Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) Preliminary Review 2017: Ontario

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The Open Government Partnership (OGP) is a voluntary international initiative that aims to secure commitments from governments to their citizenry to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance. In 2016, OGP opened to subnational participants in their own right as part of a pilot program. The OGP Subnational Pilot Program consists of 15 subnational governments who submitted Action Plans and signed onto the Subnational Declaration at the Paris Global OGP Summit, and will be implementing them from 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2017.

The Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) carries out an annual review of the activities of each government that participates in OGP. As part of the pilot status of the reports, the IRM is releasing this early version of the review of process and commitment form (Specificity, Relevance, and Potential Impact). The final report will be released in the first trimester of 2018.

The early release will be reviewed by the IRM staff and the International Experts Panel (IEP). Thereafter, it will undergo two commenting periods. In the first period (14 calendar days), each OGP-participating government is invited to review the release in draft form before it is put out for broader comment. For the second phase of comments (14 calendar days), there will be a space on the OGP website for broader public comment, which may include formal responses by governments.

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Process of development and monitoring of the action plan

Governments participating in the OGP follow a process for consultation during development of their OGP action plan and during implementation. This section summarizes the performance of the Province of Ontario during the development of their first action plan.

OGP basic requirements

Subnational Governments received the following guidance on participation during action plan development and execution:

May – November 2016: Development of commitments: Participants set up ways to work with civil society organizations and other groups outside government and use these mechanisms to identify priority areas for commitments. Specific commitments should then be developed in partnership with civil society, allowing them the opportunity to support governments in drafting them and establishing milestones. Draft commitments should be shared with the OGP Support Unit as they are being developed and for comment and advice in October-November. Commitments should be finalized and agreed by the end of November, so they can be published and announced at the OGP Summit in December.

Ontario has met the OGP basic requirements through the implementation of a three-phase consultation process with stakeholders that began in August 2016. This process entailed consulting stakeholders in generating ideas, having stakeholders vote on the ideas received, and conducting in-person and online workshops to refine the ideas.

Phase 1 (August 4-26, 2017) involved the conducting of a public online survey asking respondents to submit ideas about potential open government commitments aligning with one of four pre-identified themes:[1],[2] transparency, accountability, public participation, technology and innovation.

Phase 2 (August 27-October 12, 2017) involved two activities. First, having the ideas received assessed internally by Treasury Board Secretariat, Ministries, as well as other internal departments and agencies in order to determine whether they constituted a new activity/initiative and could be achieved within one year.[3] Second, having the public vote online for their favorite idea in each theme.[4]

Phase 3 (October 24-26, 2017) entailed the conducting of three workshops with targeted stakeholders over three days – one in Toronto, one in Ottawa, and one online using the OpenON Forum.[5] According to Nosa Ero-Brown, Director, Open Government Office, Treasury Board Secretariat, these workshops sought to engage with "*as wide a range [of stakeholders] as possible.*" This included soliciting participation from representatives of Ministries and agencies within the Ontario government because it is the people working in these entities who ultimately "*are responsible for implementing and doing*" Open Government, as well as engaging with external actors. The objective was to have participation be "*as broad as it could be in terms of reflecting a broad representation of society.*"

There are two notable aspect of the consultation process:

(1) public servants constituted the majority of participants; and

(2) although Ontario's three commitments all emerged from the consultation process, these specific commitments were not the three most popular ideas in terms of the number of public votes garnered.[6]

Table 3.1: Basic requirements

1. **Participatory Mechanism:** Was there a way of working with CSOs and other groups? Guideline: Participants set up ways to work with civil society organizations and other groups outside government and use these mechanisms to identify priority areas for commitments.	Yes
2. **Priority identification:** Was civil society able to help identify priority areas for commitments? Guideline: Specific commitments should then be developed in partnership with civil society, allowing them the opportunity to support governments in drafting them and establishing milestones.	Yes
3. **Commitment development:** Did civil society participate in the [development/drafting] of commitments and milestones? Guideline: Specific commitments should then be developed in partnership with civil society, allowing them the opportunity to support governments in drafting them and establishing milestones.	Yes
4. **Review:** Were commitments submitted for review to the Open Government Partnership Support Unit prior to finalization? Guideline: Draft commitments should be shared with the OGP Support Unit as they are being developed and for comment and advice in October-November.	Yes
5. **Submission:** Were commitments submitted on time? Guideline: Commitments should be finalized and agreed by the end of November, so they can be published and announced at the OGP Summit in December.	Yes

Openness of consultation

Who was invited?

Ontario residents were invited to participate via a range of on and off-line communication channels, along with more than 500 stakeholders who where contacted either by internal government communication or direct invitation to participate. The workshops conducted during Phase 3 were promoted on the Government of Ontario website and direct invitation to entities on the original stakeholder list as well as participants who had expressed their interest during Phase 1.

There were 236 stakeholders directly invited to participate in the idea generation phase of the consultation (i.e., Phase 1). The *Ontario Open Government Partnership Action Plan* web site, that provides a background to the roll out of the Action Plan (see, https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontarios-open-government-partnership-action-plan [last accessed 5 July 2017]), offers the following breakdown of direct invitations: [7]

- 23 academic institutions
- 95 civil society organizations

- 32 not for profit
- 42 private sector stakeholders
- 44 public sector organizations

Additionally, some 279 invitations targeting Ontario public servants were sent through internal government communication channels. The not yet publicly available electronic documentation provided to the researcher by the Open Government Office, and whose authorship is not specified, (https://docs.google.com/document/d/10kXiCRczXvabzDllPBrGDcm7OwSUIuIR26KtnxmoWzQ/edit [last accessed 5 July 2017]) sets out the following breakdown of these notices:

- 135 Ministry contacts
- 25 Internal Research contacts
- 59 Open Government Ministry Staff Leads
- 60 Open Government Ministry Executive Leads

Overall, 54 percent of the 515 invitations sent out targeted internal government actors, with 46 percent distributed to external stakeholders.

How was awareness-raising carried out?

The consultation process involved using diverse communication channels and platforms to notify interested parties about the process, to provide information about the status of activities, and to encourage broad public engagement. These included:

- Providing updates on the Ontario government's *Open Government website* <https://www.ontario.ca/page/open-government>
- Online Survey
- Online Voting
- In-person and online workshops
- Creation of three advisory groups – one for each Action Plan commitment
- Social media outreach
- Email communications with mailing-list subscribers

Which parts of civil society participated?

During Phase 1, idea generation, some 272 submissions were received,[8] of which 238 were submitted by individual residents.[9] Of the remaining 33 submissions:[10]

- 29 were from 19 self-identified non-profit organizations (of which 15 submissions were from 10 civil society organizations, 7 submissions from 7 religious and anti-abortion entities, and 7 responses from unnamed entities);
- three submissions from three public sector organizations; and
- one submission from a self-identified academic institution.[11]

The Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS), working in consultation with representatives from the Ministries identified as being affected by the ideas received, assessed all submissions on the basis of four criteria: (i) relevancy to Open Government in Ontario; (ii) achievability by the end of 2017; (iii) connection to themes of transparency, accountability, public participation, and technology and innovation; and (iv) novelty of the proposed activity or initiative.

Of the 272 ideas received, the TBS presented 46 online, and gave the public 14 days to vote for

their favorite idea in each theme.[12] Some 785 anonymous votes identifying 15 top ideas were generated through this exercise.[13] Noteworthy in this regard is the finding that youth engagement, the basis of Ontario's Commitment 2, fell outside of this list. In terms of votes, it ranked 16th (n=77) overall.[14]

Level of public input

The IRM has adapted the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) "Spectrum of Participation" to apply to OGP.[15] This spectrum shows the potential level of public influence on the contents of the action plan. In the spirit of OGP, most countries should aspire for "collaborative."

Given that the voting in Phase 2 to identify the most popular ideas was conducted anonymously, there is no way of identifying who actually participated in the vote. Moreover, and despite Phase 2 being participatory insofar as voting apparently was open to all interested actors, the available evidence precludes reaching any empirically grounded conclusions about the diversity of views represented in the voting outcome.

Some 85 stakeholders the majority of which were members of provincial and federal government ministries participated in the three workshops constituting Phase 3. At these workshops, facilitators were used to lead participants through a series of activities aimed at assessing and prioritizing three to five of the top 15 voted commitments – and youth engagement – for inclusion in Ontario's action plan. The largest contingent of participants was composed of representatives from the Ontario Public Sector Ministries. Indeed, the latter group accounted for just less than one half of the total participants (N=39).[16] Eleven participant entities self-identified as representing a civil society organization. The next most represented stakeholders where private sector and academic organizations, each of which had eight participant entities.

A total of eight commitments were selected during the workshops, of which three were selected and refined at two or more of these workshops.[17] Of these, the three identified as being most desirable were:

1. Create a dashboard to provide citizens with information about key government outcomes, metrics, and initiatives;
2. Adopt the international open data charter and its 6 principles for all Ontario ministry and provincial agency data;
3. Provide a digital engagement tool for cross-government use, in order to better engage youth in conversations to support the development of policies and programs that impact youth the most. The tool would enable the civic participation of youth who are not engaged through traditional methods.

The commitment to "Create a dashboard to provide citizens with information about key government outcomes, metrics, and initiatives" is not present in the Ontario government's Action Plan.[18] This is due, in large part, to the Treasury Board Secretariat determining that delivering a fully operational dashboard within twelve months was not feasible. Principal considerations in this regard included issues pertaining to defining the scope of such an undertaking, the time and complexity of building the dashboard, as well as uncertainties about how to link legacy and emerging data into such a dashboard. Ultimately, the Government of Ontario determined that proceeding with building a dashboard risked not having any demonstrable output to the OGP by the end of 2017.

Public input into the action plan development process was actively sought in diverse ways through the use of online platforms, stakeholder networks and in–person workshops. Nonetheless overall participation was limited. Participants constituted 0.00005% of the total population, and representation from central and northern parts of the province where some of the more rural and remote communities, as well as indigenous communities, are situated was marginal.

A key challenge for the Ontario initiative rests in the fact that in terms of population and geographical size it is akin a small state. Indeed, it is larger than some of the OGP's member countries. This magnifies the diversity of interests needing to be considered in attempting to move forward with the development process when compared to the province's urban counterparts in the subnational pilot program initiative.[19] It also means having to mobilize a large public bureaucracy wherein the speed of decision-making and policy implementation is much slower than many of Ontario's counterparts in the pilot program. Another consideration is rooted in Ontario having the third lowest civic engagement and volunteer rates in the Canada.[20] Likewise, voter turnout in provincial elections throughout the last 20 years has averaged only slightly more than 50 percent.[21] These considerations may help to account, in part, for both the seemingly limited level of public engagement, and the adoption of broad rather than more narrowly circumscribed commitments.

The Government of Ontario undertook multiple activities to solicit input from different stakeholders, kept the public informed about the commitment development process, as well as listened to, and acknowledged the participants', concerns and aspirations. A summary of the different stages of the commitment development process and their respective outcomes also was provided on an ongoing basis on the *Ontario.ca* website. However, upon completion of the consultation phases no draft action plan was made available for public comment. Nor was any explanation of how the input received had influenced the government's deliberations in selecting the final commitments made publicly available. The Government of Ontario remained the ultimate decision maker. As such, the level of public input during the development process of the action plan is best defined as *Consult*.

Table 3.2 Level of public input

Level of public input		During development of action plan
Empower	The government handed decision-making power to members of the public.	
Collaborate	There was iterative dialogue AND the public helped set the agenda.	
Involve	The government gave feedback on how public inputs were considered.	
Consult	The public could give inputs.	✓
Inform	The government provided the public with information on the action plan.	
No Consultation	No consultation	

[1] *Ontario Inviting Public Feedback on Open Government Initiatives.* See, https://news.ontario.ca/tbs/en/2016/08/ontario-inviting-public-feedback-on-open-government-initiatives.html. [last accessed 5 July 2017].

[2] An archived copy of the questionnaire is not yet publicly available. However, an electronic document listing the questions posed in the survey was provided to the researcher. See, https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0B6VJeErIt5duR1RkanVRam1YRlU. [last accessed 5 July 2017].

[3] *Ontario's Open Government Partnership Action Plan.* See, https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontarios-open-government-partnership-action-plan [last accessed 5 July 2017]. A list of the ministries and internal departments is not yet publicly available. The information was however made available to the researcher. See, https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0B6VJeErIt5duSHU2RV94b2VzV0k [last accessed 5 July 2017].

[4] *Vote on Ideas to Make Ontario the Most Open Government in Canada.* See, https://news.ontario.ca/tbs/en/2016/09/vote-on-ideas-to-make-ontario-the-most-open-government-in-canada-1.html [last accessed 5 July 2017]

[5] For more detailed information about the scheduling and location of the workshops see Table 1 at: https://goo.gl/8QVfBP

[6] A breakdown of the top 15 ideas in terms of votes received is provided in Table 2 at: https://goo.gl/8QVfBP. The idea that would go on to become Commitment 1 received the most votes overall. Commitment 3 is an amalgam of the 9th and 14th most popular ideas. Commitment 2, fostering youth engagement, was actually the 16th most popular (N=77) idea. Interestingly, of the 14 ideas submitted by those in the 15-25 age demographic, none called for great youth engagement. Of the ideas submitted by members of this group the two most common were: calls to repeal Section 65(5.7) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act forbidding access to information requests about abortion service statistics (N=5), and calls for increased dialogue between various levels of government and the public (N=4). This suggests that push to develop tool to facilitate youth engagement was not, in this instance, something driven by the youth participants themselves.

[7] At the time of preparing this report the IRM researcher has not been able to identify whom exactly were the stakeholders comprising the numbers presented here. Citing the Ontario Government's Privacy Statement <https://www.ontario.ca/page/privacy-statement> the Open Government Office, Treasury Board Secretariat has been unwilling to share the names and contact details of organizational representatives who participated in the process.

[8] The province's *Open Government Partnership Program* web site <https://www.ontario.ca/page/open-government-partnership-program> [last accessed 5 July 2017]) states "over 270 open government ideas" received but does not as of yet offer any summary of who the respondents submitting the ideas were.

[9] The researcher has not been able to ascertain how those responsible for conducting the online survey were able to confirm that the respondents actually were residents of the province.

[10] The information provided here is from not yet publicly available electronic documentation provided to the researcher. See, https://docs.google.com/document/d/1CeH158dMkl0K1Cwr0Kfov18GGTZo6jO9wL7IRE_yNHM/edit [last accessed 5 July 2017].

[11] Follow-up verification by the researcher confirms that this entity actually is a US-based provider of business-related courseware tools, and not an academic institution as self-identified.

[12] *Vote on Ideas to Make Ontario the Most Open Government in Canada.* See, https://news.ontario.ca/tbs/en/2016/09/vote-on-ideas-to-make-ontario-the-most-open-government-in-canada-1.html [last accessed 5 July 2017]

[13] The results and the ranking of the voting process for ideas were posted on the *Open Government Consultation* page <https://www.ontario.ca/page/open-government-consultation#section-2> [last accessed 5 July 2017]) for the public and civil society to review.

[14] See footnote 6.

[15] "IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum", International Association for Public Participation Federation, (2014) http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/foundations_course/IAP2_P2_Spectrum_FINAL.pdf

[16] There is some discrepancy regarding the number of stakeholders who participated in the workshops. The province's *Open Government Partnership Program* web site (https://www.ontario.ca/page/open-government-partnership-program [last accessed 5 July 2017]) states, "We hosted in-person and online workshops with more than 100 people, including members of the public, non-governmental organizations and community groups, to consider the top-voted ideas." However, the not yet publicly available electronic documentation provided to the researcher points to 85 participating stakeholders. See, https://docs.google.com/document/d/1YofWJ-eBWfdRAVzHtu-XD0Ojr_xlOvwTAJaVrrto-hA/edit [last accessed 5 July 2017]. The information presented in Tables 3 and 4 at <https://goo.gl/8QVfBP> offers a synopsis of the data set out in the latter documentation.

[17] The full list of commitments selected at the three workshops is as follows:

Preliminary Commitment – Top voted in work shops

1. Create a dashboard to provide citizens with information about key government outcomes, metrics, and initiatives
2. Adopt the international open data charter and its 6 principles for all Ontario ministry and provincial agency data
3. Provide a digital engagement tool for cross-government use, in order to better engage youth in conversations to support the development of policies and programs that impact youth the most. The tool would enable the civic participation of youth who are not engaged through traditional methods.

Other workshop Commitments

4. Enhance the Consultation Directory to create user-friendly and API-enabled online portal for public consultations that is comprehensive and allows people to sign up for updates, review key documents, and see what changes were made as a result of consultation.
5. Use the Dialogue Xchange to engage the public on social issues that local communities are facing
6. Create training on Open Government and Digital Government for public servants
7. Implement all of the recommendations made by the Open Government Engagement Team in 2014
8. Develop an Open Government guide in collaboration with other levels of government that offers clear and tangible ways for public servants to align their daily work with the principles of open government.

[18] The information provided on The *Ontario Open Government Partnership Action Plan* web site (see https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontarios-open-government-partnership-action-plan [last accessed 5 July 2017]) does not mention that these were the three principal commitments to emerge from the workshops. The latter are however directly identified in not yet publicly available electronic documentation provided to the researcher. See, https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0B6VJeErIt5duTV9nY1k4dHVUVTg [last accessed 10 September 2017].

[19] Furthermore, the development process is being administered and overseen by a very small team of individuals with limited resources.

[20] See, Turcotte, M. (2015). Civic Engagement and Political Participation in Canada. Statistics Canada. http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-652-x/89-652-x2015006-eng.pdf [last accessed 10 January 2018].

[21] See, https://www.elections.on.ca/content/dam/NGW/sitecontent/2017/resources/comparative-historical-results/1867%20-%202014%20General%20Election%20Turnout%20Information.pdf [last accessed 10 January 2018].

Early assessment of commitments

1. Strengthen Ontario's commitment to making government data open by default by adopting the international open data charter.

Commitment Text:

Status quo or problem/issue to be addressed:

Ontario has implemented an Open Data Directive that requires all government data to be open by default, unless it is exempt for legal, privacy, security, confidentiality or commercially-sensitive reasons.

While the directive is a strong foundation, there are concrete steps to be taken to enhance accountability and ensure a more robust implementation of the Open Data Directive. The gaps that will be closed by adopting the open data charter include (1) clear time-bound actions including timing for the release of datasets and inventories as well as concrete methods to demonstrate progress towards clearly defined and communicated targets. (2) Concrete measures for proactive civil society engagement with data and (3) Engagement with domestic and international standards bodies and other standard setting initiatives to increase the interoperability and comparability of Ontario's data.

Main objective: *To maximize the release of, increase access to, and promote greater impact of Ontario's data.*

Brief description of commitment: *The International Open Data Charter brings Ontario into an emerging body of national and subnational governments that are releasing their data in a standardized and comparable format. The International Open Data Charter provides Ontario with a common foundation as well as continuing guidance for realizing the full potential of its open data.*

Milestones

1. Provincial announcement of the adoption of the International Data Charter
2. Develop strategy for Ontario to further align its Open Data Directive with the Charter principles
3. Publish Implementation Schedule and Plan
4. Provide updated tools and guidance (Open data guidebook) for ministries and provincial agencies

Commitment overview

Start date:	January 2017
Intended completion date:	Not specified in the action plan
Period under review:	1 January to 31 December 2017
Responsible Office:	Nosa Ero-Brown, Manager, Policy and Partnerships Open Government Office
Lead CSO partners:	None identified in the action plan

Commitment overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative
Overall			✓		✓						✓	

Commitment aim

Overall Objective & Relevance

The pledge to strengthen Ontario's commitment to making government data open by default by adopting the *International Open Data Charter*[22] constitutes an early important step in achieving greater access to information for residents of Ontario. It focuses on pursuing internal administrative reforms aimed at ensuring the robust implementation of Ontario's *Open Data Directive*. The latter directive,

> *"Instructs ministries and Provincial Agencies to release Government Data that they create, collect, and/or manage as Open Data, unless the Data is exempt from release as Open Data, pursuant to this directive*
>
> *Defines principles and requirements for publishing Government Data as Open Data*
>
> *Promotes a culture of openness and collaboration – both within the public service and externally with the people of Ontario"* [23]

As such, Commitment 1 is meant "to maximize the release of, increase access to, and promote greater impact of Ontario's data" and foster an "increase in access to Ontario's data, a greater economic and social impact of Ontario's data and better consistency and comparability of Ontario's data with other jurisdictions."[24] Adhering to the Charter's six principles is seen as providing a guiding framework for closing three specific gaps in the *Open Data Directive's* implementation: *(1) clear time-bound actions including timing for the release of datasets and inventories as well as concrete methods to demonstrate progress towards clearly defined and communicated targets. (2) Concrete measures for proactive civil society engagement with data and (3) Engagement with domestic and international standards bodies and other standard setting initiatives to increase the interoperability and comparability of Ontario's data.*

These challenges, and others, were identified in a previous, and related, public consultation process that took place in late 2013 and early 2014. Led by the Open Government Engagement Team – a group of nine representatives from academia, business, and community groups who were tasked with providing recommendations about how to advance Open Government in Ontario – the consultations had focused on: (i) how the government of Ontario views information, data, and

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dialogue; and (ii) the changes needed to enable the Ontario government to become transparent and accessible in the light of the rapid pace of technological innovation, and growing public expectations for greater accountability and engagement.[25] The three principal challenges identified by the participants in these consultations centered on the:[26]

- necessity of a culture shift and 'leap of faith' among politicians and public servants if Open Government is to succeed;
- need to facilitate and catalyze public engagement by redressing information disparities between government and members of the public; and
- importance of ensuring ready access to adequate resources – financial and otherwise – so as not to impinge on the implementation of Open Data initiatives.[27]

Based on the value definitions provided by the OGP, the relevance of this commitment, as presented, is restricted to the OGP value of *Access to Information*. None of the four milestones are directly aimed at civic participation, public accountability, or technology and innovation for openness and accountability. This said, only milestones 1.1 and 1.2 are deemed to be directly relevant to the OGP value of *Access to Information*. Adopting the *Charter* contributes to improving access to information insofar as its statement of principles champions the timely release of comprehensive datasets, ensuring that the released data is accessible and usable as well as comparable and interoperable, and proactively engaging with citizens.

The primary audience for Milestone 1.3 is the International Open Data Charter Stewards and Working Groups, the advisory committees to the province's open government initiative, and the Ontario government's ministries and agencies. The objective of the milestone is to enable these parties to be familiar with the plan as well as its long- and short-term goals. Put simply, this milestone pertains to information about government activity as opposed to government-held information. Nonetheless, information about the implementation schedule and plan can potentially enable interested parties, including civil society organizations, to monitor the government's progress in moving toward becoming open by default. .

Milestone 1.4 builds on an existing internal government guidebook for public servants that is being revised to better align with OGP-related considerations and the implications thereof. In accordance with the definitions and criteria set out in the IRM Procedures Manual, and in the absence of a public-facing component to further the goals of access to information, civic participation or public accountability, it is deemed to not be relevant to OGP values.

This said, the IRM researcher maintains that these milestones are at least indirectly relevant to the OGP values of *Access to Information* and *Technological Innovation for Transparency and Accountability* insofar as they enable interested parties, including civil society organizations, to: (i) monitor the government's adherence to the principles of the International Open Data Charter; and (ii) understand the processes and procedures with which Ontario public servants must comply in order to make data open. Without such information the ability of civil society actors to effectively engage with government is impeded. Furthermore, despite their internal orientation, these two milestones do play a role in enhancing transparency.

Specificity and Potential Impact

The commitment language of the individual milestones for Commitment 1 varies. The commitment language of milestone 1.1, for instance, specifies a clear, verifiable activity and measurable deliverable (i.e., either the announcement is made, or it is not) for achieving of the commitment's objective. It is

assessed as having high specificity.

Milestones 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4 focus, broadly, on internal implementation aspects of the commitment. In each instance, the language used describes an activity that can be construed as verifiable but requiring some interpretation on the part of the reader to identify what the activity sets out to do, to determine what would the deliverables be, and how they might be measured. For instance, the reader of these milestones is left to ponder: *What exactly is the content of the strategy and plan mentioned in Milestones 1.2 and 1.3, and what is the timeline for their respective implementation?* Likewise for Milestone 1.4: *What comprises this guidebook and how are we to assess whether its contents are actually being used as intended?* In the light of these considerations, all three milestones are assessed as having low specificity. As for Milestone 1.2, the commitment language by which it is articulated contains no measurable activity, deliverable, or milestone.

The information regarding Commitment 1, as written in *Ontario's Open Government Partnership Action Plan,* is too vague to effectively ascertain how it, and its associated milestones, is meant to contribute to actualizing the specified objective and ambition. The IRM researcher considers there is no clear link between the objective/ambition specified for Commitment 1 and the milestones presented for getting there. This said, and despite the absence of clearly measurable milestones, the commitment language nonetheless describes an activity that is objectively verifiable – i.e., we can assess whether or not the International Open Data Charter is adopted. Therefore, the overall commitment is deemed to be of medium specificity.

It is difficult to assess the potential impact of this commitment and its associated milestones in any substantive sense because they outline broad plans rather than specific actions aimed at tackling specific issues/problems/challenges. Nonetheless, given the importance that government and civil society representatives attach to adopting the *International Open Data Charter* in the move toward government that is more open, the commitment as a whole is assessed as having a moderate potential impact. In addition to providing a statement of principles that can be used by all stakeholders as benchmarks for assessing the progress Ontario is making in implementing its *Open Data Directive*, adopting the Charter represents a significant step forward in pursuing broad internal administrative reform aimed at ensuring the robust implementation of Ontario's Open Data Directive.

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[22] *Open Data Charter*. See, http://opendatacharter.net [last accessed 28 August 2017]

[23] *Ontario's Open Data Directive*. See, http://www.ontario.ca/page/ontarios-open-data-directive [last accessed 28 August 2017]

[24] *Ontario's Open Government Partnership Action Plan.* See, https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontarios-open-government-partnership-action-plan [last accessed 5 July 2017].

[25] Established in October 2013 by the Minister of Government Services, the Open Government Engagement Team was tasked with finding ways for the Government of Ontario to be more open, transparent and accountable. See, *Open by Default – A new way forward for Ontario*, https://www.ontario.ca/page/open-default-new-way-forward-ontario [last accessed 17 September 2017]. See also, *Backgrounder: Ontario's Open Government Initiative,* https://news.ontario.ca/mgs/en/2013/10/ontarios-open-government-initiative.html [last accessed 17 September 2017].

[26] The participants reportedly included elected officials, government officials, public servants, the Queen's Park press gallery, representatives of aboriginal community, academics, along with other individuals and stakeholders. Unfortunately, information about the numbers of participants and, whom they represented is not publicly available.

[27] See, *Open by Default – A new way forward for Ontario*, https://www.ontario.ca/page/open-default-new-way-forward-ontario [last accessed 17 September 2017].

2. Give young people more opportunities to contribute to the development of government programs and services by working in partnership with youth to implement a digital engagement tool.

Commitment text:

Status quo or problem/issue to be addressed: *Youth are digitally connected like never before and have the skill sets and passion to solve problems affecting them locally and globally. Unfortunately, they are not engaged to civic processes in the same way as previous generations so the methods to engage them need to evolve.*

Main objective: *To engage youth on implementing a digital engagement platform that harnesses their collective energy and existing ways of connecting (e.g. social media, mobile-focused, digitally) to contribute to government policy and program development processes on an ongoing basis.*

Brief description of commitment: *Ontario will engage youth on how they currently participate civically, how they want to be engaged and how digital tool(s) would support that.*

Ambition: *Engaging youth in the design and implementation of a new digital access tool is a significant undertaking with the benefit to have substantial impact on the next generation of voters.*

Milestones

1. Engage the Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities and their youth networks on how young people currently engage in civic participation through digital means, as well as in-person, to develop insight on how they want to engage government.
2. Host design lab(s) with the Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities and their youth networks to inform the implementation of a digital engagement tool in a beta phase, for testing and evaluation.
3. Beta-launch a digital engagement tool and establish a baseline for evaluating digital youth civic engagement, and identifying opportunities for improvements.
4. Use feedback from beta testing to launch an updated version of the digital engagement tool and test/measure its impact on digital youth civic engagement, with concurrent evaluation.
5. Continue making updates to the digital engagement tool with the Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities and their youth networks through design lab(s) or other open government tools (e.g. PoliHack).

Commitment overview

Start date:	January 2017
Intended completion date:	Not specified in the action plan
Period under review:	1 January to 31 December 2017
Responsible Office:	Sean Twyford, Youth Strategies Branch Ministry of Children and Youth Services
Lead CSO partners:	None identified in the action plan

Commitment overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative
Overall			✓			✓		✓			✓	

Commitment aim

Overall Objective & Relevance

The issue that Commitment 2 seeks to address is the low levels and changing nature of youth engagement in the development and design of the Ontario government's programs, policies, and services. Some of the key barriers to youth engagement in Ontario include time constraints, financial restrictions, transportation, experiencing social stigma, having reduced levels of self-confidence, as well as inadequate support from community members and organizations.[28] The understanding of youth civic engagement underpinning Commitment 2 transcends equating civic engagement foremost with participating in elections toward a broader view of technologically mediated digital citizenship.[29] The stated objective of Commitment 2 is to "engage youth on implementing a digital engagement platform that harnesses their collective energy and existing ways of connecting (e.g. social media, mobile-focused, digitally) to contribute to government policy and program development processes on an ongoing basis." The Youth Strategies Branch of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services hopes that this exercise will have substantial positive impact on the next generation of voters by demonstrating that their contributions can and do make a difference in the functioning of government policies, programs, and services.

This commitment entails the Youth Strategies Branch of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services working in consultation with the Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities (PCYO)[30] to find where and how to use social media platforms as appealing modes of civic engagement for youth. In the words of Sean Twyford, Director, Youth Strategies Branch, Ministry of Children and Youth Services, and the responsible contact for this commitment, the open government pilot initiative

> *"provides an effective framing for youth engagement. It moves us from being youth centered to having a frame to tie our work and rationale to something more easily understood in terms of why government would do this. The commitment gave us the ability to dedicate staff and resources to this initiative"*

The relevance of this commitment, as presented, centers on the OGP values of civic participation, and technology and innovation for openness and accountability. Each of the five milestones seek to open up decision making to Ontario's youth and solicit meaningful input from this demographic to

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inform decision-making as well as promoting new technologies – or in this case online platforms – offering opportunities for information sharing, public, participation, and collaboration.

At the core of the five cumulative milestones is the development and design of a digital engagement tool that solicits and collects social media and anonymous responses to youth policy questions "for the purpose of improving government programs and services for Ontario's youth."

This commitment builds on long standing efforts by the Ontario government to enhance youth engagement in policy development. In recent years this has included such activities as, engaging with youth in pre-budget consultations through both an online forum created to engage Ontarians about decisions affecting them and on Twitter (#budgettalks),[31] provincial support for numerous #PoliHack events bringing together various youth sector stakeholders including data specialists, researchers, policymakers and youth who bring their collective knowledge to propose strategies and develop apps aimed at tackling real-world youth-related issues.[32] As noted by Mr. Twyford the benchmark for assessing the success of Commitment 2 will not rest on the number of participant youth voices per se, but rather on demonstrating to the youth of Ontario that "*your voice is actually having an impact on how government is working.*"

Specificity and Potential Impact

The commitment language of the individual milestones for Commitment 2 is relatively uniform across milestones 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4. In each instance the language used describes activity that can be construed as verifiable but requiring some interpretation on the part of the reader to identify what the activity sets out to do and determine what would the deliverables be. As such, each of these milestones is assessed as having low specificity. Although there currently are low levels of youth civic participation[33] in the province of Ontario, and despite the tool being created in collaboration with relevant beneficiaries, the lack of specificity among the milestones in Commitment 2 precludes one from understanding the scope and scale of the tool to be created. This said, even in the absence of clear indicators or deliverables, the milestones are self-explanatory verifiable activities, and the same holds true for the commitment overall. Based on this assessment Commitment 2 is assessed to be of medium specificity.

The starting point for considering the potential impact of Commitment 2 is rooted in the premise that, "*the increasing popularity of technology means that civic engagement activities need to be redefined to fit a new era of digital citizenship*" and "*civic engagement via online activities is under-examined.*"[34] For Commitment 2 there is a clear link between the specified objective and the five milestones set out for realizing this goal. Working with Ontario's youth to design and implement a digital engagement tool is a novel method for offering young people opportunities to contribute to the development of government programs and services. It cannot, however, be taken for granted that this particular undertaking will *necessarily* serve as a bridge to engagement across a wider range of youth issues. The common feature across of the five cumulative milestones is a seeming effort at determining how best to apply "existing ways of connecting (e.g. social media, mobile-focused, digitally)" to beget enhanced youth engagement. However, realizing the full transformative potential of these "existing ways of connecting" is contingent upon also identifying and addressing the conditions under which they can most effectively give young people more opportunities to contribute to the development of government programs and services. This said, Commitment 2 is assessed as being a major step forward in the relevant policy area.

[28] See, Chan, Meanne, and Joe Lee (2016). *Youth Impact Summit: Redefining Youth Civic Engagement in Ontario 2016/2017*

Report. https://studioy.marsdd.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/MaRS-YIS-Public-Report-2.pdf [last accessed 10 September 2017].

29 See, Turcotte, M. (2015). Insights on Canadian Society: Political participation and civic engagement of youth. Statistics Canada, 1-17. http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-006-x/2015001/article/14232-eng.pdf [last accessed 10 September 2017]. See also, Samara (2015). *Message Not Delivered: The Myth of Apathetic Youth and the Importance of Contact in Political Participation.* http://www.samaracanada.com/docs/default-source/default-document-library/samara-messagenotdelivered-g.pdf?sfvrsn=2, and Hamel, A. V. (2011). From Consumer to Citizen: Digital Media and Youth Civic Engagement. Media Awareness Network, 1-36. http://mediasmarts.ca/sites/mediasmarts/files/pdfs/publication-report/full/civic-engagement.pdf [last accessed 10 September 2017].

30 The PCYO is a 25-member group of young professionals and leaders, ages 16 to 25+. They give advice to the Premier and the Minister of Children and Youth Services on issues affecting youth and work within their local communities to make sure youth voices are considered in government decision-making. See, https://www.ontario.ca/page/about-premiers-council-youth-opportunities

31 See, http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/english/youthopportunities/steppingup/steppingup2015/civicengagement.aspx, and http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/documents/youthopportunities/steppingup/2015exec_summary.pdf [last accessed 18 October 2017].

32 http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/professionals/steppingup/steppingup2016/civicengagement.aspx [last accessed 18 October 2017].

33 See, Chan, Meanne, and Lee (2016), and Samara (2015), op. cit

34 See, Chan, Meanne, and Lee (2016) op. cit.

3. Further embed open government principles in the day-to-day work of the Ontario Public Service through the development of a new guide and training.

Commitment text

Status quo or problem/issue to be addressed: *Staff has differing levels of understanding and capacity to embed open government principles (regarding data, info and public engagement) in their daily tasks.*

Main objective: *To create an Open Government literate with common principles embedded into daily responsibilities that promote accountability, transparency and public participation.*

Brief description of commitment: *As open government increases in prominence it will change the way that public-sector employees engage with their responsibilities.*

Ambition: *Develop an Open Government guide and training in collaboration with other levels of government that offers clear and tangible ways for public servants to align their daily work with the principles of open government.*

Milestones

1. Develop (draft) guide with input from government ministries and agencies.
2. Establish a community of practice
3. Undertake pilots
4. Training of Trainers

Commitment overview

Start date:	Not specified in the action plan
Intended completion date:	Not specified in the action plan
Period under review:	1 January to 31 December 2017
Responsible Office:	Kelly Villeneuve, Manager, Outreach and Organizational Change, Treasury Board Secretariat
Lead CSO partners:	None identified in the action plan

Commitment overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative
Overall		✓			Unclear relevance					✓		

Commitment aim

Overall Objective & Relevance

Commitment 3 targets a challenge identified during the Open Government Engagement Team's 2013/2014 consultations that informed the province's Open Data Directive. Specifically, the recognition that successfully implementing Open Government in Ontario will be contingent upon a culture shift and 'leap of faith' among its politicians and public servants. Common issues raised by the approximately 100 Ontario Public Service staff whom participated in these discussions included: [35]

- recognition that Open Government constitutes a dramatic change in how government conducts its affairs, and engages with the public
- the need for sustained, enterprise-wide commitment to successfully implement Open Government; and
- successfully shifting public servant culture would require: *"building staff capacity in the areas of dialogue, information and data; trusting in staff to be more open and responsive to the public; and motivating or encouraging staff to embrace the principles of Open Government."*

It is these concerns that undergird Commitment 3's focus on addressing the differing levels of understanding of, and competencies for, operationalizing and embedding open government principles into the day-to-day work of Ontario's public servants and the stated objective of creating, "an Open Government literate OPS with common principles embedded into daily responsibilities that promote accountability, transparency and public participation."

In line with the views expressed by Kelly Villeneuve, Manager, Outreach and Organizational Change, Treasury Board Secretariat, and Don Lenihan, a member of Ontario's Open Government Advisory committee, Commitment 3 is an essential first step in a larger capacity building effort within the OPS to ensure that the public will be served well by Ontario's open government initiative over the medium- and long-term. This said, it is unclear how this commitment and the accompanying milestones, as written, align with any of the four OGP values, considering it is principally an internal-facing administrative initiative. As identified in the action plan, the implementation of this commitment can potentially change the ways in which public servants engage with their responsibilities, embedding open government principles in their day-to-day work. While the commitment might help to foster a culture within the public service that is more conducive to open

government, none of the milestones contain a public facing element that is vital to the notion of relevance as defined by the OGP.[36]

Specificity and Potential Impact

The commitment language is vague. For each milestone, the language used contains no measurable activity or deliverable. The IRM researcher could verify whether the guide was developed or if a training took place during the implementation period, however, the lack of specificity requires interpretation from the reader to identify how these activities are to be carried out, what their scope and reach will be, among other variables. Given this situation, the commitment is assessed as having low specificity.

Creating a guide and training for pubic servants clearly is a positive step toward facilitating a better understanding of how to operationalize open government across the Ontario Public Service. However, the low specificity of Commitment 3 and its associated milestones, combined with its divergence from the OGP's call for commitments to be SMART, precludes any substantive assessment of its potential impact. The transformative potential of successfully shifting pubic servant culture through training notwithstanding, Commitment 3, as written in *Ontario's Open Government Partnership Action Plan,* is assessed as having minor potential impact.

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[35] See, *Open by Default – A new way forward for Ontario*, https://www.ontario.ca/page/open-default-new-way-forward-ontario - section-9 [last accessed 17 September 2017].

[36] See, Open Government Partnership, 2016. *IRM Procedures Manual.* https://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/IRM-Procedures-Manual-v4_Sept2017.docx [last accessed 17 September 2017].