Ministry of the Interior and
Kingdom Relations

Open government in the Netherlands

Action Plan 2016-2017

Contents

1 Open government in the Netherlands:
Keeping pace with the changing society

> *'The government must become more open. That is inevitable and inescapable due to various ongoing developments, both technological and social.'*
>
> (Open Government Citizen Panel, 2015)

1 Open government in the Netherlands

The Netherlands has a long democratic tradition and a strong civil society of which we can be proud. Confidence in the democratic process remains high[1] and we rank among the Top 10 countries on the Transparency International index. The Netherlands is in fifth place in the Open Government Index 2015, published as part of the World Justice Project[2] which examines the situation in no fewer than 102 countries. Criteria include the volume of published legislation and open government data, the degree of participation and the government's response to complaints. In another ranking, the Open Data Monitor 2015, the Netherlands is now in sixth place, having risen four places since the previous year. In short, open government in our country may be said to be 'in a good state'. In the global context, it is nothing short of excellent.

Nevertheless, democracy is not static. Our society is constantly changing. Advances in information and communications technology, improvements in education and media, trends such as internationalisation and individualisation: all shape the expectations citizens have of their government. The Dutch government acknowledges this and is taking steps to make its relationship with the general public more open. We actively invite ideas and opinions, and we act upon them. There is now even greater transparency with regard to government procedures and decision-making processes. Information is provided more readily and in a simpler, more appropriate form. Data collected by the government is made available for reuse by third parties with a view to innovation and enterprise. The Dutch government holds the firm view that relationships between the citizen and public sector authorities at all levels can and should be made (even) more open.

The first Action Plan for Open Government (2014-2015) introduced a number of measures intended to increase openness and transparency at all levels within the public sector. While this represents a step in the right direction, there is still work to be done. The public are demanding government action not only on a national but also on a local scale.

Action Plan for Open Government 2016-2017
The Action Plan for Open Government sets out the ambitions of the government and its partners. It describes how we intend to pursue those ambitions. The document is therefore a practical implementation of the earlier 'Vision for Open Government'.[3] The overall process is one in which we shall move towards a situation in which public sector authorities make virtually all information and data freely available. Those authorities will actively collaborate with and support civil society organisations. They will be fully open and accessible to all.

---

[1] *Legitimiteitsmonitor Democratisch Bestuur*, 2013.
[2] http://data.worldjusticeproject.org/opengov/#/groups/NLD
[3] Letter of recommendation accompanying the document Visie en Actieplan OGP, 26 September 2013, ref. 2013-0000579899

2 Working towards open government: *Building on ongoing projects*

'How can we make the transition from a hierarchy to a network society? That is something in which I want to be involved!'

(Wouter Breedt Bruijn, Multi-stakeholder meeting, 17 June 2015)

2 Working towards open government

There is a clear movement towards greater openness within all Dutch public sector authorities. For example, the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS) declared 2015 'the year of transparency as the key to better and affordable care'.[4] The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) has been extremely active in ensuring access to relevant data.[5] All ministries acknowledge openness to be an important aspect of professional conduct and public accountability. Moreover, efforts are not confined to the national level. The Netherlands has recently subscribed to the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), a global standard to promote open and accountable management of natural resources, and is a member of the International Aid Transparency Initiative. Regional authorities, including the Province of Groningen, have implemented their own Open Government Action Plan, as have local authorities such as Lelystad. The words 'transparency' and 'openness' now appear in official programmes with greater regularity. Of course, the move towards greater openness entails careful consideration of aspects such as the active publication of information and privacy, 'big data' and the relationship between a government authority and civil society. To achieve 'openness' in practice will not be automatic: some support and assistance is required. The Action Plan offers a basis for cooperation between authorities at all levels as they pursue their ambitions. It builds upon the results of the previous action plan, from which a number of lessons will be drawn.

2.1 Developing an active and structured open data policy

"We consider it neither necessary nor desirable for all information to be made public. Nevertheless, it is very important to make a clear distinction which information is made public and which is not" (Open Government Citizen Panel, 2015).
As an increasing number of public sector authorities place their data in the public domain, it is necessary to establish an appropriate structure for the databases and identify the requirements which they must meet. At the same time, civil society organisations have called on the government to accelerate the process of making its data available.[6] The term 'open data' refers to structured information which is computer-readable, and ideally in an open file format which requires no proprietary software to read. The initial steps towards an active and structured open data policy were set out in the previous action plan. First, it was necessary to identify the information that the government actually possesses, and that which can be made public without risk to, say, national security. To this end, a government-wide inventory was performed.
The number of datasets made available online (through https://data.overheid.nl) more than doubled: from 3250 in February 2015 to 7610 in November.[7] The Ministry of Finance has agreed a multiannual plan with all other ministries and departments with regard to the publication of financial information at central government level. Moreover, largely due to the efforts of the Open State Foundation and CBS/Statistics Netherlands, all financial information at the local government level has been made widely available. This is a significant milestone in terms of creating greater financial transparency. The current action plan builds upon these successes, while also initiating an examination of further opportunities to use open data in addressing today's societal challenges.

---

[4] See Letter to the House of Representatives dated 2 March 2015, ref. 723160-133094MC.
[5] In its Open Data Trend Report 2015, the Court of Audit cites the Ministry of OCW's publication of education data as a 'good practice example'.
[6] 'Onze Overheid, Onze Informatie', the manifesto of the Social Coalition for Open Government, 2015.
[7] Reference date: 20 September 2015.

2.2 Active openness: learn and expand

"Information and products financed from the public purse should be made available to the public, unless doing so impinges on legitimate interests such as privacy or security" (the manifesto of the Social Coalition for Open Government, 2015).

The government is not only working to establish a system of open data but is also actively promoting the dissemination of qualitative and unstructured information, such as policy reports. Today's citizens are well educated and articulate. They wish to have greater influence in the various decision-making procedures. If they are to understand the workings of a government organisation and form an objective opinion on matters of policy, they must have access to the relevant information. The previous action plan therefore adopted the motto, 'make information public, unless...'. In other words, it is not necessary to show a reason to place information in the public domain, but it is necessary to show a reason *not* to do so. However, the principle of 'open by design' has proven difficult to apply in practice. Not only does it raise questions regarding the categories of information to be published, but existing information systems seem not to be compatible with the principle. A further consideration is cost: the publication of fully open information often involves significant investment. The translation of theoretical possibility into practical reality therefore remains a challenge. This action plan, like its predecessor, therefore adopts a incremental approach. While there will be active pursuit of openness in government, the process must be undertaken gradually.

Another important consideration is the ease with which information can be found by those who wish to consult it. The former action plan introduced the Digital 2017 agenda to address this point. The purpose of the agenda is to arrive at a fully accessible and searchable corpus of digital government information by the year 2017.[8] The agenda is now to be pursued as an independent programme rather than an intrinsic component of the action plan.

2.3 Openness demands appropriate interaction between government and citizen

"We see Open Government not (only) as a question of technology, but something which calls for a shift in attitude and behaviour on the part of the government. (Open Government Citizen Panel, 2015).

Openness goes beyond the mere publication of data and information. Openness demands appropriate interaction between public sector authorities and the citizen. Within government, efforts are already in hand to increase awareness of the various roles of departments and individual staff, and of the ways in which the general public can and should be involved in formulating policy. It is acknowledged that the public sector can and should align itself with social initiatives: projects undertaken by civil society groups or individuals. In the former action plan, these aims were addressed within projects such as *Slimmer Werken* ('Smarter Working'). A full account of the methodologies, results and infrastructure developed within this project is now available online.[9] The Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment has established a dedicated 'Participation' department which supports officials in their interaction with 'the energetic society' and will continue to do so under the current action plan. The ongoing project *Prettig Contact met de Overheid* ('Pleasant contact with the government') is also to be continued. Its informal interventions have been shown to result in decisions of higher quality, with fewer appeals and objections, more efficient processes, increased confidence in government, and greater satisfaction on the part of both officials and the citizens affected by their decisions.[10]

---

[8] Digitaal 2017 Implementation Agenda, available online at www.digitaleoverheid.nl.

[9] See www.slimmernetwerk.nl.

[10] See final report *Pioniertraject mediationvaardigheden resultaten, analyses & aanbevelingen, (2010)* and the report *Legitimiteit van de overheid, aanvaarding van overheidsbesluiten en ervaren procedurele rechtvaardigheid (2013).*

3 The Action Plan 2016-2017: *Ambitions and intended results*

'We consider open government at the local level to be important since this is closest to the citizen. This is the level at which joint decision-making, joint action and joint evaluation are most effective. Openness in local government is an essential precondition to public participation.'

(Citizen Panel advisory report, 2015)

3 The Action Plan 2016-2017

The Open Government Action Plan sets out various projects, programmes and measures to be undertaken by public sector authorities and civil society organisations with a view to enhancing their own openness and transparency. The preparation and production of the Action Plan involved significant public consultation (see Chapter 4). The form, focus and content of the current action plan are based on all the suggestions and ideas received, as well as the lessons learned during the implementation of the former plan.

In this action plan, the emphasis is on the active publication of a greater volume of government data and information and on encouraging an open attitude among public sector officials. The plan also explores how open data can help to solve the current societal challenges. It is concerned with promoting open government at both national and local level. The latter is seen as particularly important since local government – the 'municipality' - is closest to the citizen[11].

Action point 1: National Open Data Agenda
Lead implementing agency: Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom relations.
In association with: all other ministries.

In the manifesto *Onze Overheid, Onze Informatie* ('Our government, our information'), various civil society organisations call on the government to accelerate the process of making data available and accessible. "Only then can members of the public, data journalists and programmers assess the true value of the data and use it in their analyses and interpretations."[12] Open data will certainly make the government and its processes more transparent for the general public. It will also allow the private sector to develop new applications, products and services. All ministries are therefore working to make the data they hold available to society at large. The Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (BZK), in association with those other ministries, must establish frameworks governing how the data is to be made accessible and the quality requirements it must meet. We shall do so by means of the National Open Data Agenda. The Ministry of BZK will also support and assist other public sector authorities and the (re-) users of the data. The online portal https://data.overheid.nl serves as the central access point for all government data.

> **Eindhoven develops an open data strategy**
> Through the enthusiasm of a small group of staff, supported by management and elected officials, the City of Eindhoven has developed its own strategy whereby the public and private sector will join forces to develop new applications for open data. The entire process began when the city authority published a number of datasets online, thus indicating its support for the concept of open data. Over time, the added value of open data became even more apparent and the various stakeholders joined forces to seek new applications. One concrete result of this process has been an annual open data conference, intended to encourage other local authorities to make their data more readily available. For further information, see www.openeindhoven.nl.

---

[11] Open Government Citizen Panel advisory report, June 2015.
[12] '*Onze Overheid, Onze Informatie*', September 2015.

Results:

1. The portal https://data.overheid.nl is fully accessible and its datasets are 'usable': public, free of charge and not subject to copyright restrictions or registration. They comprise raw data which can be processed using standard software. They are complete, up-to-date and findable.
2. The government-wide inventory of datasets is to be repeated and updated. All ministries and departments will identify the datasets in their possession. They will produce a schedule for the publication of those datasets using the classifications, 'available', 'planned', 'under consideration' and 'high value'.
3. BZK will monitor progress in publishing datasets through the data.overheid.nl portal.
4. BZK will provide any necessary support to ensure the quality of the metadata (descriptors, explanations and context) accompanying the published datasets.
5. BZK will assist other ministries in the further development of their open data policy and activities.
6. In 2016, BZK will extend the current support arrangements intended to help public sector authorities make their datasets available through the data.overheid.nl portal. It can advise on all aspects, including technical matters and licences.
7. An open data users group is to be set up to assess the functioning of the portal and to consider matters which are not confined to the public sector itself.

Action point 2: The Stuiveling Open Data Award
Lead implementing agency: Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations.
In association with: the Open Government Expertise Centre (LEOO).

The government will make as much data as possible freely available to the general public and the business community. If the data is in a form that permits simple re-use and processing, it becomes possible to develop useful new applications in areas such as education and healthcare, or to promote democracy and good governance. As an incentive to the development of new applications, products and services, the government is to introduce the 'Stuiveling Open Data Award', which will be presented to a public or private party who has used open data in an innovative manner to address current societal challenges. The award will encourage both the public and private sectors to learn from each other's experiences. The Open Government Expertise Centre *(Leer- en Expertisepunt Open Overheid; LEOO)* will strengthen the learning effect by disseminating best practices and producing handbooks based on entries for the award. LEOO will also assist those organisations which are inspired to pursue their open data activities further.

The first Stuiveling Open Data Award will be presented in 2016. It is named after the former president of the Court of Audit, Saskia Stuiveling, who for many years championed effective accountability, transparency and (technological) modernisation of government.

> **Results:**
>
> 1. There is to be an annual contest to promote the re-use of open data. The amount of €20,000 will be available to divide among the winners.
> 2. There will be an annual presentation ceremony.
> 3. To promote and support the competition, a website is to be launched in 2016. It will highlight best practice examples of the re-use of open data.

Action point 3: ROUTE-TO-PA: Re-use of open data in the Province of Groningen

Lead implementing agency: Utrecht University.

In association with: the Province of Groningen, the City of The Hague, the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, Wise & Munro (Netherlands), the University of Salerno, Ancitel, Comune di Prato (Italy), National de la Recherche Scientifique (France), National University of Ireland, Dublin City Council, Dublinked (Eire), Warsaw School of Economics (Poland), Ortelio Ltd and the Open Knowledge Foundation (UK).

The Province of Groningen has joined other stakeholders in the public and private sectors, civil society organisations and individuals to explore ways in which open data can help to address and resolve issues relating to demographic shrinkage,[13] and specifically in the areas of housing, employment, healthcare and welfare.

The Groningen project is part of a three-year European research programme entitled *Raising Open and User-friendly Transparency-Enabling Technologies for Public Administration Project* (ROUTE-TO-PA), in which the social and societal impact of open data is to be assessed. The key objective of the project is to promote the re-use of open data using new IT applications. This will not only make government more transparent but will create new opportunities to resolve societal issues based on the use of open data.

> **Results:**
>
> 1. A social platform for open data which facilitates interaction between government and the users of open data with regard to one or more societal issues.
> 2. Tools intended to increase transparency (to accompany the social platform).
> 3. Guidelines and good practices to ensure more effective use of open data in addressing various societal challenges.

---

[13] The Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency recognises three distinct forms of demographic shrinkage: a decrease in population, a decrease in the number of households, and a decrease in the potential working population (those aged 20-64 and available for employment). In the regions experiencing shrinkage, there are also shifts in the demographic make-up due to factors such as population ageing (see www.pbl.nl).

Action point 4: Active publication of information
Lead implementing agency: Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations.
In association with: all other ministries and executive agencies.

Because it is not possible to publish all information online immediately, for both practical and financial reasons, the former action plan established certain categories of information for which publication is to be prioritised. They are: research reports, purchasing and procurement data, information relating to the award of grants and subsidies, and feasibility assessments further to various planning procedures. The process of publishing such information will allow the various stakeholders to gain a better understanding of the practical implications, costs and limitations of open government. Eventually, we will work towards a system which may be described as 'open by design', in which full publication of information is regarded as the norm.

Under the current action plan, the pilot projects commenced under its predecessor are to be continued and expanded to other ministries, as requested by various civil society organisations.[14] These pilot projects involve the publication of research reports. Activities to date have shown that there is no standard approach with regard to the publication of feasibility assessments. Not all are made public; those that are appear in various forms and through various channels. Accordingly, efforts will now focus on creating greater uniformity. Financial data, such as information about procurement and the award of grants and subsidies, is already being published to the greatest extent possible, whereupon no additional action is required under the current action plan.

Results:

1. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport are to join the pilot projects currently being undertaken by Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. They will make their research reports available online (at www.rijksoverheid.nl), except where legitimate grounds for exemption exist. The target date for online publication is within four weeks of the report being finalised.
2. The results of these pilots are to be assessed by or on behalf of tje Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. The House of Representatives will be informed of the findings during the latter half of 2016.
3. Assuming positive results, the extended pilot projects will form the basis for active publication of reports and the government-wide implementation of the approach thus developed.
4. A further investigation of opportunities to publish feasibility assessments will be conducted in 2016.
5. Based on the results of this investigation, a standard procedure for the active publication of feasibility assessments will be developed under the responsibility of the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Security and Justice (V&J).

---

[14] *Onze Overheid, Onze Informatie*, September 2015.

Action point 5: Open about finances: detailed open spending data

Lead implementing agency: Open State Foundation (OSF).

In association with: provincial authorities, water management authorities, local authorities, the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, the Interprovincial Consultative Committee (IPO), the Federation of Water Management Authorities (UVW) and the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG).

Since 2015, provincial authorities, water management authorities and local authorities (the municipalities) have made their financial 'Information for Third Parties' (IV3) available through Statistics Netherlands/CBS and the website www.openspending.nl. It is already apparent that users such as officials, elected representatives, journalists and members of the public would appreciate more information in a greater level of detail. BZK therefore commissioned the Open State Foundation (OSF) to conduct a pilot project in which five local authorities published detailed financial data in a form suitable for reuse. The pilots have been successful: all stakeholders see added value in standardising financial information at this more detailed level.

With financial support from BZK, the Open State Foundation is now working to implement a system in which all provincial authorities, local authorities and water management authorities use a common publication standard. The original 'detailed open spending data' programme has been extended to include these various decentral authorities. The Ministry of BZK is supporting the activities as part of the broader approach to open government, and therefore offers a platform through the Open Government Expertise Centre (LEOO; see action point 9).

Results:

1. A handbook for decentral authorities, based on the results achieved in 2016.
2. The intention is that some 75 decentral authorities (local, provincial and water management authorities) will take part in the detailed open financial data project in 2016. The results will depend in part on the financial commitment of those authorities.
3. The intention is that this number will increase to 150 in 2017. Once again, results will depend in part on the level of financial commitment shown by the authorities.
4. Two national conferences on 'Open spending data' are to be held (in 2016 and 2017).

Breda Begroot

Breda Begroot ('Breda Budgeted') is an experiment in which residents of the city of Breda can exert influence over how the local authority spends (part of) its budget. The project was designed further to an interactive process involving the municipal executive, the city council and the general public. In September 2015, a trial of 'civic budgeting' was launched in two city districts, Prinsenbeek and Princenhage. Residents were invited to discuss and suggest how the funds allocated to their districts should be spent. The purpose of the pilot projects is to experiment and draw lessons whereupon the system can be rolled out to the rest of the metropolitan area in 2017.

Action point 6: Open local authority decision-making
Lead implementing agency: Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG).
In association with the Open State Foundation, various local authorities and the Ministry of BZK.

Much of the 'council information' currently available to the general public and their elected representatives is unstructured and not in an open, machine-readable format. The information on which decisions have been, or are to be, based is difficult to find. Moreover, it is not possible to compare information produced by different local authorities, even when relating to the same topic. The Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations and the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG) have therefore commissioned the Open State Foundation to run a pilot project in which five local authorities will produce and publish information in a standardised, machine-readable format (as open data). This pilot project will create a basis for the publication of such data nationwide. The VNG has announced the attention of rolling out the project to all municipalities as part of its Digital Agenda 2020 programme. If the information on which local authorities base their decisions is made available as open data, it will become possible for members of the public, elected representatives and journalists to follow the decision-making process more closely. They will also have greater influence and input. The open data will also allow the development of further innovative applications and products, such as visualisations, websites and apps. Elected representatives will have new tools to assist them in fulfilling their responsibilities, and this will strengthen interaction with their constituents.

Results:

1. Development of a standard for the publication of information as open data, in a form which is reliable, reusable and permits ready comparison.
2. All local authorities are supported to adopt this standard by the end of 2017, whereupon all information currently available in an unstructured form will have been converted to the new, uniform standard and published as open data.

The coalition 'Transparant Nederland' (Transparent Netherlands)
Various civil society organisations are working to increase the transparency of government decision-making processes. A number of such organisations have now joined forces to form the 'Transparent Netherlands' coalition: Netwerk Democratie, the University of Amsterdam, Leiden University, the Waag Society and media partners De Volkskrant, VPRO Tegenlicht, De Correspondent and NieuwsUur. The coalition is supported by the Press Innovation Fund, whose website (www.svdj.nl) states: "Transparent Netherlands wishes to solve a number of problems. This initiative aims to help make our democracy more resilient by strengthening the information position of the citizen. Openness and transparency with regard to the administrative and decision-making networks, as well as the decision-making processes themselves, are excellent ways in which to foster the trust and confidence of the general public. At the same time, Transparent Netherlands offers journalists a code of practice with regard to the use of data, whereupon they can fulfil their key responsibility – ensuring the accountability of those in power – in keeping with the possibilities created by 21st-century technology."

Action point 7: The public officer as professional within the civil society
Lead implementing agency: Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment.
In association with: the Ministry of BZK and the civil society.

If there is to be good and effective dialogue, it is essential that the government is open to civil society initiatives. It must actively involve citizens in the development and implementation of policy, and must work alongside the social partners. After all, the government is part of today's networking society. It is no longer 'in charge' but a partner in the performance of the public tasks. The government is expected to 'work and learn alongside the people'.[15] The civil society partners have called for greater investment in the public sector staff, and specifically in the development of the skills they need to interact effectively with today's network society. It is a question of further professionalisation.

The Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment has already done much to promote public consultation and participation. It continues to pursue the ambitions set out in the former action plan and is devoting considerable attention to developing the skills of staff and managers. All activities focus on the attitudes and behaviour needed to perform effectively within today's network society. The Ministry of I&M serves as an inspiring role model for other government departments in that it is demonstrating a highly effective form of interaction and cooperation.

Public 'review board' visits Oude IJsselstreek
Ways of better working with the civil society are also being sought at the local level. In 2014 the municipality of Oude IJsselstreek invited a group of local residents to act as a 'review board' and evaluate the way in which the local authority was updating its organisation to allow more room for social initiatives. Six fully independent volunteers considered questions such as, "what effects are the organisational changes having, and what are the likely results?" "What other areas should the local authority tackle?" "What effects will the organisational changes have in terms of public governance?" The senior manager within the organisation saw the review as a welcome development: "If you wish to draw on the strengths of the community, it is only logical that you ask the members of that community to assess the functioning of the municipal processes."

---

[15] Open Government Citizen Panel, 2015.

Results:

1. By the end of 2017, all policy staff within the Ministry of I&M will have attended professionalization courses and/or masterclasses, and will be familiar with their new role as 'networking officials' who can interact effectively with civil society.
2. By the end of 2017, all work processes will have been adapted to allow staff every opportunity to perform effectively as 'networking officials'.
3. Communities of Practice: staff who have completed the course 'The civil servant as professional' will come together in a peer review setting and, based on actual case studies, exchange experiences of acting in the networking role. A similar Community of Practice for managers will be formed by December 2017.
4. Management professionalisation: by the end of 2017, all managers within I&M will have received training in interaction with their networking staff.
5. The Ministry of BZK is currently formulating ambitions for the public sector as a whole. The result of the activities at I&M will provide further input.

Action point 8: Informal approach to freedom of information requests
Lead implementing agency: Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations.
In association with: various local authorities and the Open Government Expertise Centre (LEOO).

The Public Adminstration Act *(Wet Openbaarheid van Bestuur)* entitles a 'stakeholder' (usually a member of the public) to submit an application requesting certain information. The most common use of these information requests is to challenge planning decisions. In many instances, a request for information leads to unnecessary bureaucracy and can seriously strain the relationship between the applicant and the government department concerned. Such problems can be prevented by adopting an informal, personal approach. Rather than entering into long correspondence, a member of the department's staff contacts the applicant directly by phone. He or she adopts an open and enquiring attitude to ascertain the nature of the applicant's grievance and will employ good interpersonal communication skills such as active listening, summarising (recapping) and questioning. The focus then shifts from the procedural aspects to a proactive response which is clearly intended to arrive at a mutually acceptable solution.

This approach has been applied in practice as part of the 'Pleasant contact with the government' programme and has been shown to result in decisions of better quality, fewer objections and appeals, more efficient processes, greater public confidence and enhanced satisfaction on the part of both citizens and government officials.

Results:

1. A handbook setting out the informal approach, listing interventions, process optimisations and best practices.
2. Assistance to public sector authorities in adopting the informal approach, to be provided by or through the Open Government Expertise Centre and the 'Pleasant Contact with the Government' programme.
3. Monitoring, analysis and reporting with a view to further increasing the effectiveness of the informal approach.

Gouda takes a proactive approach to Wob requests

What can a local authority do if suddenly faced by a rapid increase in the number of Freedom of Information requests but no concomitant increase in capacity? This was the situation faced by the City of Gouda which, keen to maintain the quality of its information provision, assembled a dedicated "Wob" team and adopted the informal approach. This proved successful. *"By reaching for the phone more often or inviting people to 'drop in' for a chat, Gouda was able to process Wob requests more quickly. Moreover, no penalty notices were issued in 2014, and neither were any formal appeals or objections received,"* reports Marieke van Paassen, project manager of Gouda's Wob team.

Action point 9: Support to other public sector organisations: the Open Government Expertise Centre (LEOO)

Lead implementing agency: Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations.
In association with: ICTU, civil society organisations, various provincial and local authorities, and other ministries.

The *Leer- en Expertisepunt Open Overheid* (Open Government Expertise Centre; LEOO) identifies relevant issues and assists public sector organisations in arriving at an appropriate response. LEOO collates and disseminates relevant knowledge and (co-) organises various meetings about Open Government. Through LEOO, the Ministry of BZK wishes to strengthen the position of all public sector organisations as they implement policy and legislation. LEOO will provide support based on three distinct functions: knowledge broker, facilitator and platform which helps to increase the visibility of Open Government activities.

Results:

1. Ten further knowledge instruments, such as a factsheet about the new *Wet Hergebruik van Overheidsinformatie* (Reuse of Government Information Act 2015) and an self-scan Open Government, to be developed in association with local authorities and civil society partners.
2. Twenty meetings, to include one major conference attended by at least four hundred delegates (at which the Stuiveling Open Data Award is presented) and a meeting for all lead implementing agencies of the national action plan.
3. One hundred personal coaching processes and one-to-one meetings for managers and government staff.
4. Five long-term support programmes for educational institutes wishing to include Open Government as a module or topic within their programmes.
5. One hundred additional national or international initiatives dealing with Open Government.
6. Twenty new interviews and other content to be published on the Open Government website every two or three weeks.

The LEOO website

The Open Government Expertise Centre's website is regularly updated with new content, including blogs, a networking page, an agenda and a map showing more than 170 ongoing and recent initiatives, over fifty of which are international.

The 'Toolkit' pages offer useful handbooks and tips for public sector authorities, many based on real-life case studies and practical experience. Users will also find comprehensive information about various aspects of Open Government and relevant developments. See: www.open-overheid.nl
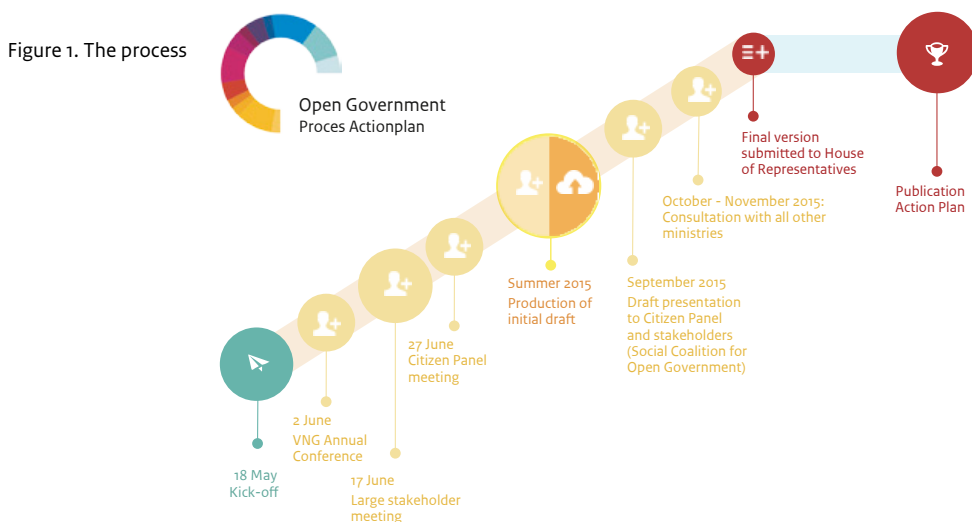
4   The process

> *"Get citizens involved in processes as experts from the very start."*
>
> *(Culture of Open Governance, Multi-stakeholder meeting, 17 June)*

4 The process

This action plan is a co-production which relies on significant input from other public sector authorities, a broad group of civil society organisations and interested members of the public. In an online process and a series of meetings, everyone enjoyed an opportunity to contribute their ideas, suggestions and notes of caution. The process and its timeline are shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. The process

Open Government
Proces Actionplan

18 May
Kick-off

2 June
VNG Annual
Conference

17 June
Large stakeholder
meeting

27 June
Citizen Panel
meeting

Summer 2015
Production of
initial draft

September 2015
Draft presentation
to Citizen Panel
and stakeholders
(Social Coalition for
Open Government)

October - November 2015:
Consultation with all other
ministries

Final version
submitted to House
of Representatives

Publication
Action Plan

4.1 The Citizen Panel

A 'Citizen Panel' was convened to advise on the contents of this action plan. Its eighteen members were selected by an independent consultancy to provide a representative mix of background and experience. The panel produced an advisory report containing various notes, cautions and suggestions.[16]
On 21 September 2015, the panel was informed which of their suggestions would be included in the Open Government Action Plan 2016-2017 and which would not, with reasons given.

4.2 Multi-stakeholder consultation

Various groups, stakeholders, government representatives and professionals contributed to the Open Government Action Plan 2016-2017: see Figure 2. At two meetings (held on 18 May and 17 June 2015), over 140 stakeholders joined staff of the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations to discuss the contents of this document in some detail. Reports of the day's meetings were published online, as were the outcomes of the deliberations. Members of the public were invited to comment, add any points that may have been overlooked, and to take part in the subsequent discussion. Visitors to the website were also asked

---

[16] The report of the Citizen Panel is available online at www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/ rapporten/2015/06/27/ advies-burgerpanel-actieplan-open-overheid-2016-2017 (in Dutch)
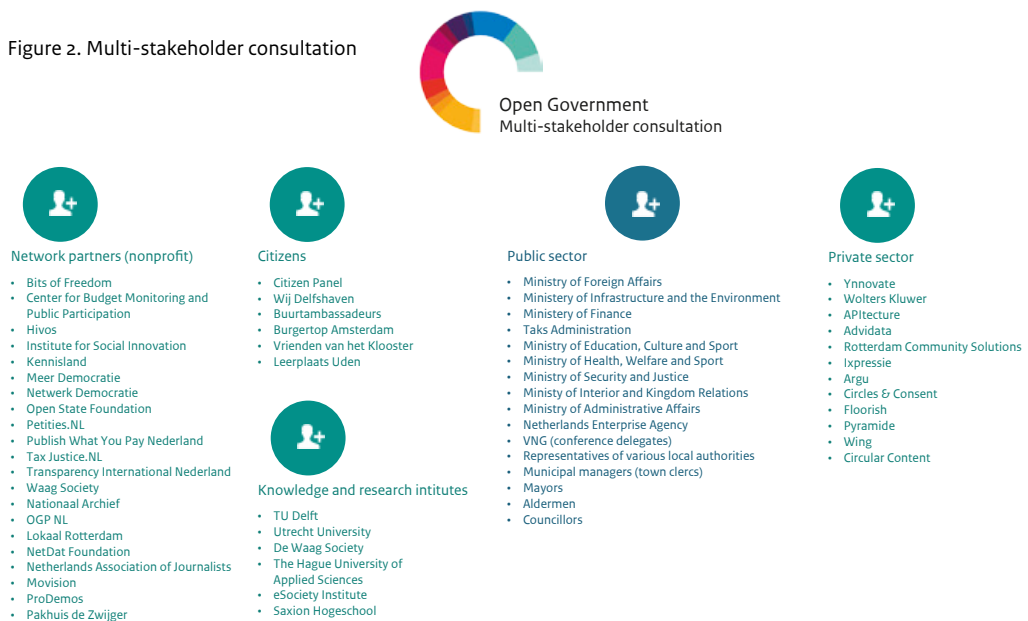
whether they would be willing to help in the implementation of the various action points. Links to the online reports of the meetings of 18 May[17] and 17 June[18] were posted on Twitter. Several civil society organisations produced a joint manifesto entitled *Mijn overheid, mijn informatie* ('My government, my information') which was submitted to the Ministry of the Interior.[19] Several points from this document were adopted in the action plan.

Public sector representatives were also closely involved in the production of the action plan. At the VNG conference on 2 June, several mayors, aldermen, councillors and municipal managers were invited to give short (five minute) presentations, explaining how they would go about making government more transparent.

4.3 Communication

In addition to the stakeholder and citizen panel meetings, there was an opportunity for everyone to contribute to the process online. Starting on 18 May, considerable attention was devoted to the process on the website of the Open Government Expertise Centre and on social media channels such as Twitter and Facebook[20].

Figure 2. Multi-stakeholder consultation

Open Government
Multi-stakeholder consultation

Network partners (nonprofit)
- Bits of Freedom
- Center for Budget Monitoring and Public Participation
- Hivos
- Institute for Social Innovation
- Kennisland
- Meer Democratie
- Netwerk Democratie
- Open State Foundation
- Petities.NL
- Publish What You Pay Nederland
- Tax Justice.NL
- Transparency International Nederland
- Waag Society
- Nationaal Archief
- OGP NL
- Lokaal Rotterdam
- NetDat Foundation
- Netherlands Association of Journalists
- Movision
- ProDemos
- Pakhuis de Zwijger

Citizens
- Citizen Panel
- Wij Delfshaven
- Buurtambassadeurs
- Burgertop Amsterdam
- Vrienden van het Klooster
- Leerplaats Uden

Knowledge and research intitutes
- TU Delft
- Utrecht University
- De Waag Society
- The Hague University of Applied Sciences
- eSociety Institute
- Saxion Hogeschool

Public sector
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment
- Ministery of Finance
- Taks Administration
- Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport
- Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport
- Ministry of Security and Justice
- Ministy of Interior and Kingdom Relations
- Ministry of Administrative Affairs
- Netherlands Enterprise Agency
- VNG (conference delegates)
- Representatives of various local authorities
- Municipal managers (town clercs)
- Mayors
- Aldermen
- Councillors

Private sector
- Ynnovate
- Wolters Kluwer
- APItecture
- Advidata
- Rotterdam Community Solutions
- Ixpressie
- Argu
- Circles & Consent
- Floorish
- Pyramide
- Wing
- Circular Content

---

[17] See https://storify.com/HenryvdZwan/doe-open

[18] See https://storify.com/renewthinking/actieplan-open-overheid-17-juni

[19] The manifesto is available online at http://open-overheid.nl/open-overheid/ onze-overheid-onze-informatie-manifest-voor-een-open-overheid/ (in Dutch).

[20] www.open-overheid.nl

4.4 Video report

A picture is worth a thousand words.

A video report of the entire process is available at www.open-overheid.nl.

The site also includes a review of activities further to the first action plan.

Photo credits

All photos are used by permission. We wish to thank:

Joep Kroes Photography	Doe Open Festival (page 2)
Sebastiaan ter Burg	Multi-stakeholder meeting 17 June (page 4)
Perry Boomsluiter	Multi-stakeholder meeting 17 June (page 7)
	Citizen Panel meeting 27 June 2015 (page 17)