

BELIZE OPEN GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN DEVELOPMENT IN TIMES OF COVID-19

PROJECT: Transformation to an Open Public Administration in Belize

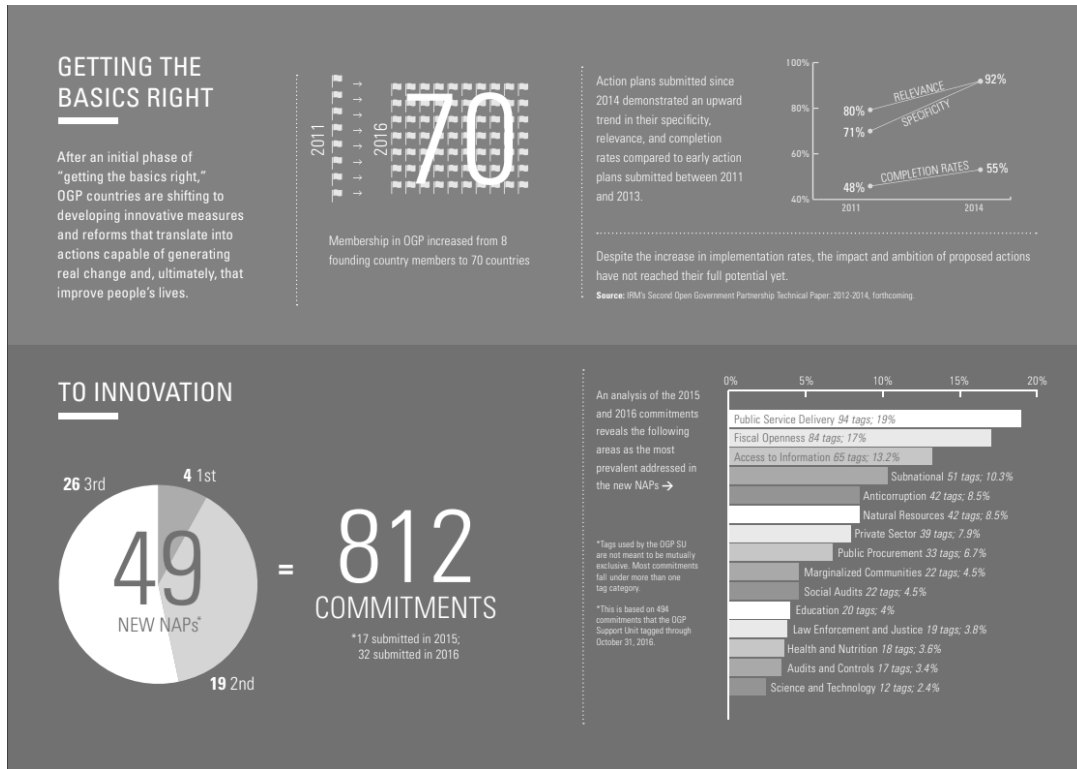
Co-Creation Phase

Open Government embraces principles of transparency, social participation, accountability, and technological innovation. When intertwined, these principles help in strengthening democratic governance. The effect of the principles produces governments that are more transparent, responsive, accountable, and effective. These principles become even more relevant when facing national or local emergency challenges such as the ones posed by the COVID-19 Pandemic or natural disasters, for example. Open government has the potential to contribute to alleviate the emergencies by serving as a support mechanism to the government response; meanwhile, giving an opportunity to non-governmental, social actors, to contribute in the design, implementation, and follow-up of the emergency response. An open government participatory approach to emergencies response secures the intended outcomes of a strategy to serve the ultimate goal of addressing efficiently and transparently the priority needs of all citizenry and those most affected, within the government's capacities.

In advancing open government in Belize through a multi-stakeholder co-creation approach, the Trust for the Americas, and the Organization of the American States (OAS), are supporting during 2020 the process for developing Belize's first open government action plan. The Action Plan is intended to serve as the instrument to orient the actions of stakeholders in Belize to accomplish certain open government commitments that are identified and agreed by government and non-government in different topics and/or sectors. Given the diverse challenges posed by COVID-19 in Belize, the exercise of developing Belize's open government action plan seeks to contribute in defining priority areas in which open government could add more value or have a greater impact for COVID-19 related emergency response and/or recovery.

The co-creation process of an action plan entails a sustained participatory approach, open to anyone wishing to participate, to identify areas of opportunity to utilize open government in pursuing new policies, improved government services, and innovative transparency efforts, among others. At the end of the action plan co-creation process and much public consultation, agreed areas of opportunities to address COVID-19 response and recovery through open government become what are known as open government commitments within action plans.

Currently, open government plans of action from around the world, as per 79 OGP participating countries and 20 subnational governments, have made over 3,850 commitments to make governments more open, efficient, and accountable. The following is a snapshot of action plans up to 2016 according to the Open Government Partnership (OGP):



In the case of Belize, and with the support of the OAS/Trust project, the activities outlined in this document establishes the process for developing its action plan as a consultation process that extends over the next 5 months (June-November), with the ultimate goal of producing a final version of the action plan by December of 2020.

The action plan development process is divided in 3 phases: 1. Launching and Drafting; 2. Public Consultation; and 3. Editing final Plan. Respecting social distancing during the pandemic, the co-creation process will initiate as an online exercise. Once the conditions allow, the activities will resume in a face-to-face meeting setting. Phases:

1. Launching and Drafting:

This first phase is intended to initiate a public discussion to identifying priority areas in which the plan of action could focus on. The identification of priority areas opens the path for a second part of this phase, intended to begin the process of shaping open government commitments by drafting them, using a dedicated template form. At the end of this phase, a number of commitments would have been drafted to initiate a public consultation. This phase will take place during the months of June, July, August, and September.

Activities (for additional information see the calendar and milestones section of this document):

- Online open government ecosystem meet-up to launch and explain the co-creation process and discuss initial areas of interest in an online workshop environment. To guide the process, the areas of interest will follow the country's COVID-19 response strategy.
- Monthly online seminars and dedicated follow-up to support drafting of commitments and monitor progress by the OAS/Trust team.

Outcome:

- 5 to 10 drafted open government commitments
- Documentation (videos, forms, interviews, and others)

2. Public Consultation *(for additional information see the calendar and milestones section of this document):*

This phase is aimed at having the general public review and comment directly the drafted commitments accomplished during phase 1. This phase extends the months of October and November. The public consultation will be done through electronic means, and in a face-to-face setting when conditions allow it. The electronic means will vary but range from using social media to dedicated web services and tools to collect the reviews. Participants and the general public will be given instructions during this phase to access the review process or to be assisted in order to be able to provide inputs to the process.

Activities:

- Uploading of the drafted commitments to the platforms by OAS/Trust.
- Active review of the commitments by ecosystem stakeholders.
- Monitoring progress, and stakeholder follow-up by the OAS/Trust project.
- Drafting of the introductory text of the action plan by the open government steering committee, supported by the OAS/Trust project.

Outcome:

- Reports and audit of the review, containing all inputs and comments provided to commitments.
- Documentation (videos, forms, interviews, and others)

3. Editing and final plan *(for additional information see the calendar and milestones section of this document):*

Once the public consultation phase is over, the inputs resulted from the revision and comments will be taken into consideration during an editing phase. The OAS/Trust team will analyze and incorporate the inputs for a final edited version of the drafted commitments. This version will be

presented to the Belize Open Government Steering Committee for its review, comment, final editing, and endorsement. This phase will take place in the month of December.

Outcome:

- Final Open government Action plan containing all agreed and edited commitments.
- Documentation (videos, forms, interviews, and others).

Methodology:

The co-creation of the open government action plan is a multi-stakeholder process of defining commitments/objectives for an executable plan. Co-creation works better when there are more actors participating in the process. The more participative, plural, and inclusive, the co-creation process, the more enhanced the end-product should be. Greater participation during the process contributes to the incorporation of all possible angles, ideas, concerns, and needs, by capturing a wider variety of stakeholder's views.

The process will be assisted by the OAS/Trust project from Washington and locally in DC., and will be accomplished through online means, and face-to-face when deemed possible. The co-creation of the action plan entails 7 consecutive phases: 1. Launching; 2. Dialogue and Drafting; 3. Public Consultation; 4. Reviewing; 5. Editing; 6. Publishing; and, 7. Final Document presentation. For the purpose of this document, we will provide more details about the second and third phases "Dialogue and Drafting" and "Public Consultation".

Dialogue and Drafting refers to an active and participatory role of the stakeholders interested in contributing to the development of the action plan. It is the exercise of a cycle of thinking, proposing, reflecting, discussing, and materializing collective ideas in a written fashion, that if done well, it is fulfilled with the successful production of open government commitments. Participating stakeholders will be asked to write an excerpt of ideas in preparation, to join virtual meetings, to express their thoughts, to dialogue towards understanding and consensus, to review others' commitment proposals, to contribute to drafting and editing final ideas.

On the other hand, Public Consultation refers to the task of reviewing all final drafted commitments and commenting on a last occasion with the purpose of enhancing or validating the commitments. This is a wider participatory exercise that is encouraged to be done by engaging an audience that extends beyond the stakeholders that participated in the drafting of the commitments. With support of stakeholders, the consultation is intended to be exercised at all possible districts, organizations, and citizens. The public consultation will be accomplished through digital means and face-to-face when conditions allow it.

Open government commitments are encouraged to be ambitious, yet realistic. When developing ideas, we suggest thinking about the best possible way to combine installed capacities and resources for the

accomplishment of the envisioned results. Keep in mind that the commitments are not meant to be, nor will they be, financed by external sources.

Co-creation platform and forms:

Microsoft teams. The platform is the online meeting place for discussion and drafting of commitments. In parallel, the participants will access the commitment template form provided below, where those interested participants will include their own inputs to the form. There will be a grouped monthly discussion meeting. Other follow-up or small personal meetings, for specific topics or sectors may take place, may take place as needed. The links to connect to this platform will be distributed in a case-by-case basis.

Action Plan Commitment Template Form:

A downloadable and editable shared document will be shared so participants can put in writing their commitments' draft ideas for further discussion. Also, this form will be the same used by the OAS/Trust team to present the final drafted commitments. The format follows the official Open Government Partnership commitments form.

Guidelines for approaching COVID-19 related open government commitments:

Although such a specific guide to develop COVID-19 related open government commitments does not exist, this section is intended to provide guidance as to how to approach the development of these commitments. We are also including reference to some resources that could help in illustrating the use of open government in the COVID-19 response.

1. Understand the country's COVID-19 response plan objectives and actions. Think about what aspects of the country's COVID-19 response could be addressed through open government (transparency, social participation, accountability, and technological innovation). From that, think about how you could propose to enhance such COVID-19 objectives through the open government principles. This may include proposing engaging different actors to produce a tool, a policy, follow-up or monitoring mechanism, or alike, under a coalition or consortium approach.
2. Data is essential: improving access and proactive publishing of COVID-19 related information could be beneficial for any commitment. Commitments, programs, or tools could be built upon that data, even sector or program targeted data. Open data publishing, developing an open data portal or policy, could also, if needed, be commitments in itself.
3. Focus on pressing macro concerning issues. Think transparency, economy, health, etc. Look at the challenges posed by the pandemic and think of ways to address them through the open government principles.

4. Look at the most generalized challenges faced by citizens during and post pandemic, then think on ways to address them by activating any or all of the open government principles.

In light of dialogues sustained by the project within the open government COVID-19 combined approach for Belize, the project suggests the following areas for consideration:

- Economic development: how to address economic relief and reactivation of economy post covid-19?
- Education: How does covid-19 affects academia and the student population, and how this could be addressed?
- Social Inclusion: How does covid19 affects women and vulnerable populations in Belize?
- Employment: How to address the unemployment impact of covid-19?
- Security: How to guaranty that the information publicly shared is accurate and prevents misinformation, and phishing and other scams could be prevented?
- Access of information on health, social benefits, or procurement.

In what relates to OGP COVID-19 approach and the open government response advise provided by the organism, the following is a summary of their suggested approach in three phases of response, recovery, and reform:

- [Open Response](#): curbing contagion, scaling medical treatments and care, providing safety nets to the vulnerable
- [Open Recovery](#): advancing economic stimulus and recovery, strengthening health systems, enhancing transparency and accountability of aid flows
- [Open Reform](#) over the long-term: reforming institutions and re-empowering citizens by rolling back state surveillance and restoring civic freedoms and independent oversight

In closing, we encourage you to review over 350 crowdsourced examples included in the Open Government Partnership dedicated to COVID-19 in the following areas: Civic Space, Fiscal Openness, Inclusion & Gender, International Aid, Justice, Misinformation and Protecting Freedom of Expression, Open Data, Privacy Protections, Protecting Participation and Deliberation, Public Procurement, Right to Information, Social Safety Nets Whistleblower Protection, and Scientific Integrity: <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/a-guide-to-open-government-and-the-coronavirus/>

Calendar and milestones of the co-creation process:

June	Online Seminar for Launching the action plan development process. Seminar includes a first part to present the country's covid-19 response and Task Force efforts, flowed by an introduction to the methodology to develop the action plan. The final part of the session will be an initial discussion on how to align open government commitments to the covid-19 response. Participants will be granted time to comment on areas or issues of interest. Template commitment forms distributed. Individual drafting of commitments begins.
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Follow-up meetings with stakeholders regarding the template and support for drafting commitments.

July

Drafting of commitments following the template continues.

Co-creation Session (Online): This session is intended to discuss the ongoing process and proposals of commitments turned in or being drafted by interested participants. The session will include a short presentation with an example of a commitment in another country to illustrate how this process has worked in other countries.

Follow-up meetings with stakeholders regarding the template and support for drafting commitments.

August

Drafting of commitments following the template continues.

Co-creation Session (Online): This session is intended to discuss the ongoing process and proposals of commitments turned in or being drafted by interested participants. The session will include a short presentation with an example of a commitment in another country to illustrate how this process has worked in other countries.

Follow-up meetings with stakeholders regarding the template and support for drafting commitments.

September

Drafting of commitments following the template continues.

Co-creation Session (Online): This session is intended to discuss the ongoing process and proposals of commitments turned in or being drafted by interested participants. The session will include a short presentation with an example of a commitment in another country to illustrate how this process has worked in other countries.

Follow-up meetings with stakeholders regarding the template and support for drafting commitments.

Drafting of commitments closes.

October

Final draft of commitments is edited and presented.

Consultation: Drafted commitments are published for public consultation. Consultation entails review and commenting on the different drafts

November

Public consultation continues.

Public consultation closes.

Dialogue with the Open Government Steering Committee about the results of the consultation.

Analysis of the review and comments provided to drafted commitments

Drafting the introduction of the action plan document with the Steering Committee.

December Editing of final action plan.
Presentation of action plan draft.

SUPPORT MATERIAL

- OGP Participation Co-creation toolkit: https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/OGP_Participation-Cocreation-Standards20170207.pdf
- OGP Handbook: <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/ogp-handbook-rules-and-guidance-for-participants-2020/>
- OGP commitments worldwide: <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/explorer/all-data.html>
- OGP COVID-19 examples site <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/a-guide-to-open-government-and-the-coronavirus/>
- OAS COVID-19 portal <https://www.oas.org/ext/en/main/covid-19/home>

Note

The online consultation process post-session will be carried out through different channels aimed at securing wide local and multi-actor participation. Social media platforms, online survey systems, and direct electronic – or face-to-face when allowed – contact with participants of the extended open government ecosystems of Belize will be set in place for this purpose.

These activities are possible thanks to the contribution of the US Embassy in Belmopan for the execution of the project “Transformation to an Open Public Administration in Belize”.

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