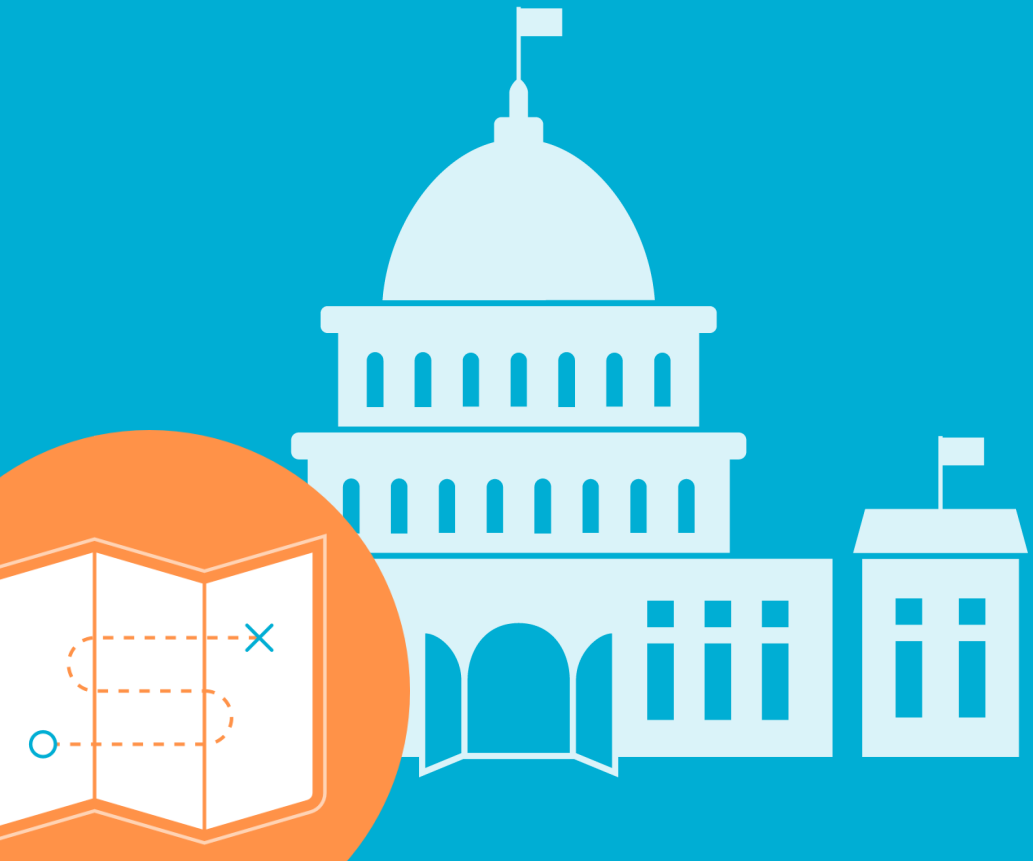


## Executive Summary

# Guide to Develop Open Parliament Action Plans





# Introduction

**Open Parliament Action Plans** have proven to be a useful tool to advance legislative openness through an innovative process involving an important collaboration with civil society. A **practical step by step guide** explaining how to develop Open Parliament Action Plans in accordance with OGP's co-creation standards and legislative policy, with insights from parliamentarians, parliamentary clerks and civil society representatives who have gone through this process, will be a valuable resource for others working on their first plan or those who wish to improve their processes.

A draft working document has been developed by ParlAmericas in collaboration with the Open Parliament e-Network (OPeN), and through input by parliamentarians, parliamentary staff and civil society representatives at ParlAmericas working sessions, including the 3rd Gathering of the ParlAmericas Open Parliament Network on the occasion of the VIII Summit of the Americas: Open States for Democratic Governance Against Corruption held on April 11-12, 2018 in Lima, Peru and the Co-Creation Meeting: Guide to Develop Open Parliament Action Plans that took place on December 6-7, 2018 in Santiago, Chile.

While the full guide is still in development, this executive summary was produced to provide an overview of the process to develop an Open Parliament Action Plan and as a means to invite further input into the long form of the guide. Should you wish to share your experience with us to help inform this guide, please do not hesitate to contact [parlAmericasopn@parlAmericas.org](mailto:parlAmericasopn@parlAmericas.org).

The full guide, along with this executive summary, will be updated following a further consultative process and will be published in 2019.

# What are Open Parliaments?

An Open Parliament refers to a form of interaction between citizens and legislatures that promotes parliamentary openness and transparency, to ensure access to public information, accountability, citizen participation, and high probity and ethical standards in parliamentary work.



## Transparency and Access to Information

Citizens' right to information that is of public interest through mechanisms for the disclosure of reliable information and compliance with requests for such information.



## Accountability

Ability of the public to hold the government, including parliament, to account for its policy and service delivery performance.



## Citizen Participation

Active involvement of citizens in public decision-making processes that may impact their lives.



## Ethics and Probity

Norms of highest integrity that individuals should adhere to while serving as public servants.

# What is an Open Parliament Action Plan?

An Open Parliament Action Plan is a mechanism through which a parliament commits to advancing openness and strengthening representation and oversight, in collaboration with civil society. A co-creation process allows parliament and civil society to identify priorities to implement, and to monitor and evaluate progress towards these commitments.

Given the goal to improve interaction with citizens, inviting various stakeholder groups and citizens more broadly to engage in the planning process can go a long way to increase the effectiveness and public legitimacy of this decision-making process. It is based on this logic that the concept of **Co-Creation** is applied to Open Parliament Action Plans.

## What is the Open Government Partnership?

The [Open Government Partnership \(OGP\)](#) is a multilateral initiative that aims to secure concrete commitments from governments to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance.

Participation in OGP is led by the executive branch of government. To become a member of OGP, participating countries must meet [eligibility criteria](#) and a [values check](#), endorse a high-level [Open Government Declaration](#), deliver a country action plan developed with public consultation, and commit to independent reporting on their progress going forward. Since its launch in 2011, 79 OGP participating countries and 20 subnational governments have made over 3,100 commitments to make their governments more open and accountable.

# How do these efforts relate to the Open Government Partnership?

OGP promotes the engagement of parliaments from participating countries and local governments in their Action Plan process. In accordance with [OGP's Parliamentary Engagement Policy](#), parliaments can contribute in two ways:

1. Submit stand-alone legislative openness commitments to be included in the government's 2-year Action Plan.
2. Co-create an independent Open Parliament Action Plan to be included as an annex or separate chapter to the government's 2-year Action Plan.

Either option requires parliaments to follow the OGP principles and participation requirements, including applying [OGP Co-Creation and Participation Standards](#), and participating in the OGP Independent Reporting Mechanism's evaluations. This includes publicly sharing regular progress updates through an online repository.

While undertaking this process through OGP brings additional benefits, parliaments whose countries do not currently participate in OGP can also develop their own stand-alone Open Parliament Action Plan, to achieve the same objectives.

These efforts to advance legislative openness, both in OGP participating countries as well as non-OGP participating countries, are supported by the Open Parliament e-Network, or OPeN (formerly the OGP Legislative Openness Working Group), led by ParlAmericas, National Democratic Institute, Latin American Legislative Transparency Network, Westminster Foundation for Democracy, Directorio Legislativo, and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

# Examples of Open Parliament Action Plans

Country	Action Plans
	<a href="#">2017-2018</a> ; <a href="#">2014-2016</a>
	<a href="#">2018-2019</a> ; <a href="#">2017-2018</a> ; <a href="#">2016-2017</a>
	<a href="#">2016-2017</a> ; <a href="#">2015-2016</a>
	<a href="#">2018-2020</a> ; <a href="#">2015-2016</a>
	<a href="#">2018-2019</a> ; <a href="#">2017</a> ; <a href="#">2015-2016</a>
	<a href="#">2016-2017</a>
	<a href="#">2018-2020</a>
	<a href="#">2016-2020</a>
	<a href="#">2018-2020</a>
	<a href="#">2016-2018</a>
	<a href="#">2016-2017</a>

## How to use this guide?

This guide provides a practical overview of the steps needed for the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of Open Parliament Action Plans undertaken both within the framework of OGP and separately. Each step includes a brief introduction and a description of relevant considerations and/or options available.

# Main Steps to Develop an Open Parliament Action Plan



#1

Build political will



#2

Create or identify a parliamentary body to lead the process



#8

Adopt and implement the Open Parliament Action Plan



#7

Co-create the Open Parliament Action Plan



#9

Monitor advances and evaluate its success





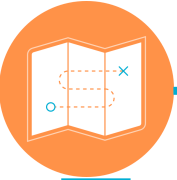
**#3**

Reflection: Which open parliament process is appropriate for your parliament?



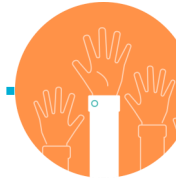
**#4**

Identify a focal point for open parliament within your institution



**#6**

Develop the co-creation process with civil society



**#5**

Identify the process by which civil society participation will take place



**#10**

Repeat the cycle as of step 6

## Step 1: Build political will

Building political will is a critical step to advancing open parliament reforms and one that will be continuous throughout the process. To build support for engaging in an Open Parliament Action Plan, it can be helpful to build an informal cross-party network of like-minded parliamentarians to champion the reforms, as well as to consider the key parliamentary actors who need to be engaged for this process to be successful.

### Relevant actors:

Political parties	All chambers	Parliamentary administration
Parliamentary leadership	Civil society organizations	General public
	OGP National Point of Contact	

### Remember...

The objective of such a plan is to generate reforms and/or activities to strengthen the parliament's ability to adopt better laws that have been debated and developed with input from individuals from all backgrounds, as well as those who will be affected by their implementation. Parliamentary openness promotes spaces for effective dialogue and the collaborative elaboration of public policies. In addition, transparency can promote respect towards opposing opinions as well as evidenced-based legislation. A better quality of work will emanate from a plural, inclusive legislative body that provides data to support the decisions that are adopted.

## Step 2: Create or identify a parliamentary body to lead the process

A parliamentary body should be identified or created to provide institutional leadership and sustainability to the process. Such a parliamentary body can be established under various levels of formality. It can be an existing or new standing parliamentary committee, a special ad-hoc committee, a multi-party group or caucus, or the process can be led by the board of directors or president of the parliament. A more formal arrangement will ensure the sustainability of this initiative but this may not be feasible in all cases.

Composition	Mandate	Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Multi-partisan representation.</li> <li>- Representation from all chambers (if parliament is bicameral).</li> <li>- Key parliamentary clerks.</li> <li>- Rotation of presidency of the body between majority and opposition parliamentarians is recommended.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lead a process that will commit the parliament to the action plan.</li> <li>- Serve as champions of parliamentary openness reforms.</li> <li>- Engage with civil society in a co-creation process.</li> <li>- Undertake public consultations.</li> <li>- Monitor the implementation of the action plan adopted.</li> <li>-Lead the development of self-assessments reports.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Human resources: Support from parliamentary clerks (ideally non-partisan staff who remain employed across electoral cycles).</li> <li>-Financial / institutional resources: Ability to meet regularly, budget for co-creation process and public consultations.</li> </ul>

## Step 3: Reflection: Which open parliament process is appropriate?

There are various options for parliaments to develop open parliament initiatives. Consult the [Open Government Partnership \(OGP\) Website](#) for a list of participating countries.

### **Parliaments of OGP Participating Countries**

Parliaments in OGP participating countries can determine which of the options below would be most beneficial given the national context:

<b><u>Option 1:</u></b> Submit stand-alone open parliament commitments in the government’s Action Plan.	<b><u>Option 2:</u></b> Co-create an Open Parliament Action Plan as a chapter of the government’s Action Plan.
The executive branch has the leading role in the Action Plan process and the parliament develops implements, monitors and evaluates the <b>open parliament commitment(s)</b> .	The executive branch has the leading role in the Action Plan process and the parliament develops implements, monitors and evaluates the <b>Open Parliament Action Plan</b> .
The executive and legislative branches must collaborate to identify a process by which open parliament commitments can be integrated in the body of the government’s Action Plan.	The executive and legislative branches must agree to integrate the Open Parliament Action Plan as a chapter of the government’s Action Plan.

For both options, the following must be considered:

- ⇒ Cover the same 2-year period of time as the country's Action Plan.
- ⇒ Be submitted to OGP as part of the country's Action Plan through the official OGP Point of Contact.
- ⇒ Follow the [OGP Co-creation and Participation Standards](#) and thus be developed and implemented in partnership with civil society, as explained in this guide. Additional information can be consulted in [OGP's Participation and Co-Creation Toolkit](#).
- ⇒ Follow OGP Action Plan development guidance on the format of commitments.
- ⇒ Be subject to the process and timeline of the country's review by the Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM).

### **Parliaments from non-OGP participating countries**

Parliaments in countries that do not participate in OGP can develop their own Open Parliament Action Plan. While these plans will not be evaluated by the OGP Independent Review Mechanism, parliaments are encouraged to follow the same steps and standards set by OGP, particularly in terms of participation, monitoring and evaluation. Parliaments embarking on this process can also take this opportunity to promote OGP and advocate for their government to join this international partnership.

## Step 4: Select a parliamentary focal point for all open parliament matters

This role is usually assigned to a non-partisan senior parliamentary official for sustainability reasons, to support the work of the parliamentary body leading this process. This person's main responsibilities are to:

- ⇒ Serve as an internal champion for parliamentary openness reform efforts.
- ⇒ Support dialogue between parliament and civil society.
- ⇒ Coordinate the implementation of legislative openness commitments adopted in the Open Parliament Action Plan.
- ⇒ Report on progress of the Open Parliament Action Plan.
- ⇒ Support communications around the Open Parliament Action Plan.
- ⇒ Liaise with the Open Parliament e-Network and request support when required.
- ⇒ Participate in and promote parliamentary participation in regional and global open parliament and open government events.
- ⇒ Liaise with Open Parliament focal points from other countries.

As the parliamentary focal point will be responsible for supporting the action plan process, it might be important to consider the resources he or she might need to effectively undertake this role. This might include a team of dedicated staff and financial resources to implement the co-creation process and the adopted commitments, as well as to participate in regional and global events to exchange experiences.

# Step 5: Identify a process to determine civil society engagement

To ensure high quality participation from various stakeholder groups, a strategy to engage civil society in this process should be established. To fully comply with the concept of co-creation, it is advised to not only invite civil society to provide their input in the development of the Open Parliament Action Plan, but also in determining the process that will be applied to develop, monitor and evaluate it.

The mechanism for civil society engagement throughout the action plan cycle should be open, fair and transparent. Such engagement can take place through various levels of formality, ranging from the establishment of a Parliamentary Multi-Stakeholder Forum, Group or Committee to an open call for participation at all meetings.

<b>Formal – Multi-Stakeholder Forum, Group or Committee</b>	A forum, group or committee composed of both the parliamentary body and civil society representatives oversees the entire action plan cycle. It is recommended for civil society representation on this forum be determined by a civil society led pro-
<b>Informal – Open Call for Each Meeting</b>	An open call for civil society participation is sent with reasonable notice prior to all meetings where the plan is being developed, monitored or evaluated.

## Step 6: Develop the co-creation process with civil society

The first co-creation meeting, with participation from the parliamentary body and civil society representatives (as identified in the previous step), can focus on determining the co-creation process for the Open Parliament Action Plan. In planning for an Open Parliament Action Plan process, as with any participatory process, it is recommended to pay particular attention to four elements:

- **Purpose:** Defining and agreeing with a clear purpose is the first crucial step to developing any participatory process. When defining a purpose, it's important to consider the primary and secondary outputs and outcomes that you wish to achieve.
- **Context:** There are a wide range of contextual factors that should be considered when planning the co-creation process. These relate both to internal factors (capacity and resources, decision-making process, internal parliament stakeholders, Budget process) within the parliament and external factors (awareness, geographic scale, internet penetration, expertise, pre-existing networks) in wider society.
- **People:** Different groups may be involved for different purposes at different stages of the OGP cycle. For example, citizens, civil society, and other stakeholders may be engaged in awareness raising, agenda setting, ideas generation, commitment formulation, decision-making, implementation, oversight or evaluation.
- **Process:** Considering the questions of purpose, context, and people will help define the process of involving civil society, citizens, and other stakeholders in the Open Parliament Action Plan cycle. Specifically, it will determine the combination of methods and channels to be used at different stages of the process.



## Step 7: Co-create the Open Parliament Action Plan

The co-creation process developed in the previous step is applied and the commitments of the Open Parliament Action Plan are developed and prioritized. Successful Open Parliament Action Plans focus on significant national priorities and ambitious reforms; are relevant to the values of transparency, accountability, public participation and ethics; and contain specific, time-bound, and measurable commitments.

### **Timeframe**

It is recommended for action plans to cover a minimum duration of one year in order to achieve significant results, and a minimum of two years within OGP. It can be important to consider: 1) electoral cycles, 2) changes in parliamentary leadership and 3) parliamentary budgeting and strategic planning processes.

### **Format and Length**

Experience has shown that action plans listing around 5 high quality commitments spread over multiple themes are preferable to those with a large number of weaker commitments. Action plans should be clear, succinct, and action oriented and should be written in plain language with minimal use of jargon or technical terms.

### **Individual Commitments**

When drafting individual commitments within the plan, it is important for them to be verifiable, measurable, answerable, relevant and time-bound.

## Step 8: Adopt and implement the Open Parliament Action Plan

The Open Parliament Action Plan is formally adopted by the parliament in accordance with the authorization process determined in step 2, Create or identify a parliamentary body to lead the Open Parliament Action Plan. It can be important to consider a communications strategy for the launch of the plan.

The parliament, in collaboration with civil society partners, then implements the commitments of the Open Parliament Action Plan and monitors its progress (as explained in the following step). During this phase of the action plan, parliament holds regular meetings with civil society representatives to monitor its progress.

Parliaments undertaking the action plan cycle within the OGP framework must coordinate the inclusion of their open parliament commitments or Open Parliament Action Plans in the country's OGP National Action Plan. The OGP Point of Contact then submits the country's National Action Plan to the OGP Support Unit.

## Step 9: Monitor progress and evaluate success

To ensure that the plan is on track and that commitments are implemented successfully, it is recommended for the parliament to monitor its progress on a regular basis and engage stakeholders to determine if new initiatives are reaching intended outcomes. Mid-term and end-of-term self-assessment reports completed in consultation with civil society are encouraged, along with a communications strategy to share progress with citizens.

**Self-assessment reports** are a key element for accountability and serve as a means of tracking progress. They are also helpful for various stakeholders to gain an understanding of the parliament's perspective on the Open Parliament Action Plan process and results achieved over the course of the year. Incorporating the reflections of civil society participants and the public at large in the process can add great value to the self-assessment reports, whether it is undertaken through the multi-stakeholder forum if one was established, or through a separate consultative process.

### **OGP Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)**

Open Parliament Action Plans or commitments developed in the framework of the OGP will also be subject to the Independent Review Mechanism of this partnership. As part of this process, an independent researcher will undertake the necessary review and consultations with key actors to develop evaluation reports.

## Step 10: Repeat the cycle

Given that this is a process of continuous improvement, after one plan ends, lessons learned from the monitoring and evaluation process are considered in the development of a new plan. It is recommended to circle back to step 6 or earlier, to have an opportunity to review and consider improvements to the civil society engagement process/mechanism.

### How can parliaments support open government reforms?

Beyond implementing open parliament initiatives, parliaments can play an important role in supporting open government initiatives across all branches of the State. For more information, consult [OGP's Parliaments as Partners for Open Government Reform](#).

**Championing OGP's values and principles** by reviewing and ratifying relevant legislation.

**Partnering with OGP for ambitious reform** by setting the national agenda and lending political weight to OGP initiatives.

**Improving the implementation of Action Plans** through parliamentary action and by publicly holding government to account.

**Securing sustainable open government reforms** by building political traction across party lines and electoral cycles.

**Embracing open parliament reforms** to cement open government across the political landscape.

# How can the Open Parliament e-Network (OPeN) assist?

The [Open Parliament e-Network \(OPeN\)](#) is a consortium of international and civil society organizations composed of ParlAmericas, National Democratic Institute, Latin American Legislative Transparency Network, Westminster Foundation for Democracy, Directorio Legislativo, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) that have come together to coordinate global efforts to advance legislative openness and contribute to global progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 16 to build strong institutions.

OPeN partners can support actors involved in the Open Parliament Action Plan cycle by:

- Sharing experiences and best practices on aspects of action plans.
- Reviewing and providing feedback on content of draft action plans.
- Identifying ambitious model commitments to include in action plans.
- Helping parliaments incorporate feedback from self-assessments and Independent Review Mechanism reports.
- Connecting parliaments to learning resources such as case studies, good practices, research papers, etc.
- Conducting bilateral or regional peer exchanges among countries.
- Providing technical assistance at the country-level to help with any stage of the action plan process.
- Organizing periodic regional and global events for the parliamentary openness community.
- Supporting advocacy efforts related to parliamentary openness, such as the [Global Legislative Openness Week \(GLOW\)](#).

For any additional information about OPeN or its Parliamentary Leadership Council, contact the consortium through any of the partner organizations or by contacting [openparlnetwork@gmail.com](mailto:openparlnetwork@gmail.com).

# Success Stories

## Chile

### Bringing New Voices Into Parliament

**To bring more citizens into parliament, the Chamber of Deputies in Chile developed a motion for improved regulation on citizen participation.**

One of the commitments of the first Open Parliament Action Plan was to evaluate existing participation mechanisms in legislative discussions in the National Congress. The conclusions of the study, carried out by the United Nations Development Program, stated that the people participating “were always the same” - a small group that consistently found its way into parliament, with a much larger group left behind. In addition, committees were not consistent in the methods they employed to select who would participate in discussions.

The Bicameral Group on Transparency of the Congress saw an imperative need to improve citizen participation standards in the legislative process and translated this into a commitment in its Second Open Parliament Action Plan.

Using the OGP methodology, an unprecedented co-creation exercise saw almost 100 civil society organizations, parliamentarians and congressional officials develop new regulation that establishes a standard for participation across both Chambers, as well as transparent and more equitable criteria for the selection of the participants of public committee hearings. An administrative unit specializing in citizen participation is set to be created to support citizen participation in its different modalities. Beyond this, updates will be implemented to improve “Virtual Congress”, a e-platform that will help decentralize participation. The members of the Chamber of Deputies in the Bicameral Group presented the motion to adopt this Regulation in May 2019 and its approval is expected before the end of the year; in the Senate, the approval to present the motion by the Ethics Commission is expected shortly as well.

# Success Stories

## Croatia

### Participatory Democracy through e-Consultations

**Through an e-consultation portal, Croatia now discloses high-quality information and empowers citizens to monitor and contribute to the drafting of legislative proposals.**

The public previously had limited opportunities to voice their opinions on legislative proposals. The few online forums that existed were scattered across individual government agencies, discouraging civic participation and lowering public accountability.

A central online [public forum](#) was established to give citizens the opportunity to monitor the drafting of legislation - all the way from the working group phase to its adoption - and to provide feedback. Citizens can register on the site and leave comments on proposed legislation, each of which the various ministries must review.

Once a consultation is completed, the relevant ministry analyses the comments they have received and decides which ones to accept or reject. This initiative has increased accountability by obliging authorities to answer each comment in a timely manner. The media has also played an important role: journalists quickly embraced the platform and highlights when important issues are open for consultations.

Croatia's government now discloses more, and higher-quality, information in a timely manner. This is creating new opportunities for the public to influence decision-making: In 2015, nearly 6,000 participants made over 15,000 comments on the e-consultation portal. From those proposals, 55 percent were completely implemented and 28 percent were partially implemented. By inviting citizens to monitor policy-making and actively contribute to the process, this commitment helped to increased public accountability in the country.

# Success Stories

## Paraguay

### Budget Execution Evaluation

**In Paraguay, a new Senate portal allows civil society, legislators and other interested parties to monitor budget execution levels for government departments in every sector .**

Limited execution of the budget approved by parliaments is a problem in several sectors, ministerial programs and provinces. The Ministry of Finance publishes this information through its State Financial Information System, but it does so in a very complex format. This makes reading and understanding it difficult for those who are not expert technicians in the field, and it makes it difficult to identify budget lines and details for a specific area.

In its first Open Parliament Action Plan (2016 - 2018), Paraguay's first commitment was to "develop new channels of interaction with citizens that allow and encourage their contribution and monitoring throughout the legislative process". This commitment included conducting a quarterly evaluation of the execution of the budget (both financial and by results) by geographic area, by the ministries of Education, Health, Public Works, Interior, Justice, Urbanism, Housing, Sanitation, Electricity and Social Services.

Today, the information gathered through these evaluations is available on the [Senate's website](#) in a user-friendly format, making it possible for civil society, legislators, or any other interested party to access the data they are looking for. Executive reports make it easy to locate relevant content, and a traffic light system categorises the budget execution levels of each sector, in each department, providing a quick and intuitive overview.



# Success Stories

## Estonia

### Citizens Find Voice through the People's Assembly

**Citizens now crowd-source, prioritize, and vote on key policy proposals online and offline through the People's Assembly, or Rahvakogu.**

In May 2012, a former Estonian MP ignited a major scandal by confessing that party officials gave him money of dubious origin to deposit in party coffers, something he claimed was routine practice for the party.

In response to the wave of protests that followed, the president agreed to consult the public to find solutions to the problem of ongoing corruption. With the support of civil society organizations, the People's Assembly was launched: Rahvakogu, a platform where citizens can crowdsource, prioritize, and vote on key policy proposals online and offline.

Estonia's parliament has since passed two of those proposals into law — on political party financing and public petitions — and has implemented a handful of others. Since 2016, more than 20 proposals, each with 1,000 digital signatures, have reached the parliament through the e-participation platform [rahvaalgatus.ee](http://rahvaalgatus.ee). The potential of this platform is now manifesting beyond Estonia; Jamaica, for instance, is now adapting the platform for domestic use.



ParlAmericas is the institution that promotes **PARLIAMENTARY DIPLOMACY** in the **INTER-AMERICAN SYSTEM**



ParlAmericas is composed of the **NATIONAL LEGISLATURES** of the member States of the OAS from North, Central and South America and the Caribbean



ParlAmericas facilitates the exchange of parliamentary **BEST PRACTICES** and promotes **COOPERATIVE POLITICAL DIALOGUE**



ParlAmericas mainstreams **GENDER EQUALITY** by advocating for women's political empowerment and the application of a gender lens in legislative work



ParlAmericas fosters **OPEN PARLIAMENTS** by advancing the principles of transparency, accountability, citizen participation, ethics and probity



ParlAmericas promotes policies and legislative measures to mitigate and adapt to the effects of **CLIMATE CHANGE**



ParlAmericas works towards strengthening democracy and governance by accompanying **ELECTORAL PROCESSES**



ParlAmericas is headquartered in **OTTAWA, CANADA**





ParlAmericas International Secretariat  
710—150 Wellington St., Ottawa, Ontario, K1P 5A4 Canada  
Telephone: +1 (613) 594-5222 | Fax: +1 (613) 594-4766  
[www.parlamericas.org](http://www.parlamericas.org) | [info@parlamericas.org](mailto:info@parlamericas.org)

