online via open.canada.ca, Twitter, and Reddit

Figure 2: Breakdown by channel

Participants



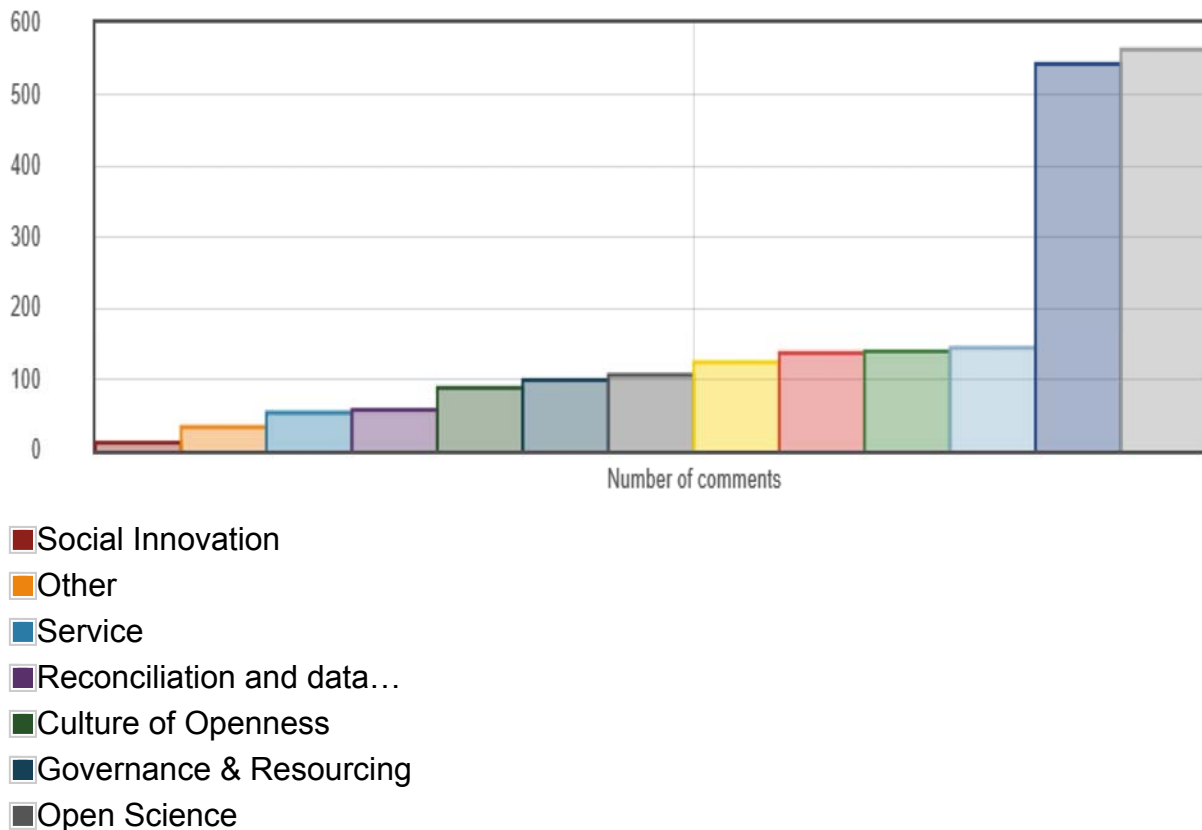


► Figure 2: Breakdown by channel - Table

We reached all sectors of Canadian society: academia, the private sector, the public sector, the charitable and not-for-profit sector, the media, and many interested citizens. We also spent time discussing open government and open data with Indigenous peoples.

We collected and transcribed every written, emailed, or spoken comment provided in every forum and built a master dataset of the ideas and concerns. We analyzed that dataset, and categorized all the comments and ideas by theme. This is the breakdown of the themes we saw in the data:

Figure 3: Number of comments by theme



- Open Information
- User Centric
- Financial Transparency
- Education
- Open Data
- Open Dialogue

► Figure 3: Number of comments by theme - Table

To see all comments by themes, see: [Open Government Consultation Data: 2017-18](#)

The core of the open government movement remains the same: open dialogue and open data. You told us to raise the bar on public engagement, making it easier for Canadians to make their voices heard in government. You also told us to make it easier for Canadians to access data and information, particularly on government spending and decision-making processes. You also identified many specific challenges for open government in current government systems and culture. We expand on all of these issues in the What We Heard report that follows this summary.

New or notable

For long-time observers of Canada's open government progress, we wanted to highlight themes that have emerged or evolved since previous National Action Plans, which you will see below. As well, it's worth noting that our engagement – and your input – is influenced by a number of external factors:

- The technological, social, and political environment is changing people's expectations and capabilities
- We are reaching a broader community of people who see a link between open government and their own interests or work
- Our progress to date on open government means we're learning from experience and we have to push further to keep advancing

Here's a short overview of significant shifts in your input since 2016:

Digital meets open

The concepts of digital government and open government are blurring together. For many of you, the idea of "open information" or accessible government starts with government services and online content. Findability, web architecture, and user experience were raised in almost every session we held.

Building on this, you asked for a human layer to the digital experience: you told us you wanted more contextual information on open data, including a direct line to the data owners. For services, policies, and programs, one of the top needs identified in our 8,000+ person questionnaire was “finding the right person to talk to.” This moves beyond the themes of our first 2 National Action Plans, where the feeling was that governments should release raw data and information and people would decide what to do with it.

Evolving open data use cases

Open data users are becoming more and more sophisticated, and are increasingly dependent on high-quality government services. A number of people we talked to during the National Action Plan development process were practically able to tell us the server uptime statistics for our website. We are seeing more open government use cases that pull constant feeds from open.canada.ca data for analysis and business intelligence. This makes clear the need for Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) and more real-time data.

Protecting healthy democracy

People are worried about the health of democracy worldwide and in Canada. There is a growing concern that trust in public institutions and democratic processes is eroding. Many of you saw the open government movement as a counterbalance to democratic decline, and saw opportunities for Canada to show leadership on this issue domestically and internationally. There’s a distinct hope that transparency and public engagement can support public trust in government, leading to stronger democracy.

From insight to action

The What We Heard report reflects our commitment to listen; the National Action Plan is our commitment to act. We believe that we have created a plan that responds to many of the ideas and concerns you shared with us. We also believe that the work we have committed to do will help make specific improvements to our open government efforts. For example, we have committed to make improvements to our open government portal, and we are planning to test and experiment with new ways to improve the Government of Canada’s approaches to public engagement. We have also ensured our commitments include specific deliverables, clear timelines, and measurable performance indicators. We invite you to review our commitments in Canada’s [2018-2020 National Action Plan on Open Government](#).

Acknowledgements

It would be impossible for us to thank everyone who contributed to making this engagement process a success. We appreciate every person who took the time to reach out to us, attend an event, ask a question, or make their voice heard.

In particular, we would like to acknowledge those organizations that helped us to organize engagement events, including:

- The Multi-Stakeholder Forum on Open Government
- Centre for Law and Democracy
- The Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue at Simon Fraser University

We would also like to thank partners from the Department of African Nova Scotian Affairs and the Black Business Initiative, as well as all members of the African Nova Scotian community who attended our Halifax engagement event.

Finally, we would like to thank partners from the British Columbia First Nations Information Governance Initiative and the Alberta First Nations Information Governance Centre, as well as all First Nations, Métis, and Inuit rights-holders and stakeholders who took the time to share their ideas and provide comments on draft commitments for the plan.

Introduction

Overview: Canada's National Action Plan on Open Government 2018-2020

Canada's National Action Plan on Open Government 2018-2020 was developed through consultations with Canadians, the Multi-Stakeholder Forum on Open Government, academia, other stakeholders, and government departments.

Canada joined the Open Government Partnership (OGP) in 2012, and has since been recognized for progress on open data, intergovernmental collaboration, public engagement, and results reporting. Building on that foundation, there was a clear desire to raise the level of ambition for Canada's 2018-2020 Plan. This stemmed from a desire to see maturity and impact in the open government movement, and for Canada to show leadership internationally. It also reflects a growing sense that open government is a crucial counterbalance to democratic decline around the world.

From that starting point, we focused on fewer, higher-impact commitments. Individually, they represent high-value and concrete steps forward. As a whole, we think the 10 commitments work together to make government more accessible to all Canadians, to open the doors to public policy-making across the spectrum, and to safeguard Canadian democracy for the long term.

We also wanted this plan to align with our priorities for the OGP. Canada was elected in 2017 to the Steering Committee of the OGP and as of October 1, 2018, will serve as the lead government chair until September 2019. There are three key priorities for Canada's co-chair year, chosen in collaboration with our civil society co-chair, Nathaniel Heller of Results for Development: **inclusion, participation and impact**.

Over the next two years, we will be reporting to Canadians about the work we are doing and our progress on implementing the plan. We will release a mid-term self-assessment report in fall 2019 and a final self-assessment report will be published once the implementation of the plan is complete. The OGP will also continue to provide an independent review of our progress through its Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM).

What follows is an explanation of how the plan came to be, and how public participation shaped the plan's commitments and sharpened our focus.

Engagement on Canada's National Action Plan on Open Government

▼ In this section

- [Overview of the engagement process](#)
- [Generating ideas and starting the conversation](#)
 - [Designing for productive conversation](#)
 - [Prioritizing inclusion and respect](#)
 - [Meeting the community where it was](#)
- [Methodology](#)
 - [Internal engagement](#)
 - [Open government workshops](#)
 - [Data analysis](#)

Overview of the engagement process

Our goal for engagement was to be as inclusive as possible, which meant greatly increasing the number and range of voices participating. We met with Canadians, the Multi-Stakeholder Forum on Open Government, civil society, businesses, academia and other sectors. We held in-person and online workshops and discussions. We tried to meet with communities at their locations, participating in a number of community conferences and events and asking questions on Twitter and Reddit.

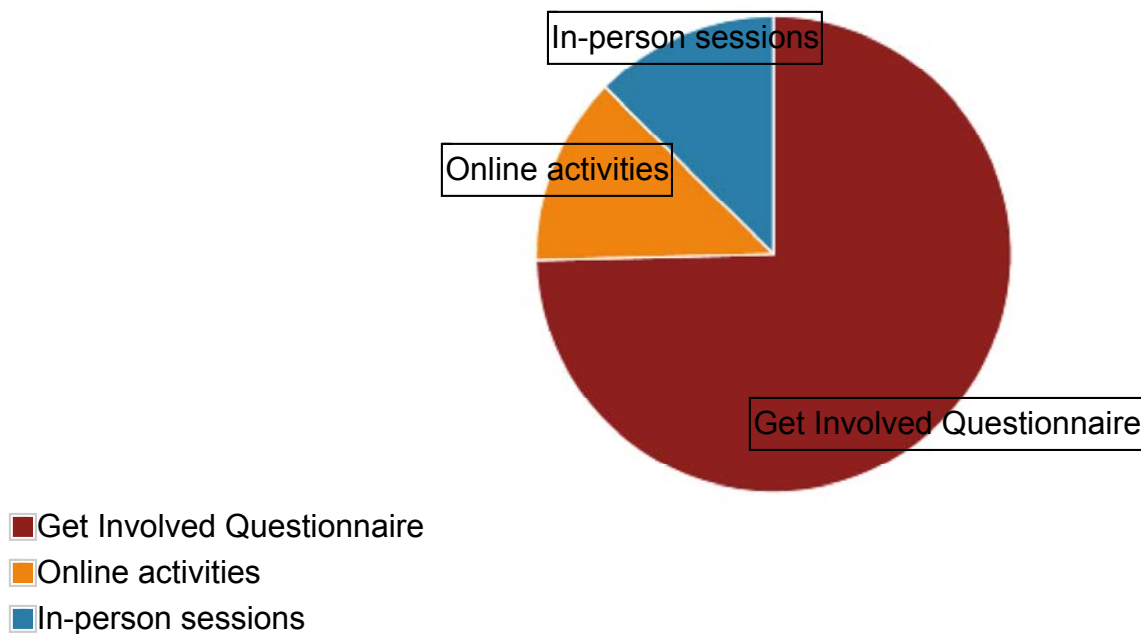
Our activities were structured in three phases.

First, we launched an online “Get Involved” questionnaire to generate a sense of priorities, both for the plan and for engagement sessions (here’s the data).

Second, we created a variety of forums to generate and develop potential commitment ideas.

Third, we asked for public feedback on draft commitment text.

Figure 4: Breakdown by channel (repeated)
Participants



► Figure 4: Breakdown by channel (repeated) - Table

Generating ideas and starting the conversation

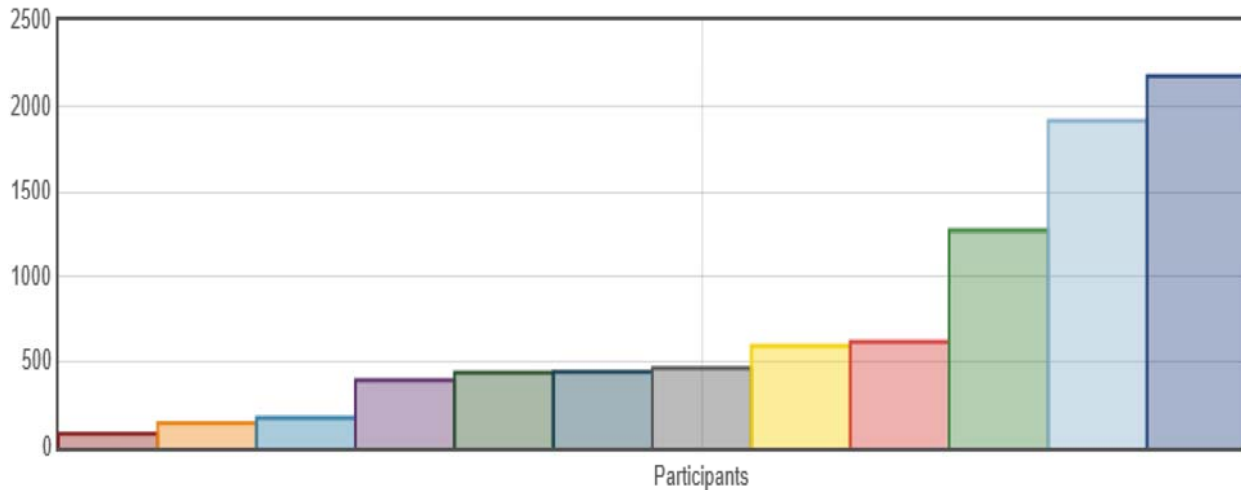
The idea-generating and development phase was a broad and multi-channel exercise. This section outlines the in-person and online events that brought the community together, and the design considerations that drove the engagement.

We received a total of 5,206 comments from these events, meetings, emails, and

open.canada.ca user feedback.

Since our 2016 engagement, we increased the diversity of backgrounds and sectors participating, though the federal government remains the most common sector participating.

Figure 5: Breakdown of participants



- Media
- MunGov
- Indigenous
- Other
- PTGov
- Student
- Academia
- Non-profit
- Retired
- Business
- Individual
- FedGov

► Figure 5: Breakdown of participants - Table

To increase reach and to try to dig deep into particular topics, we held online thematic tables on open data, feminist open government, inclusive policy-making, and financial. At the same time, we conducted in-person consultations to try to ensure we reached Canadians in their own communities. We held public in-person workshops in 13 different cities across both official language communities:

- Calgary
- Edmonton
- Fredericton

- Halifax
- Kitchener-Waterloo
- Montréal
- Ottawa
- Québec City
- Regina
- Toronto
- Vancouver
- Victoria
- Whitehorse
- Winnipeg

Designing for productive conversation

As open government matures, we have found that we needed to spend more time on more specific topics to work through the history, context, and next steps. Increasingly, we have designed sessions based on specific themes to guide discussion, rather than holding sessions focused on open government generally. While there is value in discussing commitment ideas with people with a range of interests, we often found that there was too much breadth at workshop tables. For example, if someone attended to discuss access to information reform and sat with an open source software advocate, the space to discuss either important topic is suddenly cut in half.

As examples, we held themed sessions in Alberta on how open data can support the Canadian not-for-profit community, and met with University of Toronto students on how the digital world could support open policy making. Our session in Halifax with the African Nova Scotian community focused on inclusive, user-friendly open government.

Prioritizing inclusion and respect

We wanted to ensure that both our engagement process and our National Action Plan respected the spirit of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. We wanted to foster an ongoing dialogue with interested people to hear their perspectives on open government and the right directions for commitments. This included participating in a data governance gathering in partnership with the British Columbia First Nations Information Governance Initiative and meeting with people invited through the Alberta First Nations Information Governance Centre. These and other conversations were important and insightful, and informed the plan's approach to data governance and how open government can both impact, and support, Indigenous community-building.

Meeting the community where it was

The team had many opportunities to discuss open government during community events, including a Gatineau IAP2 Conference, the Student Policy Conference at the University of Ottawa, and the Privacy and Access Council of Canada Congress.

Methodology

We tracked everything we heard and every comment we received, regardless of whether it was said at a workshop, tweeted, emailed, or written online.

Internal engagement

Our engagement on the 2018-2020 National Action Plan was initially shaped by discussions with our colleagues in Government of Canada departments and agencies. We have a number of internal working groups we engage with regularly to advance openness and transparency initiatives government-wide. As we started designing our engagement process, we reached out to these working groups to ask them for their ideas and suggestions for the plan as well. Their input is not captured in our engagement dataset, but it did help to shape our early thinking about what we may have been able to include in the National Action Plan.

Later in the engagement process, as we started to build up a significant amount of data on what Canadians were telling us, we reached out to departments and agencies to ask how the Government of Canada could respond to your ideas.

For the open government team, this work was a balance of trying to be more ambitious in responding to your ideas and suggestions, while also staying realistic about what we can achieve within the 2-year timeline for the National Action Plan.

Open government workshops

During the idea-generating and development phase, in-person workshops were designed as a forum for open dialogue that could surface new and innovative ideas for the plan. Workshops followed the same agenda, usually over 2 to 2.5 hours. The sessions began with a short presentation on open government to date and how National Action Plans are developed. Participants then worked in smaller groups to discuss commitment ideas. Participants could also fill out individual feedback forms if their table discussions left out ideas that were important to them. Facilitator notes, table notes, and feedback forms were all collected and transcribed into the master dataset of input.

We also collected input during webinars through videoconferencing and polling software

(WebEx and Sli.do) as participants discussed ideas virtually.

Data analysis

We analyzed comments and ideas to categorize each one into a high-level theme and then a more granular sub-theme. This allowed us to create a high-level overview of the feedback, and it helped us to be more objective in identifying priority areas. It is one thing to read an idea and find it compelling, but it is also important to review analyzed data and see what issues most of our participants were talking about. For instance, we might hear ideas like “people need skills to use open data” (an open data theme) and “people need to understand government to engage” (an open dialogue theme) but we would only connect the two through the “civic literacy” subtheme. Thematic analysis allowed us to identify common threads across the input data and let us put figures and rigour around statements like “many of you told us that civic literacy is foundational to realizing the benefits of open government.”

We looked at previously identified themes (e.g., open data), and new potential areas of work (e.g., healthy democracy). Each comment was reviewed by at least three people to minimize personal bias and ensure the ideas were categorized consistently. We paid particular attention to ideas that had generated many comments or votes.

In parallel, we experimented with two different artificial intelligence (AI) platforms to assess the reliability of automated coding. We used previous manually-coded open government engagement input as training data. The accuracy rate was impressive for high-volume themes (e.g. open data and open dialogue) and less so for others (e.g. social innovation). We see a lot of potential for AI support for engagement data analysis in government, but only if we see a critical mass of departments adhering to a data framework and releasing open consultation data for comparability.

Because of this, for the development of the 2018-2020 National Action Plan we relied on our manual coding process to ensure that the analysis was reliable.

The following figure explains our process and how we worked with the data captured during our consultations.

Figure 6: Our process and how we worked with the data captured during our consultations



▼ Figure 6 - Text version

1. Engage and listen:
 - Get involved questionnaire.
 - Engagement activities online and in-person.
2. Document and collect:
 - Capture comments, transcribe, clean up, transform for consistency.
3. Group and analyze
 - Code for relevance and emerging themes.
 - Iterative reports, discovery & sense making.
4. Share, discuss and decide
 - Grouped comments shared with potential partners. Incorporated into draft commitments where possible.
5. Act and report
 - Data and What We Heard released with draft report. Implementation dashboard.

Outcomes

▼ In this section

- Open dialogue and open policymaking
 - Better engagement on policies, programs, and services

- Governance and accountability
- Open data
 - Data quality and standards
 - Connecting data and people
- User-centric thinking
 - User experience
 - Open data and access to information and privacy requests
- Financial transparency
 - Create a public registry of beneficial ownership
 - Demonstrate how public money is spent
- Open information
 - Access to information
 - Open information
- Governance and resourcing
 - Better communication and collaboration across all jurisdictions
 - Resourcing civil society and communities for engagement
- Open science
 - Open science for a better society
- Service
 - Become a more digital government
 - User-driven digital services
- Reconciliation
 - Build relationships based on respect and trust
 - Start with understanding
- Social innovation
 - Understand and support the social and not-for profit sector
- Other suggestions of note
 - Open parliament
 - Open data from smart cities initiatives and improved urban data
- Consultation on draft commitments
 - Feminist and inclusive peer review

“Open government should be just that - open government about [government] action (inaction), data, policy, decision making, public consultation - everything that the government does in its regular business that doesn’t compromise national security or personal information, should, ideally, be open.”

— Participant in Calgary session at the Privacy and Access Council of Canada Congress
(round brackets original)

We analyzed and assigned themes to ideas and comments based on what we were seeing in the data. During this stage, we used the following themes as a starting point:

1. open dialogue and policy
2. open data
3. user-centric thinking
4. financial transparency
5. open information
6. governance and resourcing
7. open science
8. service
9. reconciliation
10. social innovation

In the end, we developed 10 commitments that map to the above as follows:

1. **User-friendly open government** emerged from ideas primarily in the open data, open information, and service themes.
2. **Financial transparency and accountability** maps neatly to the financial transparency theme.
3. **Corporate transparency** was separated from the financial transparency theme during the analysis because it applies to the private sector, where the above commitment applies to the public service. It was also identified as a top priority for open government in Canada.
4. **Digital government and services** emerged from the service and user-centric thinking themes.
5. **Open science** overlaps with open data and open information, but was a distinct enough theme through both the analysis and commitment phases.
6. **Healthy democracy** emerged partially from conversations about the value of open data and open information, but was particularly prevalent during general discussions: when we asked you why open government was important and where the movement needed to go.

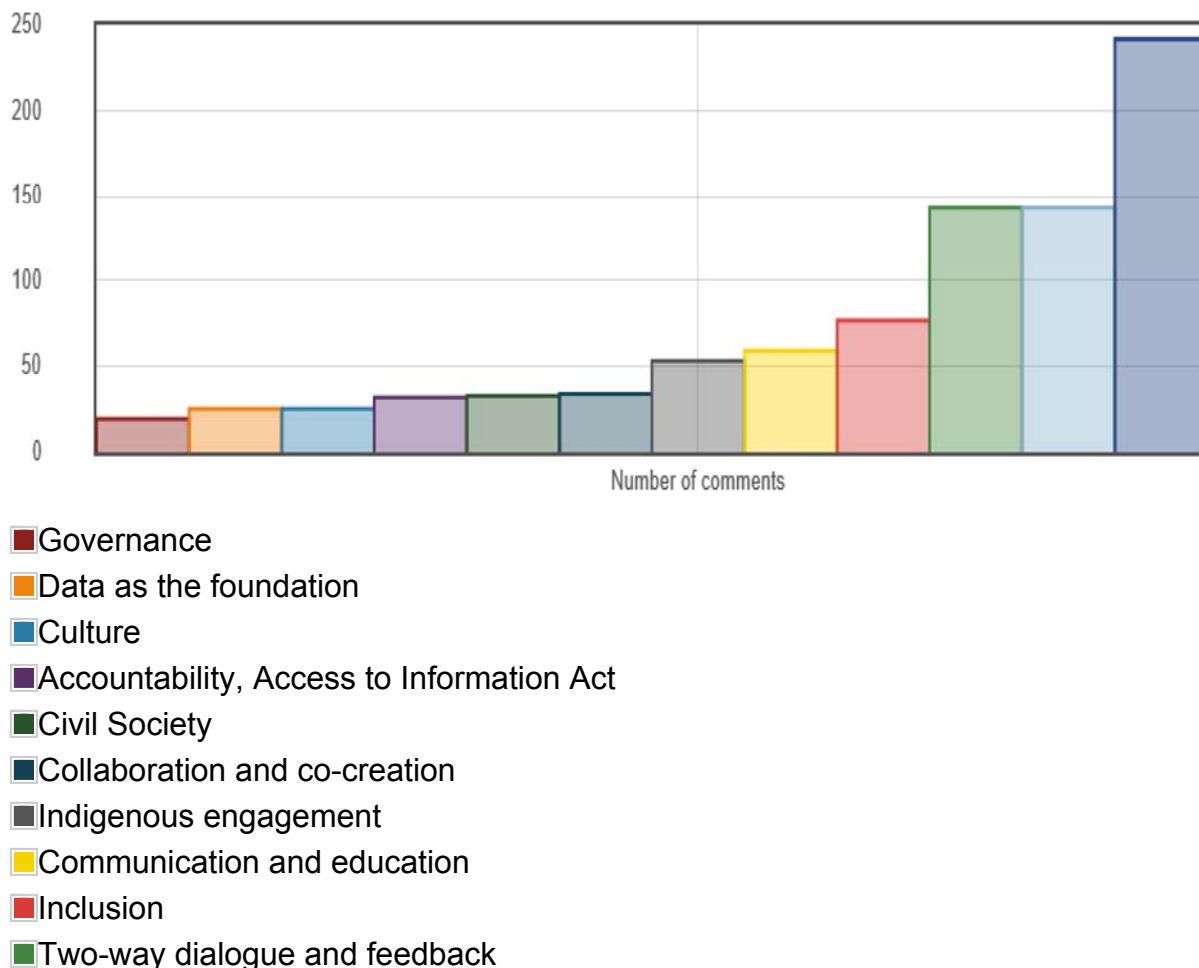
7. **Access to Information** was a distinct sub-theme within open information.
8. **Feminist and inclusive open government** emerged from many comments and concerns from the open dialogue and policy theme: about who gets to participate in that dialogue and what the power dynamics are. We also received comments about how we need to work to make sure open data and open information benefit everyone.
9. **Reconciliation and open government** maps neatly to the reconciliation theme, though concerns about inclusion, nation-to-nation approaches, and data governance appeared in the open dialogue and open data themes.
10. **Leadership and collaboration** represents a cross-section of all themes where the outcome could or should benefit from inter-jurisdictional or international standards, coordination, or collaboration.

A more detailed exploration of what we heard on each of the 10 themes above.

Open dialogue and open policymaking

Comments: 1,043

Figure 7: Open dialogue and open policy



Better engagement on policies, programs, and services

You told us that the Government of Canada should engage more frequently, in a more meaningful way, and should include marginalized communities across the country. You expressed a desire for truly open dialogue with government that represents and genuinely considers diverse perspectives at multiple stages of the policy process. You provided insight into the wide range of barriers that people might face in participating in public discussions. You also told us that we should be more collaborative and include Canadians in policy-making, not just in generating ideas or providing feedback on drafts, but throughout implementation and the evaluation of results.

“Better policies and programs: Open policymaking represents an opportunity to create and prioritize better programs and projects that are more in line with what is needed and desired by Canadians.”

— Participant at GovConnect Ottawa

We want to engage more in the coming years and be more inclusive. We’re committed to engaging in ways that ensure that the voices and experiences of marginalized and under-represented communities are represented. As part of our commitment on **Feminist and inclusive dialogue**, we will test ways to make government engagement and consultation processes more open to everyone, and share that learning across the Government of Canada. We’re taking steps to make engagement part of skills developed for federal public servants, and provide a guide for gender-based analysis in engagement processes.

“Principle for engagement should be to start with those who are impacted worst and most.”

— Participant in Toronto at the Spark! Social Innovation conference

Governance and accountability

You told us that you want us to be accountable for acting on people's contributions to engagement processes. You want us to communicate earlier and more clearly, and give feedback to communities after engaging with them. You also want us to have meaningful public participation in shaping open policy processes: who are we reaching out to, how we communicate, and what is done with the input.

We have included public engagement processes in many of our commitments, including commitments on **Corporate transparency**, **Digital government and services**, **Open science**, and **Access to Information**, to name a few. We are also working to make our processes more open and transparent to the public by publishing our open government consultation data.

The Government of Canada is working on a consultation data standard to encourage and enable more programs to release their full set of inputs, to create accountability and to facilitate external analysis. While this work is not reflected directly in our National Action Plan, we will continue to work with departments wherever possible to ensure they publish the results of their public engagement processes, and they explain how public input influenced policies, programs, and services.

“[You] need to get more people in the room (diversity).”

— Participant in Toronto at the School of Public Policy and Governance

“Are you ensuring platforms are accessible in the current engagement process? What have you done to include groups like Indigenous persons and persons with disabilities, so they do not experience barriers in participating in this important conversation?”

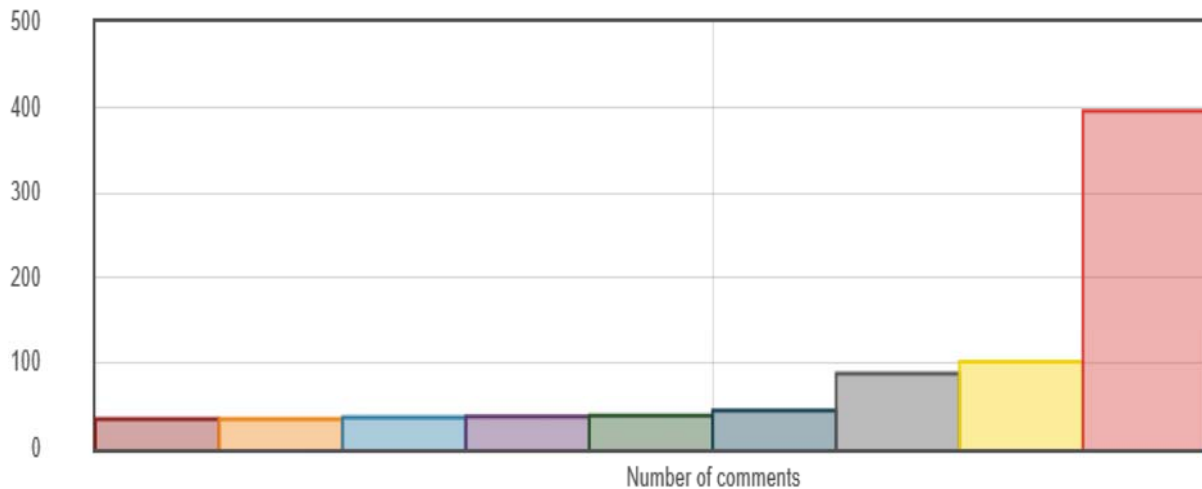
— Included in an RSVP to a webinar

We also received multiple calls to collect more demographic data about consultation participants, to track and to be held accountable for our outreach and inclusion efforts. After much discussion, we decided not to pursue a commitment in this direction, prioritizing participants' privacy instead. We worried that disclosing additional personal information might create barriers for precisely those people we were trying to reach. People can sometimes be less candid in their suggestions and comments if they feel government is collecting their data in order to track their input. For our engagement processes, the problem remains of how to balance the need to collect more detailed demographic information with the need to protect our participants' privacy.

Open data

Comments: 849

Figure 8: Open data



- Open.canada.ca improvements
- Privacy
- Governance and performance
- Communication and education
- Collaboration and co-creation
- User-centricity
- Specifics about data sets and formats
- Quality and Standards
- Value and principles for open data

► Figure 8: Open data - Table

Data quality and standards

One of the clearest themes from your input was that we need to do a lot more work on data: quality, standards, timeliness, and formats.

As part of our **User-friendly open government** commitment, we will be continuing our work to ensure that the data on open.canada.ca is high-quality and high value. We have committed to develop new data quality guidelines and a new data quality rating system. We have also committed to reviewing datasets already on open.canada.ca to ensure they meet the highest quality standards. Finally, as part of our **Open government community** commitment, we will work with partners in provincial and territorial governments on a pilot project to standardize five high-value datasets across Canada.

In previous National Action Plan cycles, we specifically sought out opinions on whether to prioritize data quality or maximize release. The principle we arrived at was “release early, improve often.” However, since then, we have heard an increasing number of stakeholders suggest that the approach should be to focus on high-quality and high-value datasets. We need to find a way to reconcile that request with our 2014 [open-by-default policy](#) and get the best of both worlds. This will be an ongoing focus of our work. For example, it will be addressed through the new Digital Policy for the Government of Canada, as outlined in our **Digital government and services** commitment.

We also heard more requests than ever for developer-friendly formats, real-time data updates, Application Programming Interfaces (APIs), and better standards for server uptime. The user base and use cases are diversifying over time, and we’re adjusting to evolving requirements. You also told us that there’s a lot of variance between federal organizations in data governance, and that we need more guidance available to enable consistency. To that end, we recently launched an [Open Government Guidebook](#), and we’re going to work with our partners across the Government of Canada to make sure the data offered on [open.canada.ca](#) is the best possible.

Connecting data and people

You told us that we should connect data with people. Specifically, you want us to:

- provide more context on how data was collected
- publish examples of how data has been used
- provide suggestions for civic technology projects or public problems to solve
- host thematic web-based information sessions about data holdings
- make it easier to reach out to data curators directly

At the core of this theme, we found a few foundational principles:

- having data online doesn’t mean it’s always findable or understandable
- it’s hard to conduct research or make business or social policy decisions on data alone, unless the data is impeccably documented

Improved guidance like the [Open Government Guidebook](#) will help with the documentation side, ensuring data is well described so the context is understandable to our users. We’re also working to encourage Government of Canada organizations to create more direct links between raw data, the work of government, and the real-world benefits for Canadians.

“Engagement really needs to be on themes: poverty reduction, eco-development... people do not respond to abstract concepts like open data but do mobilize to issues that need open data to succeed.”

— Participant in the Future of Open Data webinar

For example, as part of our **Open science** commitment, the National Research Council will launch a platform to connect Canadians to science professionals, allowing you to better understand what federal scientists are working on. As part of our **User-friendly open government** commitment, we'll curate a series of data webinars to help bridge the supply and demand of data. We've also committed to creating a space on the website for stories of open data impact, including user-submitted stories, datasets, visualizations, and reports to build community and conversation around the data.

“When quality issues are identified, have a way to track the issues defined in an open way... publish them as open data and make sure there is appropriate attention to fix the quality issues.”

— Participant in the Future of Open Data webinar

We also heard that we should have a way to openly track issues with both datasets and the open.canada.ca website. We currently have comment threads on each dataset so that if we solve a user problem once, it's visible to all future users. We continue to seek opportunities to enhance the open.canada.ca website and the quality of the data assets available. We continue to aim for a high level of responsiveness to feedback. You can always communicate with our web team at open-ouvert@tbs-sct.gc.ca.

User-centric thinking

Comments: 248

Figure 9: User-centric thinking





- Engagement, Education and Collaboration
- 10 other sub-themes
- Open Data, official languages, Etc.
- Digital service
- Open.canada.ca tools
- General about user centric thinking

► Figure 9: User-centric thinking - Table

This theme spanned many concepts within open government, including the open government portal itself, government websites, public engagement events, and digital services.

In response to many of the suggestions below, we made user-centric thinking a key theme of our National Action Plan, and included a specific commitment on **User-friendly open government**.

User experience

Many comments throughout the engagement emphasized that the data and information ecosystem for a government starts with user-friendly websites, findability, and optimization.

“Need more intuitive websites and visualizations – many in the community expressed that they have no idea how to figure out who is responsible for what or what government is working on.”

— Participant in Halifax at the African Nova Scotian workshop

You told us that Government of Canada websites are often hard to understand and navigate, and that solving that issue starts with knowing our users. We agree, and the Government of Canada is currently working through top tasks and high-impact services to optimize web interactions for usability and inclusive, accessible design. We also committed in our **Digital government and services** commitment to create a service dashboard about our progress optimizing government websites in the interest of transparency and accountability.

Open data and access to information and privacy requests

You also told us to improve the open data and Access to Information (ATI) portals. We heard about issues with findability, broken links, and a need for an updated ATI request service.

We also heard a range of functionality requests – beyond those covered in the open data section, above - including data previews and visualization tools.

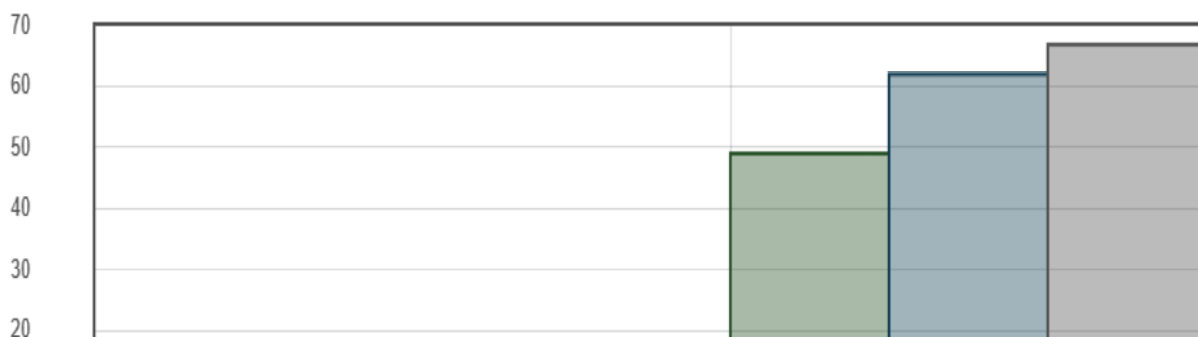
We will work in the coming months to make major improvements to open.canada.ca and the ATI systems. As part of our **Access to information** commitment, we will make it easier for Canadians to understand how to make access to information and personal information requests. We will also make it easier for departments to provide access to information responses electronically, so that requesters can get their documents in a digital format if they want to.

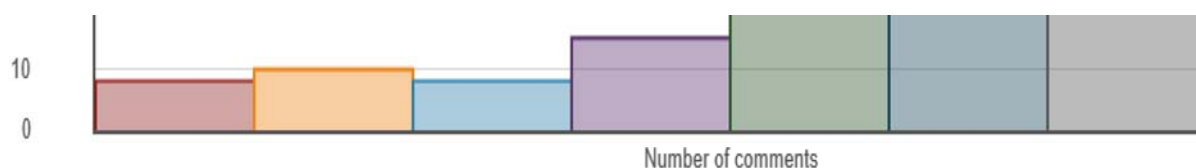
On open.canada.ca, we will be making some much-needed improvements to the site navigation and information architecture. We want to make it easier for you to find what you're looking for on our open government portal. After all, that information is there for you. As part of our **User-friendly open government** commitment, we will be reporting publicly more regularly on the improvements we are making to open.canada.ca

Financial transparency

Comments: 242

Figure 10: Financial transparency





- Collaboration, communication and...
- Open Data
- Accountability
- Grants and contributions data
- Corporate transparency
- Spending and procurement transparency
- Budget transparency

► Figure 10: Financial transparency - Table

Create a public registry of beneficial ownership

You told us that you feel Canada is lagging behind in preventing corporate malfeasance, including money laundering and corruption, and that Canada should consider the policy case for creating a registry of information on beneficial owners of corporations. A beneficial owner is anyone who receives the benefits of ownership of a corporation, even if they're not the listed owner. We also received feedback expressing concerns about privacy of personal information and disincentives to economic activity, which we must take into account in assessing the options available.

The federal, provincial, and territorial governments in Canada are already working together to strengthen the transparency of beneficial ownership information, as set out in the Agreement to Strengthen Beneficial Ownership Transparency, announced in December 2017 by Canada's finance ministers. You told us that it is important this work consider the development of a registry that is open and publicly accessible.

As the responsibility for regulating corporations is divided between the federal government and the provinces and territories, inter-governmental collaboration on this work is important. Federal action alone would only apply to about 10% of Canadian corporations.

As such, in the long run, it will be much more effective to develop a consistent approach across Canada that improves timely and appropriate access to beneficial ownership information on all corporations in Canada.

As part of our **Corporate transparency** commitment, we have committed to continue to engage with stakeholders in civil society, private sector, and academia to explore options for strengthening beneficial ownership transparency. One of the options we have committed to explore is the creation of a public registry. We will also ensure that we equip stakeholders to engage in a meaningful way with government, providing a discussion document on beneficial ownership issues to inform this engagement.

Some stakeholders told us that they think the current commitment falls short of their expectations. However, we believe this commitment will help to strengthen the transparency of beneficial ownership in Canada, and will allow governments to continue to explore options to continue this work in future.

Demonstrate how public money is spent

You told us that it needs to be easier to understand, track, and analyze public spending.

“Reporting on services provided, so you can see how your taxes are being used.”

“Transparency and accountability with respect to where funds come from and how those same funds are spent.”

— Participants in Calgary

Specifically, we heard calls for a “citizen’s budget” that explains the Government of Canada’s spending plans in plain language, as well as tools that allow people to search and explore spending by themes or regions.

We heard calls for more explicit links between all the documents in the budget cycle: the estimates, the budget, procurement data, and the public accounts. As part of our **Financial transparency and accountability** commitment, we have committed to engaging Parliament and Canadians to review our progress in improving the timeliness, completeness, and transparency of the Budget and Main Estimates. We will also expand and improve [GC InfoBase](#), a data exploration and visualization tool for government spending, programs, and results delivered.

“Use and champion open standards -contribute to international standards communities. E.g., OCDS.”

— Participant in the Future of Open Data webinar

You also told us that you would like to see Canada officially endorse the Open Contracting Data Standard (OCDS) for procurement data. We committed in the next National Action Plan to ensure that Canadians have access to open procurement data, and to pilot OCDS-aligned approaches. The pilot data will include planning, tender, award, contract, and implementation information. We will continue to work with partners throughout the Government of Canada, across the country, and around the world to ensure Canada’s work on open contracting is aligned with leading global practices.

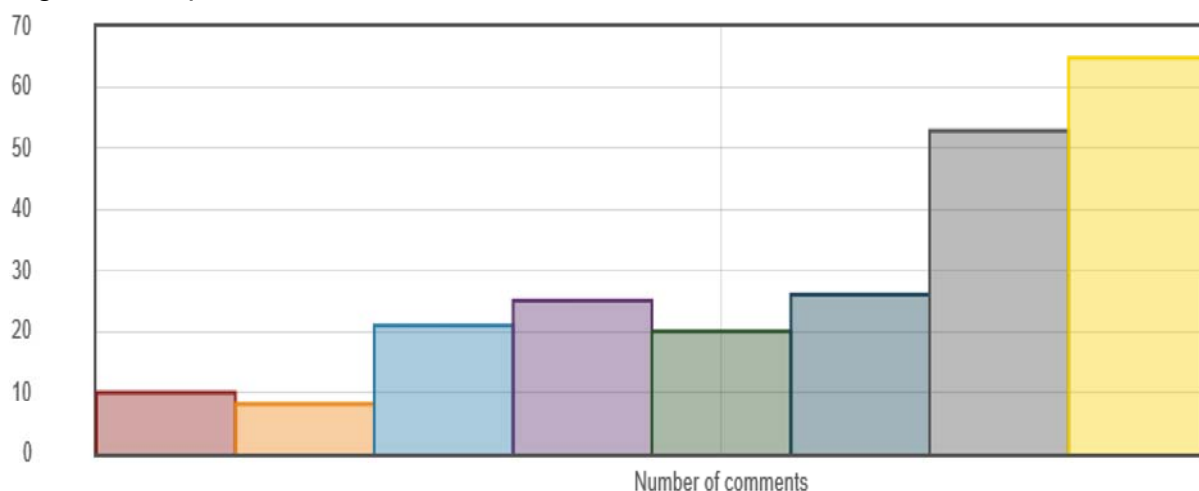
Open information

Comments: 228

“Everything that’s not confidential, secure, or private should be published. Is there... accountability in place?”

— Participant in Toronto at the School of Public Policy and Governance

Figure 11: Open information



- Communication and education
- Specifics about types of information
- Culture and useability
- Governance and performance
- Personal information

- Inclusion and feminism
- Providing and preserving access
- Access to Information Act reform

► Figure 11: Open information - Table

Access to information

A suggestion related to reforming the Access to Information (ATI) regime received the highest number of votes on open.canada.ca. This idea included recommendations for improving the administration of ATI. It also recommended changes to the content of proposed legislative amendments to the Access to Information Act, known as Bill C-58. Bill C-58 would require more information to be proactively disclosed by government institutions, including briefing note titles, ministerial transition binders, question period notes and parliamentary committee binders. Many of you felt C-58 does not go far enough, particularly that it doesn't address exemptions.

In our **Access to information** commitment, we noted that a full review of the Access to Information Act will begin within a year of Royal Assent of Bill C-58.

“[There's an] urgent need for real and substantial review of Canada's sorely outdated Access to Information Act.”

— Centre for Law and Democracy submission to the ideas discussion

Some of you expressed concerns about our proposal to commit to further consultation on improving ATI. Consultations on certain targeted changes took place in summer 2016. However, some issues may warrant further exploration through additional and deeper consultations with Canadians, and particularly with Indigenous peoples. It will be important to continue to engage with Indigenous organizations and representatives about how the Access to Information Act needs to evolve to reflect Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples, including how information and knowledge of Indigenous communities is protected and made accessible.

We also committed to improving the online request service, to providing plain-language explanations to requestors, and to pursuing other steps to improve the ATI process.

A number of stakeholders told us that they think the current commitments fall short of the changes that are needed. The commitment to a full review of the Access to Information Act and improvements to the ATIP Online Request Service are intended to continue to improve access.

Stakeholder feedback received during the development of Bill C-58 and the National Action Plan on Open Government will inform the full legislative review; your concerns and feedback were received, understood, and appreciated.

Open information

You told us that any information collected or created by the government should be freely accessible to citizens, in line with the “open by default” approach.

We’re working in this direction, and learning as we go. We’ve put in place policies and platforms to support open information by default, and are providing guidance to departments based on the experiences to date across the federal government.

One of the challenges we seek to address is providing more real-time open information while continuing to meet our other obligations; we want everything to be open, but we also want anything that’s publicly available to be accessible to everyone, and available in both official languages. We’ve experimented with releasing draft working documents, and we are currently piloting automated translation of metadata. In the coming months, we plan to experiment with additional automated translation and accessibility tools to maximize the amount of information that can be proactively shared publicly. This work is outlined in our **User-friendly open government** commitment, where we have committed to expand the Open by Default pilot to make working documents from government officials open by default

“Is crown copyright still relevant in an open government world?”

— Participant in a federal, territorial, and provincial Open Government meeting

You also told us that privacy and security need to be at the centre of our thinking, particularly as the effort towards open data and information grows while the technological environment evolves in parallel. The Government of Canada is building capacity for data governance, data ethics, and digital rights and is fully committed to protecting the privacy of citizens, businesses, and institutions. While this work is not captured in the National Action Plan, it will be a focus for a number of Government of Canada departments in the coming years.

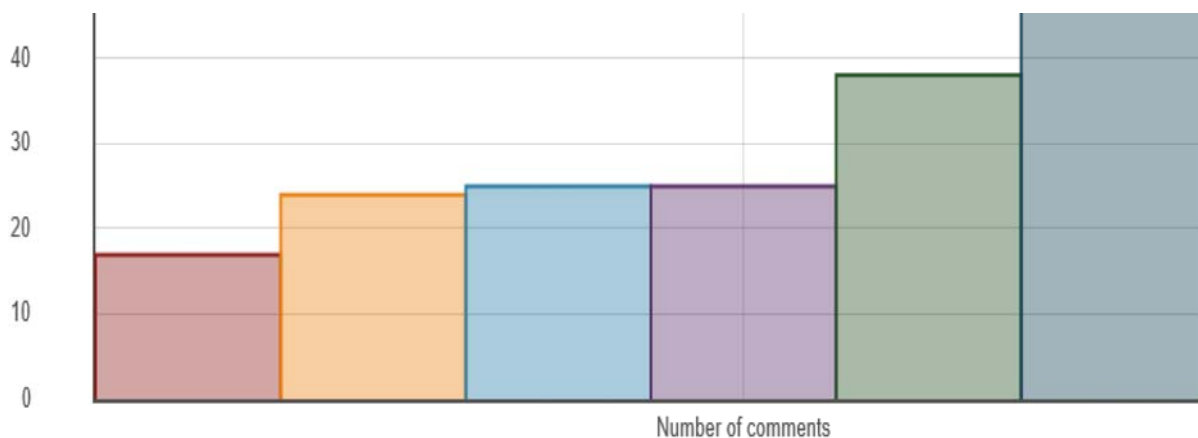
Governance and resourcing

Comments: 237

Figure 12: Governance and resourcing

50





- Performance and accountability
- Communication and education
- Inclusion and feminism
- Collaboration, communication, and useability
- Licences, reuse, and resources
- Collaboration across jurisdictions and countries

► Figure 12: Governance and resourcing - Table

A number of comments cut across many sub-themes of open government to highlight some foundational supports: governance and resources (time, people, skills, and financial resources).

Better communication and collaboration across all jurisdictions

You told us that the federal government needs to do a better job collaborating with provinces, territories and municipalities for the sake of data standards and for consistent user experiences.

We collaborate across jurisdictions regularly and enthusiastically. We recognize a need to mature from mutual learning and aligning projects to a more institutionalized approach, focusing on specific areas for pan-Canadian approaches.

For example, this past year we worked with provinces and territories to identify a set of high-value datasets for standardized release, to create maximum comparability and combination of data that includes public spending, water quality, maps, and education. As part of our **Open government community** commitment for the 2018-2020 Plan, we will work with provinces and territories to pilot standardizing some of these high-value datasets.

You told us you support the idea of a federated data search that we had previously committed to. Building on our federated search portal with the province of Alberta, we have committed to partner with at least two other interested provincial and territorial governments, as well as two municipal governments.

Intergovernmental collaboration also underpins several other commitments falling under other themes, including common contracting data standards (in our **Financial transparency and accountability** commitment) and beneficial ownership transparency (in our **Corporate transparency** commitment).

Finally, we will be looking to expand our outreach and collaboration with local governments.

Resourcing civil society and communities for engagement

We heard that more needs to be done to support civil society and community groups. In an era of distributed problem-solving and public participation as a standard policy-making approach, civil society and community organizations need resources to research, analyze, and engage their communities. We have taken some steps to address this in our National Action Plan. For example, as part of our **Feminist and inclusive dialogue** commitment, we will support initiatives that build the capacity and longer-term viability of women's organizations. We recognize there is more to do across the whole of government to offer support and resources to the civil society and community groups that keep governments accountable.

We also heard that we need to actively support the public and, in particular, marginalized and underrepresented communities in open policymaking processes. As captured in our **Feminist and inclusive dialogue** commitment, we plan to test promising new practices for supporting participation and lowering the barriers to engagement.

Finally, as part of our **Healthy democracy** commitment, we are working to ensure Canada's democratic institutions are robust and resilient, so that they can effectively represent all Canadians. This will include work to support a healthy and reliable news ecosystem at the domestic level. It will also include work internationally to strengthen governments' capacity to identify and respond to threats to democracy

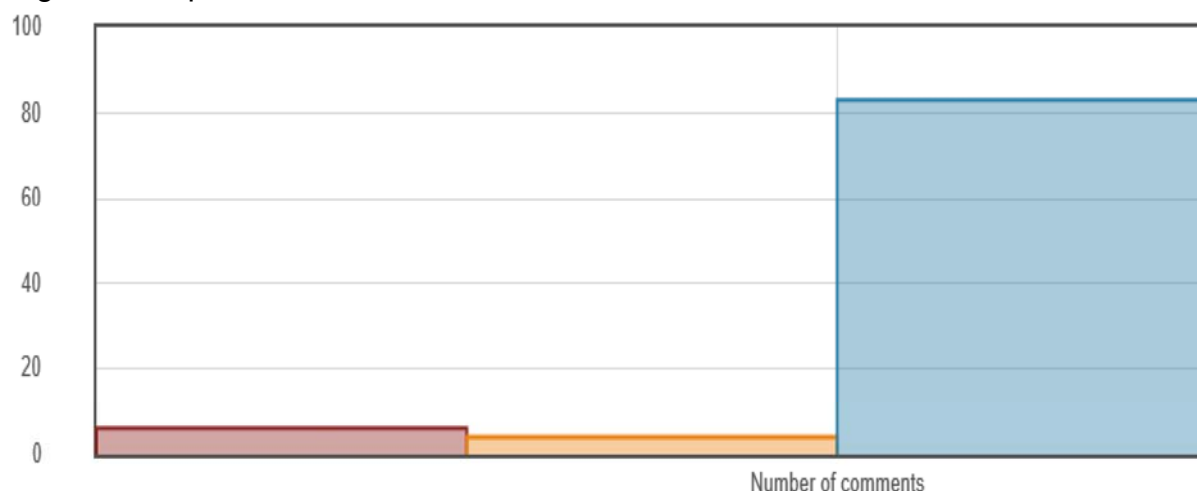
Open science

Comments: 114

“Governments fund science for the betterment of their citizens and yet we have not been getting dollar for dollar return on investment. To cure this we need to make science more open.”

— Emailed comment

Figure 13: Open science



- Specifics about data
- Open access to scientific data
- Open access to federally-funded science

► Figure 13: Open science - Table

Open science for a better society

You told us that the benefits associated with opening access to scientific data and research are far-reaching and have great potential to advance society. In line with the broader open information principle, you told us that not only should the work of government scientists be open, but all federally-funded science.

“We need to be uncomfortably sharing information.”

— Participant in an Open Science meeting

Other specific ideas included the creation of a centralized archive of open publications, strengthening collaboration between government and academia, and ensuring that scientists can speak freely about their work.

As part of our **Open science** commitment, we committed to piloting an open science portal to make it easier to access open publications from federal scientists. We also committed to launching a platform to connect people to National Research Council scientists, and to working closely with the scientific community on future actions to build the open science ecosystem. This will include engagement sessions with diverse stakeholders across the country.

“Suggested commitment: Work with Science Based Departments and Agencies to measure the implementation of Open Science.”

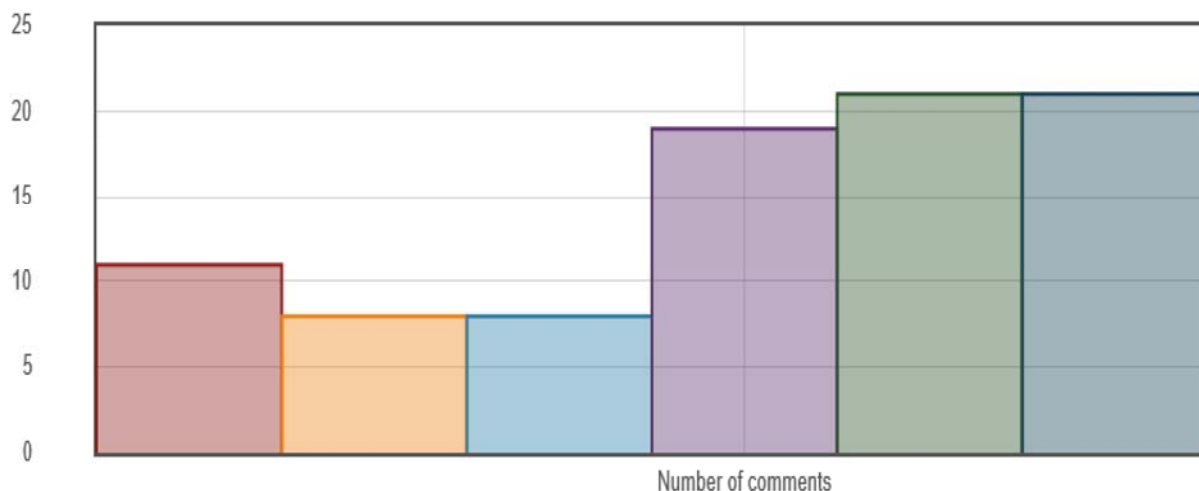
— Meeting participant

We also recognize that there’s a cultural and leadership element to sharing data, information, and scientific works. You told us that complete transparency is required to benefit from open science. Even if the data shared is not “positive”, people want to know the full story. As part of our **User-friendly open government** commitment, we intend to showcase Canada’s leadership, promote the stories and benefits of open approaches, and provide training and guidance to maximize the soft skills required for open government.

Service

Comments: 106

Figure 14: Service



- Collaboration, communication, and useability
- Service standards and strategies
- Processes and tools
- Digital services and websites
- User centricity

■ Importance of service lens

► Figure 14: Service - Table

As with the “user-centric thinking” theme, many comments pointed to the role of user-friendly, understandable, and findable web services in underpinning citizens’ relationship with their government. We could have combined the themes, but “service transparency” was such a distinct theme that we wanted to keep the two separate.

Become a more digital government

You told us that the government needs to have an increased and improved online presence, including more user-friendly applications and websites with greater interoperability with different devices and other jurisdictions.

This is a top priority for the Government of Canada. Former Treasury Board President Scott Brison was appointed as the first-ever Minister of Digital Government. This follows the launch of the Canadian Digital Service, the decision to make the Government of Canada Chief Information Officer a Deputy Minister-level position, the development of digital standards and a single digital policy, and a number of other complementary initiatives.

For open government specifically, we have created a **User-friendly open government** commitment. As part of this commitment, we will work to improve open.canada.ca to make it more user-friendly. We will also leverage digital tools like webinars to reach out to Canadians to tell them more about the work we are doing.

We have also included a commitment on **Digital government and services**, which sets out how we will engage with Canadians to understand how they are impacted by the changing roles of data and digital government. Two major centrepieces of this commitment are a new Digital Policy for the Government of Canada and a Data Strategy Roadmap. These will help us chart a path forward to allow departments to better use data and digital solutions to connect with Canadians and make sound decisions.

User-driven digital services

“... In many non-gov service sectors, direct customers’ feedback is the main mechanism for improving services – why not gov? Ongoing DIRECT citizen feedback to services they are getting plus genuine accountability... is needed and can be done.”

— Twitter comment

“If we knew more about the clients, we could better adapt to fit their needs.”

— Participant in Edmonton at a workshop

You told us to get more innovative and creative with service delivery, including leveraging the expertise and capacity that exists outside of government. You asked for “tell us once” approaches so that you don’t have to send the same information to government multiple times for different services. And you asked for transparency about specific services, like the status of applications, and about government’s progress towards service improvement, through dashboards and public reporting on transformation.

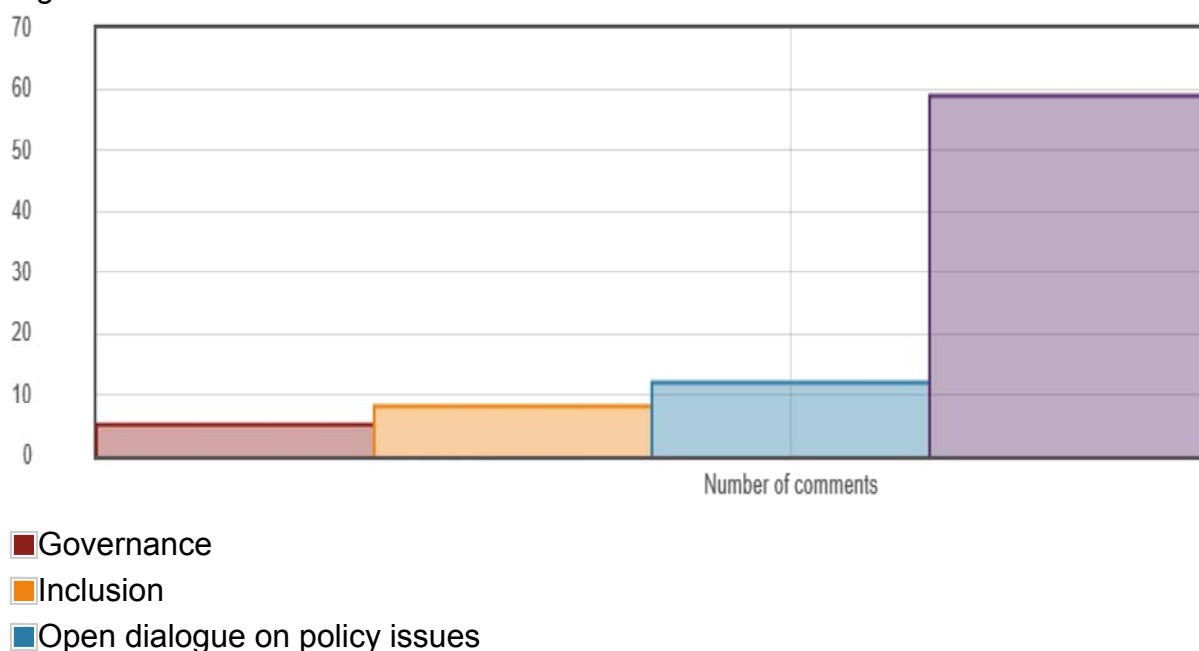
You also told us the importance of empathy and responsiveness, and you told us we can’t forget the role of people in a digitally-driven service ecosystem: “Ensure there is someone on the other end.”

We recognize that creating user-driven services means giving users the information they need to understand what kind of standards they can expect. As part of our **Digital government and services** commitment, we will publish a dashboard of data on service delivery performance for all major service departments. We will also publish analytics on canada.ca website traffic for key service portals.

Reconciliation

Comments: 85

Figure 15: Reconciliation



■ Relationship between government and Indigenous communities

► Figure 15: Reconciliation - Table

It is important to acknowledge that the number of comments received on this theme is partially influenced by the fact that we worked with Indigenous stakeholders to convene specific discussions on this topic. That said, the importance of reconciliation, engaging diverse perspectives, and the barriers to public participation for different communities, including Indigenous peoples, were raised at many sessions throughout the process.

Build relationships based on respect and trust

We recognize that no individual or group can speak for others, let alone the multitude of Indigenous communities and voices across the country. We do, however, think that it is incredibly important to work with as many communities as possible and continuously expand our understanding in new directions.

“Data sovereignty issues need to be sorted.”

— Participant in Victoria at the Data Governance Gathering

Based on our discussions with Indigenous people, we believe that we haven’t done enough in our work on data and open policy-making. We need to do more to ensure that this work is fair and appropriate for everyone who may be impacted. And this work has to be guided by an ongoing dialogue and a lasting relationship.

As part of our **Reconciliation and open government** commitment, we will try to identify opportunities for stronger collaboration with Indigenous peoples on open government and data governance. And we will do our own homework as well. All members of the open government team will receive OCAP training so we can better understand how the First Nations principles of Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession apply to our work on open data and information.

Start with understanding

You told us that more needs to be done to ensure that we understand Indigenous peoples’ perspectives on open government, and on government more broadly. You believe that we have to improve the way that we discuss data governance and the collection of information.

“First Nations are distinct and unique with different world views – we must think about and respect the differences in world views. Humility and respect are essential – co-creation or self-determined solutions are the only way to go forward.”

— Participant in Edmonton at the Alberta First Nations Information Governance Centre event

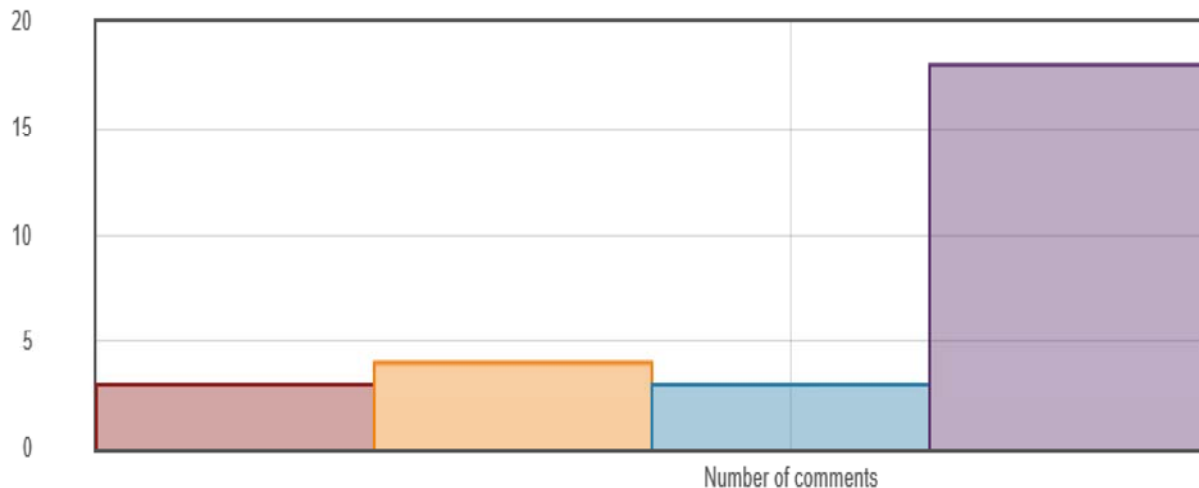
As part of our **Reconciliation and open government** commitment, we will work in the coming years to build capacity for Indigenous communities and organizations to use data and research their own requirements and needs towards the goal of supporting improved social and economic outcomes.

We also have taken steps to improve our relationship with Indigenous peoples across the country. We will continue to learn and to encourage federal public servants to take courses and training about the rights-based relationships between the Government of Canada and Indigenous peoples.

Social innovation

Comments: 37

Figure 16: Social innovation



■ Collaboration, communication, and useability

■ Inclusion and feminism

■ Services

■ The open data ecosystem

► Figure 16: Social innovation - Table

Understand and support the social and not-for profit sector

You told us that we should support local efforts to use open data for community impact through research, civic technology projects, and social innovation projects. You also told us that the government should take a more proactive stance in understanding the work of the social and not-for-profit sector, so that we can suggest data and resources that might be of interest for social policy and research purposes. Some participants suggested connecting potential public problems with data resources and trying to build community around those ideas.

“How can we encourage the business sector to share data to impact social challenges? Data philanthropy. E.g., could global food production data help solve hunger?”

— Govmaker Building a Movement panel

We also heard that while many not-for-profits could benefit from open data, many are lacking the time, skills, or capacity to fully leverage what’s available. You told us government should work to support these organizations, and should lower the barriers to open data use. You told us that we should streamline and simplify reporting requirements for grant-based projects, using more standardized data.

As part of our **User-friendly open government** commitment, we will seek to make our work more accessible and understandable to everyone. We will make improvements to our website, increase data standardization, and focus on open government education and awareness-building. The goal of this work is to help Canadians and civil society organizations to more easily access the work we do and connect with us when they need to.

You also told us to continue this dialogue, and to work with businesses and not-for-profit organizations on how these sectors can improve open data sharing.

Other suggestions of note

Open parliament

While this theme was more popular in our 2016 engagement process than it was in 2018, it was still raised by a number of participants. You told us you wanted to see Parliament become more open, including by creating additional channels for public input before votes, providing easier ways to track legislation through the process, strengthening Question Period in the House of Commons, and extending the Access to Information regime to elected officials.

“How do we put the legislative role of government into the hands of the people? A legitimate, open process?”

— Participant in Toronto at the School of Public Policy and Governance

While we recognize the close links between openness in government and openness in Parliament, the National Action Plan process focuses on what the federal public service can accomplish. We’ve continued discussions and shared comments with organizations better placed to advance this conversation in Canada. We are excited about recent discussions regarding the development of a process for co-creating a Canadian Open Parliament Action Plan. We will continue to work with partners in civil society and in Parliament to support this work in any way we can.

Open data from smart cities initiatives and improved urban data

You asked for two initiatives to support the urban data ecosystem. First, that we maximize the openness of data collected through smart cities initiatives. Second, that we release more, and more granular, foundational geospatial data that can help urban planning and social policy design. We are continuing conversations on both these areas, and we hope to make this part of our work over the coming years, even if it is not reflected directly in the plan.

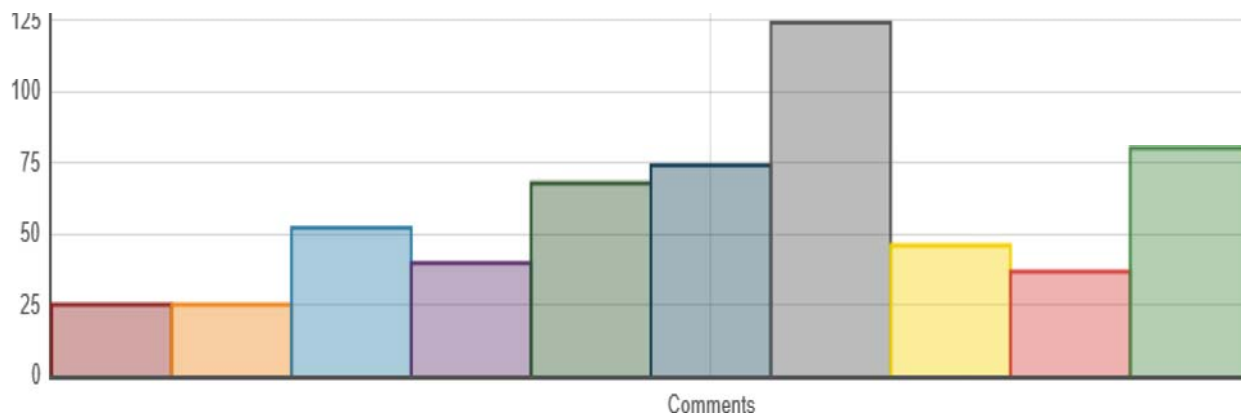
Consultation on draft commitments

Throughout the idea generating phase, our team was collecting and analyzing comments and ideas, then sharing that input with partners in departments and agencies across the Government of Canada. Where possible, we also set up conversations between Government of Canada officials and civil society representatives, working in the direction of a co-creation approach. In some cases, specific milestones came from these collaborations. Through these discussions, we developed a set of draft commitments which we published on open.canada.ca and as [Google Docs](#).

Over a 3-week period Canadians were invited to provide their thoughts, and you delivered: we received almost 600 comments and ideas, and we found them detailed, specific, and thoughtful. This led to a second round of discussions with lead departments to make commitments clearer, more ambitious, and more in line with what you were calling for. Here’s the breakdown by commitment:

Figure 17: Number of comments on draft commitments





- Open government community
- Reconciliation and open government
- Feminist and inclusive dialogue
- Access to information
- Healthy democracy
- Open science
- Digital government and services
- Corporate transparency
- Financial transparency and accountability
- User-friendly open government

► Figure 17: Number of comments on draft commitments - Table

1. User-friendly open government: 80 comments
2. Financial transparency and accountability: 37 comments
3. Corporate transparency: 46 comments
4. Digital government and services: 124 comments
5. Open science: 74 comments
6. Healthy democracy: 68 comments
7. Access to information: 40 comments
8. Feminist and inclusive dialogue: 52 comments
9. Reconciliation and open government: 25 comments
10. Open government community: 25 comments

We received the highest number of comments on our Digital government and services commitment. Commenters asked us to be more specific about the mechanisms we would use to measure our success in engaging Canadians on issues related to data and digital government. They also asked us to be stronger in our commitment to encouraging departments to use open source software and to publish open source code wherever possible.

We also received a high number of comments on:

- User-friendly open government, where commenters asked us to use clearer, more specific language to explain how we would measure our success in being more user-friendly
- Open science, where users asked us to consider ways to make all federally-funded science more open, not just science conducted by Government of Canada researchers
- Healthy democracy, where we knew we had more work to do to identify specific initiatives that could help strengthen and protect democratic processes in Canada

We updated our consultation data with these comments, and added a column for each containing our response.

Feminist and inclusive peer review

As we began the process of developing our National Action Plan, the open government team discussed options for ensuring that the commitments in the plan reflected the needs and expectations of under-represented communities, including equity-seeking groups like women, girls, LGBTQ2 people, racialized communities, persons with disabilities, young Canadians, low-income Canadians, and others. We wanted to ensure that the plan represented not just our own understanding of inclusion, but a broader expertise in inclusive and feminist policy-making.

We therefore decided to reach out to 4 experts to ask them to conduct a peer review of our draft National Action Plan, make recommendations, and suggest changes. Our 4 peer reviewers were:

- Nasma Ahmed, facilitator and developer
- Elodie Joy Jacquet, Dialogue and Public Engagement Consultant, SFU Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue
- Saadia Muzaffar, tech entrepreneur, author, and advocate
- Leslie Shade, Professor and Associate Dean, University of Toronto

Our reviewer's recommendations focused on 3 key areas:

- Accessibility
- Intersectionality
- Co-creation through public engagement

On accessibility, reviewers focused on the digital divide – the differing level of digital skills and access to digital technologies. Capacity for and access to digital technologies can be influenced by socio-economic status, demographics (gender, generation, race, ethnicity) and geography, leaving some Canadians with less digital access than others. While issues

of affordability and technology are beyond the scope of the National Action Plan, the open government team has committed to test best practices for designing inclusive public engagement processes. We will continue to incorporate both digital and in-person options for participation in our engagement processes. This aims to ensure that open government activities can reach a geographically diverse audience through digital channels, while still providing some opportunities for Canadians to participate in their own communities.

On intersectionality, reviewers noted that the National Action Plan should include a clearer, more detailed definition of “intersectionality”, as we have identified it as a lens through which we will view all of our open government work. We have added a more detailed definition of intersectionality as an annex to our plan, which is linked to the text of our Feminist and inclusive dialogue commitment.

Finally, on co-creation through public engagement, reviewers suggested that some of the commitments in the draft plan – such as “Feminist and inclusive government” and “Leadership and collaboration” – did not represent discrete activities that formed part of open government. Instead, they were over-arching principles that should apply to all open government work. They recommended these commitments be reflected instead in introductory text for the plan. While we have maintained the concrete commitments on Feminist and inclusive dialogue and Open government community, we have also included a set of guiding principles in the introduction to the plan. These principles will guide all our open government work in the years to come, across all commitments. Principles include accessibility, inclusion, collaboration, and gender equality.

We also asked our reviewers to help us create gender-based or inclusion indicators for all of our National Action Plan commitments. After serious considerations, reviewers decided not to propose these indicators, because they felt they were not in a position to represent the diverse communities that may be impacted by our open government work. They believed that more work was needed to engage directly with those communities to understand how we can measure our success in including them in our open government work. For this reason, we have dropped from the plan our commitment to create and monitor GBA+ indicators for all commitments. Instead, over the next two years we will work to engage communities across Canada to better understand how we can measure whether we are being inclusive in our open government work.

The full findings of our feminist and inclusive peer reviewers can be found in [Annex A](#) of this report.

Lessons learned

▼ In this section

- [General](#)
- [Optimizing our design](#)
- [Creating the space for a full discussion](#)
- [Civil society engagement](#)
- [Inclusive engagement](#)
- [Promotion and communication](#)

Open government has always been a partnership between governments and civil society, and public participation is a fundamental goal of that partnership. As such, we want our public engagement on the National Action Plan to be as meaningful and inclusive as possible. The Government of Canada's [principles and guidelines for public engagement](#) emerged out of the open government movement and we want to fully respect that direction. To get there, we ask for feedback on the engagement process itself and conduct our own retrospectives on lessons learned. This section summarizes those lessons learned, and our recommendations for future engagement processes. We welcome your input on how we can improve.

General

We think we improved our engagement processes significantly over past years. We heard from more people than ever, with a broader mix of Canadian society than ever. We held almost 50 in-person and online events, with a mix of thematic and general sessions, in addition to the ideas discussion on open.canada.ca and an open discussion on Reddit. We experimented with webinars to maximize participation across Canada's geography, tried to attend community events wherever possible, and made specific trips to reach particular communities.

That said, we can and should do more to reach schools, universities, and local libraries in particular, and will leverage some of the below recommendations on inclusion to do so. We think we should build on the practices above that we tried during the engagement process, such as social media engagement and thematic sessions. We know that any way that we can reach people is valuable, but we need to continue to work on finding the best mix of approaches, both for the investment of public money and for your time.

Optimizing our design

In future National Action Plan processes, we'll likely move away from some approaches. At this point in the evolution of open government, we think there's more value in diving deep into topics and creating sustained discussion and back-and-forth. This means that webinars and workshops are often more valuable ways to engage than, for instance, Twitter questions. We will also try not to host as many in-person events by ourselves, and we will instead work with community partners to connect the dots between the broader concept of open government and related communities of interest like civic tech, social innovation, privacy, and public administration.

Creating the space for a full discussion

We need to ensure that all of the related program and policy leads are present throughout the engagement process. While we tried to do this with our thematic webinars, there is more work to be done in future. The open government team can convene the right stakeholders, but there's less value in us engaging on behalf of the entire Government of Canada. The more that we can encourage two-way dialogue between government and external stakeholders in real time, the better.

Civil society engagement

Throughout the process we felt a tension between engaging experts and academics on particular topics and bringing new and broader communities into the discussion. On one hand, there are topics within the broader idea of open government that people have been working on for decades or more (e.g., open data, access to information). Advanced research and learning in these areas will drive progress into maturity. On the other hand, direct engagement with leading open government champions can sometimes leave out perspectives about these topics that lead to more holistic understanding. For example, diverse perspectives on data sovereignty, the changing environment for privacy concerns, and inclusion and feminism in open policymaking processes can shape our entire approach to open government. There's no right answer here, but we want to make explicit the need to design participation options for two types of audiences and discussions, and to recognize the value of each.

The Multi-stakeholder Forum (MSF) on Open Government deserves particular attention as both a pillar of the Canadian open government movement and as a source of deep learning. We launched the MSF in December 2017 to provide guidance and oversight on open government, and to create a permanent dialogue mechanism between government and civil society. It is also where we learned some of the toughest lessons throughout this process, including the need to bring policy and program leads directly into the discussions, and the difficulty in having a full and honest two-way dialogue on potential government

directions. We recognize the need to better integrate the full spectrum of decision-makers in multi-lateral processes to make these discussions as effective as possible, and to honour the time and investment of civil society partners.

Inclusive engagement

We asked the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue at Simon Fraser University to research and recommend best practices for inclusive engagement. These apply equally to Government of Canada-wide engagement and engagement on open government. They proposed four key strategies to respond to the challenges and opportunities they identified through literature reviews and interviews:

1. Partner with and support community-based organizations and neutral third parties to serve as intermediaries between government and under-served populations.
2. Support communities in navigating government complexity, with the objectives of building sustained relationships, providing a venue for communities to identify issues for discussion, and improving two-way communications.
3. Improve the capacities of departments and agencies to engage with under-served communities, especially to identify how upcoming policy decisions, data collection strategies and access to information requests may impact specific populations.
4. Develop standards for data handling, reporting and communication that take into account the needs of under-served communities such as privacy, accessibility and context.

Regarding lessons we learned on our own, we failed at providing a fully accessible engagement option for our thematic webinars. In response to this, we conducted research and experiments into accessible web-based platforms and are struggling to find solutions that are both bilingual and accessible. However, we have learned that we can design better sessions where we ensure that neither the visual nor the audio component alone contains vital information for understanding.

We committed to experimenting and leading by example on inclusive engagement in the National Action Plan, and we look forward to reporting back on good practices and learning in the future.

Promotion and communication

As a best practice, we recognize that consultations should be advertised at least two weeks before events takes place, to ensure people have enough time to learn about the session and plan their attendance. Background information and an agenda should be distributed at the same time to give more information on the session to potential participants.

We designed our sessions to work through the background as quickly as possible and get into discussion and ideas. However, we increasingly heard that we should spend more time on background and education, which makes sense. In the last plan alone, there were 22 commitments, all with different levels of progress and impact. Participants said that they needed a better sense of the current state of play before they could propose future directions and actions. Specifically, this included calls to send backgrounders ahead of time, which also helps people decide whether or not to attend.

Lastly, we should continue to develop our lists of stakeholders on specific subjects and encourage them to share our consultations through their networks. This will also help us maintain our relationships with stakeholders.

Conclusion

At this point, the engagement process becomes a National Action Plan and we return to our ongoing channels for listening and responding: comments on open.canada.ca, community events, [@opengovcan](https://twitter.com/opengovcan), emails to open-ouvert@tbs-sct.gc.ca, the Multi-Stakeholder Forum on Open Government, and any other way you would like to reach us.

We will post updates throughout the implementation of the plan, and look forward to continued collaboration – and challenge – from you as we continue to push open government forward.

Thank you from the entire open government team for your participation.

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