

TUTORIAL on FISCAL TRANSPARENCY PORTALS

A USER-CENTERED DEVELOPMENT

MODULE.3

Defining objectives
and indicators



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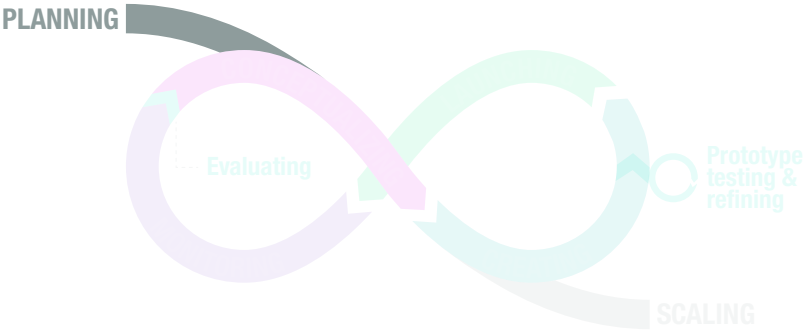
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While some countries have committed to protecting access to public information as a fundamental right¹, proactive transparency, which generally also has legal foundations, entails that anyone interested can have immediate access to public information and avoid the costs of submitting a request or participating in administrative procedures (OECD, 2011). With this in mind, the proactive publication of fiscal information can have strategic objectives that enrich and extend the protection of rights.

As stated previously, it is important to be clear about the objective of publishing a fiscal transparency portal or platform. This is necessary to allow the portal to be subsequently evaluated, thereby providing opportunities for improvement. Determining the reason behind the development of the project--that is, defining the general purpose of the portal, with its specific objectives and indicators--is an essential first step; referred to here as *planning*.



1. Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes the access to public information as a human right. The Declaration was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly and signed by 48 countries in 1948.

How to define the objectives of a fiscal transparency portal

A portal's objective or purpose can vary depending on the state of each country's public financial management. However, the primary intention is for the implementing team to be able to properly identify the portal's requirements by considering outstanding social needs. The information and form of publication can vary based on a portal's general purpose, specific objectives and performance indicators.

Having a unified objective motivates people to collaborate towards shared results, sets the direction for subsequent transformation activities and facilitates coherence between the involved areas and organizations. A general purpose or objective must be disseminated within the project's leading organization--whether it's a ministry of finance, a government-civil society coalition or some other form of leadership--from groups at management levels to those in charge of the technical processes.

The following are examples of some general objectives that have been put forward for a fiscal transparency portal:

- Facilitating the monitoring of a specific public service
- Improving public engagement and interaction
- Providing certainty about the economy's position for financial markets
- Accompanying and strengthening public financial management reforms

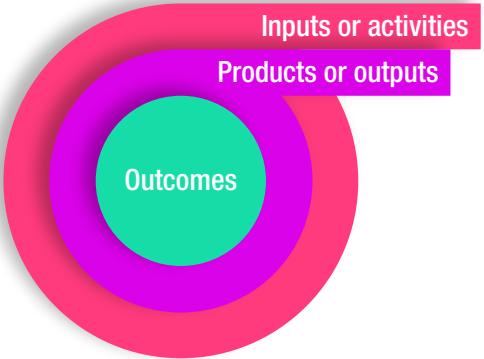
Tip: Keep in mind that a portal can be composed of different platforms with information and structures that serve different objectives and audiences. This topic will be addressed later in the tutorial.

Defining specific objectives

Objectives should describe the desired results of the publication, and should be used in project planning either by governments, by civil society organizations (CSOs) or by coalitions. To produce the greatest benefit, these objectives must be defined at the beginning part of the project's life cycle, be specific and measurable, and comply with time, budget and quality requirements.

A project must have a general objective (outcomes), intermediate objectives (products or outputs) and immediate objectives (inputs or activities), all of which should be consequently achieved. Often, however it will be realized that the successful publication, use, or impact of the information, requires regulatory or process reforms--which will imply more complex policies or actions than the mere publication.

There are a range of specific techniques that support the planning and monitoring of policies and projects with a performance-oriented approach. These help



ensure that any activities, outputs and publishing results have a sequential logic, and facilitate the delineation of indicators for each level. Below two of the most commonly used techniques are presented:

- *Logical framework methodology* – This technique is based on the identification of a problem, including its roots and consequences; the transition towards objectives; and the hierarchical structure of inputs, outputs and outcomes. Normally, the logical framework matrix, which helps to establish indicators for each level of the hierarchical structure, will stem from this identification process.

To learn more about this methodology visit the Manual for the Logical Framework Methodology for planning, monitoring and evaluation of projects and programs from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL) [here](#).

- *The theory of change* - This methodology is based on the identification of a chain of causality that links objectives, inputs, products, intermediate results and impacts, which in turn facilitates the definition of hypotheses to be verified. Unlike the logical framework methodology, the theory of change offers a “general overview” and summarizes the work at a strategic level.

To learn more about this methodology, visit the following guide for the Theory of Change, Indicators and Impact Measurement by Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) [here](#).



Tip: No matter which technique is used, the audience can participate in defining the objectives of the portal or platform. This can be facilitated by opening up the process to public inputs.

Examples on how to do this:

- Publish a draft of the strategy document on the leading organization's site and accept comments through online tools (such as Google Survey, Typeform, Survey Monkey, etc.).
- Create a collaborative document for each phase where those who are interested can comment and propose changes (by using Google Docs, for example).
- Open a public invitation for co-creating strategy (bearing in mind there is a maximum capacity for participants that will allow work to be guided).

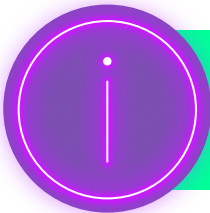
Defining indicators

Indicators assist in assessing whether the performance-oriented actions taken are having the expected impact and in redirecting them, if they have not.

Indicators must always be:

- **Clear** - They must be accurate, unambiguous and related to the objective. In cases where specific measurement is not feasible or the necessary data is not available, it is possible to use *proxy*² indicators (or indirect measurements).
- **Relevant** - They must reflect the importance of achieving the objective and provide information about what should be measured. Accordingly, they should be appropriate for their respective level--that is, as markers of immediate, intermediate or outcomes objectives.

2. A proxy indicator is a measurement or indirect sign that approximates or represents a phenomenon in the absence of a direct measurement or sign.



Tip: It is a common error to consider user or page visit counts as results indicators. While these are significant metrics to monitor, it is important to keep in mind that they say little about the actual impact of a portal.

- **Monitorable** - Their metrics must result from a specific calculation linked to the data sources being utilized. Indicators can have different dimensions such as quality, efficiency, effectiveness or satisfaction.



Tip: One way of measuring the audience's level of satisfaction is by conducting user surveys about the portal's use and utility using objective-oriented questions. These surveys can be kept on the site/s, with results extracted periodically to allow for an analysis of trends regarding the improvement or deterioration of satisfaction.

Application example relating to the module on defining objectives and indicators

The following exemplifies this module with a case related to performance evaluation, which was inspired by real cases discussed within the GIFT network.

Main problem: Civil society organizations, academia and the legislative branch face difficulties when trying to use government programs' performance information to base their studies and analysis.

Roots of the problem:

- The performance information is published by each government agency in its own portal (scatter).
- The published information is generated in a different format by each agency (heterogeneity).
- The published information lacks the necessary details--methods of calculation, sources of information, etcetera--to enable a rigorous analysis (comprehensiveness).
- The indicators are only published with the approval of the budget; monitoring throughout the budget execution is not published and the results are only published with the year-end report, and even then, only for selected indicators (availability).
- The published indicators are low-quality and management-oriented (quality).
- CSOs and legislative branch actors ignore the information existence (knowledge) and/or how to use it (capability).

Outcomes objective: CSOs, academia and the legislative branch have fiscal performance information (financial and non-financial) that supports the discussion of the budget in the different stages of the budget cycle.

- **Indicator 1:** Percentage of CSOs, academia and legislative branch actors that report that the published information has facilitated their analysis of government performance in specific issues³.
- **Indicator 2:** Percentage of budget with non-financial performance information updated according to its measuring frequency.

Intermediate objectives:

- Consolidate the financial and non-financial performance information of the different government agencies into a single point.
 - **Indicator 1:** Progress percentage in the development of the fiscal transparency portal's first iteration.
- Establishing a homogeneous format.
 - **Indicator 2:** Percentage of administrative units or departments that report their non-financial performance information in the structure established by the Ministry.

Immediate objectives:

- Managing the development of a user-centered fiscal transparency portal.
 - **Indicator 1:** Progress in the implementation of a user-centered methodology for the new fiscal transparency portal.
 - **Indicator (n)...**



3. This case includes a proxy indicator due to the difficulty of measuring the "performance-oriented approach of budget discussions".