follow themoney

All roads lead to
(or should lead to)
openness

OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS · gesoc a.c. GESTIÓN SOCIAL Y COOPERACIÓN · GLOBAL INTEGRITY · inai Instituto Nacional de Transparencia, Acceso a la Información y Protección de Datos Personales

NOTE

The story presented in this document is written for explanatory purposes. The sitations, characters, government agencies and services presented are fictious, under no circunstances it should be interpreted as a critique or position about the performance of a particular government, agency, or public servant.

FOR YOU, WHO ARE WILLING TO CHANGE THE WORLD, BUT FOR NOW, CAN ONLY CHANGE YOUR CITY

On June 1, 2016, Mexico City registered one of the worst air pollution levels of the year. Also that day, two things happened:
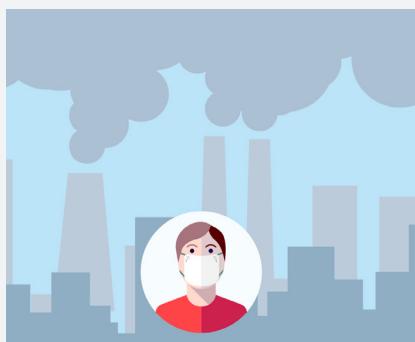
1. POLLUTION CONTINGENCY PLAN

A pollution contingency plan was implemented. This meant banning transit for half the vehicle fleet in the city and prioritizing sustainable mobility options, such as public transportation, electric vehicles, and bicycles.
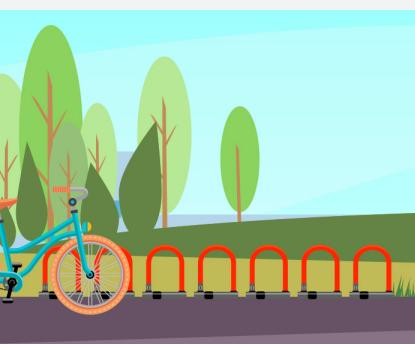
2. MOST OF @TUBICI STATIONS WERE EMPTY

Ironically, that day most of @TuBici's – Mexico City's public bike sharing system – stations, were empty. The reason? @TuBici's collector trucks, the ones that take the bikes to maintenance services, had also been banned due to the air pollution and, therefore, were unable to supply the stations.

Victor, a daily user of @TuBici service, thought this situation made no sense. He found out about the restriction for the collector trucks on Twitter when @TuBici's account replied to a message from him stating he had been waiting more than two hours to rent a bike but there were none.

That is to say, the transportation system that should have been not only an alternative but the first mobility option for this type of contingency failed precisely when it needed to operate at maximum efficiency. Most importantly, if no one had asked @TuBici why the collector trucks were banned there would have been no explanation. **There was no official data of any kind: whether there would be an extended schedule given the circumstances, or the number of bicycles available in all stations, nor how long would it take to reestablish @TuBici's service once the contingency plan was completed.**

Two buses later, and already at home...

... Victor found another reply to one of his tweets, this time from the Office of Environmental Affairs' account, the agency that manages @TuBici's service, inviting him to go to its transparency unit to get an explanation regarding the collecting trucks ban and whether or not they use clean energy.

Let's take a minute to sink this in. Information about a specific public service, which should be in principle transparent and accessible, was not available when needed. If this is the case with a low-cost and easy follow-up transportation system, how much do we not know - and should know - about so many important issues in our daily life, like basic garbage collection services, public schools, or the health-care system?

Beyond Mexico City's cycling infrastructure, specific questions arise regarding the public transport system in the city as a whole. How much does it affect the city's mobility to not have information or have information that is unavailable to the citizens? How much could our lives improve if we had more and better information on public services and expenditure?

Victor recalled that before the contingency plan started, the Office of Environmental Affairs reported making a significant investment to improve and expand the cycling infrastructure in the city; however, neither the resources allocated nor the numerous plans and projects aimed at improving the @TuBici system were sufficient to deal with the bicycle shortage derived from the contingency plan. Taking this into account, one might wonder: are public resources destined for @TuBici really being spent in the best possible way?
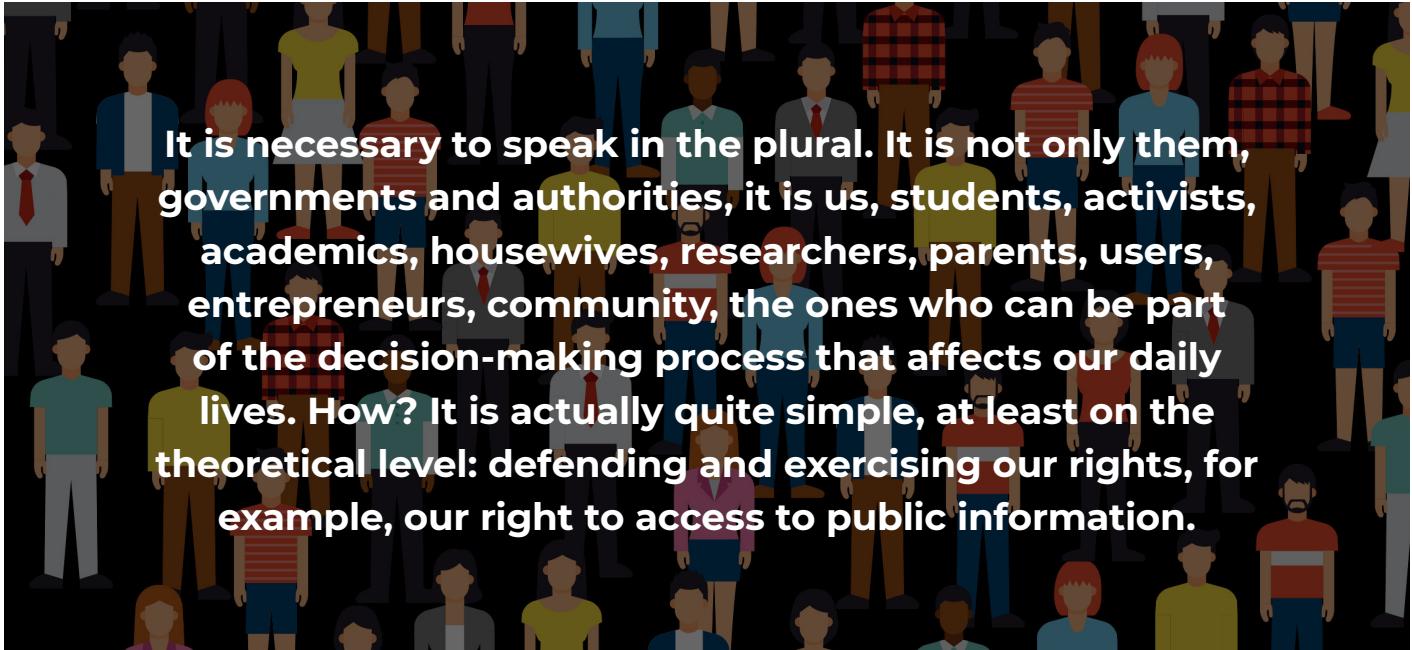
It is necessary to speak in the plural. It is not only them, governments and authorities, it is us, students, activists, academics, housewives, researchers, parents, users, entrepreneurs, community, the ones who can be part of the decision-making process that affects our daily lives. How? It is actually quite simple, at least on the theoretical level: defending and exercising our rights, for example, our right to access to public information.

Because, like Victor, you have surely asked yourself these and other questions more than once and want to actively collaborate in finding plausible solutions to collective action problems, this report intends to facilitate that path through a brief and clear methodology, as well as by showing practical cases that draw from the using and opening socially useful information.

All of this by focusing on one of the possible ways to positively impact the decision-making process: the monitoring and oversight of public resources. If you want to help improve a particular public service, get involved in a specific cause, or just want to know how our governments operate, here you will find a guide that can be of great use.

MAY IT BE THAT WAY!

BEFORE GETTING STARTED, CONSIDER THIS
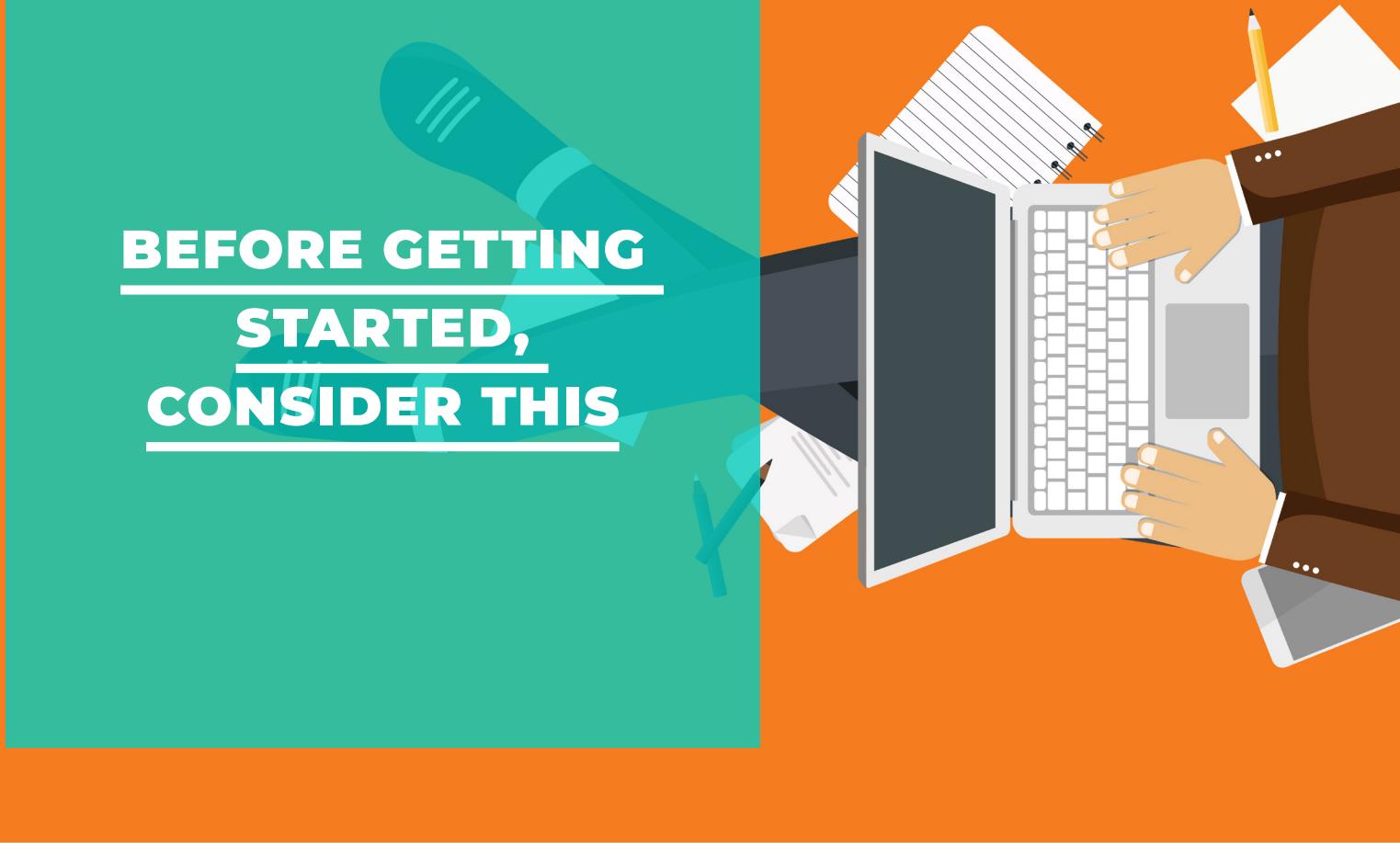
1

ASKING FOR AND REVIEWING PUBLIC DATA IS A HUMAN RIGHT
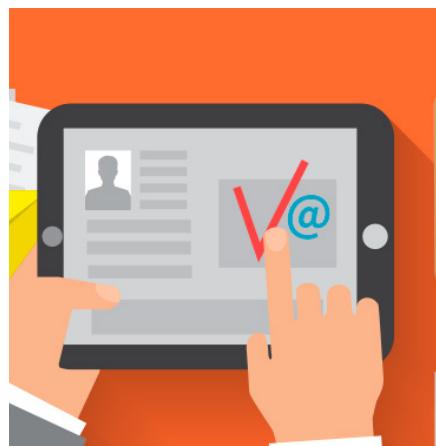
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PUBLIC DATA IS USEFUL (OR IT SHOULD BE)
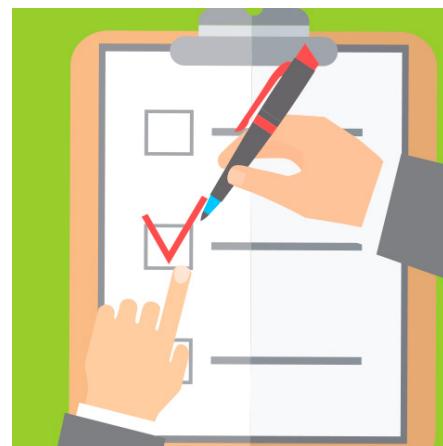
3

IF PUBLIC DATA IS USEFUL, IT BECOMES MEANINGFUL IN OUR EVERYDAY LIFE

Asking for and reviewing public data is our right; therefore, it must be protected and granted by government institutions. But why is public information so valuable?

Public data is valuable for the sole reason that it allows citizens to know what their governments are doing. What governments do has a, positive or negative, impact in our lives. Moreover, we must always bear in mind that the public services we use have lots of staff entirely dedicated to making sure they work as they should, as well as an assigned budget and regulations to ensure they are properly managed.

Additioanally, the knowledge acquired from this information, as well as the individual capacities to put it into practice, constitutes a useful tool for actively being part of government actions. How? by using the information to open up dialogue and spaces for collaboration with government agencies that can enable citizens' inputs and demands to be integrated into government action. This type of horizontal and cooperative relationship between governments and citizenship, based on public data and citizen engagement tools to establish, monitor and achieve common goals, is known as institutional openness.

That being said, considering public services and procedures have an allocated budget, monitoring budget data on any given subject of our interest is one of many possible ways to understand public affairs, audit its results, identify hidden irregularities, and engage it improving those services. This is exactly the path we will take, hoping it leads to the opening up of both public data and institutions.

As stated before, Victor uses @TuBici's service frequently. However, that by itself does not make him an expert on sustainable mobility. If he indeed intends to improve Mexico City's transportation system based on public data, specifically on @TuBici's statistics, it would be useful for him to partner with strategic stakeholders with similar interests to find relevant pathways to achieving his goals.

WHAT IF YOU WERE HIM?

A tweet aroused Victor's curiosity in knowing how @TuBici was being managed. Has an eventuality like this ever spawn your interest in knowing how public resources are being spent or in making transparent information about a particular service? You might not be a @TuBici user and sustainable mobility may not be a priority for you. What issues interest you the most? Most likely in your community, there are problems to solve and more than one public service you use on a daily basis. How could you improve it? Look out! Sometimes the most disruptive transformations begin from mere curiosity.

7

FOLLOW THE MONEY

Cases like Victor's, as well as the need to push for citizen knowledge-driven exercises, along with monitoring and evaluating data regarding public resources, gave rise to *Follow the Money.*

follow the money

Follow the Money (FtM) is a methodology developed jointly by Mexico's National Institute for Transparency, Acess to Information and Personal Data Protection (INAI, for its Spanish acronym) and non-governmental organizations Gestión Social, A.C. (GESOC) and Global Integrity, to make public spending more efficient and effective and, consequently, help solve collective action problems at the local level.

OBJECTIVES

1

USE DATA ON THE USE OF PUBLIC RESOURCES TO POSITIVELY SHAPE LOCAL PUBLIC POLICY

2

DESIGN AND IMPLEMENT COMMITMENTS TO *FOLLOW THE MONEY* BASED ON LOCAL CO-CREATION DYNAMICS

3

DEVELOP A METHODOLOGY TO TRACE AND ASSESS PUBLIC SPENDING

THEORY OF CHANGE

In order to achieve these goals, *Follow the Money* is based on the Theory of Change – a theoretical framework that explains how a given action or set of **actions** lead to specific **outputs** and **results** to **impact** in a positive way; in this case, how local public policies management helps to trace and shape the use of public resources.

ACTIONS

1. Identify local priorities and challenges

2. Engage key stakeholders based on these priorities

OUTPUTS

1. Training of stakeholders based on identified local priorities

2. Tools to devise commitments based on tracking the use of public resources

RESULTS

1. Useful knowledge regarding the use of public resources

2. Quality public data to address local challenges

3. Collaborative processes to solve public problems

IMPACT

A more efficient use of public resources to solve local development challenges more effectively

WALKING AND CYCLING. ONE STEP AT A TIME

The official website for the "Hoy No Circula"[1] program specifies what kind of vehicles are allowed to transit in case of a pollution contingency. Among the vehicles allowed are those that use green energies and those utilized for emergency services and public transportation. Naturally, Victor assumed that collector trucks entered the first category, but just to be clear, he submitted a freedom of information request to the Office of Environmental Affairs' asking not only if, indeed, the trucks use electric power, but also the number of trucks and how profitable the entire bike sharing system had been since it began to operate.

Beyond following a process like the latter to wherever it takes, it is necessary to be realistic about the public data one can get. For instance, if you were in Victor's place, assuming the Office of Environmental Affairs gave you the data he asked for, what would you do with it? Could you actually track public resources to verify that @TuBici does serve its purpose as it should, taking into account the characteristics of the Follow the Money methodology described above? If not, how could you use it then? What specific purposes can it serve? These questions might be a bit overwhelming, but the possibilities to do and create from public data are limitless, as will be described in the following chapters. However, before undertaking such an effort, we must be clear in the process to follow so that information leads to effective action. From pedal to pedal, from bike to bike, one step at a time; that will get us to real openness and improvement in our communities.

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1. Hoy No Circula is a program implemented in Mexico City and its metropolitan area to reduce air poulltion and lighten traffic. To check its website, visit https://www.hoy-no-circula.com.mx/

STEP 1.
HOW CAN I PUT TO USE THE FOLLOW THE MONEY METHODOLOGY?

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Follow the Money introduces precise steps to track public expenditure by using public data and, hence, be able to address specific collective action problems. Each step is described below as well as how its operational framework can be narrowed down to achieve better results.

In response to Victor's information request, the Office of Environmental Affairs replied that, up to October 2018, @TuBici had 5529 bicycles operating, which means there was a bicycle available for every 45 users and, since it began its operation, a total of 670,000 USD had been invested in it, with a sustained growth of, approximately, 2% to 3% since the program started back in in 2010. Its general maintenance cost was not specified.

So now, how to put this kind of information regarding cycling infrastructure and public expenditure into perspective to improve sustainable mobility in the city?

To try this methodology out, first, it is necessary to identify a specific public issue and establish the most pressing needs related to it. This becomes easier if key stakeholders with previous knowledge of the identified issue are involved.

The following are questions that, if answered, can be of great use to tighten the issue that we aim to solve:

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

Mexico City is one of the most congested cities in the world. Its mobility infrastructure encourages the use of private vehicles instead of public transportation or green mobility options, such as bicycles.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Because of the ever-increasing social, economic, and environmental costs of using private transportation.

WHO DOES IT MATTER TO?

Current bicycle users, sustainable mobility advocates, and potential bicycle users, for whom, whatever the reason, cycling to school, work or home is just impractical.

WHAT INFORMATION IS NEEDED TO SOLVE IT?

Information on the public bike sharing system, as well as public transportation routes and corridors, the number of bike lanes, dangerous bicycle cruises, road infrastructure and other indicators that can provide an overview of mobility and environmental conditions in the city.

STEP 2.
DEFINE A GOAL BASED ON THE IDENTIFIED PUBLIC ISSUE

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Local contexts work at a very different pace than regional and national ones. In order to deal with the daily challenges faced by their citizens, local governments need to make policy in a different way that enables them to provide a quick and effective solutions that can improve the quality of life of their citizens. For instance, public policies and resources allocated to these policies must be implemented based on specific targets, which in turn will allow to determine whether or not they have met citizens' needs. If these needs are not met, the necessary adjustments should be made accordingly. Therefore, after identifying the public problem to which resourced will be allocated and traced, it is necessary to set clear goals based on the solution to the problem. Doing this provide a basic evaluation system to measure and compare the extent to which progress is, or isn't, achieved. On this particular point, we should always bear in mind that:

A

THAT WHICH IS NOT TRANSPARENT CANNOT BE KNOWN

➡

B

THAT WHICH IS UNKNOWN CANNOT BE CHANGED

➡

C

THAT WHICH CANNOT BE MEASURED CANNOT BE IMPROVED

STEP 3.
LOCALITY AND PROXIMITY

Identifying the public issue for which the money will be traced is a prospective exercise that allows not only to document the entire process but also to identify strengths, potential conflicts in the management of the resources, and areas of improvement. It also sheds light on the particular challenges that might arise depending on the context in which the work is done. Thus, as a third step, it is necessary to understand the dynamics under which Follow the Money will unfold and the distinct factors that can aid or hinder the activity. This can be done through different approaches:

- Collaboration with key stakeholders. We might not always have a full-framed picture of local politics. To establish alliances with local partners that already implement activities related to our topic of interest fosters collaborative actions and facilitates not only the understanding of the local political dynamics of a certain state, or city, but also of the money allocation processes and, hence, the way to oversee it. On this particular point, always have into account public resources are distributed and spent differently depending on the entity and the subject to be addressed.

- Register activities already done by local government agencies. If there is no previous work done, you can approach the local agencies to identify available inputs to start a Follow the Money exercise. Although with unequal capabilities and scope, they are natural allies you can turn to when working in local settings, especially if you have no prior knowledge regarding the public issue you seek to address. Likewise, consider these agencies serve to enable constructive dialogue between entrepreneurs, government authorities, civil society organizations, and other potential partners willing to participate.
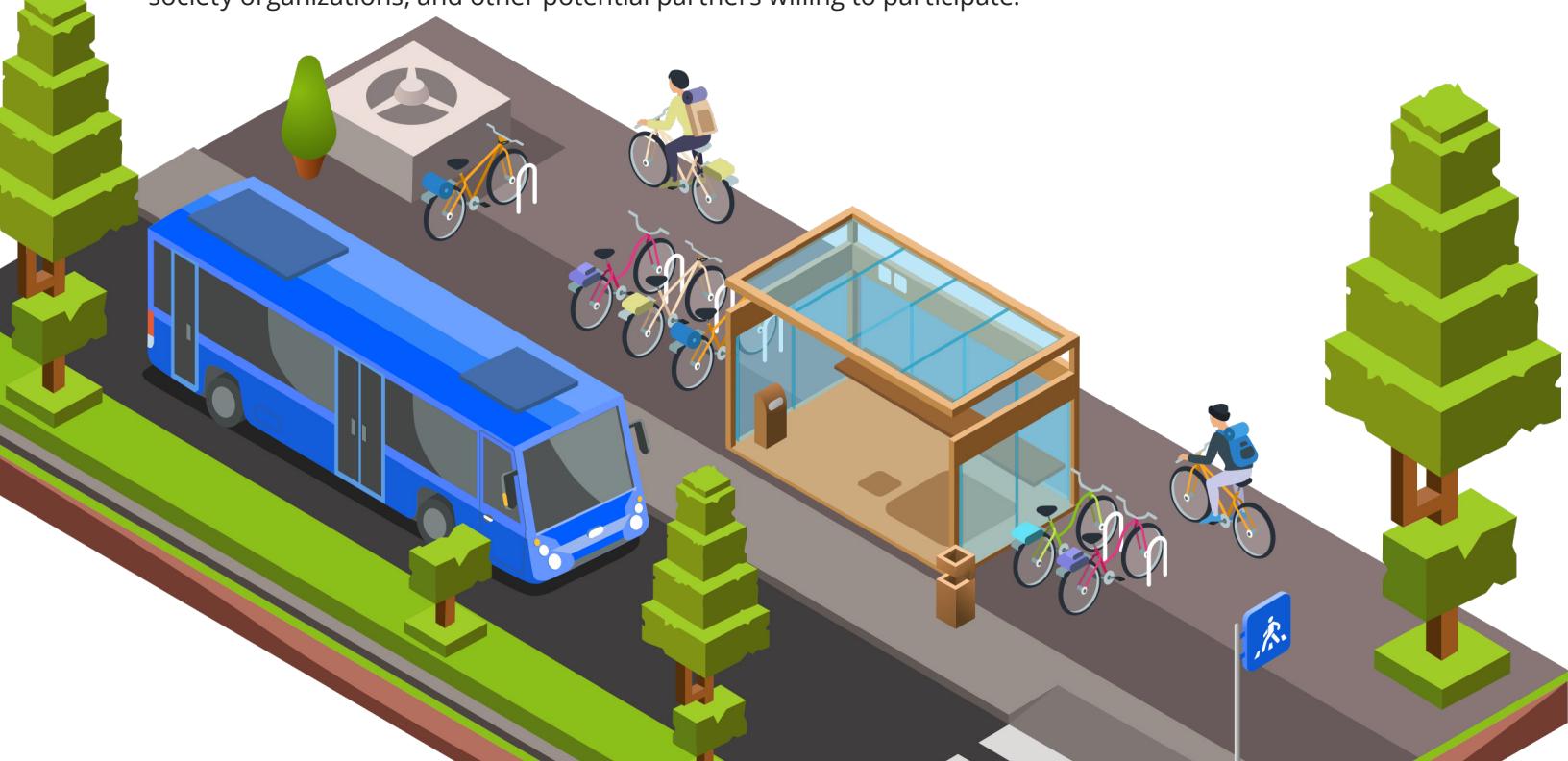
CITIZEN CO-CREATION
BECAUSE THINGS DO HAPPEN BEYOND GOVERNMENT

We tend to understand openness out of the will of those responsible for implementing transparency and access to information policies, but most of the times the momentum comes from citizens themselves who, with nothing more than genuine interest in improving their surroundings, end up connecting their governments with innovative ideas and knowledge disperse in society.

Monitor Karewa, Chihuahua[2]

A purchase made with corruption means fewer resources for public expenditure

One of the areas more prone to secrecy within any government agency is public procurement. Taking this into account, in Chihuahua, Mexico, Karewa, a civil society organization that aims to prevent corruption in procurement and public contracting, developed a strategy to improve the public bidding process and consequently help provide transparency to it while giving preference to participating local companies. Today, Karewa has its own monitoring tool, Monitor Karewa, a digital platform that has made transparent public data regarding local government's acquisitions and contracts, allowing its visualization by type of procurement, year, and even by the administrative unit requesting it.

Citizen Agenda, Hermosillo[3]

Making the public a challenge owned by everyone

In Hermosillo, Mexico, aspiring to articulate citizen engagement through the monitoring of local public policies, Hermosillo, ¿Cómo Vamos? a civil society organization, analyzes municipal development indicators to deploy working groups interested in solving the city's most pressing development challenges. Partnering with more than 30 organizations, in 2018 they presented a citizen agenda to the candidates running for Mayor's Office to influence the public debate and advocate for the inclusion of citizen priorities into municipal development plans.

Local governments, whether statewide or municipal, are directly responsible for implementing public policies in their communities. Considering they are the closest governments to citizens, it is important their actions minimize the extent of corruption and maximize effective citizen participation so that through openness and co-creation processes value can be created data and used for the benefit of all.

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2. For more information, visit the website http://karewa.org/monitor-karewa/
3. For more information, visit the website https://www.hermosillocomovamos.org/

STEP 4.
WALKING THE TALK

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In **Chihuahua**, as a result of **Karewa's** workbased on public data extracted from the city's transparency portal, all the data related to public procurement were gathered on a digital platform and is now possible to track public resources allocated to them.

In **Hermosillo** ¿Cómo Vamos? case, citizen surveys helped detect local priorities. Consequently, those results enabled the construction of a civil society led agenda so specific public issues could be addressed in a way that responded to citizens' needs and priorities.

If there is not a community of users around public data that consumes it and enhances it, it will not generate any social value by itself. For this reason, this community, that will ultimately be strengthened through the use of co-creation tools like the ones mentioned in the previous sections, should take into account the following points to have a successful *Follow the Money* exercise:

- Spot specific information needs. Despite the goodwill of civil society organizations in Hermosillo and Chihuahua, had there not been an initial set of information about public expenditure to conceive, respectively, their citizen agenda and monitor, it would hardly have been possible to achieve any positive impact at all. Making information transparent not only fosters socially useful knowledge but also makes an impact on the way it is generated, processed and eventually used. For this reason, once the public issue we want to address is defined and a goal based on it is set, we must find the necessary information to promote virtuous cycles of openness, use, and improvement.

It should be noted that when Karewa began working on its monitor, public data was low-quality. But it was precisely because of its effort that data has been improved, and government institutions have upgraded their gathering and evaluation standards. Hermosillo, ¿Cómo Vamos? has been using public data for a relatively short time, and hence has not been actively involved in upgrading its quality. However, it has developed alternative sources of information through its perception surveys.

- Engage in Local Open Government Spaces. The Local Technical Secretariats are task groups specially conceived to facilitate and trigger collaborative actions amongst government officials, civil society organizations, and citizens in general to the design, implement and monitor specific policies to address public issues at the local level.[4]

- Mobilize Working Groups Around Specific issues. Involve as many stakeholders as possible, promote open dialogue and build active partnerships to carry out activities around the public issue selected based on available information.

STEP 5.
SHARE THE INFORMATION
ON THE PROCESS

Let's refresh our memory and review what we have done so far:

FOLLOW THE MONEY METHODOLOGY

HOW CAN IT BE APPLIED?

FOLLOW THE MONEY METHODOLOGY	HOW CAN IT BE APPLIED?
Identify a specific public issue	In your commnutnity, what are the most pressing problems to solve?
Define a specific goal based on the identified issue	What would you like to achieve regarding the identified public issue?
Understand local dynamics	Does your community have any special features that makes it easier, or harder, to address the identified issue?
Put into practice the Follow the Money methodology	What context specific factors need to be considered to implement the methodology?

To create value from public data is, in essence, a government responsibility. However, it is also a significant opportunity for citizens, in a sustained manner, to understand the data and take advantage of it to positively impact the decision-making processes. This is why, in order to strengthen the networks based on co-creation spaces and to ensure that everything described in this document has the biggest possible impact, these experiences must be shared through compelling storytelling. Moreover, it is imperative to continue to encourage steady efforts to open up and use public data. To learn from what has already been done and identify areas for improvement is what ultimately will keep up and sustain active collaboration among stakeholders.

IN THE END, WHAT WAS IT ALL FOR?

This work contributes to making public data useful and to make citizen participation a common asset for institutional endeavors. This process requires the diversification of sources of information used by public agencies, a diversification that can enable them to respond to citizen needs in accordance to the needs and characteristics of each local context.

Thanks to Karewa's work, since 2016, in Chihuahua all data regarding public procurement and contracting has been published on schedule. Likewise, its monitor has helped identify information gaps that will eventually have to be occupied if transparency and accountability are to prevail.

Hermosillo, ¿Cómo Vamos? has helped develop human and technical capacities to analyze public data while helping coordinate major transparency efforts amongst government agencies and civl society organizations.

What both organizations have done in their cities makes crystal clear how necessary it is for politicians to have the will to act when needed. For civil society organizations, to fill in the information gaps is expensive in both technical and financial terms and, in the end, it is not their job. If governments are not willingly part of the joint effort of a capacity-building process based on a shared agenda, the overall costs will only increase.

By the time @TuBici had five years operating, it was one of the largest bike sharing systems in Latin America. Today, almost ten years later, it is the largest, with more than ten million annual rides, and has become a sustainable and, most importantly, viable, mean of transportation for thousands of people in Mexico City.

Nevertheless, 2016 registered an all-time high air pollution record in the city. In this regard, Victor understood the need to make mobility a sustainable policy after @TuBici's collector trucks were banned and, consequently, were unable to supply the bike stations precisely when needed the most. Logically, one would assume that as it is more pressing to implement a pollution contingency plan, it becomes imperative to use alternative means of transportation, like bicycles, especially considering its sustained increase in the number of rides.

Hence, if bikes are so widely used, why has air pollution escalated? As Victor tracked down @TuBici's public resources, he found a much complex challenge than making a bike sharing system a safe and accessible means of transport. And while he now knows that he cannot solve this by himself, on his way he partnered with strategic allies with whom, beyond sharing common interests, he devised an actual possibility to boost a public service.

To open up public data, make transparency a prevalent practice and boost institutional openness for the common good will only be achieved if you continue pedaling. The possibilities of improving public services by effectively using public data are infinite, **may at least one of them be the one that you put into action.**