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Common Contracting Data Standards across Canada

Report on Milestone 2.4 under Canada's 2018-2020 National Action Plan on Open Government

Drafted September 2019 by Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC)



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Background

Open Government Partnership

The [Open Government Partnership](#) (OGP) is a multilateral initiative with the mandate to foster greater public transparency and accountability, improve governance, and increase civic engagement worldwide. The OGP is comprised of 79 countries and over 20 sub-national jurisdictions.

As a condition of membership, all OGP member states must publish a biennial action plan on open government, containing commitments to advance the principles of transparency, accountability, citizen participation, and technology and innovation. Canada’s 4th biannual plan – the [2018-2020 National Action Plan on Open Government](#) – was published in December 2018.

Canada’s OGP Commitment #2: Financial transparency and accountability

As part of the 2018-2020 National Action Plan on Open Government, Canada has committed to continue to improve the transparency of its procurement spend. By ensuring access to open data on government procurement and by exploring the adoption of contracting data standards, it will be easier for Canadians to understand how government spends their tax dollars. To this end, the second commitment under Canada’s National Action Plan is entitled *financial transparency and accountability*.

In response to the call for increased uniformity in Canada’s public sector procurement, the Government of Canada committed to having met with representatives from provincial and territorial governments “*to discuss potential adoption of common contracting data standards for tender notices*” by August 2019. Additionally, the Government of Canada committed to having “*further explored adoption of common contracting data standards across the broader procurement cycle*” by June 2020. Both of these commitments are identified under Milestone 2.4 of Canada’s National Action Plan on Open Government, and as part of this Milestone, representatives and officials of the federal, provincial and territorial governments were to meet to explore the adoption of common contracting data standards across Canada.

Tender notices are published summations of opportunities to sell goods and/or services to government. Tender notices include the details about what and how an organization (in this case, government) intends to source goods and/or services, and typically outlines the forthcoming process

to receive and evaluate proposals for these goods and services. Currently, there is no standardization of tender notice data across the Canadian public sector. The Government of Canada, provinces and territories all have different content included within their tender notices, and there is no uniformity in the structure or presentation of this content.

By extension, there is also no uniformity in the standards used to publish contracting data from across the broader procurement cycle – from procurement planning through to contract award and implementation. Common contracting data standards for tender notices as well as for across the broader procurement cycle could enable greater transparency in public contracting through an increased ability to search and compare public sector spend across Canada.

Milestone Status

The Government of Canada has met its two commitments under Milestone 2.4. Federal, provincial and territorial government representatives and officials have met and have further explored the potential adoption of common contracting data standards for tender notices, as well as for across the broader procurement cycle.

Stakeholders and Engagements

Representatives from the Government of Canada as well as from each of Canada’s provinces and territories convened at a series of multilateral committee meetings conducted at the Deputy Minister, Assistant Deputy Minister, and Director-level. Representatives from these bodies were engaged through a combination of written briefings, presentations and open dialogue to promote discussion on the potential adoption of common contracting data standards across Canada.

The three federal-provincial-territorial (FPT) bodies at which contracting data standards were discussed include:

The FPT Deputy Heads Committee on Public Works	
Mandate	This committee shall encourage the sharing of information and best practices on common issues and challenges in the field of public works and procurement across jurisdictions.
Membership	The federal government, as well as all provincial and territorial governments have a seat on the committee. Members are nominated by their jurisdiction. When required, an Assistant Deputy Minister may represent the jurisdiction as a substitute member.
Frequency of Meetings	Quarterly teleconferences Annual in-person meetings
Meetings where contracting data standards were discussed	September 18-19, 2018 (in person) February 6, 2019 May 14, 2019 September 17-18, 2019 (in person)

The FPT Assistant Deputy Minister Procurement Sub-Committee	
Mandate	This sub-committee reports to the FPT Deputy Heads committee, and also encourages the sharing of knowledge and best practices of issues and challenges relating to public procurement.
Membership	The federal government, as well as all provincial and territorial governments has a seat on the sub-committee. Members are nominated by their jurisdiction.
Frequency of meetings	Quarterly teleconferences Annual in-person meetings
Meetings where contracting data standards were discussed	May 31 to June 1, 2018 (in person) November 27, 2018 February 19, 2019 June 11-12, 2019 (in person) August 21, 2019

The FPT e-Procurement Working Group	
Mandate	This Director-Level working group reports to the FPT Assistant Deputy Minister Procurement Sub-Committee, and is a platform to share knowledge and best practices on common issues in the field of e-procurement. The working group has also expanded the scope of its discussions to include the governance and implementation of the Single Point of Access (SPA) for Canadian public sector procurement notices.
Membership	All provinces and territories are invited, though not all are consistently represented at working group meetings.
Frequency of meetings	Bi-monthly teleconferences
Meetings where contracting data standards were discussed	September 5, 2018 December 3, 2018 February 8, 2019 April 17, 2019

Findings

There is consensus on the value of data standards: There was a broad consensus among the FPT committee, sub-committee and working group members that contracting data standards would be of value to the pan-Canadian supplier community. It was acknowledged that using a common data structure would simplify the lives of suppliers, civil society and citizens who wish to better understand and analyze public spending.

There is a trend towards the adoption of common commodity codes for procurement items: The classification of goods and services allows for consistent recording and reporting of procurement information. The current trend within the Canadian public sector is towards adopting the United Nations Standard Product and Services Code (UNSPSC), an open and internationally-recognized standard. Three provinces currently use the UNSPSC, and an additional six jurisdictions (including the Government of Canada) have identified the UNSPSC as their future classification taxonomy.

Additional common contracting data standards are beyond current scope: The adoption of common contracting data standards for tender notices or across the broader procurement cycle is beyond the scope of many of jurisdictions' current mandates and priorities. Rather, efforts continue to be directed towards meeting other pressing and collective procurement, e-procurement and real property challenges.

Costs and legacy systems are constraints: It is costly and difficult for jurisdictions to change their current state (legacy) e-procurement systems and policies to institute new data standards. This is particularly salient in jurisdictions with smaller procurement organizations who need to balance these costs with other key priorities and initiatives, as well as for jurisdictions whose e-procurement platforms are managed by third-party contractors.

Aligning with contracting data standards is best achieved when transitioning to a new e-procurement platform: Several jurisdictions are in the process of replacing and/or modernizing their e-procurement platforms. This transition from legacy systems to modern procurement platforms represents an opportunity to ensure that openness and transparency – represented in part through the implementation of contracting data standards – are considered in the creation of new procurement technologies, processes and standards.

The Single Point of Access is an opportunity to advance the discussion on common data standards for tender notices: As specified in [Article 19.6](#) of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), the Government of Canada is responsible for establishing a Single Point of Access (SPA) for [covered](#) procurement notices by September 21, 2022. This SPA will include tender notices from the Government of Canada as well as from provinces, territories and their respective municipal, academic, social and health sector institutions. This represents an opportunity to advance discussions on implementing common contracting data standards for tender notices, and all jurisdictions have committed to work towards establishing the SPA.

Leverage and share related findings and best practices: The successful completion of pilot projects and initiatives relating to open data and contracting standards may reveal insightful details pertaining to the time, cost, challenges and lessons learned associated with adopting common contracting data standards. The most notable outputs will result from the following commitments identified within Canada's 2018-2020 National Action Plan on Open Government:

What will PSPC do?	How will we know when we've succeeded?	What is our deadline?
<p>2.3.1 – Ensure Canadians have access to open data on Government of Canada procurement</p>	<p>Pilot data that tests the implementation of the Open Contracting Data Standard (OCDS) is undertaken, which includes a cross-section of at least 300 contract records for a variety of contracts, including major projects. Pilot data will include all stages of the procurement cycle (planning, tender, award, contract and implementation).</p>	<p>December 2019</p>
<p>2.3.2 – Ensure Canadians have access to open data on Government of Canada procurement</p>	<p>3-5 public workshops on open contracting are held to analyze what types of contracting data are currently available and assess barriers to releasing opening contracting data.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The workshops consider the results of the open data pilot. • Workshops include participation from civil society, procurement experts, and industry representatives. • A report is developed outlining input received and recommendations developed during the workshops. 	<p>June 2020</p>
<p>2.3.3 – Ensure Canadians have access to open data on Government of Canada procurement</p>	<p>Tender, award, and contract data aligned with the Open Contracting Data Standard (OCDS) is published for all contracts for fiscal years 2016 to 2017 and 2017 to 2018. Data is published on open.canada.ca and is updated on a regular schedule.</p>	<p>August 2020</p>

Next Steps

Keep the conversation going: The federal-provincial-territorial committees will continue to meet on an ongoing basis, and are expected to continue discussing contracting data standards as an issue of shared interest and importance. Additionally, given that the Single Point of Access may serve as an opportunity where pan-Canadian public sector tender notices are presented in a common format, this initiative will also continue to be prioritized by the FPT community.