Canada2020

March 4, 2016

Dear Members of the Selection Committee of the Open Government Partnership Subnational Government Pilot Program:

I'm very pleased to learn that the Open Government Partnership is now accepting applications from sub-national governments; and I'm writing in support of the Canadian Province of Ontario, which is applying for membership status.

With about 40% of Canada's population—some 13 million people—and a million square kilometers of territory, Ontario is not only the country's most populous province, but is bigger than France and Spain combined and has a population significantly larger than many member countries of the Partnership.

As an expert in public engagement and Open Government, over the years I have worked with the Government of Ontario on many projects, including the reform of its service delivery practices, the development of online services, and a province-wide public engagement initiative to renew the legislation that governs the province's 600,000 condominiums. Of particular relevance here is my work with the Province on Open Government.

Through the winter of 2014-15, I served as Chair of Ontario's Open Government Engagement Team. Our nine-member Team was asked to consult with citizens and experts across the province; and to provide the government with recommendations to make Ontario a leader in the field of Open Government. Our mandate divided Open Government into three key streams:

- **Open Data**, which uses digital tools to make governments' vast reserves of data available to the public for evidence-based decision-making and as a resource to build new products and services for the knowledge economy.

- **Open Information**, which uses online tools to promote new levels of transparency and accountability through a more proactive release of government information.

- **Open Dialogue**, which uses digital tools to involve citizens and stakeholders more directly in planning and decision-making.

Our final report, which was submitted in April of 2014, has formed the basis of Ontario's plan for Open Government. Since it was created in June 2014, Ontario's Open Government Office

(OGO) in the Treasury Board Secretariat has been spearheading an ambitious series of Open Government initiatives in all three areas.

For example, under its leadership, in May 2015, 185 data sets were made public, bringing the total number to more than 400. In November 2015, the OGO released its Open Data Directive, which is based on the principle of Open by Default, and requires all government data to be made public, unless it is exempt for legal, privacy, security, confidentiality or commercially-sensitive reasons.

On Open Information, the government has broken new ground by making public the mandate letters to cabinet ministers that instruct them on the government's priorities. It has also moved to make information more accessible, for example, by making the public accounts more user-friendly with an online interactive visualization tool, fueled by machine-readable data.

Perhaps the government's most innovative efforts, however, are in the area of Open Dialogue. In the government's view, Open Dialogue is critical to the success of Open Government for the following reasons:

- Involving the public in decision-making through Open Dialogue can help improve transparency, accountability and responsiveness.
- Open Dialogue is essential for collaboration, which brings the right mix of people, skills and resources together to solve complex issues, such as poverty or innovation.
- Communities are wellsprings of "lived experience" and Open Dialogue is the tool governments rely on to tap this knowledge and ensure their policies and programs are responsive to community needs.
- Open Dialogue brings a mix of voices to the interpretation of data to ensure that evidence-based decision-making is balanced.

Online tools, from social media to complex algorithms, are taking this to a new level. Increasingly, they will allow Ontario to engage more people, more often and less expensively; and to mobilize them around shared goals and solutions.

In the spring of 2015, the Open Government Office launched an Open Dialogue project to develop a Public Engagement Framework that will guide future use of engagement processes in the Ontario Public Service. The team is testing and applying new methods of public engagement with partner ministries through five demonstration projects. The goal is to make the use of public consultation far more principled and systematic. This approach was proposed in the Engagement Team's report.

This is a bold and innovative step that positions Ontario as a leader in Open Dialogue in the context of Open Government. As a member of the Open Government Partnership, Ontario would bring these forward-looking ideas and experiences to the table. Other governments would benefit from its experience and might, in turn, see Open Government in a different light.

For its part, I am confident the OGO will forge strong bonds with other members of the Partnership, and will seek to benefit from their expertise and experiences, and to put them into practice here in Ontario.

I strongly encourage you to approve Ontario's application. The Province would be a strong and articulate voice for sub-national governments in the partnership, as well as a champion for the place of Open Dialogue in Open Government. I believe both a very important to the movement's future success.

Sincerely,

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