



Centre for
Public Impact
A BCG FOUNDATION

A brief introduction to...
Open data

Open data

Open data on decision-makers and government performance

What is Open data?

Open data policies ensure that government provides citizens with access to free and timely data on the conduct of its work, or to any data that may be of public interest.

Open data maintains that government data – namely, structured data that is created, collected or processed by or for the government – is a national asset to be available to all (although subject to security and privacy constraints). Open data initiatives have been driven by technological advancements that have reduced the costs of sharing information to negligible levels.

What does it seek to achieve?

Open data seeks to improve government effectiveness and accountability through transparency – which together with participation and collaboration comprise the Open Government approach – by informing the public of government actions and results. This allows citizens, the media, civil society and others to regularly evaluate political promises against this data.

Open data also allows citizens to be more knowledgeable consumers of public services and to make better-informed choices. They can evaluate indicators covering areas such as healthcare, education, housing, infrastructure, pollution and crime.

Finally, open data spurs innovation by facilitating, and often enabling, the generation of novel data-driven services and businesses. As government creates and holds large amounts of data, opening it up can unlock substantial social and economic value.

Keys to success



Photography by Andreas Fidler

What are the key success factors?

- ✓ Timely, complete and clearly described data
- ✓ Machine-readable formats under terms that permit reuse and redistribution
- ✓ Access that is as widespread as possible, so that data is easily available to anyone, at any time, at minimal cost, without requirements of identification or justification, and without restrictions of use

All these factors can be significantly improved through continuous government engagement with existing and prospective data users, so that data is collected, processed and shared by the government in a manner that increasingly maximises its potential value for these “consumers” and for society as a whole.

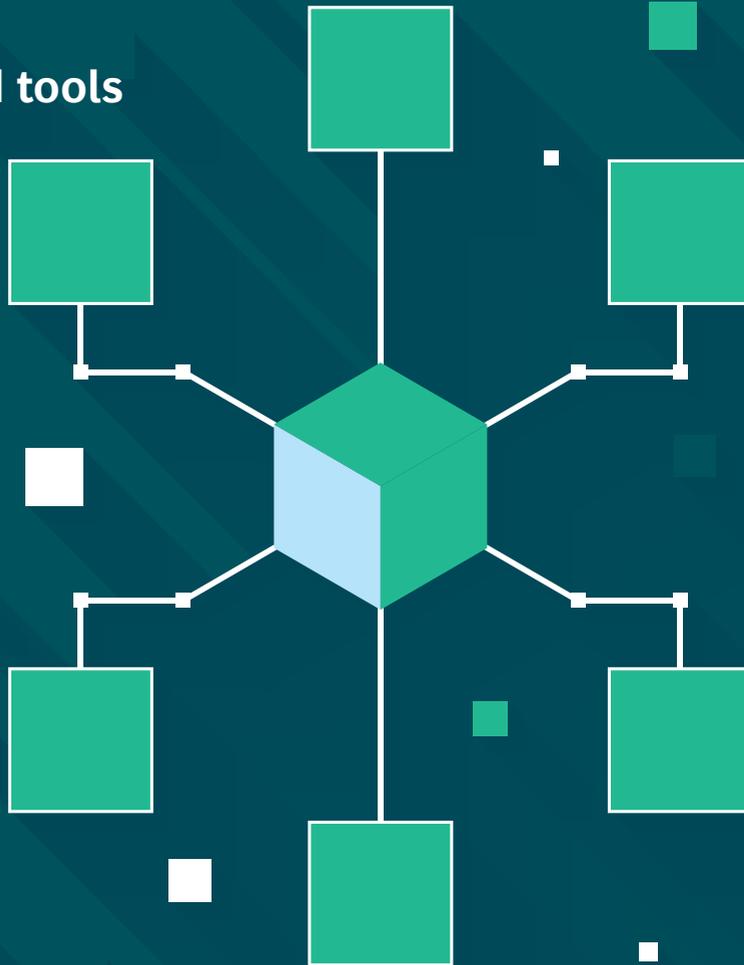
Things to look out for

The following table displays three specific challenges related to open data, as well as potential mitigating factors.

Issue	Main challenges to address	Ways to mitigate
Location	Citizens may struggle to identify which of the many government units holds the data of interest.	A one-stop online shop for open data.
Interoperability	The ability to combine data from diverse systems to enable better insights and more applications.	Standard government procedures and formats for sharing data.
Privacy concerns	Citizens may worry that open data might expose personally identifiable data or sensitive patterns.	Transparent organisational and technological protocols for data pseudonymisation.

Approaches

and tools



Open data on decision-makers

Enacting institutional or legal requirements to share in a timely manner any data on the potential misuse of public offices or processes for private gain.



Disclosing government officials' spending and gifts: statutes and online platforms that increase transparency regarding government officials' actions, in terms of personal spending, gifts received, and travel.

Example:

The European Parliament curates a publicly available register of gifts received by its members during the performance of their duty. While the code of conduct states that gifts or benefits valued at more than €150 must be refused or, if the MEP was officially representing Parliament, passed on to Parliament's President, all gifts valued at less need to be reported and are registered by the European Parliament. See: European Parliament, *About MEPs*



Lobbying transparency: publicly disclosing the identities of lobbyists – as well as the people they are talking to – mitigates the potential of interest groups to use their resources to gain undue influence over politicians, possibly against the public interest and without the public's knowledge.

Example:

the State of New Jersey was notorious for "pay-to-play", awarding state construction contracts to firms who had made substantial donations to the political party in power. In 2006, the New Jersey legislature enacted the Prohibition on Business Entity Contributions, one of the strongest anti pay-to-play laws in the United States, which was followed by several other states. See: Centre for Public Impact, *Eliminating Pay-for-Play in New Jersey*

Approaches

and tools

Open data on government performance: publishing data that allows citizens to assess the decisions and actions of elected officials and government bodies against their stated plans and commitments.



Repository of government performance data:

an accessible repository of data on government performance and statistics. This can be used to track government's work, but also to unlock substantial social and economic value.

Example:

in 2013, the Edo state government in Nigeria launched its open data portal, which houses over 188 datasets and aims to drive government transparency as well as foster innovation in the state.

See: Centre for Public Impact, *Extended opening hours: stories of open data from around the world*



Open contracting:

making the full contracting cycle transparent online to ensure that public goods and services provide good value for money, constituting an optimal mix of expertise, capacity and price.

Example:

in 2009, in an effort to tackle ever-present corruption, the El Salvadorian Ministry of Public Works introduced integrity pacts with project contractors to clean up procurement and delivery. The pacts stipulate that companies bidding for government infrastructure projects have to commit publicly to transparency and are then monitored by Transparency International and other NGOs. See: Centre for Public Impact, *A Blueprint for Transparency: Integrity Pacts for Public Works*

Approaches

and tools



Open budgeting:

publishing the government's revenues and expenditure in a high-resolution format. This allows the public to hold government accountable by analysing the actual generation and allocation of resources – which strongly affect outcomes – and thus evaluate political commitments and delivery competence in full knowledge of the facts.

Example:

in 2007, a year after the US government mandated the creation of its federal spending website, the state of Missouri developed its own portal, MAP, to show citizens how and where their state's money was being spent. In its first year it received 14 million hits from users, and is now a permanent part of Missouri's open data framework. See: Centre for Public Impact, *The Missouri Accountability Portal (MAP)*



Politicians' attendance and voting:

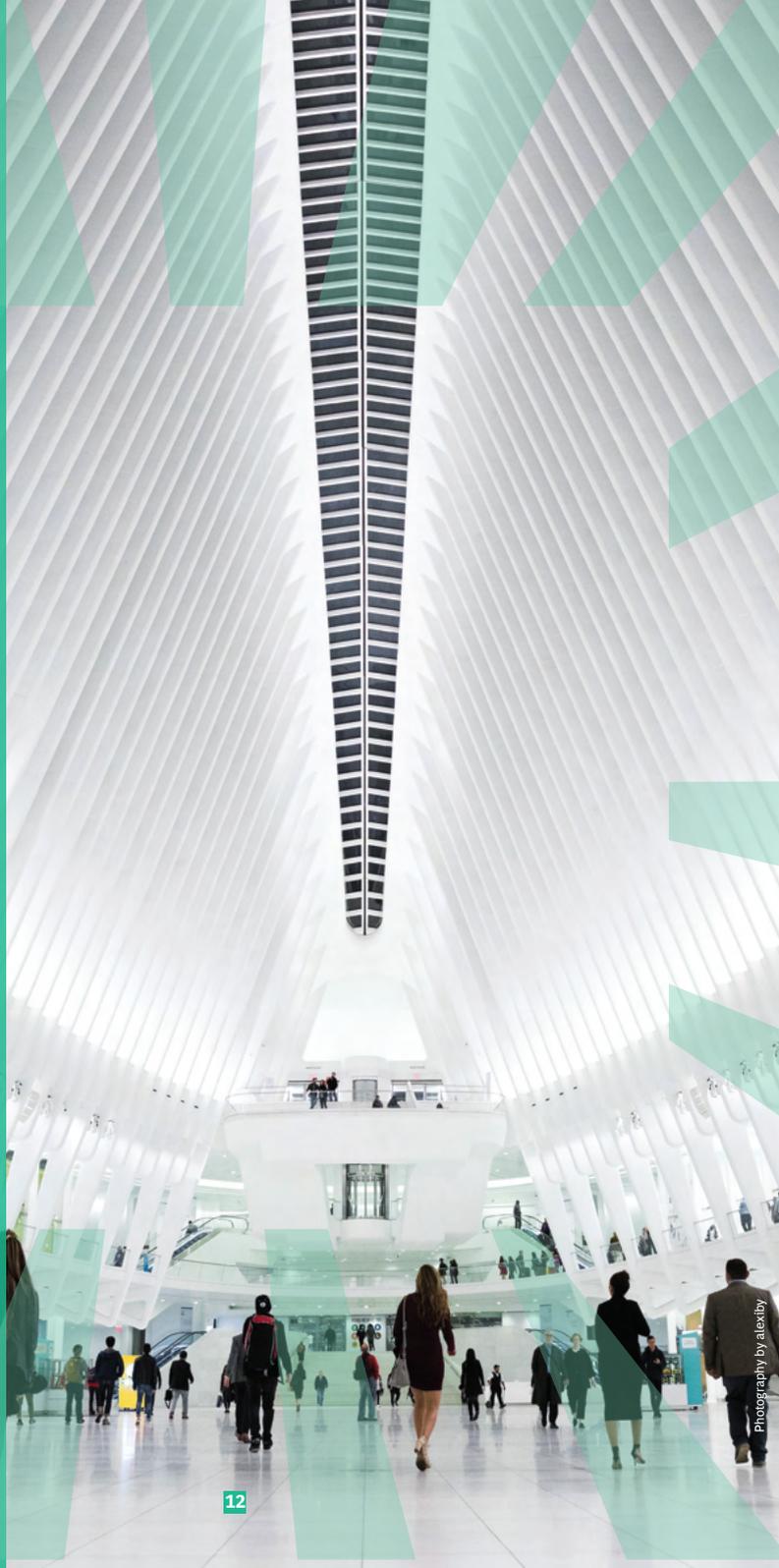
many governments publish high-resolution data on how politicians spend their time, their record of voting on different issues, and their comments in parliamentary debates, all of which serve to facilitate personal accountability and inform citizens' electoral choices.

Example:

the UK's House of Commons publishes members' attendance and voting records in the House of Commons Hansard no later than 8am on the day after a parliamentary debate. See: House of Commons, *The Official Report of all parliamentary debates*

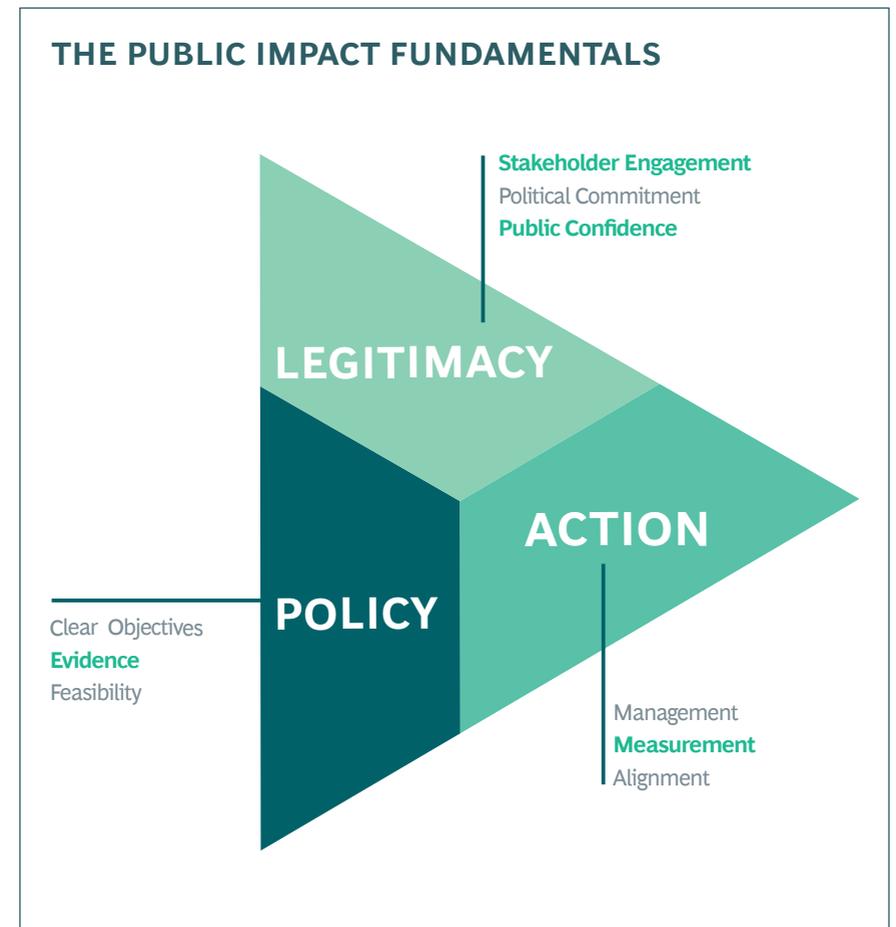
Fundamentals

The



How does Open data help achieve greater public impact?

CPI's Public Impact Fundamentals are a systematic attempt to understand what makes a successful policy outcome and describe what can be done to maximise the chances of achieving public impact. Below, we have highlighted the elements of the Fundamentals that are most likely to be positively influenced by open data.



Further reading

The Centre for Public Impact,
The Public Impact Fundamentals, 2016

Open Government Guide,
<http://www.opengovpartnership.org>

G8 Open Data Charter,
signed on 18 June, 2013

HM Government,
UK Open Government National Action Plan
2016-18, 2016

Open Data Institute,
Open data means business, 2015



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