Open Government Partnership
Access to Information
Working Group

Work Plan 2015

Introduction

Faced with the growing demand for quality, useful and reliable information, as well as the urgent need to improve confidence in public institutions, the right of access to information (ATI) was identified as central to the Open Government Partnership (OGP). As a means of promoting and supporting ATI within the OGP context, in 2013 the Access to Information Working Group (ATI WG) was created. The main objectives of the ATI WG are to support learning opportunities among Open Government Partnership (OGP) member countries, to encourage more ambitious commitments on access to information as part of OGP action plans, and to engage the participation of stakeholders in the formulation and oversight of the ATI commitments.

Increasing transparency and access to information (ATI) is at the core of OGP values and principles, and crucial to addressing the most pressing social needs, solving public problems and improving the effectiveness of government institutions. Public information is the foundation upon which other components of Open Government can be developed; and therefore a focus must be placed on enhancing the capacities of both institutions and society to identify, publish, and disseminate useful information. We believe that with transparency as a tool, citizen participation as a condition, accountability as an objective and innovation as a strategy the elements will exist for designing and implementing more participatory and public policies to meet the social demands.

The working group includes more than 180 members from across all regions who have indicated an interest in promoting the right of access to information as a key component of the open government partnership; and it is anchored by Mexico (Federal Institute for Access to Information and Data Protection) and The Carter Center's Global Access to Information Program.

In developing the OGP ATI Working Group plan for 2015, a survey was sent to all listed members. The results of the survey are incorporated into the action plan. Notably, the survey served to validate the purpose and the objectives of the working group, as defined in the 2014 work plan, and provided important inputs for the direction of the group over the coming year.

The main aims of the Access to Information Working Group (ATI WG) continue to be:

- To become a resource that helps governments in designing and implementing effective and ambitious commitments regarding ATI and disclosure of relevant information;
- To support the participation of key stakeholders, ATI oversight agencies, networks and civil society in the OGP ATI dialogue;

As well as:

- To promote best practices and coordinate efforts to promote access to public information with OGP member states; and
- To promote the right of access to information as a catalyst for generating useful public knowledge, contributing to building more open institutions and accountability.

Purpose and objectives

The right of access to information is at different stages, and its legal development and implementation vary widely internationally. Thus, the ATI WG will look to engage at key moments in the fulfillment of four purposes (with the objectives listed based on priority assigned through the survey):

1) To support governments that are developing their commitments or making new commitments around access to information. The ATI WG will promote the adoption of ambitious commitments that advance the national ATI agenda and lead to greater transparency and openness.
2) To promote an inclusive dialogue where multiple stakeholders, particularly ATI oversight bodies and civil society leaders, participate in the OGP national process (from consultation to evaluation) and actively engage in permanent national dialogue mechanisms.
3) To serve as a resource and support for government agencies and civil society groups that are trying to fulfill their ATI-related commitments.
4) To provide direction and support to ensure full compliance with the access to information eligibility criteria to governments which are not presently part of OGP but interested in joining or which are seeking to improve their ATI-related scores.

Working Group Membership

The ATI Working Group is open to interested government representatives, civil society organizations, networks, advocates of the right to access information, and any other person whose work relates to access of information. We will continue to reach out to potential members, with particular emphasis on the positive role that networks can play, and will seek opportunities for members to more actively participate.

As suggested in responses to the survey, the ATI Working Group will seek to maintain contact with its members through notification of relevant events, such as regional/national OGP events, webinars etc., sharing relevant information about OGP commitments and milestones, and disseminating relevant

research. Ultimately, the success of the ATI Working Group will depend on the extent that members show interest and are prepared to engage.

To strengthen the participation of government representatives, civil society organizations, advocates of the right to access information, and any other person interested in access to information, we will place an open call on the OGP webpage to all those interested in joining the group. This effort will be additional to the ongoing dissemination of the group's activities published in the corresponding communication channels.

Lead Coordinators/Anchors

Joel Salas, Commissioner, Federal Institute for Access to Information and Data Protection

Laura Neuman, Director, Global Access to Information Initiative, The Carter Center

Accomplishments from 2014

Following the OGP summit in London in 2013, and with the great support of the Brazil's Office of the Comptroller General, Chile's Transparency Council, the Americas Regional Alliance for Freedom of Expression and Information, and the Centre for Freedom of Information, the ATI Working Group developed a work plan with activities designed to advance the four main objectives. Over the course of 2014, the working group implemented a number of these activities including:

- Analysis of ATI-related commitments in OGP Participating Countries First Action Plans
- Letters of introduction sent to Cohort 2 and Cohort 4 countries
- Recommendations related to OGP ATI commitments to interested countries, such as Sierra Leone, Tunisia and Georgia
- Exchange visit of government and civil society leaders from Georgia to Mexico
- ATI WG panels and workshops at OGP annual and regional meetings
    - Americas Regional Meeting, Costa Rica
    - Annual Summit and meeting among Peer Learning and Support Subcommittee and Working Group Anchors, New York
    - European Regional Meeting, Ireland
- Webinar, Introducing the ATI Working Group, September 2013

Deliverables and Proposed Activities for 2015

The following provides an ambitious and comprehensive set of deliverables and activities. The engagement of these activities and achievement of the deliverable is dependent upon the active participation of ATI Working Group members and funding/resources.

1. **Review new draft commitments related to access to information and support in formulating action plans**

   Date: Present - December

In support of Objective 1 to promote ambitious action plans, the ATI Working Group will offer assistance to relevant OGP countries to review draft commitments and support the development of actions plan to advance implementation. Activities may include:

   1. Writing to all relevant Points of Contact (POCs) to notify of potential support from the ATI Working Group
   2. Sharing the draft commitments and action plans directly with ATI Working Group members from the relevant countries, encouraging their comments and active engagement in developing and finalizing ATI commitments
   3. Providing comments and suggestions to the POC and civil society partners related to ATI commitments, including potential analysis on the importance and challenges with the fulfillment of the commitments
   4. Uploading all draft commitments, action plans, and comments to the OGP ATI Working Group website page

2. **Participate in National, Regional and International OGP Events to promote and inclusive dialogue and encourage emphasis on the role of access to information for openness, transparency and participation**

   Date: Present - December

Objective 2 of the working group speaks to the importance of an inclusive dialogue and the active engagement of the ATI Working Group to promote the right of access to information as central to OGP. In support of this deliverable, activities may include:

   1. Notifying members of upcoming activities and encouraging participation, such as for the African Regional Meeting scheduled for May 2015 in Tanzania and for the Annual Meeting scheduled for October in Mexico
   2. Participating in POC meeting to share the value of ATI commitments

3. Supporting civil society engagement at national OGP meetings, including ATI Working Group members convening in-country meetings
4. Organizing ATI Working Group panels or speakers for key events, with a particular focus on the potential positive impact that the awareness and exercise of may have on other components of Open Government
5. Holding an ATI Working Group planning meeting at the Annual Meeting in Mexico
6. Preparing, in collaboration with the World Bank, an ATI Working Group webinar

3. Encourage and Support Peer Exchanges
Date: Present-December

A number of OGP countries have sought support from the ATI Working Group as they seek to advance their efforts to pass, implement and enforce access to information regimes. Concurrently, ATI champions from OGP member states have offered to share experiences and provide mentorship. In furtherance of ATI Working Group Objective 3, we will seek to provide concrete opportunities for peer exchanges and mentorship through activities such as:

1. Organizing a West African meeting of POCs and relevant government ATI actors to share experiences
2. Identifying champions and mentors and pairing with interested OGP countries, such as with Ghana, Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Philippines, and other interested countries
3. Facilitate a visit of an OGP country to another for learning and exchange of experiences
4. Consider the potential for future technical staff exchanges to encourage deeper learning of various access to information practices, build capacity, and share best practices

4. Engage countries considering OGP membership
Date: Present-December

As countries seek to meet the OGP membership criteria or demonstrate interest in joining OGP, the ATI Working Group will be prepared to provide advice and/or assistance. Activities in furtherance of Objective 4 may include:

1. Explore which countries are considering joining OGP, such as Morocco or Mozambique
2. Discussing ATI criteria and potential commitments with governments interested in OGP, as facilitated by the support unit
3. Support for civil society partners that are promoting OGP membership in their respective countries, including sending letters to relevant government officials or providing invitations to working group activities

4. Develop strategic content (briefs, brochures, newsletters, etc.) that stimulate greater interest from the community who wants to join the initiative

5. Link Access to Information to other core OGP principles
Date: April - December

In advancement of access to information as a fundamental component of OGP principles and objectives, the ATI Working Group will develop theoretical and substantive links. Activities under this deliverable may include:

1. Partnering with other OGP Working Groups on events, panels and/or activities
2. Developing a small grants project for research or programming that clearly demonstrates the link between access to information and other government OGP commitments, such as related to improvement of service-delivery or greater citizen engagement in public decision-making
3. Sharing preliminary results from small grants project/research at Annual Meeting in Mexico

6. Develop and Disseminate Research/Analysis/Relevant Information
Date: April - December

The ATI Working Group will support development of new research and analysis related to ATI OGP commitments as well as disseminate additional relevant information among its members, such as IRM reports, research and articles related to access to information and OGP etc. Activities may include:

1. Further development of OGP ATI Working Group website
2. Documenting the successful experiences of ATI OGP commitments and sharing on the website, including where access to information has encouraged fulfillment of another Open Government component
3. Support for new research related to OGP ATI commitments and best practices, potentially commissioning papers/analysis, for example, analysis of IRM findings to evaluate ATI performance in OGP countries or a diagnosis of the state of ATI commitments
4. Dissemination of IRM reports, particularly related to ATI commitments
5. Inviting scholars and academics to share relevant papers/articles with the ATI Working Group
6. Providing updates to list serve members

Budget:

The OGP support unit will provide up to US$25,000 for each working group. These funds will be allocated as follows:

Travel and Meetings: $15,000
Small Grants: $ 7,500 (3/$2,500 each)
Research: $ 2,500