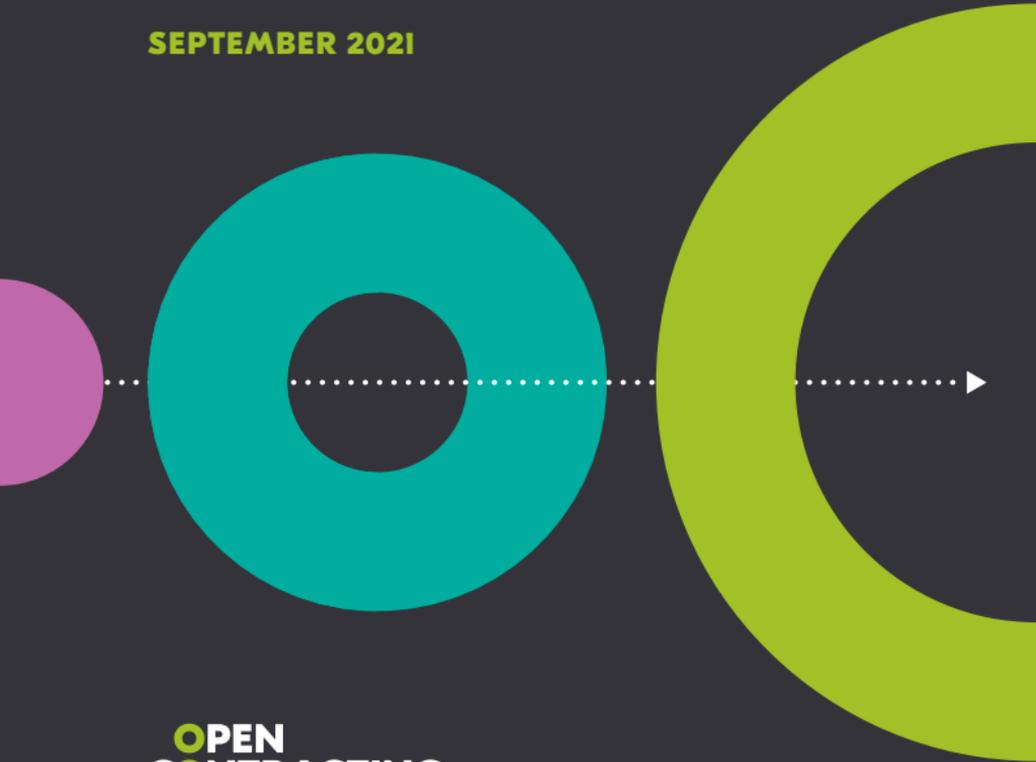


# Open Contracting Quickstart Guide

15 practical strategies  
for open, fairer, and better  
public procurement

SEPTEMBER 2021



**OPEN**  
**CONTRACTING**  
**PARTNERSHIP**

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**15 practical strategies  
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**Open Contracting Partnership 2021.**

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# Join the global vision for open contracting.

**Open contracting is an approach to open up and reimagine public procurement by promoting transparency, collaboration, and achieving results.**

It is about engaging public, private, civil society or other sectors to use procurement information and smarter processes to deliver better public goods, works, and services. It is about inviting stakeholders in to listen and respond to their needs, expanding equity, sustainability, and economic opportunities. It is also about open data, and how sharing timely, user-friendly and accessible information can improve monitoring, feedback and—over time—trust.

This quickstart guide will help you get up and running with open contracting—from the big fixes to the quick fixes. You'll learn key strategies, discover tools and resources, and be inspired by open contracting efforts from around the globe.

For more resources, visit us at: [open-contracting.org](https://open-contracting.org)



**In this guide, you'll find 15 practical strategies within four sections covering core aspects of public procurement reform.**

**Let's get started.**

**Set contracting reform goals and secure buy-in. .... 6**

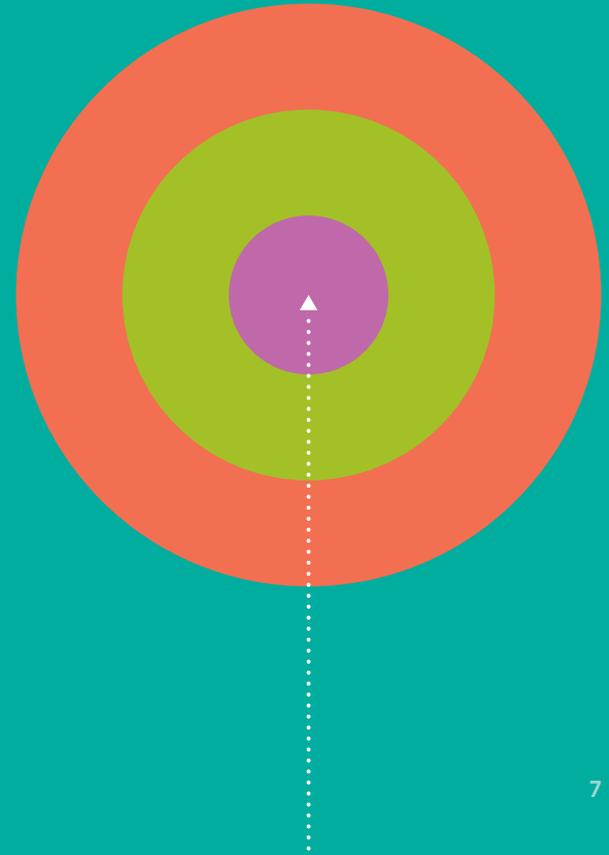
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# Set contracting reform goals and secure buy-in.

**Impactful, sustainable reforms need good planning. In this section, you'll find tried and tested strategies to get you started identifying your goals and helping you mobilize allies.**



# I. Define your goal and a theory of change.

## What

An effective theory of change lays out a strategic plan to achieve your reform goal and the steps you will take to navigate challenges.

## Why

This problem-solving approach generates incentives to work on what is important, track your progress even when you lack precise measurements, avoid jumping too early to diagnoses or solutions, and break big problems down into smaller ones that can be more easily tackled. It will also help you focus your efforts and resources on activities that deliver the highest value.

## How

Check out the following tools to begin crafting your theory of change.

Theory of change template:  
[open-contracting.org/start-toc](https://open-contracting.org/start-toc)

Theory of change guidance:  
[open-contracting.org/start-toc-guidance](https://open-contracting.org/start-toc-guidance)



## Example

The teams participating in the OCP Lift Impact Accelerator program spent a week together defining and refining their goals and theories of change. This provided clarity on how to address issues such as improving opportunities for smaller businesses, lowering the price of medicines, offering innovative public services, and enhancing internal coordination within government.

Learn more:  
[open-contracting.org/lift-toc](https://open-contracting.org/lift-toc)

## 2. Build a robust political mandate.

### What

A robust mandate means a public commitment by one or more high-ranking public officials with the authority to make decisions, together with dedicated resources, such as an appropriate budget and capable team members.

### Why

We have seen over and over again that the most successful procurement reforms have robust political mandates and high-level political leadership that is sustained during the entire reform implementation.

### How

Understanding your stakeholders and their interests is important for creating compelling reasoning to secure their buy-in. These stakeholder and power mapping exercises can help you identify and begin thinking through their interests.

Local stakeholder mapping template:  
[open-contracting.org/start-stakeholders](https://open-contracting.org/start-stakeholders)

Power mapping (2×2) template:  
[open-contracting.org/start-power-mapping](https://open-contracting.org/start-power-mapping)

Mapping guidance:  
[open-contracting.org/start-mapping-guidance](https://open-contracting.org/start-mapping-guidance)

### Example

Ukraine's then Deputy Minister for Economic Development was an essential champion for the country's work on ProZorro—a fully open, transparent e-procurement platform. Conceived as a tool for fighting corruption, its benefits include increasing competition, streamlining contracting processes, and making procurement fairer for suppliers.

***“We had this window of opportunity. People with the ability to influence decision making are critical to the reform process.”***

Max Nefyodov  
Deputy Minister for Economic Development,  
Ukraine

Learn more:  
[open-contracting.org/ukraine-prozorro](https://open-contracting.org/ukraine-prozorro)

### 3. Conduct user research to understand needs and define use cases.

#### What

Identify and map key institutions and actors in the procurement ecosystem, and determine their goals, problems and needs.

#### Why

Although this takes time, the benefits are huge. User research can help identify the right goal, build valuable partnerships and develop meaningful user cases for public contracting data.

#### How

Develop your research plan. This is the framework that defines your research objectives, key themes, and questions, as well as the methods you will use to collect this information. The following resources will introduce you to the basics steps involved and get you started creating your own plan.

Research plan guide:

[open-contracting.org/start-research](https://open-contracting.org/start-research)

Research plan template:

[open-contracting.org/start-research-template](https://open-contracting.org/start-research-template)

#### Example

The City of Philadelphia engaged community members to understand how it could improve food purchasing for children's summer camps and other people who rely on the government for meals. The research highlighted the need to involve frontline staff such as cooks and warehouse workers into scheduling and oversight to ensure consistent food quality.

***“Bringing our kitchen staff into the conversation and switching to Best Value for food contracts is just the beginning.”***

Trevor Day

Deputy Chief Administrative Officer  
for the City of Philadelphia

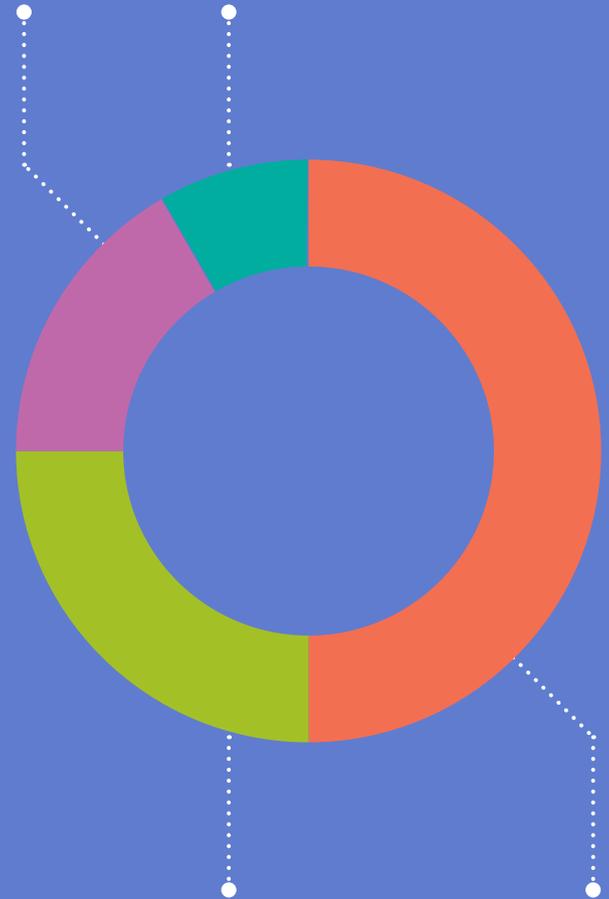
Learn more:

[open-contracting.org/philadelphia-food](https://open-contracting.org/philadelphia-food)

# **Publish, use, and improve open contracting data.**

**Good quality, open data on public procurement is very valuable. It allows you to analyze how funds are being spent, supports better decision-making, and enables better oversight. But you can't manage what you can't measure.**

**These tools and guidance can help you convert paper documents to digital formats and break down government information silos using standardized open data.**



## 4. Digitize paper-based systems.

### What

Redesign paper-based systems to be electronic, open-by-design, and user-friendly.

### Why

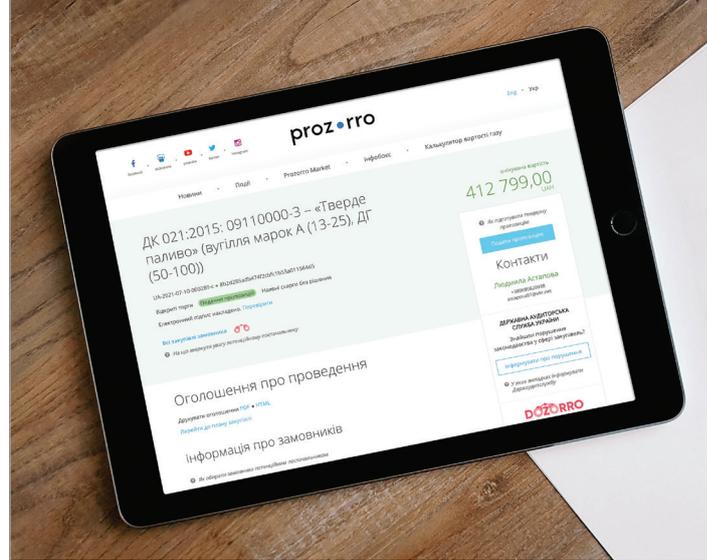
Done well, electronic procurement systems are much more efficient. This saves the government and vendors time and money, and enables faster and better decision making.

### How

If you are looking to purchase digital and technology products, check out the Government Digital Service's *Digital Buying Guide*. To make sure that your system will meet your needs, our guidance outlines factors to consider as you develop your electronic procurement system.

*Digital Buying Guide:*  
[www.digitalbuyingguide.org](http://www.digitalbuyingguide.org)

Electronic systems guidance:  
[open-contracting.org/start-ocds-egp](http://open-contracting.org/start-ocds-egp)



### Example

Ukraine developed an open, transparent, national procurement platform called ProZorro system to improve accountability and get better value for the money that the government was spending. ProZorro has already saved over US\$2 billion for more than 3,900 government agencies and state-owned enterprises across Ukraine and counting.

Learn more:  
[open-contracting.org/ukraine-prozorro](http://open-contracting.org/ukraine-prozorro)

## 5. Implement the Open Contracting Data Standard.

### What

The Open Contracting Data Standard (OCDS), is a free, non-proprietary open data standard for public contracting, describing how to publish data and documents at all stages of the contracting process.

### Why

The OCDS helps organizations increase contracting transparency and enable deeper analysis of contracting data. When data is published according to the OCDS, you know that your procurement information will be as useful as possible for monitoring and analysis. Plus, since OCDS is open source and supported by governments around the world, there is a lot of guidance and tools you can use for using, analyzing, and improving your data.

### How

Read how to implement the OCDS or email our free helpdesk for one-on-one guidance.

OCDS documentation:  
[standard.open-contracting.org](https://standard.open-contracting.org)

OCDS helpdesk:  
[data@open-contracting.org](mailto:data@open-contracting.org)

### Example

Globally more than 40 countries, agencies, and organizations are publishing procurement data using the Open Contracting Data Standard. Chile began publishing OCDS data in 2018 and has since been gradually expanding its coverage to the full process from planning to spending.

***“The OCDS has made the complete procurement process visible. It gives ChileCompra users the freedom to analyze and explore the data.”***

Guillermo Burr

Former Head of Research & Business Intelligence,  
ChileCompra

See the map:

[open-contracting.org/worldwide](https://open-contracting.org/worldwide)

## 6. Publish planning and post-award information.

### What

Openly share procurement information during the planning phase and implementation.

### Why

Publishing planning information increases competition and helps vendors develop stronger proposals, while sharing post-award information allows stakeholders to monitor the results and ensure that citizens get the services they need.

### How

Make the case to your team for why sharing this information is important with ideas from our mythbusting guide.

*Mythbusting Confidentiality in Public Contracting:*  
[mythbusting.open-contracting.org](https://mythbusting.open-contracting.org)



### Example

In Colombia, procuring entities must publish procurement plans detailing what they intend to contract each year. When a new procurement is set to start, the entity must disclose tender notices along with draft tender documents. This policy has helped measurably increase competition, for example among providers of school meal programs.

Learn more:

[open-contracting.org/colombia-publish](https://open-contracting.org/colombia-publish)

## 7. Invest in procurement analytics and business intelligence.

### What

Use software tools and approaches for procurement data analysis to provide better business intelligence to the market.

### Why

Companies begin to participate more and perform better if they have full information on topics like upcoming contract expirations, awards, and winning bids.

### How

A variety of open source OCDS business intelligence tools are free for reuse, and can help you create, visualize, or analyze data.

Tools library:

[open-contracting.org/start-ocds-tools](https://open-contracting.org/start-ocds-tools)

### Example

In the Kyrgyz Republic, the government developed a business intelligence tool for internal use by the Ministry of Finance's monitoring unit and the Chamber of Accounts, the agency responsible for audits. OCDS data is also being reused by a mobile app, Tenderbot, a commercial service that alerts suppliers to new tenders and answers basic questions about upcoming contracts.

***“We’ve significantly reduced the time required to collect and analyze data for the Chamber’s annual procurement and budget reports. Up to 60% of audit planning can now be conducted without site visits.”***

Dinara Duishenkul  
Former Auditor, Chamber of Accounts,  
Kyrgyz Republic

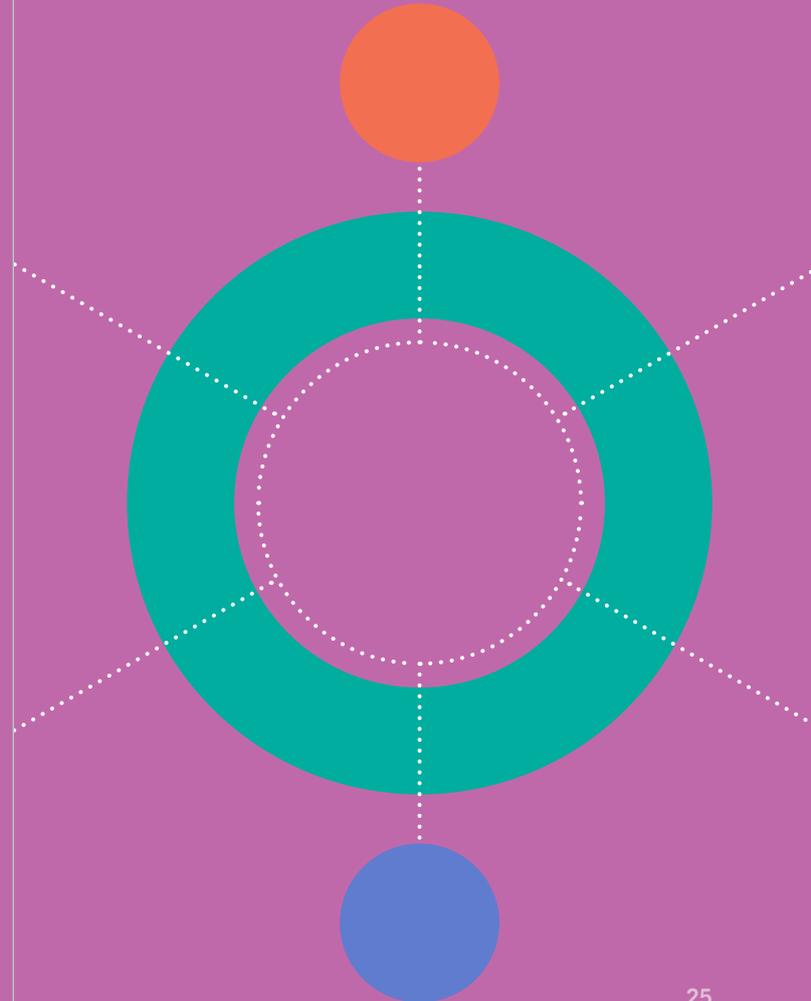
Learn more:

[open-contracting.org/kyrgyz-republic-ocds](https://open-contracting.org/kyrgyz-republic-ocds)

# Improve stakeholder engagement and oversight.

**Deepening engagement can help you reach the best vendors and leverage the knowledge and support of industry experts and local communities. It also provides meaningful oversight of the procurement process.**

**Used well, these strategies will result in a feedback loop between the government, suppliers, and other actors, helping hold everyone mutually accountable and deliver stronger outcomes.**



## 8. Engage vendors in pre-market consultations.

### What

Get vendor input during the planning process to create a stronger RFP that matches government needs with vendor capabilities.

### Why

Engaging vendors before issuing an RFP can help the government understand the ways that the market could address their challenge and write RFPs that vendors will respond to. Plus, this engagement gives new suppliers enough advance notice to prepare their bids and compete with previous suppliers.

### How

You can solicit feedback through vendor conferences, phone calls, surveys, and focus groups. For tips and guidance, start with these resources.

*The art of the possible in public procurement* from Bates Braithwaite Wells:

[open-contracting.org/start-art-possible](https://open-contracting.org/start-art-possible)

*Digital Buying Guide* ('Plan' section):

[www.digitalbuyingguide.org/en/guide/plan](https://www.digitalbuyingguide.org/en/guide/plan)



### Example

Early on in the procurement process for their bikeshare system, Mexico City prioritized vendor engagement, including by sharing data via a dedicated website and openly sharing vendor questions and answers, and issuing a request for information (RFI).

Learn more:

[open-contracting.org/mexico-city-ecobici](https://open-contracting.org/mexico-city-ecobici)

## 9. Get feedback on specific contracting processes or stages.

### What

Solicit and use feedback from stakeholders on different stages of the procurement cycle, from planning, to tendering and awarding the contract, to implementation.

### Why

Integrating feedback is key to unlocking better value and outcomes from public contracts. Plus, embedding feedback from the community and civil society helps close information asymmetries and lower monitoring costs.

### How

Your strategies will depend on the stage of the procurement cycle. Check out our guidance for ideas:

*Open Contracting Playbook:*  
[open-contracting.org/oc-playbook](https://open-contracting.org/oc-playbook)

### Example

In Paraguay, students from Ciudad del Este monitored how royalties from a hydroelectric dam were allocated to schools in their region. Using open contracting data with collective action, they helped neglected schools chase funding for crucial repairs, leading to a dramatically fairer distribution of funds for school facilities. In 2017, 80% of the most needy schools received funding, compared to less than 20% in 2015.

***“We learnt that our authorities don’t allocate the money well and they don’t do it according to the law.”***

Luiz Brizuela  
Student Volunteer, reAcción,  
Paraguay

Learn more:  
[open-contracting.org/paraguay-reaccion](https://open-contracting.org/paraguay-reaccion)

## 10. Embed monitoring across the entire procurement system.

### What

Provide open contracting data for monitoring every step of the contracting process, with the aim of helping users answer key questions such as if demand for the procurement justified, if the estimated value of the contract is fair, and if the contract was implemented well.

### Why

Having access to data allows users to conduct analysis on their own and add additional structured information if needed. With support and training, this monitoring can add huge value to tracking and delivering public contracts.

### How

Open data is a critical first step to enabling monitoring. Start with our tips on monitoring in a digital world.

Monitoring best practices:

[open-contracting.org/start-monitoring](https://open-contracting.org/start-monitoring)



### Example

In Ukraine, citizens and businesses can report violations or good practices across the procurement cycle through the online platform Dozorro. The platform collects structured feedback to help buyers perform better, bidders to be treated equally and citizens to get value for money. Civil society organizations can also use risk indicators, business intelligence, and other monitoring tools to target their monitoring on the greatest risk areas.

Learn more:

[open-contracting.org/ukraine-dozorro](https://open-contracting.org/ukraine-dozorro)

## 11. Establish complaints and oversight mechanisms.

### What

An efficient and effective monitoring and complaints mechanism for civil servants, unsuccessful bidders, and citizens to lift up concerns and have them addressed.

### Why

For all your monitoring to lead to actual impact, it is important to have a mechanism in place for someone to act upon it and take corrective action.

### How

Establishing an efficient and effective consultation monitoring and complaints mechanism will likely require changes to legislation. For tips on this topic, explore our new legislative guide.

*Open Contracting Legislative Guide:*

[open-contracting.org/oc-legislative-guidance](https://open-contracting.org/oc-legislative-guidance)

### Example

In Georgia, any individual interested in participating in a procurement process can file online complaints if there has been a violation of the law. A complaint can put a tender on hold for up to 10 days, until a dispute review board has discussed the complaint and decided how to proceed. All complaints and decisions are published online.

***“Governments need to close the feedback loop by responding to and acting on the feedback received. Effective oversight and continued user engagement requires that oversight bodies hold officials accountable.”***

*Global Report,  
Open Government Partnership*

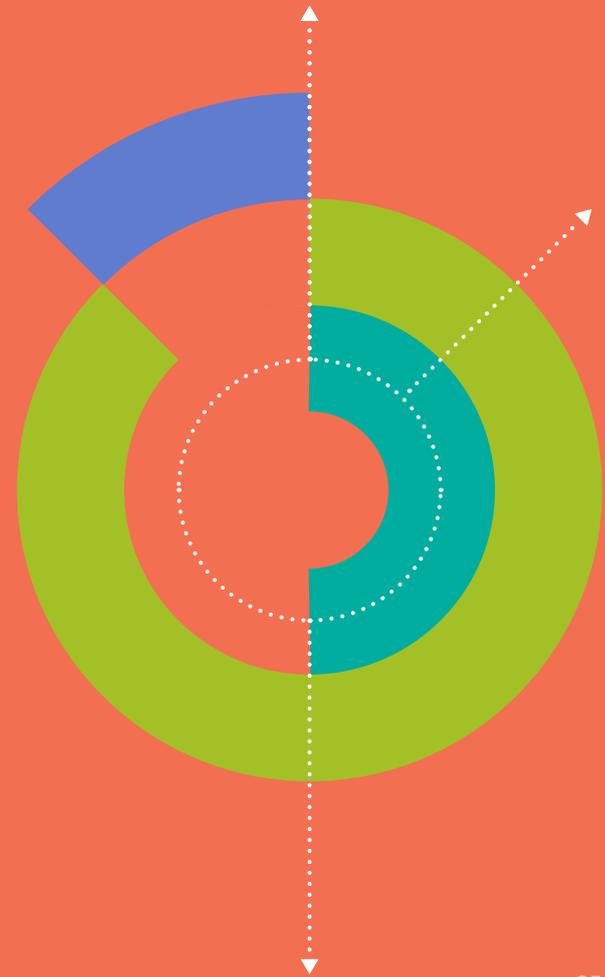
Learn more:

[open-contracting.org/georgia-oversight](https://open-contracting.org/georgia-oversight)

# Measure, adapt and institutionalize reforms.

**Change is hard and progress is never linear. There will be setbacks and challenges so it is important to be agile, have permission to experiment, and measure and adapt your reforms.**

**These strategies can also help you institutionalize reforms to make them more sustainable.**



## 12. Have a (simple) monitoring, evaluation, and learning plan.

### What

A monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) plan will help you track the progress of the reform against key outcomes, such as goal articulation, legal reforms, data publication, data use, or citizen participation.

### Why

Gathering persuasive, quantifiable evidence will help demonstrate to policymakers and the public that your reform efforts are making a difference, and help you notice when your approach is not working and you need to change direction.

### How

Your team can get started on tracking your progress using our template. For more information on how to use it, refer to the guidance used for our Lift program.

MEL tracker template:

[open-contracting.org/start-mel-tracker](https://open-contracting.org/start-mel-tracker)

MEL tracker guidance:

[open-contracting.org/start-mel-tracker-guidance](https://open-contracting.org/start-mel-tracker-guidance)

### Example

For a high level MEL plan, check out OCP's Lift program MEL. In some cases, existing data will not be sufficient to determine key indicators and credible baselines. In Nepal, a qualitative design approach using semi-structured interviews provided insights into the key challenges and allowed to develop quantifiable indicators.

***“Dhangadhi is an amazing place. You actually get heard when you have some great ideas and [get] every support possible to test those ideas.”***

Saroj Bista

Open Data Coordinator, YoungInnovations,  
Nepal

Learn more:

[open-contracting.org/lift-mel](https://open-contracting.org/lift-mel)

## 13. Use strategic communications to build support.

### What

A strategy for building buy-in for your project and communicating the news of your success.

### Why

Making the case for your project and demonstrating wins can persuade skeptics and build support for the program among key actors and the public.

### How

Develop a strategic communications strategy with the Strategic Communications Plan template. This will help your team think through your audiences and tailoring your messages to build buy-in.

Strategic communications plan template:  
[open-contracting.org/start-coms-plan-template](https://open-contracting.org/start-coms-plan-template)



### Example

The Ukraine ProZorro team explains their progress and impact through traditional and social media channels, shares narrative case studies in accessible language, and creates explanatory videos and project updates. Communications were a crucial part of the ProZorro team's strong response during the COVID-19 crisis.

Learn more:

[open-contracting.org/ukraine-covid](https://open-contracting.org/ukraine-covid)

## 14. Establish an inter-agency or multi-stakeholder working group.

### What

A working group or committee to keep key actors across departments informed and onboard of your plans, and to coordinate your efforts as needed.

### Why

Multi-stakeholder working groups signal the government's openness and willingness to improve, generate external brainpower to aid reforms, and help align plans across sectors or departments.

### How

How to get started will depend on the political environment in each country. The development of National Action Plans under the Open Government Partnership provided a good starting point in Ecuador. For more inspiration, see how countries like Chile, Ukraine, the UK, and Uganda have formed these strategic partnerships.

Case studies:

[open-contracting.org/uganda-dialogue](https://open-contracting.org/uganda-dialogue)

[open-contracting.org/uk-insights](https://open-contracting.org/uk-insights)

[open-contracting.org/ukraine-corruption](https://open-contracting.org/ukraine-corruption)



### Example

The Moldovan organization Positive Initiative leads a group of over 30 civil organizations including government ministries. When the pandemic struck, the community was able to quickly respond and launch a platform to monitor COVID-19 emergency contracts. User-friendly dashboards reveal real-time insights that are most relevant to taxpayers and vendors, such as price comparisons, spending at each health facility, when items are delivered, and which companies are supplying them.

Learn more:

[open-contracting.org/moldova-covid](https://open-contracting.org/moldova-covid)

## 15. Structure and share a comprehensive reform plan.

### What

A comprehensive reform plan unifies many areas of public procurement reform under one overarching strategy. For example, a plan may aim to ensure that different types of procurement procedures are coherent and effective under law, and set out the rules of conduct and reporting for everyone in the procurement process. It might also aim to encourage local innovation and testing of new processes or taking those innovations to scale throughout government. Together, these pieces support broad systemic change in the procurement ecosystem.

### Why

Strong comprehensive reform plans help institutionalize reforms and make them sustainable through political transitions.

### How

As you create your reform plan, consider what new policies, budgetary appropriation, and legislation changes you may need to achieve your goal. You may need investments in capacity and resources as well to ensure lasting change. Communicate and engage users as you create and refine your plan so that your changes will help meet their needs.

### Example

The UK Government's green paper, *Transforming Public Procurement* is a good template for systematic reforms. It covers new legal principles for public procurement, simplifying procurement procedure types, establishing best value as opposed to best economic value for award decisions, new approaches to measuring performance of contractors and KPIs for contracts, an improved review system for complaints, creation of a new oversight office, and new end-to-end digital transparency and open data for contracts.

***“We propose enshrining in law the principles of public procurement: the public good, value for money, transparency, integrity, fair treatment of suppliers and non-discrimination.”***

*Transforming Public Procurement*

Read the green paper:  
[open-contracting.org/uk-transforming](https://open-contracting.org/uk-transforming)

## About the Open Contracting Partnership

The Open Contracting Partnership is a silo-busting collaboration across governments, businesses, civil society, and technologists to open up and transform government contracting worldwide. We bring open data and open government together to ensure public money is spent openly, fairly and effectively. We focus on public contracts as they are the single biggest item of spending by most governments. They are a government's number one corruption risk and they are vital to ensuring citizens get the services that they deserve.

We are an independent not-for-profit working in over 50 countries. We drive massively improved value for money, public integrity and service delivery by shifting public contracting from closed processes and masses of paperwork to digital services that are fairer and better.

### **Contact us**

[engage@open-contracting.org](mailto:engage@open-contracting.org)

[www.open-contracting.org](http://www.open-contracting.org)

[🐦 @opencontracting](https://twitter.com/opencontracting)

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