

PARLIAMENTARY OPENNESS AND  
THE OPEN GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP

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A TOOLKIT FOR  
**ADVANCING  
LEGISLATIVE  
OPENNESS**



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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# BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) was established in 2011 as a collaboration between eight governments sharing a **common goal**: “to secure concrete commitments from governments to their citizenry to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance.” OGP includes a number of novel features: basic eligibility criteria related to government openness, country-owned commitments that are developed collaboratively between government and civil society, and an Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) to ensure accountability. In the six years since OGP’s launch, the model has proved very successful. As of this writing, some 74 governments have developed National Action Plans (NAPs) containing over 3,000 commitments, ranging from access to information, to citizen engagement, to technological innovation.

While executive branches have demonstrated a commitment to openness reform through participation in OGP, many of the world’s parliaments have also begun to engage in democratic reform processes to strengthen public trust in governance institutions. Beginning in the mid-2000s, international **standards for democratic parliaments** have been adopted by parliamentary associations that touch most of the world’s parliaments. A number of parliaments and international parliamentary groupings have joined more than 180 civil society organizations (CSOs) from over 80 countries in supporting the **Declaration on Parliamentary Openness**, which outlines criteria for openness and citizen engagement

in a digital world. Likewise, parliamentarians have also agreed to enhance openness and integrity systems by signing onto the **Santiago Declaration**, the product of a regional parliamentary conference hosted in Chile. Efforts to support parliamentary use of technologies that enable greater openness have also been a focus of several **World e-Parliament Conferences**. Such initiatives indicate demand and momentum for parliamentary openness reform in countries around the world. Many civil society activists and members of parliament (MPs) have noted the importance of engaging the representative branch in discussions about openness, transparency and citizen engagement.

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*“You cannot have only the executive opening up. The parliament, as the people’s representative, must also open up. We have more opportunity to demand executive accountability if the parliament is transparent and engaging of citizens. If the parliament, which is responsible for overseeing the work of government is not open, the government will not work effectively.”*

*Hon. Emmanuel Bedzrah, Chair of Committee on Government Assurances, Parliament of Ghana*

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To date, more than 15 parliaments have either submitted legislative openness commitments in their country’s OGP National Action Plan or engaged in exemplary reform

efforts consistent with OGP values of collaboration with civil society and innovation in open governance<sup>1</sup>. An even larger number of National Action Plans require some level of legislative engagement for implementation, by passing legislation or allocating budgetary resources. Recognizing a growing interest in deeper engagement of parliaments in OGP, the **Legislative Openness Working Group (LOWG)** was established within OGP in October 2013. Chaired by the Chilean Congress and the National Democratic Institute, the LOWG was established in response to the increasing understanding among parliaments, civil society and international institutions of the changing nature of politics worldwide and the evolution of citizens’ demands for more open and transparent governance.

While Leader of the United Kingdom House of Commons, Rt. Hon. Andrew Lansley, CBE, stated at the **working group’s inauguration**: “Expectations are rising. People are used to commenting instantly on events and having their voices heard, and they rightly want to have that immediacy and voice heard in the legislative process.”

## WHAT IS IN THIS GUIDE?

This guide aims to enrich the efforts of parliaments and their civil society counterparts to engage in collaborative processes aimed at developing and implementing openness commitments, either as part of the OGP process or otherwise. The first section focuses on the development of open parliament commitments in NAPs and the variety of ways that parliaments can engage

in and around OGP. The second section shares the experiences of a variety of parliaments and CSOs in collaborating in the creation of parliamentary openness commitments and in developing ongoing mechanisms for dialogue on openness. The final section shares some of the types of commitments that parliaments have made to become more open, accountable and engaging of citizens. It also lists additional resources that can be drawn upon to advance parliamentary openness.

Given that parliamentary engagement in OGP and on openness reform generally continues to evolve, updates will be regularly incorporated into the guide, which should be seen as a living document. In order to best capture current good practice, community contributions, suggestions, and revisions are welcome. To contribute to this resource, please email [vwelborn@ndi.org](mailto:vwelborn@ndi.org) to provide comments and suggestions.

# PARLIAMENTARY ENGAGEMENT ON OPEN GOVERNMENT & THE OGP NATIONAL ACTION PLAN

The LOWG was created to assist parliaments in the development and implementation of openness commitments and provide opportunities for peer learning and exchange. While government participation in OGP is centered on the elaboration and implementation of national action plans (NAPs), parliamentary participation may occur in a variety of ways. These include:

- **Enacting Legislation on Openness:** By some counts, [around 15 percent](#) of OGP commitments require legislative action. Often, this includes the enactment of legislation that would alter the country's governance or integrity framework, such as freedom of information laws, regulations on lobbying and political finance, and open data laws. Parliaments may study these draft laws and offer amendments that advance the values of the [Open Government Declaration](#), to which all OGP member countries have pledged. The legislature can support the institutionalization and sustainability of openness reforms by supporting related legislation. Through advancing such legislation, OGP can also provide a fruitful opportunity for dialogue between the executive and legislative branches. For example, the Chilean Congress has initiated strategy meetings with the executive branch to discuss legislative priorities to be included in the National Action Plan.
- **Conducting Government Oversight:** According to the OGP Support Unit, several parliaments have received testimony from OGP's [Independent Reporting Mechanism \(IRM\)](#) researchers, including: Armenia, [Canada](#), Czech Republic, Dominican Republic, Estonia, Guatemala, Israel, and Italy. The IRM aims to serve as an independent, objective review of government effectiveness in implementing OGP commitments. These objective, external reviews can be an extremely useful input to legislatures as they conduct oversight and seek to ensure that

NAP commitments are effectively implemented.

- **Adding Parliamentary Openness Commitments to NAPs:** Some parliaments, including those of Croatia, Ghana and Greece, have participated in OGP by submitting legislative openness commitments as part of the NAP. Including legislative commitments in the NAP helps ensure that they are consistent with OGP values, developed collaboratively with civil society, and subject to the IRM process. Recognizing that the relationship between the legislature and the executive plays an important role in structuring parliamentary participation in OGP, and recognizing that parliaments have an important role to play in the OGP process, the OGP Steering Committee passed a policy on legislative engagement in 2016. The policy, which is discussed in greater detail below, provides parliaments with a range of options with regard to developing and publishing commitments as part of the NAP.
- **Creating an Open Parliament Plan.** As mentioned above, in 2016 the OGP Steering Committee formally approved a [legislative engagement policy](#), which endorses two methods for parliaments to add legislative openness commitments to the NAP. The first method, which has been used in many OGP participant countries, is to integrate parliamentary commitments into the NAP through collaboration with the executive agency managing the process. In this method, the process for co-creating commitments between parliament and civil society is integrated into the same process for co-creating government commitments. The second method is to record legislative openness commitments in a separate document (sometimes referred to as an Open Parliament Plan or OPP), which is appended to the NAP. This method is particularly useful in separation-of-powers systems, where there are concerns about the executive having a role in the development

of open parliament commitments. In this method, there is also a process for co-creating commitments between the legislature and civil society, but this process is separate from and complementary to the government's process<sup>2</sup>. Regardless of the method chosen, parliaments that wish to develop legislative openness commitments are required to adhere to all OGP principles and standards, particularly with regard to civil society engagement and reporting on progress.

- **Advocating for OGP Participation:** Finally, parliaments can be helpful in advocating for a country to join OGP by raising awareness and expressing support for participation. Additionally, when a country does not meet OGP's eligibility criteria, parliament can play an important role in helping to advance the needed reforms.

To an extent, this diverse set of options is required to accommodate differing political realities within and across countries. Whether parliaments pursue openness reform through OGP or through independent processes, there are a number of lessons learned from OGP countries that may be useful. These lessons are related to both the process of drafting and implementing action plans, as well as their content. It should be noted that parliaments in non-OGP eligible jurisdictions<sup>3</sup>, as well as subnational legislatures, may wish to use the open parliament methodology, even if those plans are not formally part of OGP.

## LESSONS LEARNED: PROCESS

- **Ensuring Inclusive, Meaningful Participation:** In 2017, [OGP developed OGP Participation and Co-Creation Standards](#) that are intended to support participation and co-creation at all stages of the OGP cycle. They are intended for use by governments, civil society and any other stakeholders to understand both the minimum of what is expected of a national OGP process as well as the more ambitious standard that

countries should be striving for. These guidelines are also applicable to parliaments that seek to develop open parliament commitments and/or plans. Section 2 of this report includes concrete examples, from six countries, of inclusive processes for the creation and implementation of NAP commitments or an OPP.

- **Selecting a Parliamentary Point of Contact:** For parliaments pursuing openness reform, it is often helpful for parliamentary leadership to designate a point of contact for all OGP matters. This could be the chair of a relevant committee or a senior parliamentary official. OGP's [Points of Contact Manual](#) is a useful reference point. Whether or not a parliament is participating formally in OGP, having a Parliamentary Point of Contact (PPoC) is a useful mechanism. Just as many local governments and private corporations have begun to designate a chief innovation officer to facilitate organizational innovation, designating an internal champion for openness can help ensure that this critical issue remains on the political agenda.

The PPoC can help facilitate dialogue between parliament and civil society, liaise with the governmental PoC, and coordinate implementation of legislative openness commitments. In addition to serving as an internal champion for openness reform efforts, a PPoC can also liaise with the OGP Support Unit and the international open parliament community, which can facilitate information sharing with peer parliaments. A PPoC can also help to ensure that information about OGP events, the domestic NAP process, and IRM reviews are appropriately distributed throughout parliament. While the PPoC would typically be a non-partisan officer of parliament, he or she would work closely with political leadership to advance parliamentary openness objectives. In parliaments with a parliamentary committee focused on openness and transparency, the

2. Prior to passage of the legislative engagement policy, many parliaments developed commitments outside the executive-led OGP process; these were known as "stand-alone parliamentary action plans." Although these plans were developed in a manner that was consistent with OGP processes and values, they were not formally a part of OGP, and thus there is no provision within OGP for an independent review of their implementation.

3. The Assembly of Kosovo, for example, has adopted the [Declaration on Parliamentary Openness](#) and launched a Forum for Parliamentary Transparency.

PPoC could be a senior staff member of that committee. In other contexts, it may make sense to designate an official in the Speaker or Secretary General's office.

- **Conducting Self-Assessments and Enabling External Assessments:** OGP participating countries complete [Self-Assessment Reports](#), which are spearheaded by the PoC. Parliaments may wish to review these reports to enable oversight of the NAP. Additionally, if a parliament is contributing commitments to the NAP, it will complete its own self-assessment following OGP guidelines. In many countries, CSOs have also engaged in [shadow reporting](#) which can help contribute to more effective implementation. In the case of the Chilean Congress, which developed a stand-alone open parliament action plan, an external evaluation was conducted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

#### LESSONS LEARNED: CONTENT

- **Defining Clear Objectives:** Some national action plans contain a variety of commitments that, while clearly aligned with the broader goals of enhancing openness, accountability and citizen participation in the work of parliament, lack clearly defined objectives. In these instances, it can be difficult to accurately evaluate performance and results. Some parliaments, like those of [France](#) and [Chile](#), have organized their commitments into sections based on specific objectives. Doing so enables parliaments and civil society to better assess the impact of individual commitments and to better understand the results of their efforts.
- **Adhering to a Clear Timeline:** OGP participating countries develop action plans on [two-year cycles](#). This cycle may not always be ideal for parliaments. For example, if a new legislature is elected during the middle of that cycle, it may be challenging to ensure

implementation under new legislative leadership. To address this issue, the Costa Rican Legislative Assembly has developed plans on an annual basis, which fits more appropriately with the timeline for electing its steering committee, also done annually. Whatever calendar a parliament adopts for its action-plan process, it is essential to indicate a clearly defined timeline for implementation of commitments. It should be noted that parliaments interested in contributing commitments to the National Action Plan must adhere to NAP deadlines, but commitments can be added to the NAP as amendments part way through the NAP timeline.

- **Enhancing the Quality of Open Parliament Plans:** OGP has set forth standards for the [quality of NAPs](#) that may be useful to a parliament developing an Open Parliament Plan. OGP recommends that all NAPs be ambitious and relevant, and ensure that all commitments meet the OGP objectives of enhancing transparency, accountability, citizen participation and/or technology and innovation. The types of commitments that parliaments have made to address these issues is addressed in section 3 of this report.
- **Using a Template:** Individual commitments made by parliaments should, in general, conform with the “SMART” criteria: Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Relevant and Time-bound. OGP also provides an [action plan template and a commitment template](#) that help ensure effective engagement in OGP. A similar format has been used by both the [Georgian Parliament](#) and [Ukrainian Rada](#) in the development of their stand-alone openness plans.

Commitment 2.6. Improving the Content of Explanatory Notes				
<b>Lead Agency</b>	Parliament of Georgia			
<b>Partners</b>	Public Institution			
	Civil Society/Private Sector	Initiators: Transparency International Georgia		
<b>Current Situation and Challenges</b>	Explanatory notes to the draft laws are critical for fostering parliamentary accountability and citizen engagement in legislative drafting. An explanatory note should be informative and contain justification and arguments.  The standards for explanatory notes need to be improved to provide rationale of the purpose of the draft law and financial justifications.			
<b>Main Objective</b>	To improve public services.			
<b>OGP Challenge</b>	Improving public services.			
<b>OGP Principles</b>	Access to Information	Accountability	Citizen Engagement	Technologies and Innovation
	✓	✓		
<b>Milestones to Fulfill the Commitment</b>	New or Ongoing Commitment	Start Date:	End Date:	
Conduct public consultations to develop the uniform standards	New	09/2015	03/2016	
Adoption of instructions by the Bureau of the Parliament on the improving of content of explanatory note and establishing uniform standards	New	03/2016	06/2016	

*This is a sample commitment from the stand-alone action plan developed by the Parliament of Georgia. The commitment includes a clear timeline for implementation and identifies a civil society partner to support implementation.*

# PROCESS: DEVELOPING OPEN PARLIAMENT COMMITMENTS

As described above, the OGP process requires participating governments to enter into a co-creation process with civil society to develop commitments. This should also be a key element of any parliamentary efforts to develop NAP commitments or an Open Parliament Plan. Although the general characteristics of this process are clearly articulated by OGP, the structural arrangements devised to ensure a fully collaborative process vary.

*“There’s a lack of understanding about the whole open process. OGP doesn’t require just opening, presenting, and publishing commitments; there has to be an intention of opening a dialogue. There’s a big difference between publishing open data and having that be a real action of open government. What happens after you open things should generate a different dialogue, a different action and a different accountability mechanism.”*

*Pablo Collada, Director, Fundación Ciudadano Inteligente (Chile)*

This section describes some of the structural innovations devised by parliaments and civil society—at times in collaboration with the executive branch—to ensure a robust engagement process. The models identified draw on experiences of parliaments, civil society and the executive branch both inside and outside of the OGP process. Parliaments and civil society counterparts may consider mixing various approaches as they devise permanent groups that participate in and oversee action plan implementation.

It should also be recognized that the majority of the commitments made to advance parliamentary openness were accomplished prior to OGP’s adoption of the [Legislative Engagement Policy](#). Therefore, the following models were developed primarily to support “stand-alone parliamentary action plans,” but are nonetheless still relevant under the new policy.

The models discussed in this section include:



#### **PARTICIPATION IN A NATIONAL OGP STEERING COMMITTEE (GHANA AND SERBIA)**



#### **CREATION OF A NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR OPEN PARLIAMENT (MEXICO)**



#### **DEVELOPMENT OF AN ADVISORY COMMISSION WITH VARIED EXPERTISE (UNITED KINGDOM)**



#### **CREATION OF A CIVIL SOCIETY-SUPPORTED INTER-FACTIONAL PARLIAMENTARY WORKING GROUP (GEORGIA)**

Regardless of the specific mechanism adopted to structure civil society-parliamentary engagement, the models discussed point to several key factors that parliaments and civil society organizations should consider as they forge ahead. These include:

- In a number of countries, the commitment-making process has been primarily driven by civil society. While civil society leadership on these issues is important, sufficient political will within parliament is critical to success. Whether the process is initiated by civil society or parliament does not appear to be a major determining factor in the success of openness initiatives, as long as both become involved in developing the commitments.
- Within parliament, the support for openness reform from key leadership positions is essential. In some institutions, openness reforms cannot, as a practical matter, be implemented without the speaker’s support. In other institutions, key leaders within the parliamentary administration can help drive reform.
- Institutionalizing mechanisms for ongoing engagement between civil society and parliaments on openness should be a primary goal of openness advocates. The creation of permanent bodies, such as a working group or commission tasked with focusing on openness and accountability, can be an effective way of sustaining openness reforms and keeping openness on the legislature’s agenda. Georgia, for example, has created a Permanent Parliamentary Council on Open and Transparent Government, as part of its action plan.
- Working with international institutions to help support parliament and civil society has been effective in a variety of countries. For example, the [United Nations Development Programme \(UNDP\)](#) has provided support

to efforts to create and implement open parliament commitments in Chile, Ukraine and Georgia, while the [National Democratic Institute \(NDI\)](#) has facilitated collaboration in Colombia, Kosovo, Mexico, and Paraguay. In places where the legislature is receiving support from international development partners, open parliament commitments can also be useful in playing a donor coordination role. However, while international partners can play a useful supporting role in sharing international practice and supporting the implementation of specific commitments, it is essential that the development of commitments be entirely driven by parliament and domestic civil society.



### MODEL 1: PARTICIPATION IN A NATIONAL OGP STEERING COMMITTEE (GHANA AND SERBIA)

Whereas OGP participation in most countries is managed by a specific ministry, Ghana has adopted a more inclusive cross-sector approach. A domestic [steering committee](#) consisting of representatives of the executive branch, parliament, and civil society guides the country's involvement in OGP. More specifically, the steering committee includes a representative of the Public Sector Reform Secretariat, which is part of the President's office, other ministerial representatives, and the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Government Assurance Committee in Parliament. It also includes representatives of leading civil society organizations, including the [Ghana Center for Democratic Development \(CDD-Ghana\)](#), which has been active in encouraging parliamentary openness and transparency for many years.

To date, Ghana's NAP has focused largely on executive branch openness commitments. However, the [2016-17 NAP](#) includes a commitment (§4.2.0) to advocate for parliamentary adoption of international standards on parliamentary openness. It also encourages the implementation of outreach activities to educate citizens on opportunities for engaging in the work of parliament. According to Hon. Emmanuel Bedzrah, Chairman of the Government Assurance Committee, this commitment was the direct result of parliamentary participation in the steering committee, along with the backing of CDD-Ghana.

Ghana is not the only country to include MPs and parliamentary-focused civil society organizations on a national OGP governing body. Serbia's Inter-Ministerial Working Group also includes two MPs from the governing party and representatives of the [Center](#)

for [Research, Transparency and Accountability \(CRTA\)](#), a non-profit organization that has signed a memorandum of understanding in order to access and publicize information contained in parts of the National Assembly's internal database. Jovana Djurbabic of CRTA said:

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*"The OGP process is developing. It's improving. CSOs are at the table and it's an opportunity for parliamentarians to be more involved in OGP."*

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However, their inclusion has yet to result in the creation of OGP commitments on legislative openness.

In 2015, CRTA worked with the Deputy Speaker to establish an informal working group that includes representatives of all 11 party groups and a variety of civil society organizations, aimed at advancing the openness agenda. The informal working group is viewed as an important step toward continued dialogue between civil society and parliamentarians on issues of openness and citizen engagement. During the Serbian National Assembly's Parliament Week in October 2015, which included more than 70 events with over 30 partners, many of the leaders of the informal working group were present and actively participated in the week's events.



### MODEL 2: CREATION OF A NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR OPEN PARLIAMENT (MEXICO)

The idea of creating the [National Open Parliament Alliance](#) arose during meetings between the Chairwoman of the Mexican Senate's Committee on the Assurance of Access and Transparency of Information (COGATI), and representatives of the association [Fundar](#). These meetings initially focused on engagement around the [Declaration on Parliamentary Openness](#), which COGATI [endorsed](#) in April 2013. According to Melissa Ortiz Massó of Fundar, writing at [OpeningParliament.org](#):

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*"[T]he local organizations that were present – Impacto Legislativo, Visión Legislativa and Fundar – had never before seen such a commitment ... In this endorsement, we received a stated recognition from the legislators and staff who generate and protect legislative information that it is necessary to move toward a more open legislative process."*

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The continued collaboration between COGATI and civil society, riding the wave of interest in open government that accompanied Mexico's appointment as chair of the OGP Steering Committee for 2014-15, led to the collaborative implementation of a [parliamentary transparency week](#) in March 2014 and, ultimately, the [launch](#) of the Alliance in September 2014. The Open Parliament Alliance played a crucial role in convening civil society organizations to lead a dialogue with the Mexican Senate around the substance of transparency reforms that were passed in 2015.





### MODEL 3: DEVELOPMENT OF AN ADVISORY COMMISSION WITH VARIED EXPERTISE (UNITED KINGDOM)

Making informed openness commitments is critical to the success of the reform process. One means of gathering diverse skills and expertise is to assemble a commission of parliamentarians and external experts to conduct an analysis and provide recommendations, which was the approach adopted by the UK House of Commons. While this process was unconnected to OGP, it was guided by similar principles of co-creation.

In 2014, Rt. Hon. John Bercow, Speaker of the House of Commons, assembled the Digital Democracy Commission (DDC), with the [mandate](#) “to explore how Parliament could make better use of digital technology to enhance and improve its work.” In addition to the Speaker himself, the DDC included an MP from each of the governing and opposition parties, as well as six civil society members and activists. While the MPs chosen were known for their active efforts to use technology to engage citizens in parliamentary work, the non-parliamentary commission members came from a variety of backgrounds. Some were experts focused on parliamentary openness and the use of technology tools. Others had little knowledge about parliamentary procedure, but were engaged in activism on social issues. This balance would prove valuable as the commission explored the essential issue of encouraging non-participating citizens to engage in parliamentary work, particularly those who do not view Parliament as having an interest in their challenges or concerns.

Over a nine-month period, the DDC collected citizen input. Initial meetings related to strategy, agenda setting and housekeeping issues took place in a formal setting. As the process continued, meetings became less formal and more participatory. The DDC began meeting in a committee room, where they could invite members of the public to participate as they took testimony from parliamentary staff and experts. Breaking with tradition, the commission permitted the use of mobile devices during meetings to enhance outreach and participation.

The DDC also conducted numerous roundtable events with diverse audiences outside of Parliament, including a large marketing corporation, a group of learning disabled adults, academics from Wales and Scotland, and bloggers from Northern Ireland. They also forged partnerships with five universities, including through computer science and politics departments. In the words of [Edward Wood](#), the Parliament’s Director of Public Information, “*We tried to meet with people who would be regarded ordinarily as being estranged from the [legislative] process.*”

In January 2015, the DDC issued its [report](#) with recommendations that aim to meet five key targets by 2020. Among the early successes, some of which were discussed at a [February 2016 progress meeting](#), the DDC’s recommendations have led to the development of a new parliamentary communications strategy. According to Wood, “The Commission were impressed by the work that goes on with outreach, but they had never seen this stuff or heard of it themselves. And if they’ve never heard of it, you have to question the impact.” Advancements with respect to simplifying parliamentary language have also been made.

The Commission’s findings have given a boost to efforts underway to rebuild the Parliament’s website and to augment its open data offerings. Wood projects that one key victory, attributable to the Commission and other recent openness efforts, is a broad recognition that parliamentary initiatives must incorporate open data principles. “Where a procedural system is developed in the future, it will be based on the principles of operable data so that data is ready-made to be shared, rather than retrofitted. There is a huge limitation to putting data on paper; there is a paradigm shift.”



### MODEL 4: CREATION OF A CIVIL SOCIETY-SUPPORTED INTER-FACTIONAL PARLIAMENTARY WORKING GROUP (GEORGIA)

The Parliament of Georgia began to explore the idea of developing a stand-alone open parliament plan in early 2015. [Nino Beradze](#), who heads the Public Relations & Information Department, specifically cited the impact of new technologies:

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*“Social media and new media have changed the world. It’s a different time and you have to be responsive. [The creation of the Parliament’s action plan is linked] to understanding the value and importance of greater citizen participation in the legislative decision-making process, and the higher commitment from Parliamentary leadership to not only keep constituents informed, but also engage them.”*

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[Giorgi Kldiashvili](#) of the [Institute for Development of Freedom of Information \(IDFI\)](#) remarked:

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*“The Parliament was interested in enacting openness commitments because it was their priority. They didn’t do anything special - they just saw it as an opportunity. They were happy about the opportunity to engage citizens in the legislative process and to use technology to help citizens to engage.”*

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The first step to developing a parliamentary action plan was to establish a broad-based coalition for openness. The parliament accomplished this in April 2015 through the creation of an Inter-Factional Working Group that would include representatives nominated by each political faction in parliament.

As the parliament took the necessary organizational steps to forge an open parliament coalition, civil society began to mobilize. Led by IDFI, civil society organizations

developed a list of possible reforms and actions that the parliament could take to enhance its openness and accountability. IDFI was proactive in organizing meetings with parliamentary leaders and members of the working group to ensure that its work remained a priority. According to Kldiashvili, “IDFI conducted an openness study that we submitted to Parliament, along with other products and materials. They began to see IDFI as an expert and took interest in our support.” Staff from the Speaker’s office, Public Relations directorate and Information Technology unit were actively involved in the discussions as well.

Negotiations over the action plan took place between February and July 2015. During this time, the parliament adopted the [Declaration on Parliamentary Openness](#), further demonstrating its commitment to the ideals of transparency, openness and accountability.

Uncertain as to how receptive parliament would be of their suggestions, civil society whittled down their initial 26 recommendations to 18. Parliamentary leaders were largely supportive of these suggestions, ultimately adopting 16 of them. To ensure that diverse priorities were included in the action plan, some of the language was left intentionally vague so that it could be negotiated during the implementation phase. Due to the collaborative nature of this effort, the Inter-Factional Working Group received the first [OGP Government Champions Award](#).

Since adopting the action plan, the parliament has taken the first critical step toward its implementation: it has successfully established a [permanent council](#) on open and transparent governance (§4.1). The Speaker has appointed the council’s chair, and the council, consisting entirely of MPs, has been formed. An [advisory council](#) of civil society organizations and international institutions who have been supportive of the parliament’s reforms has also been established. Three working groups, studying legislative amendments, information technologies, and codes of conduct, are deeply involved in the implementation of the action plan commitments.

# OVERVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY OPENNESS COMMITMENTS

This section reviews a range of specific commitments that parliaments have made to become more open, accountable and engaging of citizens. The section is organized in part based on the organization of the [Declaration on Parliamentary Openness](#). It begins with a focus on commitments aimed at reforming the institutional design of parliaments and their functioning. Because many parliaments have made commitments that would enhance the integrity and ethics of parliament, the second section focuses on these items. This is followed by a discussion of the information that parliaments have committed to publish and efforts to enhance the ability of citizens to access this information. The final two parts of this section focus on citizen engagement in parliamentary work (both online and offline), and the commitments made to provide open data and improve the functioning of parliamentary websites.

A variety of resources are linked throughout this section that aim to provide additional information to users of this guide. While there are a number of region-specific resources, including the [Latin American Index of Legislative Transparency](#), global resources are also available, including the [Parliaments topic in the OpenGov Guide](#) and the [Legislative Openness Data Explorer](#), which compares openness in over 25 countries worldwide.

Similarly to section three, many of the examples in section four were developed as part of “stand-alone parliamentary action plans” prior to OGP’s adoption of a legislative engagement policy. Nonetheless, they provide a range of potential commitments that could be considered by parliaments seeking to develop legislative openness commitments under the new policy.

## LEGISLATIVE OPENNESS DATA EXPLORER

The Legislative Openness Data Explorer website compiles global, comparative information on legislative openness practices, focusing specifically on access to legislative information. The data displayed on the site was crowdsourced from both parliaments and civil society parliamentary monitoring groups. The site’s core functionality allows users to generate custom maps and data tables, download the raw data, and contribute to the database by suggesting edits or submitting new information. Users also have the option of submitting good practice examples to a growing catalog covering a range of topics, including access to information, citizen participation, legislative ethics, committee transparency, and more.

While the data explorer currently includes information on parliaments in more than 25 countries, additional data will be added to the site regularly. The site is currently available in beta, and additions to its functionality and information are planned. Email the site administrator ([vwelborn@ndi.org](mailto:vwelborn@ndi.org)) to request additional information about the project.

## 1. CREATING A CULTURE OF OPENNESS: ENSURING INSTITUTIONAL OPENNESS

To create a culture of openness, parliaments must institutionalize procedures and practices that enable access to information and citizen participation. This section focuses on commitments made by parliaments to review and amend the rules of the game to include citizens. It covers commitments aimed at planning strategically to implement openness practices, altering regulatory or legal frameworks related to openness, engaging civil society in ongoing or sustained activities, and efforts to enhance the human and physical resources of parliament to better address the openness agenda.

### 1.1 STRATEGIC PLANNING & ANALYSIS

Implementing the principle of openness requires thoughtful strategic planning, particularly when new policies affect the work of one or more divisions of a parliamentary administration. As described in the introduction to this section, several parliaments—the UK, Chile and France among them—devised stand-alone action plans that aimed to address key objectives. Some open parliament plans have sought to put in place a strategic planning process relating to openness and ensuring that parliaments adapt to the digital age:

*By the end of 2015, Parliament should have in place a strategy to ensure that it has the skills it needs to meet the target of being digital and interactive by 2020. The strategy must ensure that the Head of Digital has sufficient means to recruit and retain staff with the specialist digital skills that Parliament needs. —UK Parliament, §33*

Requiring that an analysis be implemented prior to taking action is another means for developing

effective commitments. Parliaments can gain a sense of where they stand vis-a-vis other parliaments by analyzing their results on the [Legislative Openness Data Explorer](#), which is discussed above.

In the commitments below, the French National Assembly and Chilean Congress have committed to analyzing mechanisms for engaging citizens in public consultations. The Chilean commitment specifies that the analysis will help inform a pilot initiative to enhance public participation in the legislative process.

*Continue analysis of the implementation of mechanisms for citizen consultation within the National Assembly ahead of parliamentary debate. —French National Assembly, §3*

*Realizar asimismo, en el marco del Convenio con el PNUD, un diagnóstico sobre los mecanismos de consulta y participación de la ciudadanía en las discusiones de ambas Cámaras con el objetivo de identificar prácticas, evaluarlas y elaborar una propuesta para fortalecer la participación en las distintas etapas del proceso legislativo. En ese marco, se considerará la ejecución de un plan piloto. — Chilean Congress, §3.2*

### 1.2 ENSURING HUMAN & PHYSICAL RESOURCE AVAILABILITY

Policy changes often require shifting human capital and other resources from one priority to another. To meet high standards of openness, parliamentary staff may spend more time focusing on responding to freedom of information requests or developing web platforms that harness citizen input.

Parliaments are making a number of commitments aimed at bolstering resources for openness initiatives. The Chilean

Congress has committed to creating an office in each chamber of Congress that aids members in completing their asset declarations and reporting on lobbying activities. This initiative complies with the [Common Ethical Principles for Members of Parliament](#) recommendation that “Members of parliament shall actively support mechanisms or resources...to ensure that all members and parliamentary staff are provided with the training and support necessary to fully understand and adhere to rules on ethics and conduct” (§3.4.4). A Colombian commitment aims to identify one member of each legislative work unit to serve as the focal point for petitions, complaints and solicitations related to open government.

*Crear una unidad de apoyo interno en cada Cámara con el fin de prestar ayuda a los congresistas para llenar adecuadamente las declaraciones patrimoniales y de intereses, incluyendo los mandatos de administración de activos (fideicomiso), así como para ajustarse a las obligaciones previstas en la ley que regula el lobby y las gestiones que representen intereses particulares antes las autoridades y Funcionarios. —Chilean Congress, §2.2*

*Apacitar como mínimo a un miembro de cada Unidad de Trabajo Legislativo en materia de respuesta de (i) Peticiones, Quejas, Reclamos y Solicitudes y (ii) Gobierno Abierto. (Fecha límite:31 de junio de 2016). --Colombian Congress, §3F*

With an eye toward the increasing use of technology for conducting parliamentary work and engaging citizens, the UK Digital Democracy Commission has made a broad recommendation for Parliament to assess its institutional needs into the future. In France, a commitment to establish an innovation fellowship program, first implemented by the presidency in the United States, aims to bring technologists into Parliament who can help transform its use of information and communication technologies.

*The Digital Democracy Commission recommends that Parliament should seize the opportunity that restoration and renewal work provides to improve facilities to assist MPs in their work for the public and ensure the fabric of Parliament is fit for the future. —UK Parliament, §28*

*Implement an “Innovation Fellows Program” within the National Assembly. —French National Assembly, §4*

### 1.3 ADOPTING AND AMENDING LEGAL FRAMEWORKS FOR OPENNESS

Parliaments must change their procedures to benefit from technological advancements and cope with citizen expectations for how a modern parliament should function. The Declaration on Parliamentary Openness recognizes that “Parliament has a duty to enact legislation, as well as internal rules of procedure and codes of conduct, that foster an enabling environment guaranteeing the public’s right to government and parliamentary information...” (§2).

#### 1.3.1 ENABLING CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

Parliaments are vowing to amend their legislative or procedural processes to enable increased citizen engagement. The Ukrainian Rada has committed to establishing rules that would provide advance notice of most plenary and committee meetings and enable citizens to participate upon request. The commitment also advises the parliament to broadcast these sessions on the Parliament’s website.

*.. Provide a clear mechanism for civic participation in the meetings of the committees, parliamentary and committee hearings. —Ukrainian Rada, §2.2*

The Georgian Parliament has promised to adopt a legal framework for public consultations in the legislative drafting process. Its action plan notes that “[t]he lack of a uniform regulatory framework for consultations results in unequal practices, [in spite] of the overall intent of the parliament and the government to engage stakeholders in the process of legislative drafting.” In adopting a uniform consultation process, the parliament can clarify expectations for citizen engagement, including who will be consulted and how, the mechanisms that will be adopted to alert citizens to the opportunity to participate, and the tools that will be used to enable that participation.

*.. to ensure a participatory legislative drafting process and to establish an effective consultation mechanism, the Parliament of Georgia needs to develop a uniform regulatory framework for consultations with stakeholders which will comprehensively address various aspects of consultative process in the course of legislative drafting. —Georgian Parliament, §2.3*

#### 1.3.2 REMOVING RESTRICTIONS ON INFORMATION USE

The [Declaration on Parliamentary Openness](#) states that “citizens should be allowed to reuse and republish parliamentary information, in whole or in part. Any exceptions or restrictions to this principle shall be narrowly defined by law” (§1). Reusability requires that information be technologically open (e.g. the information can be used with non-proprietary software) and legally open (e.g. no copyright prevents citizens from freely sharing the information). While the UK Parliament has enabled the legal reuse of much of its information, the UK’s Digital Democracy Commission has noted that there should not be unreasonable copyright restrictions on video content.

*Parliament should make its audio-visual coverage of debates and committees freely available for anyone to download and re-use without unreasonable copyright restrictions by the end of 2015.—UK Parliament, §8*

#### 1.4 MONITORING IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMITMENTS

The [Declaration on Parliamentary Openness](#) calls on parliaments “to recognize the right and duty of civil society, media, and the general public to monitor parliament and parliamentarians” (§7). The role of civil society in monitoring open parliament commitments is also welcomed by OGP, which provides relevant information on its [website](#). While the Ukrainian Rada calls for civil society to monitor its action plan and to participate in quarterly meetings, the Chilean plan calls for submission to OGP regulations.

*Identification of parliamentary monitoring organisations for monitoring of the Action Plan implementation and holding their quarterly meetings with the Parliament. —Ukrainian Rada, §3.3*

*El Plan de Acción se someterá a las reglas generales de la Alianza de Gobierno Abierto, en cuanto a informes de avance y reformulaciones que correspondan, y a un proceso “peer to peer” para evaluar su implementación. —Chilean Congress, §4*

#### 1.5 ENABLING CONTINUED ENGAGEMENT

Engaging in ongoing dialogue with citizens and civil society is a core OGP value that is also enshrined in the [Declaration on Parliamentary Openness](#) (§5). The adoption

of such commitments can help ensure the continuity of an openness agenda despite changes in political will. The Parliament of Georgia made two such commitments aimed at sustaining dialogue with civil society:

*Establishing Permanent Parliamentary Council on Open and Transparent Governance. —Georgian Parliament, §4.1*

*Conducting Annual Meeting of the Parliament of Georgia and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). --Georgian Parliament, §4.2*

The former commitment establishes the Permanent Council on Open and Transparent Governance, consisting of MPs and CSO representatives, who are also participating in a consultative council. The Permanent Council, which was the first commitment enacted from the Georgian NAP, is chaired by one MP and one CSO representative. According to the plan: “The Council will be tasked with the development and monitoring of the implementation of the commitments under the Open Parliament Georgia Action Plan.”

#### 1.6 ADOPTING INTERNATIONAL OPENNESS FRAMEWORKS

A number of parliaments have incorporated commitments to adopt or implement international standards for democratic parliaments. In Ghana, the provision is included in the NAP. Beyond a signal of intent to become more open, the inclusion of this commitment provides the starting point for an open parliament plan or similar reform efforts.

*.. Advocate for Parliament to develop an action plan on the implementation of the declaration on parliamentary openness. —Ghanaian Parliament, §4.2.0*

*The House of Commons should formally adopt the principles set out in the Declaration on Parliamentary Openness. —UK Parliament, §34*

## 2. CREATING A CULTURE OF OPENNESS: INTEGRITY SYSTEM

According to the [Common Ethical Principles for Members of Parliament](#) (hereinafter Common Ethical Principles), “For parliaments and parliamentarians to meet...democratic standards, it is essential that parliaments build and maintain the public trust by conducting their work according to high standards of ethics.” The Santiago Declaration states: “It is a priority to reinforce the mechanisms that ensure that the democratic institutions are transparent and adherent to the highest principles of ethics applicable to public duties, and to the fundamental rights and liberties as guaranteed by the American Human Rights Convention and by all the Constitutions of American States” (p. 2).

### COMMON ETHICAL PRINCIPLES FOR MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

While the international community of parliaments and parliamentary support organizations has successfully developed international standards or benchmarks for the institution of parliament, far less attention has been dedicated to developing standards for the ethical conduct of individual members. To help fill this gap and to start a global conversation, members of the Open Government Partnership’s Legislative Openness Working Group drafted Common Ethical Principles for Members of Parliament. The draft principles were developed in conjunction with members of the OpeningParliament.org civil society community.

The draft is based on the emerging body of international standards for parliaments, including the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association’s [Recommended Benchmarks for Codes of Conduct Applying to Members of Parliament](#) and the [Declaration on Parliamentary Openness](#). The Common Ethical Principles also draw heavily on existing good practice employed by parliaments around the world. The document calls on members of parliament to, among other things, safeguard democracy and human rights, serve the public above all else, ensure public integrity, avoid conflicts of interest, carry out public duties professionally and transparently, and value diversity and political pluralism.

A number of parliaments have developed commitments specifically aimed at strengthening integrity systems, improving outreach on integrity issues and enhancing access to integrity information. Increased attention to ethical standards may reflect the increasing scrutiny on parliaments to become more open with regard to information on elected representatives, their wealth and their potential conflicts of interest.

### 2.1 DEVELOPING INTEGRITY POLICIES, CODES & REGULATIONS

Integrity policies—including codes of ethics, codes of conduct, and laws restricting campaign finance and conflicts of interest—can be valuable in combating corruption. Most important is ensuring that these tools are implemented in a transparent manner and that there are consequences to violating them. According to the [Common Ethical Principles](#), “Members of parliament shall advance a culture of ethics in the legislature and ensure that parliament’s ethics rules are effective and meaningfully enforced” (§3.4.2). This provision is supported by the Georgian Parliament’s stand-alone action plan, which calls for the development of an enforceable code of ethics:

*By formulating clear and enforceable provisions, the Parliament of Georgia will become more accountable to the citizens and will demonstrate an increased interest of MPs towards citizens’ perceptions. —Georgian Parliament, §4.4*

The Chilean Congress’s action plan calls for regulation of the activities of lobbyists and other special interest representatives. It specifies the need to conduct a public consultation during the drafting of rules for MPs, senior staff and advisors on travel, donations and meetings. The Congress has also agreed to collaborate with civil society and international organizations to conduct a medium-term assessment on ethics, probity and transparency in the Congress and to make sure good practices are being implemented.

*Aprobar, previa consulta pública, los reglamentos que debe dictar cada Cámara, de conformidad a la Ley 20.730, que regula el lobby y las gestiones que representen intereses particulares antes las autoridades y funcionarios. Dichos reglamentos, que ha de elaborar cada Comisión de Ética y Transparencia, dan normas sobre el registro de agenda pública (audiencias o reuniones, viajes y donativos) de los parlamentarios, altos funcionarios del Congreso y asesores legislativos, y el registro de lobbistas y gestores que estarán a cargo de las mismas Comisiones. —Chilean Congress, §2.1*

*Efectuar, en el marco del Convenio con el PNUD, un estudio a mediano plazo para analizar, en conjunto con la sociedad civil el marco normativo sobre ética, transparencia y probidad en la gestión del Congreso con el fin de implementar buenas prácticas consensuadas que apoyen el fortalecimiento ético y de transparencia en el Congreso Nacional. Entre esas materias, analizar la regulación de las inhabilidades de los parlamentarios para promover y votar determinados asuntos. En ese marco, se realizará en el mes de septiembre de 2014 un seminario internacional sobre buenas prácticas parlamentarias. —Chilean Congress, §3.1*

The Colombian Congress has committed to developing accountability guidelines—effectively a workplan with a timetable, activities and performance indicators that were published online for civil society’s comments.

*Expedir y/o actualizar, socializar y publicar en línea un Documento de Lineamientos para la Rendición de Cuentas, con actividades, tiempos e indicadores de cumplimiento, el cual deberá considerar las disposiciones de (i) la Ley 5 de 1992 (Reglamento del Congreso), (ii) la Ley 1757 de 2015 (Estatutaria de Participación Ciudadana), (iii) la Ley 1712 de 2014 (Ley de Transparencia y de Derecho de Acceso a la Información Pública Nacional), y versará sobre temas misionales y administrativos. Para tal fin, se invitará a la Comisión Ciudadana de Lucha contra la Corrupción y a organizaciones de la sociedad civil de reconocida trayectoria en materia de transparencia y lucha contra la corrupción, a enviar su retroalimentación sobre el Documento. (Fecha límite: 1 de abril de 2016). --Colombian Congress, §1a*

### 2.2 ENHANCING COMMUNICATION ON ETHICS

Parliaments often make sensitive information, such as the assets and conflicts of interest of elected officials, difficult to access by publishing it on paper or in non-searchable formats like PDF. The action plan of the Colombian Congress includes a commitment to designing a strategy to disseminate information and conduct activities that aim to promote a culture of integrity and honesty. It plans to use the Congressional television channel in order to do so.

*Diseñar una estrategia para difundir iniciativas, información y actividades orientadas a promover una cultura de la integridad y honestidad por parte de la ciudadanía y los líderes políticos del país, la cual será difundirá á través del Canal del Congreso. (Fecha límite: 31 de marzo de 2016). --Colombian Congress, §3d*

## 2.3 PROVIDING ACCESS TO INTEGRITY INFORMATION

The [Declaration on Parliamentary Openness](#) specifies that MPs should disclose “sufficient information to allow citizens to make informed judgments regarding the integrity and probity of individual members, including information on members’ asset disclosures, their parliamentary expenses, and their non-parliamentary income, including interest, dividends, lease payments or other in-kind benefits” (§24). It also calls for disclosing information on unethical conduct and potential conflicts of interest (§25). The [Common Ethical Principles](#) adds that MPs “shall disclose sufficient information regarding their business relationships and financial interests, including information for close family members, to give the public confidence that the member is acting to advance public interests rather than private interests” (§3.3.1).

The action plan of the Colombian Congress calls for making MPs’ declarations of conflicts of interest available on the websites of both chambers.

*Dar a conocer en las páginas web del Senado y la Cámara de Representantes las Declaraciones de Conflictos de Intereses de los congresistas, radicadas al momento de tomar posesión ante la Secretaría General de cada Cámara. Las Secretarías Generales adoptarán los ajustes tecnológicos y de procedimiento necesarios para realizar la publicación oportuna de las Declaraciones. Las Declaraciones de los congresistas elegidos para el periodo 2014-2018, serán publicadas en la fecha límite acá señalada.(Fecha límite: 31 de diciembre de 2015). --Colombian Congress, §2a*

Seeking to ensure MP cooperation and compliance with parliamentary investigations, the Ukrainian Rada has included a commitment to provide access to information about investigative committees:

*Access to information on the activities of temporary investigation commissions and temporary special commissions of the Ukrainian Parliament. —Ukrainian Rada, §1.5*

### 3. ACCESS TO INFORMATION: BOOSTING TRANSPARENCY

In its second section, the [Declaration on Parliamentary Openness](#) sets forth a variety of information categories and more specific document types that parliaments should make publicly available. These categories touch on legislative process information, including that related to the work of plenary and committees, as well as information about MPs and staff, the parliamentary budget and spending, voting records, oversight initiatives, and more.

The ultimate goal of making parliamentary information public is to ensure that citizens have the opportunity to learn about who is making the laws, the content of these laws and the possibility of participating in the lawmaking process. A transparent lawmaking process can also deter corruption and prevent the appearance of conflicts of interest by one or more participants in the process.

#### 3.1 LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

Many parliaments recognize the importance of helping citizens to understand how they function. The [Declaration on Parliamentary Openness](#) states: “Parliament shall make available information about its constitutional role, structure, functions, internal rules, administrative procedures and workflow, as well as the same information for its committees” (§14). In the UK, where the parliamentary rules have developed through practice over centuries, the rules of procedure—a treatise published by Erskine May, Clerk of the House of Commons in the late 19th century—have been owned by a private company. The DCC has recommended that Erskine May’s treatise be publicly available without pay:

*We recommend that Erskine May, the definitive guide to parliamentary procedure, should be freely available online by the time the next edition is produced. —UK Parliament, §32*

The Ukrainian Rada’s action plan acknowledges a need to reconcile varying laws pertaining to access to information about committee information, while recommending compliance with a law already on the books that lists specific information that should

be on the parliament’s website. This list includes information about the structure and composition of committees, agendas and minutes, evidence submitted, acts adopted, etc. The list also includes registration procedures for citizens to view committee meetings.

*.. Order No.699 of the Chairman of Ukrainian Parliament “On Web Resources of the Ukrainian Parliament” dated 19 May 2015... is not fulfilled, while it envisages quite a comprehensive list of data about the activities of the Ukrainian Parliament Committees to be made public. —Ukrainian Rada, §1.4*

Publishing amendments in the context of a law so the changes can be easily understood is another commitment from the Ukrainian Rada.

*.. amendments and suggested alterations shall be included in the initial draft bill or law that has already been in force, in visible form, so that one may understand in real-time mode, which provision was offered initially, and which is proposed to replace it, or which provision is effective and which is proposed; in a word, to show the original text and amendments thereto simultaneously. —Ukrainian Rada, §1.6*

#### 3.2 MP & STAFF INFORMATION

Parliaments vary with respect to the information they publish about individual MPs and parliamentary staff. The most recent [World e-Parliament Report](#) (2012) provides a chart that shows the information categories being made available on parliamentary websites by category<sup>4</sup>. Colombia’s action plan includes a commitment to make available contact information for MPs and staff, information that a number of parliaments indicate that they already make available. Going a step further, the commitment would also provide contact information for key staff who are in charge of fielding petitions and complaints, and who are involved in open government strategies.

*Publicar en el sitio web, sin perjuicio de las disposiciones establecidas en la Ley 1712 de 2014, los siguientes datos de los congresistas y de los miembros de sus Unidades de Trabajo Legislativo: i. Nombres y apellidos completos,*

*ii. Extensión telefónica, y iii. Correo institucional. También deberán identificar al miembro de cada Unidad de Trabajo Legislativo que haya sido delegado por cada congresista en materia de (i) Peticiones, Quejas, Reclamos y Solicitudes y (ii) Gobierno Abierto. (Fecha límite: 1 de febrero de 2016). —Colombian Congress, §3c*

Ukraine’s action plan includes a commitment to require the publication of specific information about MPs and parliamentary staff on the Rada’s website. To do so, the Rada would need to amend the law “On the Status of Members of Ukrainian Parliament” to update a list of data that is required for publication. Among the information to be included on the site is a complete curriculum vitae, asset declaration, electoral program, links to personal websites and social media accounts, the results of investigations of the MP and any violations of ethical norms adopted by the Rada. Information about staff would include their curriculum vitae, skills and declarations required by the public service law.

*Full access to information about members of the Ukrainian Parliament and their assistants... In this respect, pursuant to the Declaration on the Parliamentary Openness it would be necessary to make comprehensive amendments to the Law of Ukraine “On the Status of Members of Ukrainian Parliament”. In particular, but not exclusively, to supplement Section 3 of the Law with the list of data that is mandatory for publishing on MPs’ pages. —Ukrainian Rada, §1.1*

#### 3.3 BUDGET & SPENDING

The Declaration on Parliamentary Openness states: “Parliament has a responsibility to make public comprehensive, detailed, and easily understandable information about the national budget and public expenditures, including past, current, and projected revenues and expenditures. Similarly, parliament has a duty to publish information regarding the parliament’s own budget, including information about its own budget execution and bids and contracts. This information shall be made public in its entirety, using a consistent taxonomy, along with plain language summaries, explanations or

reports that help promote citizen understanding” (§23). A number of parliaments have made commitments to ensure public access to essential budgetary information. Tanzania, for instance, has committed to making reports of the Parliamentary Audit Committee public and calls on the executive branch to publish budgets in open formats (§4.3).

The Ukrainian Rada has committed to enhancing citizen access to budgetary and expenditure information with a focus on parliament’s own finances. These include cost estimates for the parliament in an open format.

*.. it is necessary to ensure the publication of a detailed cost estimate for the exercise of powers of the Ukrainian Parliament (in addition to the extract from the state budget) in the form of a table in an open format that does not require downloading, as well as a report of its performance. —Ukrainian Rada, §3.1*

#### 3.4 ADDITIONAL INFORMATION CATEGORIES

The Croatian Parliament included a commitment in the country’s [NAP](#) to upgrade its website to include timely and complete voting data, information on meetings and who attended them, and links to asset declarations and conflict of interest information (§9.1).

Some of the other information categories which are the subject of parliamentary openness commitments include: historical information (Hellenic Parliament, §4.4), voting data (UK Parliament, §29), and inquiries (questions) to the executive branch (Georgian Parliament, §2.5; Ukrainian Rada, §1.2)

#### 4. EASING ACCESS TO PARLIAMENTARY INFORMATION: ENSURING INFORMATION USABILITY

Parliamentary information should be provided in a variety of formats for it to be sufficiently accessible to citizens. Video feeds of parliamentary sessions help provide critical audio and visual context to debates, but written transcripts are also essential to recording the acts taken by parliament, facilitating analysis of legislative debates, and ensuring the accuracy of the parliamentary record. Accordingly, the [Declaration on Parliamentary Openness](#) emphasizes providing information through “multiple channels,” including “first-person observation, print media, radio and television broadcasts, and Internet and mobile device technology” (§27).

In addition to being widely available, information must be usable to various communities. The Declaration specifies that parliamentary information should be provided in all commonly used languages (§33) and make use of terminology that citizens can easily comprehend (§32). It also notes that access to information should be widespread and not restricted by geographic barriers (§31) and that it should be free of charge (§34). Below are some of the channels through which parliaments have committed to making information available and more usable.

##### 4.1 PHYSICAL ACCESS AND USE OF TECHNOLOGY

Parliamentary commitments to ensure public access to parliament go beyond the Declaration’s provision calling on parliaments to provide physical access “subject only to demonstrable public safety and space limitations” (§28). In recent years, many parliaments have debated the value of allowing MPs and the public to use computers, mobile phones and other electronic devices in parliamentary meetings. However, the culture may be beginning to shift as parliaments from the UK to Morocco issue electronic devices to MPs to enable them to more effectively conduct their work. As stated below, the UK’s Digital Democracy Commission has recommended permitting citizens to use electronic devices in parliament, while the Ukrainian Rada has committed to allowing a variety of recording methods.

*The Commission recommends that the current restrictions on members of the public taking mobile electronic devices into the House of Commons chamber and Westminster Hall debates are removed. —UK Parliament, §11*

*.. grant requestors with the right to make extracts, take photographs, copies and scan copies, make records using any data carriers, etc. —Ukrainian Rada, §2.3*

In many instances, policies on accessing parliament lack clear definition. The Georgian Parliament has committed to publishing a detailed description of its access policy on the parliamentary website to help citizens engage.

*To enter the Parliament building one needs a special pass is required which may be issued only by the MPs and few employees of the Office of the Parliament of Georgia. Moreover, there is no reference available at the parliamentary website. This significantly hinders the overall engagement level in the parliamentary work and contradicts both the principle of parliamentary openness and the best international democratic and open society practices. There is a need to publish detailed instructions on the parliamentary website on the procedure to attend the plenary sittings and committee meetings. —Georgian Parliament, §1.4*

##### 4.2 SIMPLIFICATION

The [Declaration on Parliamentary Openness](#) calls on parliaments to “ensure that legal or technical language does not serve as a barrier to citizens seeking to access parliamentary information” (§32). In many countries, not only do legal and technical language pose a barrier to citizen participation, but also to certain MPs and staff.

In its action plan, the Colombian Congress has committed to addressing the lack of public understanding of the legislative process through the creation of a guide that will explain the legislative process and how citizens may participate.

*Expedir, socializar y publicar en línea una Guía Básica de las Funciones, del Proceso Legislativo, de la Estructura del Congreso de la República y de la Estructura de cada Cámara, orientada a los ciudadanos, que exponga de una forma didáctica y asequible (i) los pasos del procedimiento legislativo, y (ii) los canales y mecanismos a través de los cuales los ciudadanos pueden realizar aportes a la actividad legislativa. (Fecha límite: 1 de febrero de 2016) —Colombian Congress, §1b*

The Georgian Parliament has committed to providing explanatory notes with all draft legislation. The commitment expresses the need for a standardized explanatory note, which helps ensure equal treatment of each bill.

*Explanatory notes to the draft laws are critical for fostering parliamentary accountability and citizen engagement in legislative drafting. An explanatory note should be informative and contain justification and arguments. The standards for explanatory notes need to be improved to provide rationale of the purpose of the draft law and financial justifications. —Georgian Parliament, §2.6*

The UK’s Digital Democracy Commission has recommended that Parliament increase its use of infographics and data visualizations (§2) and pilot new procedures for amending bills in plain language (§5). After realizing that many citizens are turned off to Parliament and the legislative process due to its complexity and use of legal jargon, the Commission recommended a variety of methods to make legislation and the legislative process more understandable.

*The House of Commons should take action, during the 2015-16 session, to make parliamentary language and communications easier to understand. This should include:*

- 1. simplifying and clarifying parliamentary language, including procedural terms;*
- 2. developing digital tools such as jargon busters to help readers understand parliamentary language and processes, including the lawmaking process;*
- 3. clarifying and simplifying online and printed communications; and*
- 4. the wider use of aids for people with disabilities*

*and sensory impairments such as British Sign Language translations and subtitles for video material to help the hard of hearing to engage with Parliament. —UK Parliament, §4*

The Parliament has begun to fulfill this recommendation by creating the “rolling minute,” which explains each action taken by Parliament in real time. During the Commission’s [one-year anniversary update](#), it became clear that this feature was not known to citizens and that integrating it into other features of the Parliament’s website could enhance its utility.

##### 4.3 ENABLING INFORMATION ACCESS BY PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Parliamentary information should be available to persons with disabilities, and many parliaments and executive branches have adopted practices aimed at ensuring usability by those with audio, visual and other impairments. The UK Parliament, for example, aims for its [website](#) to meet the standards set forth by the [WRC/WAI’s Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0](#). The Georgian Parliament has adopted a commitment to improve the accessibility of its website as well.

*The Parliament of Georgia has a commitment to formulate a concept regarding an easy access to the parliamentary information for persons with disabilities and develop budget for activities necessary to implement it. The final objective is to enable access to parliamentary information for persons with disabilities through specially designed web page or the website of the Parliament of Georgia. —Georgian Parliament, §2.1*

##### 4.4 PROVIDING INFORMATION THROUGH MULTIPLE CHANNELS

As mentioned in the introduction to this section, the [Declaration on Parliamentary Openness](#) encourages parliaments to exploit a variety of channels to ensure citizen access to parliamentary information. In some instances, a certain amount of experimentation may be necessary to determine which channels are most useful for reaching citizens. For instance, the UK’s Digital Democracy

Commission recommends experimenting with building linkages to community-based organizations and services in order to reach the digitally excluded (§20) and using experimental digital tools to improve political education in schools (§3). It also recommends promoting the Electoral Commission’s website, which citizens reported as being effective in providing access to electoral information.

*The Digital Democracy Commission also notes a clear indication from a range of comments received that the profile and knowledge of the Electoral Commission needs to be improved, as it is a vital source of information to voters, with a website that is an Aladdin’s cave for those wishing to participate in the UK’s political process. —UK Parliament, §23*

The Ukrainian Rada has committed to publishing weekly digests of the institution’s activities that would be sent to citizens who sign up. Although it is often expected that citizens will come to parliament if they are interested in parliamentary information, it is equally important to reach out to citizens to encourage their involvement.

*Implemented by informing the public through the website of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine by publishing weekly digests, providing opportunities to attend plenary sessions of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine etc. —Ukrainian Rada, §2.4*

#### 4.5 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

Freedom of information laws are a critical transparency mechanism. In August 2017, Argentina submitted its third NAP. It included parliamentary commitments to develop and implement a policy for opening access to public information by designing a clear, structured and simple way for the public to search for and find information, and by removing barriers to information reuse by third parties. Specifically, both houses (the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies) will implement legislative data opening plans and will develop an open data portal with parliamentary and administrative information from the National Congress.

*Desarrollar e implementar una política de apertura*

*de datos administrativos y parlamentarios en el ámbito de ambas Cámaras del Congreso de la Nación en línea con los estándares y experiencias internacionales en la materia y el ámbito específico, acompañando la implementación de la Ley 27.275 de Acceso a la Información Pública. Así, se facilita la búsqueda y el acceso a la información pública de una manera clara, estructurada y sencilla para los interesados, procurando remover toda barrera que obstaculice o dificulte su reutilización por parte de terceros. -Argentina Congress, §11*

## 5. ENGAGING CITIZENS AND CITIZEN

### GROUPS: ONLINE AND OFFLINE

Citizen participation in decision making is one of the **four pillars** of OGP and a key element of modern governance. The **Declaration on Parliamentary Openness** establishes that “Parliament has a duty to actively engage citizens and civil society, without discrimination, in parliamentary processes and decision-making in order to effectively represent citizen interests and to give effect to the right of citizens to petition their government” (§5). The **Santiago Declaration** regards the “[e]stablishment of rules that allow the active participation of the citizens and the exercise of ‘citizen’s control’ as part of [parliamentary] accountability measures... and [necessary for the] efficient use of public funds in Parliament” (p. 3).

#### 5.1 LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

In recent years, there has been increased effort among parliaments, civil society and private businesses to develop platforms that would aid in capturing more voices in the legislative process. Among parliaments, the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies’ **WikiLegis**, which is being refined by a collaborative group of civic hackers led by the Chamber of Deputies itself (a case study is available [here](#)), and efforts by the Finnish Eduskunta, captured in [this article](#), are some of the best documented. Civil society initiatives, such as **Parlement-et-Citoyenne**, which helps French MPs engage citizens in a collaborative brainstorming process, and the **OpenGov Foundation’s Madison Project**, have injected additional creativity and helped mainstream these efforts. For-profit initiatives, such as **LegislationLab** and **Ideascale**, can also aid legislative drafting processes or facilitate ideation in support of parliamentary objectives.

Citing Brazil’s e-democracia platform and Finland’s **OpenMinistry**, a civil society website that enables citizens to propose initiatives to the Eduskunta, the Georgian Parliament has committed to increasing public participation in the legislative process. While many parliaments allow citizens to submit comments on legislation privately, many new tools enable legislative commenting and editing as a public process.

*As a rule, the draft laws and collateral documents are posted on the website of the Parliament of Georgia. However, there is a need for more open and transparent legislative process ensured by the Parliament. To increase the level of public involvement, it is also important to allow citizens to comment on the draft legislation and newly adopted laws. That will also stimulate both the public discussions through the increased citizen engagement and the improvement of legislation. Currently, commenting on laws and draft laws is possible through the Legislative Herald of Georgia (“Sakanonmdablo Matsne”). The Parliament should also offer similar mechanism as being a legislative body it is exclusively authorized to make changes to the legislation and modify bills passed to the Parliament. —Georgian Parliament, §1.1*

Technology is not required for incorporating citizen voices in the legislative process, depending on the audience that parliament seeks to engage. The Croatian Parliament is seeking to broaden its access to expertise by including external stakeholders in parliamentary working groups. The Parliament has included an additional commitment for engaging target groups in sessions specific to budget implementation.

*Improving the Practice of Consulting the Interested Public in Procedures of Adopting New Laws: Include external members in Parliament working bodies. —Croatian Parliament, §9.5*

*Setting up a System of Participatory Drafting and Monitoring of State and Local Budget Implementation: Citizens’ participation in Parliament - Enable participation of public employees, scientists, experts and other persons in the discussions about key budgetary documents in sessions of Croatian Parliament working bodies. —Croatian Parliament, §8.2*

#### 5.2 OUTREACH EVENTS

There is broad consensus among parliaments in even the most electronically connected societies that face-to-face interactions cannot be replaced by online engagement.

Many communities remain disconnected, particularly those most in need of representation. The Legislative Openness Working Group has encouraged parliaments to engage citizens both offline and online through its annual Global Legislative Openness Week (GLOW). In 2014, dozens of events were held in over 30 countries. The French National Assembly then committed to participating in GLOW:

*By the end of 2015 or early 2016, the National Assembly, in coordination with the international week of the opening of the legislature initiated by the “legislative opening” OGP working group, will organize a collaborative event open to all. It will bring together her members of departments of the National Assembly, members of Parliament, and innovators, in order to develop innovative solutions with civil society for parliamentary work and debate. —French National Assembly, §2*

The Ghanaian NAP includes a commitment for parliamentary education events in various regions, as well as outreach programs with faith-based organizations:

1. Conduct 10 regional Adult Education Programme on the opportunities available for participating in local administration and Parliament by 2017...
2. Organize 10 regional outreach programmes with faith based organizations on the
3. opportunities available for participating in local administration and Parliament by 2017. —Ghanaian Parliament, §4.2.0

Some parliaments are hosting their own parliamentary openness weeks with civil society support. This was the case in Serbia where the Serbian Parliament and CRTA collaborated to host a “Week of Parliamentarism” in 2015. The Georgian Parliament plans to implement a similar event.

*To strengthen the institutional image and role of the Parliament and to increase public awareness and knowledge about its activities, role and mission, the Parliament of Georgia plans to establish a Parliamentary Openness Week (“Georgian Parliament Open Days”); to organize regular issue-based meetings, presentations and seminars involving parliamentary committees and students from state and private higher education institutions of Georgia; to upgrade and diversify programs for visitors (tours with a guide for different target groups); to develop educational programs, including a lecture course on parliamentarism; to institutionalize simulated youth parliament, organize innovative competitions and other activities promoting citizen engagement and bilateral dialogue with target groups and citizens. —Georgian Parliament, §1.6*

### 5.3 ENGAGING CIVIL SOCIETY

Collaboration between parliaments and civil society has been a common theme throughout this document and several sections have focused on this issue specifically. There is increasing recognition on both sides of the need for constructive collaboration to address voter malaise, youth disenfranchisement and other issues. The 2012 Parliamentary Development Report recognized civil society parliamentary monitoring organizations (PMOs) for their role in “creating a new form of external validation of parliamentary representation” and their potential “to enhance the public position of parliaments.” These organizations often develop civic technologies that help citizens engage with parliament and with legislation. They can also innovate at a pace that parliaments cannot. Some parliaments have sought to nurture and support these “civic hacktivists” who can contribute technology skills to help better engage citizens, such as the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies with its path-breaking Hacker Lab.

In this vein, the UK Commission on Digital Democracy has encouraged further development of tools by civil society to help disseminate trustworthy information about parliament.

*The Commission strongly encourages the political education bodies and charities to consider how to make available and publicise trustworthy information about candidates and their policies, including by means of voter advice applications. —UK Parliament, §22*

The Colombian Congress has agreed to host a hearing on ethics focused entirely on listening to civil society.

*Los Presidentes de Senado y Cámara, y los Presidentes de las Comisiones de Ética, convocarán una audiencia pública durante el primer trimestre de 2016, orientada a escuchar los puntos de vista de la sociedad civil sobre el Proyecto de Ley por el cual se expide el Código de Ética del Congresista. (Fecha límite: 31 de marzo de 2016) —Colombian Congress, §2c*

### 5.4 E-PETITIONS

New technologies have enhanced the ability of citizens to use online petitions to rally support for their policy demands. Petitions enable citizens to raise policy issues that may not be on the public agenda. Latvia’s e-petition website ManaBals and the Finnish website OpenMinistry are both civil society-led tools that enable citizens to propose and campaign for parliamentary action on issues that they find important. Both websites provide legal consultation for proposals that gain a certain level of popularity. They also verify the authenticity of signatures using their respective countries’ banking systems.

The UK and Ukrainian plans include the implementation

of e-petition systems that incorporate specific criteria. The UK recommendation to overhaul its e-petitions system includes a suggestion to invite the author of the petition to the House of Commons to participate in a hearing on the petition.

*... with regard to the amendments introduced by the Law of Ukraine “On Amendments to the Law of Ukraine ‘On Public Appeals’ in Part of E-appeals and E-petitions”, in the course of collecting signatures in support of e-petitions, the Ukrainian Parliament should provide:*

1. free-of-charge access and use of the information and telecommunication system, through which the signatures are collected;
2. electronic registration of citizens for signing the petition;
3. preventing the automatic input of information, including signing e-petitions, without a citizen’s participation;
4. recording the date and time of publication and signing of the e-petition by a citizen.

*As for individual public electronic appeals, the online submission option via the Internet and means of electronic communication must be ensured in accordance with Article 5 of the Law of Ukraine “On Public Appeals”, with regard to the amendments introduced by the Law of Ukraine “On Amendments to the Law of Ukraine ‘On Public Appeals’ in Part of E-appeals and E-petitions” —Ukrainian Rada, §4.2*

*We support the recent recommendation by the House of Commons Procedure Committee for a new e-petitions system hosted on Parliament’s website, overseen by a committee of MPs. Such a committee would have a much wider range of possible responses to both paper and e-petitions than exists under the current system, including:*

1. writing to the person who launched a petition
2. asking them to come and speak to the committee
3. referring a petition to another suitable committee to be discussed (for example, the Health Committee or the Home Affairs Committee)
4. seeking further information from the Government about the issue raised by a petition
5. putting forward petitions for debate. —UK Parliament, Digital Democracy Commission p. 67.

### 5.5 SOCIAL MEDIA & ADVERTISING

The Inter-Parliamentary Union’s Social Media Guidelines for Parliaments (Spanish, French) recognizes that “you cannot wait for the people to come to parliament; you need to go where the people are.” The IPU’s Guidelines are a valuable tool in that they provide guidance for staff to go beyond merely providing information via social media and

instead to work toward active engagement of citizens.

In its action plan, the Hellenic Parliament commits to improving its policy on social media.

*Parliament Social Media communication policy enhancement and improvement of its already established social media account e-services are the Hellenic Parliament’s major goals. Regular and organized citizens’ approach and access in terms of information, education and participation is a necessity calling for the Parliament’s integrated communication design. —Hellenic Parliament, §4.5*

The UK Speaker’s Digital Democracy Commission recommends that all Select Committees engage on social media. Importantly, it calls for using social media advertising to aid in communicating its message. This recommendation recognizes that some social media, such as Facebook, are limiting the organic reach of postings and that advertising is essential to digital outreach.

*Select Committees should make greater use of social media and online advertising to reach out to new audiences and raise awareness of their work. They should also experiment with using digital to involve people more in committee work. —UK Parliament, §16*

## 6. ENHANCING DIGITAL FUNCTIONALITY & OPEN DATA



Providing information in ‘open formats’ is the baseline of openness in the 21st century. It means providing citizens the technical ability and legal right to information so that it may be “used, modified and shared by anyone for any purpose.” A pillar of OGP, open data effectively enables citizens to use modern technology to analyze information. This section highlights the variety of activities parliaments have committed to undertaking to embrace open data and enhance the functionality of their websites.

## 6.1 OPEN DATA

The provision of information in an open format provides citizens the technical capacity and legal authority to use, modify and share legislative information. It effectively enables citizens to use technology to parse, analyze and understand parliamentary information.

The French National Assembly committed to making more than 800,000 documents available in an open format by the end of 2015. These documents include MPs’ registers of interests, oral and written questions, and legislative dossiers (including legislative process information) among other documents.

*Provide open-data access to more than 800,000 documents by the end of 2015, in accordance with the following timetable: June 2015:*

- 1. List of members of Parliament with information on their marital status (list of active members of Parliament and former members of Parliament since the start of the 11th legislature in June 1997);*
- 2. E-mail and postal addresses of members of Parliament, as well as telephone numbers of their offices... —French National Assembly, §1*

The technical architecture of parliamentary information

matters, both for end users and for parliaments themselves. It can impact the types of technology that can utilize parliamentary information, and even ensure that parliamentary information will be technologically useful in the future. A number of parliaments and international institutions are adopting a schema based on [Akoma Ntoso](#), a project designed specifically to ensure long-term interoperability of legislative and legal information. The Hellenic Parliament has committed to adopting an appropriate data structure for Greek legislative information.

*Open Parliamentary Data is a major challenge for the Hellenic Parliament, following the example of parliaments worldwide. Moreover, proper structuring of information ensures user broader and more qualitative experience and pooling of all requested data sought for at specific points of the portal. The specific commitment requires functionality improvement in the Hellenic Parliament portal, in line with new standards that meet the Open Public Data, content enrichment, application development for visual representation of information and development of search tools. —Hellenic Parliament, §4.3*

The Chilean Congress has committed to working with UNDP to conduct an assessment of data reusability. It has also committed to promoting the use of the same standards for the personal websites of MPs §1.4.

*Estructurar el contenido de los sitios electrónicos institucionales del Senado, la Cámara de Diputados y la Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional, en lo que se refiere a transparencia y rendición de cuentas de forma similar para incentivar, facilitar y mejorar el acceso ciudadano. En el marco del Convenio con el PNUD, se realizará un plan piloto con grupos de interés para verificar que los datos publicados sean de interés y estén en formatos adecuados para su reutilización. —Chilean Congress, §1.3*

To ensure that citizens have the legal right to use legislative information as they see fit, parliaments can use licenses, such as those by [Creative Commons](#), that facilitate information sharing. The UK’s Digital Democracy Commission has recommended making all legislative data available using the UK’s [Open Government Licence](#).

*The UK government will:*

- 1. promptly publish all new primary and secondary legislation on legislation.gov.uk*
- 2. bring the revised versions of primary legislation on legislation.gov.uk up to date by the end of 2015 and keep them up to date subsequently*
- 3. make legislative data available in an open and accessible format to allow people to reuse*
- 4. content under terms of the UK’s Open Government Licence. —UK Parliament, §10*

## 6.2 VERSION TRACKING

In the legislative context, version tracking is a simple way to view the changes made to legislation. Both the Hellenic and Georgian parliaments have committed to integrating version tracking as part of their amendment process.

*Through its web portal, the Hellenic Parliament makes public the legislation processing stages, as well as all related documents. However, the current process of drafting and amending draft legislation texts does not allow for automated tracking of changes brought about in each processing stage, and consequently, for the publication of electronic files in machine readable and reusable format. —Hellenic Parliament, §4.1*

*To achieve a greater participation of public in the process of legislative drafting the changes and edits made to the draft law after its formal submission should be reflected in a real time. In addition, they should be incorporated in the initial draft in a visible manner so as to reflect both the original text and the changes. This will enable any stakeholder to timely track the transformation of the draft law from the first to the final third reading. Furthermore, it will help not only engage the citizens and civil society but also keep members of the parliament and other employees timely informed... —Georgian Parliament, §2.4*

## 6.3 BULK ACCESS

Recognizing the capacity of citizens to develop tools for using parliamentary data, many parliaments have begun to provide access to their information in bulk. There are two ways that this can be done: 1) a parliament can make its information downloadable through a “data dump” or 2) it can make its data available via an application programming interface, or API. A running list of parliaments and CSOs using these methods is

available [here](#), while a discussion of the positives and negatives of both methods is available [here](#). Providing bulk data is codified in the [Declaration on Parliamentary Openness](#) provision on downloading for reuse (§39).

The Netherlands House of Representatives committed to developing its API to facilitate the use of legislative data by developers who can provide greater access to this information through their own platforms.

- 1. Parlis online Information on the parliamentary process will be made accessible via Parlis. Papers, agendas, schedules and reports will all be disclosed to the public.*
- 2. Further development of API (interface that allows for easy retrieval of customised data) Initially, an API was made available to a limited group of users. On the basis of experience to date, it is now being made openly available. This will make it possible to retrieve real-time information, among other things. —The Netherlands House of Representatives, §4*

## 6.4 OTHER FUNCTIONAL IMPROVEMENTS

In accordance with the [Declaration on Parliamentary Openness](#), parliaments are making a number of functional improvements that will enhance the experience of parliamentary information users. The Ukrainian Rada has committed to improving the searchability of its website (Declaration on Parliamentary Openness, §41) through adopting appropriate metadata.

*The Parliament shall ensure the easiness of search for the information on the Parliament’s activities required by the public by creating databases that allow simple and advanced search through the use of appropriate metadata. Information should be available at a permanent location, such as a web address with a permanent URL. Information on the Parliament’s activities should be concluded and released in an open and structured format, such as XML, which can be viewed and processed by a PC, so that the citizens, civil society, private sector and the government could use and analyze the information on the Parliament’s work. —Ukrainian Rada, §4.1*

Alert services are another tool to facilitate citizen participation. The Declaration on Parliamentary Openness states: “Where possible, parliament shall provide citizens the ability to subscribe to services to alert them to certain categories of parliamentary actions through the use of email, SMS text messaging, or other technologies” (§43). Alert services help users of parliamentary information know when discussions, votes or other actions transpire. The Colombian Congress has committed to providing this tool to the public.

*Crear y socializar un servicio de alertas en el cual los ciudadanos puedan inscribirse y ser notificados vía correo electrónico o cualquier otro instrumento tecnológico, sobre debates de control político y proyectos de ley que versen sobre temáticas de su interés. (Fecha límite: 1 de julio de 2016) —Colombian Congress, §1c*

The Georgian Parliament has committed to creating web tools designed to help citizens better understand parliamentary work. These include an e-news module and virtual tour of parliament.

*... to achieve an open, transparent, bilateral, interactive communication it plans to: create parliamentary e-news module to spread news automatically to web-page subscribers in line with the agreed frequency; add additional interactive modules/functions to the existing parliamentary web-portal; create informative/educational virtual tour of the Parliament of Georgia; develop mobile applications for web-services of the Parliament of Georgia; draft proposal for parliamentary website restructuring. These initiatives will help to promote activities of the Parliament of Georgia, establish effective bilateral dialogue, foster citizen engagement and improve interaction with different stakeholders. —Georgian Parliament, §32*

## 6.5 EXPERIMENTAL INITIATIVES

Technological advances provide a multitude of opportunities for citizens and parliaments to experiment with the use of parliamentary information. Experimentation and creativity may provide legislative staff with an opportunity to showcase their talent and encourage citizens to use their own imaginations in thinking about how to attract fellow citizens to politics.

The UK's Digital Democracy Commission has encouraged the Parliament to develop a number of pilot initiatives with the aim of enhancing outreach to citizens. Among their suggestions are efforts to facilitate public participation in parliamentary debates through a "Cyber Chamber." They also recommend experimenting with ways to provide citizens the opportunity to question ministers directly.

*We believe the public want the opportunity to have their say in House of Commons debates; we also believe that this will provide a useful resource for MPs and help to enhance those debates. We therefore recommend a unique experiment: the use of regular digital public discussion forums to inform debates held in Westminster Hall. This innovation might be known as the "Cyber Chamber" or "Open House." If at the end of the next Parliament it has been successful, it could then be extended to debates in the main House of Commons chamber itself. —UK Parliament, §18*

*The House of Commons should experiment with new ways of enabling the public to put forward questions for ministers. —UK Parliament, §19*

The Colombian Congress has committed to providing citizens a means for transmitting observations on legislation being discussed in committees and plenary directly to MPs. The initiative would also facilitate a feedback process.

*Diseñar y/o socializar y poner en marcha una herramienta que permita a los ciudadanos plasmar observaciones a los proyectos de ley que están en proceso de discusión en las comisiones o plenarias de Senado y Cámara, asegurando que dichas observaciones lleguen a los congresistas y ponentes, y que los ciudadanos puedan ser retroalimentados sobre sus aportes. (Fecha límite: 31 de diciembre de 2016) —Colombian Congress, §1d*

## INTERVIEWS

To gather information for this toolkit, the following individuals were interviewed:

**Guillermo Avila**, Researcher, Fundar Center for Analysis and Research, Mexico

**Nadiia Babynska**, Civil Network OPORA, Ukraine

**Emmanuel Bedzrah**, Member of Parliament, Parliament of Ghana

**Nino Beradze**, Head of Public Relations & Information Department, Parliament of Georgia

**Pablo Collada**, Executive Director, Fundación Ciudadano Inteligente, Chile

**Jovana Djurbabic**, Communication Manager, Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability, Serbia

**Joseph Foti**, Program Director, Independent Reporting Mechanism, Open Government Partnership

**Giorgi Klidiashvili**, Executive Director, Institute for Development of Freedom of Information, Georgia

**Maikol Porras Morales**, Secretary of the Board, Asociación Centro Ciudadano de Estudios para una Sociedad Abierta

**Juan Pablo Olmedo**, Advisor to the Bicameral Commission on Transparency, Congress of Chile

**Edward Wood**, Director of Public Information, UK Parliament

## RESOURCES

An illustrative list of legislative openness commitments, whether included in a NAP or a stand-alone legislative openness plan can be found here: <http://bit.ly/1rqZxsR>.

Links to resources can be found here: <http://bit.ly/1VH4M46>.

Additional resources will be added to these documents on a rolling basis.