

Bianca Wylie - Detailed Submission on Draft Plan

Thanks for the opportunity to provide comments on a broad and ambitious plan for open government in Canada.

New Proposed Commitment: Track and report on the implementation of the 94 calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

Firstly, I suggest you add an explicit new numbered commitment to track and report on the implementation of the 94 calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. This work should be highly visible to everyone in Canada and to the global community. Take this opportunity to create a high-level open government mechanism to support this goal.

Commitment 3: Expand and Improve Open Data

Prioritize data sets so they can be used in conjunction with national/provincial/municipal public engagement and consultation processes. If a national/provincial/municipal public discussion is going on, feed it open data. Use the calendar of political process in government (new policy/legislation), public events, and political debate to drive prioritization.

When you develop consultation plans, make the use of open data part of the format. When you design public meetings, expand your process options to include data challenges, showcasing outputs from data users. When you release discussion questions or consultation toolkits, include new data sets. More on this to follow in the open government section. The main point is, use the already existing plans for public consultation as criteria in your prioritization and release of new data sets. If you release new open data into a discussion that people are already having, you know there is a higher chance the data will be used and the intermediaries of the data (community, journalists, etc.) can have a chance to apply it to the discussion. This approach can help to maximize impact of data release.

Commitment 5: Define an Approach for Measuring Open Government Performance

A government that is actively engaged in making decisions with its residents is an open government. Refer to standards and metrics to assess public engagement. If you need to select one key performance indicator, let it be the degree to which open government is enabling residents to have an impact on decision-making. If the conditions to enable this participation are not being met (well-defined scope of what is open for influence, clear definition of roles and responsibilities of all parties, cultural understanding of the value of public input in decisions, proper mechanisms to facilitate two-way discussion etc.) then open government will not be able to live up to its potential. For standards and approaches to consider, consider best practices within the public participation sector.

Commitment 6: Develop Open Government Skills across the Federal Public Service

Rather than try to “train” the federal public service on open data and open government, build the benefits of open government into government systems and process. When the benefits of open government reveal themselves as making it easier to work within government to deliver better service, there is more opportunity for buy-in. The way this is framed is that a new layer of training is coming. The way open government should be applied is to help support better workflows and better service outcomes. This should be a consultative approach and the public sector unions should be engaged as key stakeholders in exploring how to best apply open government approaches to the work that they are responsible for.

Commitment 7: Embed Transparency Requirements in the Federal Service Strategy

This is extremely exciting to see, in concept. But the definition of service delivery needs to be inclusive of services for poor people, too often it has a middle-class focus. Work on service delivery that impacts quality of life at its core, not simply getting documents renewed quickly and easily. The technological and legal overhaul required to support this work is extensive. The impact on government employees is immense. Which means, again, the public service needs to be a key and influential stakeholder in designing these updates. The description here is too brief and more insight into how and what this means would be helpful, and would in turn help support community efforts to build external support for this kind of system change.

Commitment 11: Increase Transparency of Grants and Contributions

Excellent. Increased understanding of how the third sector is functioning is vital. These programs support some of the most vulnerable people that live in Canada, we must be extra vigilant with oversight as to how they are working and not working, and in our understanding of how to support better service delivery in these sectors. Do not to create new onerous reporting requirements for small organizations, help make this easy for them.

Commitment 19: Engage Civil Society on Open Government

Yes. The ideas put forward by by Canadian Open Government Civil Society Network present a solid base for this mechanism and I hope to see you build on this momentum, as it is a community-led initiative proposing an approach to fulfill your commitment.

Commitment 20: Enable Open Dialogue and Open Policy Making

Good. However, new processes and mechanisms for open dialogue and open policy making are only as good as the process design at the core of each public engagement process, on a project by project basis. As per Nicole Swerhun's approach, critical pieces of open dialogue are related to content, including:

- Defining which decisions are truly open for influence and which aren't
- Clarifying roles and responsibilities in decision-making
- Responding to feedback to explain what was done and why

Online consultation is a valuable tool but if it is tied to weak process design where the factors listed above aren't clear, its impact is minimized.

Functionally speaking, there is a lot of opportunity to tie open data to public engagement processes, but it must be embedded in these processes. You do not need to invent new uses for data - bring it to the stakeholders that are already at the table being engaged in processes. Build data-centric events into public engagement process. Convene and make data stewards available as support to stakeholder communities. The more open the government can be about the challenges it faces in decision-making, the more joint ownership it can develop with Canadian residents to manage the issues.

This is an opportunity to evolve political culture.