

Budget Transparency Website



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Organisation: Ministry of Finance and Public Credit

Country:

Level of government: Central government

Sector: Economic affairs, General public services

Type: Communication, Data, Digital

Launched in: 2011

Overall development time: 3 years

Link to the innovation's website

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Description

The Budget Transparency Website presents information on the budget in Mexico in a detailed way. This is the first federal level institutional site that materialises and publishes the Performance Evaluation System (SED by its acronym in Spanish), i.e. basic information of a federal programme, quarterly updates about the money spent, external evaluations and the Indicators Matrix (IM), with the respective progress of planned and achieved goals, aligned to the National Development Plan, of each indicator.

The main goal of this site is to provide a single window to access information on public expenditure, so that citizens can consult in a simple way:

- What is the government spending money on?
- Which resources are being spent?
- How is the government spending public resources?
- Where is the government spending them?

The portal creates an environment of transparency in all the stages of the budget process: Planning, programming, budgeting, exercise and control, monitoring, evaluation and accountability.

The portal works on a data bank which is fed with budget information that is continuously generated by all areas of the Ministry of Finance, so the data banks are always updated and work in real time.

Why the innovation was developed

Mexico has launched its Budget Transparency Website as a step to provide effective application of the law requiring to provide accurate, timely and reliable information on its public finance, which includes the fiscal income, the public spending and debt. It is true that such information is available for the citizens. One of the commitments of an open government is to establish proper communication channels and to have direct contact with the citizens, in order to achieve greater co-responsibility of the design and the implementation of public policies, and at the same time, the strengthening of transparency and accountability. In order to reach these goals, it was necessary to promote, institutionalise and to make budget transparency stronger; keeping in mind that budget information should be available to the citizens in a clear and simple way and in open formats so that feedback from society, in particular from non-governmental organizations and academia can be received. Such feedback creates and adds value for society.

Objectives

Enhance public trust, Enhance transparency, Improve access, Improve effectiveness, Improve efficiency, Improve user satisfaction, Increase citizen engagement

- The main purpose of the portal is to disseminate information about all stages of the budget process, always using a citizen-oriented vision and taking into consideration international standards.
 - The initiative seeks to gather budget information in one place so that citizens can have access to expenditure information without visiting multiple sites: A "one stop shop" for budget information, so that both citizens and decision makers can have the necessary tools to use the government performance information to monitor the use of public resources and to improve allocation and increase social benefits.
 - This site also seeks to materialise a budget open data strategy within the Ministry of Finance that offers users various downloadable datasets for analysis and free reuse, and to promote citizen action involving people in improving public expenditure.
 - Information on revenues, expenditures, debt, the administrative, economic and functional budget classification, investment projects, external evaluations, public finance statistics, resource transfers to states and municipalities, indicators, progress of goals, among other information is presented for its free analysis and dissemination.
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Main beneficiaries

Academia, Businesses, Civil Society, General population, Government bodies, Government staff

The information published on the website is intended for public officials, students, academics, international institutions, but above all, to the general public. Anyone who pays taxes has the right to know how their money is spent and its benefits.

Existing similar practices

Orçamento Federal

In other countries' public administrations
Brazil's Federal Government

The main objective of this site is to stream the process of resource allocation, ensuring the balance of public accounts, with a focus on results for the citizens. However, we found that the level of detail of the information is not as specific as on our site and there is no budget information submitted dynamically or in plain language.

Another main difference is the focus that the Mexican Budget Transparency website gives to making public performance evaluation information.

<http://www.orcamentofederal.gov.br/>

Results

Efficiency

If the information published on the site is increasingly used for budgetary and social decision-making as well as being useful in the daily lives of citizens, this may further improve the quality of public spending, achieving a true performance-based budget and greater accountability.

Effectiveness

The benefits of budget transparency and specifically the release of this site, are powerful. The site consolidated its position, in just one year, as a benchmark for open and easily understood budget information.

Service quality

Accessibility:

The information published on the website can be downloaded and manipulated by anyone interested in how public resources are spent.

Other improvements

The site was published in July 2011 and since that time it has constantly been updated and improved, in regards to both the quality of information published and how it is presented to the public.

In 2012, Mexico had a federal election in which a new president was elected, however, this has not affected the development or implementation of the initiative.

Instead, we have been working on a restructure of the portal that includes, first, an entire section of open data where users can find and download databases more easily and quickly, and secondly, a new application of open public work that allows the user to find the state investment projects with the basic information on the amount, location, and physical and financial progress.

Development

Design

The budget transparency website was created as a public demand through various CSOs and a fair recognition, by the Federal Government and the Ministry of Finance, of citizenship requirements to know how public resources are spent.

A group of civil society organisations, with specialists in the field called “Gastar Mejor” (“Spend Better”), participated in its development contributing their experience and interest.

Design time: 6 months

Testing

People's interests change according to current topics discussed in the media or social networks. In order to incorporate this new information into the portal, two instruments are included: communication via social networks and a comments/suggestions box, which are located in the site's index.

Communication through social media has been a key element to make the portal closer to the public, since it can help detect people's information needs related to trending topics.

The use of the suggestion box has allowed us to receive questions and concerns of the public that have helped us to publish certain types of information that was not originally included.

It should be noted that since the launch of the website, it has been visited 200 000 times, from visitors all around the world.

Testing time: 6 months

Implementation

Tools used:

The information that feeds the applications presented on the site comes from a data warehouse and various internal systems of the Ministry, which have been connected to the site for its constant updating.

On the other hand, we developed maps, tree maps, dynamic presentations and search tools for easy viewing and understanding of the information.

Due to the dispersion of information and the complexity of it, it was necessary to dialogue with the areas of income, expenses, investments, programming and budgeting, among others, for the proper use and processing of data, and to integrate the right functionality for data delivery.

Implementation time: 1 year

Challenges and solutions

The successful implementation of this commitment was possible only through close coordination with several areas of the Ministry of Finance for the recollection and data processing. Therefore, the site's information is not found in a single system and is not fed by one administrative unit of the Ministry but in fact integrated by several internal systems.

In that sense, the greatest difficulty this initiative faced was to emphasise to those responsible for the information, of the need to publish data in open formats that everyone could manipulate, reuse and disseminate. Added to this, due to the large amount of information generated by the Ministry, centralisation and systematisation of data required the development of the technological tools.

Another important challenge was to make sure that the Budget Transparency Portal had a friendly and intuitive design, which allowed any citizen to adequately access and understand a large amount of technical information. In that sense, without a doubt, an important element in the development of such a portal was the design and publication of the citizens' budget, which helps citizens understand the budget structure.

Partnerships

Civil society organisations

Civil Society

One of the main challenges of this initiative was to define the information that should be published and how it would be done, however, working together with civil society organisations allowed us to determine a list of minimum content to be included on the site.

The ways in which information is published on the portal have improved thanks to the advice from several civil organisations who maintain constant communication with us.

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

It is noteworthy that the budget information disclosed in this website helped to increase Mexico's Open Budget Index score by nine points, which placed our country in 23rd place worldwide.

The benefits of budget transparency and specifically the launch of this portal are far reaching in impact:

- It can improve the whole decision-making in the budgetary processes, the design and implementation of public policies, as well as accountability.
 - It generates commitments within the Federal Public Administration to achieve the planned goals, once progress is public and open to public scrutiny, since citizens may review whether resources are spent properly or not.
 - It can reduce uncertainty when budget information is published in a clear, simple, timely and accurate way. It gives people a better understanding of government decisions, specifically the budget decisions, generating more confidence and increase of legitimacy.
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Conditions for success

Political will is required for an initiative of budget transparency like this one, however, many technical factors are needed for proper standardization of information, ie. information must be contained in internal and external systems that work in a coordinated manner and share information with each other.

Other information

There's no doubt that the government will keep working on actions such as the continuous improvement of transparency and access to information through:

- The opening of public data.
 - Strategic reuse of public sector information.
 - Encouragement of the participation and collaboration of the citizens in the design and implementation of public policies.
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