Open Government Policy in Israel in the Digital Age

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Abstract

Open Government Policy—as it has developed throughout the Western world in recent years—aims to harness new technologies to improve communication between the government and its citizens. It also aims to correctly utilize and exploit the information that is at the disposal of the government, in order to bring about social and economic benefits. This policy paper proposes a model for the successful implementation of Open Government Policy in Israel.

In advancing the principles of transparency, making information accessible to the public, and public participation, the primary advantage of the digital age is an ability to supervise the actions of government. Another advantage is that an increased level of accessibility to data in different fields leads to public and economic benefits and encourages development and initiatives. In addition, it goes without saying that public participation is an excellent tool for actualizing the concept of the "wisdom of the crowd" (the collective perception of a group of people, who are not necessarily experts).

The implementation of Open Government principles involves facing three types of challenges:

Challenges at the organizational level: A lack of resources, and organizational opposition on the part of government officers and politicians to two processes: adoption of the principle of transparency and inclusion of the broader public in the decision-making process.

Challenges on the policy level : Outdated legislation; lack of clarity in policy papers, which aim to implement transparency and participation; a focus on technology, rather than emphasizing the re-training of government

personnel—a step that would move the process forward more successfully.

Challenges on the social level: A lack of equality, in terms of each person's access to information and her ability to make use of it; and a lack of public interest in participating in decision-making processes.

The Open Government Policy recommended here is based on three complementary principles:

1. Transparency and making government information accessible.
2. Public participation in the decision-making processes of government authorities.
3. Cooperation between the different branches of government through standardization of the information interfaces.

The suggested model for implementing Open Government Policy involves three stages:

Stage one: Increasing the transparency and accessibility of government information:

- Investing organizational resources and efforts into strengthening the legal requirements that are part of Freedom of Information laws.
- Identifying the data that have significant public importance and influence.
- Improving the quality and accessibility of information; and ensuring that it is in an open format and allows for repeated use.

Stage two: Improving public participation in the work of government:

- Improving the level of the government's attentiveness and ability to respond to queries from the public quickly and accurately.
- Improving accessibility to information that is relevant to public participation and making sure it is available in a clear and user-friendly manner.
- Encouraging public participation in the processes of creating policy and legislation.

Stage three: Advancing internal organizational cooperation between

branches of government:

- Facilitating cooperative work within government, in order to improve its efficiency and effectiveness.

The policy paper relates in depth to each aspect of improving government transparency and public participation. It discusses concrete issues that relate to these aspects, such as:

- Establishing goals and priorities that relate to making information accessible; for example, taking into consideration the cost of accessibility, and giving priority to basic, user-friendly information and information relating to property rights.
- Increasing the accessibility of the government's information database, data.gov, and establishing the characteristics of Open Government information; for example, defining copyrights as related to government information ,and establishing the formats used in making this data accessible.
- Making the government budget accessible on the Internet and creating online dashboards that present information about the relationship between the planning and execution stages.
- Using digital and social media technologies to increase public participation in the processes of decision making, policy definition and legislation.

In implementing the principles of Open Government, this research emphasizes the importance of cooperation between three independent circles that will support the process:

- Private organizations, especially those that develop technology and software.
- Government officials who are committed to the concept of government transparency.
- Focused and purposeful government policy.

The recommendations in this policy paper aim to promote a government that is committed to providing open, accessible information for all, and that

facilitates public involvement and participation in government processes.

The full text of this policy paper is available in Hebrew on the Israel Democracy Institute's Website: www.idi.org.il