

## TBS InfoBase

**Organisation:** Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat

**Country:** Canada

**Level of government:** Central government

**Sector:** General public services

**Type:** Data, Digital

**Launched in:** 2013

**Overall development time:** 1 year(s)

**Link to the innovation's website**

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# Description

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The TBS (Treasury Board Secretariat) InfoBase is a searchable online database providing financial and human resources information on government of Canada operations. It provides a quick and easy access to detailed information on government spending and people management by:

- combining contextual information and data from several sources in a single repository.
- allowing users to have an overview of the federal government of Canada as well as of its organizations.
- allowing users to build customized reports.
- providing multiple ways for users to access and explore information on government operations in the manner that best suits them.

Prior to the InfoBase, financial data were available from different sources whose electronic format often didn't include the contextual information which enhances the quality of business analysis that can be performed with the data.

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## Why the innovation was developed

- Response to a Parliamentary request for better access to information on government finances.
  - General public demand for better integration of financial planning and reporting documents that were, until the TBS InfoBase, presented in a variety of forms.
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## Objectives

Enhance public trust, Enhance transparency, Improve access, Improve efficiency, Increase citizen engagement

- To provide user-friendly access to information about government finances and people management.
  - To facilitate analysis of government operations by combining quantitative and contextual information in a single location.
  - To reduce the costs (i.e. labour) for users of data on government finances and human resources.
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## Main beneficiaries

Civil Society, General population, Government bodies, Government staff

- Canadians
- Parliamentarians
- Media
- Academia

# Results

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## Efficiency

- Administrative savings (i.e. value of time saved) for the Government of Canada is estimated to be worth CAD 43 000 since the launch of the TBS Infobase, not including: the value-added to decision-making using information from Infobase that users wouldn't attempt to seek otherwise.
  - The value of time saved and value-added to decision-making from page views outside of the Government of Canada is currently unknown.
  - These figures reflect page views only after some but limited marketing. Fixed costs have been absorbed: future page views will generate more time savings.
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## Service quality

### Accessibility:

- Total number of page views of the InfoBase: 26 000. Half of page views come from the Government of Canada, the remainder coming from other sources.

### Responsiveness:

- The TBS Infobase provides users a whole-of-government perspective when it's missing in a data product.
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## User satisfaction

- Positive informal feedback has been received from employees of Parliament of Canada.

# Development

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## Design

The TBS InfoBase was one of the projects conceived and developed by the Expenditure Analysis team (number of staff = 12) in response to a general request from a Parliamentary Committee for easier access to government financial data.

This innovation also emerged as an extension of an internal data warehouse integrating data from several sources that was developed over the years by the Expenditure Analysis team. The specific shape, form, and delivery of the InfoBase were developed largely by a single member of the team and made possible by the data management functions of his colleagues.

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## Testing

- The Agile development methodology was used to rapidly iterate a prototype from requirements to new features.
  - The tool was piloted within the team at first, then the Treasury Board Secretariat and finally to the general public.
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## Implementation

### Tools used:

- A decentralized management approach was used in the development and implementation of the TBS InfoBase. Continuous input and feedback loops from those making the most intensive analytical use of financial data occurred at every stage of the development of the InfoBase.
- The Expenditure Analysis team was in a unique position to choose the data structure and website design, as it had built a data warehouse containing a significant share of the data to be released.
- Therefore, the Expenditure Analysis team was given near total freedom in determining the data structure and website design. It also decided which technology was to be used: a combination of commercial software and open-source technology and libraries was used for data production and website conception, respectively.

### Resources used:

- The TBS InfoBase costs less than CAD 200 000 and involved approximately 2 full-time employees over the course of a year.
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## Diffusion

- The TBS InfoBase is available on the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat's website.
  - The Expenditure Analysis team created a descriptive page of the tool on GCPedia, the internal wiki of the Government of Canada.
  - The team has also conducted demonstrations of the InfoBase to departments wishing to replicate it.
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## Challenges and solutions

- Interactions with IT division: the design and implementation of the InfoBase required software that was not pre-approved by the IT department. Negotiations were required to get software installed on staff computers.
  - Finding specific skills: skills in programming languages not often used in government were required. The Expenditure Analysis team was able to hire COOP university students to support the person in charge of the web development.
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## Partnerships

### The Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer (within Treasury Board Secretariat)

#### Other Public Sector

The Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer was the first external partner to provide data to be released on the InfoBase. The EA team and the OCHRO jointly developed guidelines to ensure the future updates of HR data on the InfoBase. Interactions with this partner allowed the EA team to fine-tune its communications of the content, format and constraints of the InfoBase to data partners.

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# Lessons Learned

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## Lessons Learned

- Promote IT systems that generate data in flexible formats (i.e. readable by multiple software)
  - Promote work and skills that allows maintaining historical consistency of data.
  - Allow technological expertise to interact with business knowledge on a frequent basis.
  - Things that worked less well: limited resources and amount of work involved limited time spent on marketing plan by the Expenditure Analysis team.
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## Conditions for success

- Constant support from senior management even as senior management turnover and priority changes occur.
- Frequent (i.e. daily) interactions between technological experts and business knowledge experts.

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