CANADA Open Government Licence

What did the commitment seek to achieve, and why is this important?

One of the major goals of the Government of Canada's open government work has been to support a more seamless end-user experience. We have found that users want government information, especially data, but do not want to have to deal with different departments to find it, or a multitude of different restrictions on the use of data depending on from which department it originates. Accordingly, we set out to establish one common licence to cover the use of all open data regardless of where it originates within the government. This was the challenge we originally set out to address.

In April, 2012, Canada tabled its Action Plan on Open Government at the Open Government Partnership meeting in Brasilia. The Plan contained 12 commitments for fostering greater openness and accountability in the federal Government of Canada, including a specific commitment to developing a new **Open Government Licence**. The goal of this commitment was to remove restrictions on the reuse of published Government of Canada information (data, info, websites, and publications), aligning better with international best practices for licensing. Various licences in use to this point were inconsistent, contained restrictive clauses, and were written in language only a lawyer could understand.

How did you go about implementing the commitment? Who were the key advocates both within and outside of government during the implementation phase?

We found that at the same time we were working to change how we license information within the federal government, multiple provinces and municipalities were advancing their own open government and open data agendas. These jurisdictions at the subnational level were seeking their own solutions for how to license the use of open data, and gradually, based on an understanding that we all share the same user, several of these jurisdictions began to talk about common licensing challenges.

We asked ourselves if there was a way of combining the efforts of multiple levels of government to provide a more seamless experience to Canadians and to enable more dynamic cross-pollination of open data across multiple jurisdictions. Canada is a federation in which government programs and services are often divided between

different levels of government, and users want to be able to combine data from multiple jurisdictions in an effort to drive and create new applications. Health, transportation, and agriculture are just a few examples of government activities that have municipal, provincial and federal involvement. Collectively, these activities produce a wealth of related data of which ownership and management is dispersed across governments. Now, our new collective challenge was how to enable users to use open data regardless of which government it came from without being encumbered by a web of different rules and restrictions. Could governments work together and put in place a harmonized approach to the licensing of open data? Experience proved that we could.

What were the key factors in allowing this effort to succeed? What are the emerging opportunities as a result?

After several initial discussions with other Canadian governments at the sub-national level, there was recognition that the open licence could be more than just a Government of Canada or a province-specific licence: it could be a national licence, used by the federal government, provinces and territories, and municipalities.

Working with a number of provincial partners, Canada went about drafting a much more progressive and ambitious Open Government Licence; one that would be pan-Canadian in scope and not just for the federal government. There were a number of keys to success:

A. <u>Visible Leadership at the Top</u>

Political leaders readily saw the importance of a common licence and the benefits of multiple levels of government working together. The Honourable Tony Clement, federal minister responsible for Open Government tweeted that his goal was a "common #opengov licence for municipal, provincial, territorial, and federal data."

B. Creating the Right Forum

A cross-Canada working group was established to exchange information and best practices. By building relationships, developing networks, and discovering shared issues, the working group was able to move forward rapidly to more tangible work on the drafting of the licence. Eventually, this group not only drove agreement to a common Open Government Licence, but also became a governance body to manage the Licence, ensuring that future versions would be managed effectively, and that the adoption guidelines were uniform. This way of working will now serve as a model for other collaborative ventures in Open Government.

C. Working with International Partners

During the drafting of the Licence we talked to and closely followed the licensing work of international partners such as the United Kingdom, and consulted with international experts, including members of the Open Definition Advisory Panel.

D. Public Engagement

Public engagement was indispensable, leading to several innovative ideas that made for a better final product. Drafts of the Licence were made available on a continuous basis via our open data portal, data.gc.ca, to ensure a capacity for ongoing input from citizens, governments, and civil society organizations.

We learned some important lessons in this process that will inform our efforts going forward, including the need for flexibility, and that the timeframe for multi-jurisdictional negotiations can be very elastic. Every organization has its own rhythm, and its own tolerance to risk, and this must be factored into both planning and implementation of multi-jurisdictional activities.

How have citizens benefitted from this reform?

The Open Government Licence has been approved and already adopted by the federal government and three provinces. The number of adopters continues to grow. Our Licence has been recognized as <u>conformant</u> with the high standards of "openness" by the Open Definition Advisory Panel with considerable <u>blog</u> and <u>media coverage</u>. Citizens now benefit by having one easy to understand Open Government Licence with minimal restrictions used by multiple jurisdictions across Canada.

What did NOT go as planned, and what did you learn from this? How might you take this work forward in your next OGP action plan?

In the next year, we will continue to push for adoption of the Open Government Licence across Canada. This will help in our efforts to ensure that Canadians can enjoy a richer and more seamless experience in accessing and using Canadian open data and information, regardless of where they live across our vast and diverse country.