Empowering Through Open Government
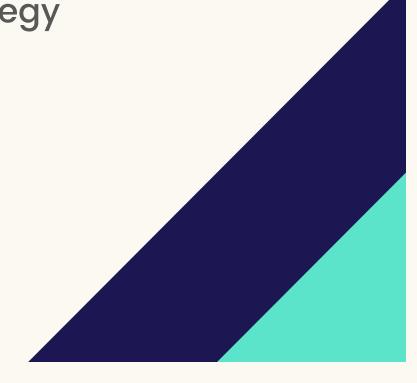
Feedback from Canadian Heritage's Open Government and Digital Strategy Consultation

March 2018

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About Powered by Data

With the goal of enabling the social sector to benefit from the rapidly changing ways society handles information, Powered by Data works with leaders in nonprofits, governments, and foundations to help them better use, share, and learn from data. Powered by Data also works with key stakeholders to open up their data for social impact. Powered by Data operates on Tides Canada's shared platform, which supports on-the-ground efforts to create uncommon solutions for the common good.

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◢ EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The mandate of the Department of Canadian Heritage (PCH) spans arts and culture, media, heritage, sport, diversity and inclusion, and official languages. The department is further developing its open government priorities and its digital strategy together, and aligning plans from each of these related initiatives.

Serving such a unique and broad mandate means that Canadian Heritage has a diverse range of stakeholders with distinct needs. Powered By Data conducted interviews with 15 of these stakeholders to identify important use cases and needs. Building upon the 2016 consultation we conducted for Canadian Heritage, Powered by Data identified three distinct user types among consultation participants - funding recipients, researchers, and associations/agencies. Participants consistently identified four needs:

1. More detailed grants and contributions data at both the funding program and individual grant-levels that would help users decide which programs to apply to, as well as enable research and analysis of funding for different purposes across Canadian communities.

2. Online applications and reporting systems that would streamline processes and make program requirements more transparent and easier to meet.

3. Open research and statistics that would inform user program activities, enable higher quality analysis, and promote a common fact base for input and decision-making.

4. A new web content structure for Canadian Heritage's website aligned to the needs of different user types and subject areas, including curated and relevant news, announcements, program updates, data and information so that this content is easy to find, rather than requiring users to scour different areas of government websites.

These needs are likely well known at Canadian Heritage, and some were identified at a high-level during Powered By Data's 2016 consultation. While progress has been made internally at Canadian Heritage and through Treasury Board processes,

stakeholder expectations for data and digital services are rising, and internal government progress is not particularly visible to those outside government until more data and information is publicly released.

Based on participant input and our experience in developing Open Government strategies, Powered by Data identified best practices that will help Canadian Heritage meets stakeholder needs through its open government and digital service priorities. These include the following practices:

- Publishing inventories of unpublished data and information (as the province of Ontario does) through existing channels as well as the Canadian Heritage website so stakeholders can find and understand what holdings are present, and help Canadian Heritage prioritize which to release.

- Mobilizing information and data beyond just publishing it, including proactive communication of new items, and solicitation of feedback on published items on both open.canada.ca, as well as the appropriate Canadian Heritage web pages, where stakeholders are more likely to search.

- Make information and data easy to use by providing basic information like data dictionaries, context, different formats, and even contact information for staff experts. Consider interactive web applications that allow users to explore popular data sets.

- Using digital transformation to revisit processes so that they are simpler, easier to comply with and more transparent at the outset.

◢ CONTEXT

Objectives

The Department of Canadian Heritage (PCH) serves a unique and broad mandate, which means it has a diverse range of stakeholders with different needs. This makes a user-centered approach to Open Government and digital services distinctly important to enable and empower stakeholders.

Canadian Heritage released its initial Open Government Implementation Plan in 2015, and has continued to update its plans and track its progress, including an open data consultation conducted in 2016. Canadian Heritage is also co-leading two of Canada's 22 Open Government commitments — 8) enhance access to culture & heritage collections, and 11) increase transparency of grants and contributions funding. Its current open government priorities include the following:

1. **Open Data: Openness and Transparency of Funding Program Data**

2. **Open Information: Open Research**

3. **Open Information: Open by Design**

4. **Open Dialogue: Create a Community of Practice**

5. **Open Governance: PCH's governance is open & transparent**

Concurrent to implementing its open government plans, the department is developing its digital strategy, which includes a maturity assessment and the development of future state goals. Canadian Heritage has recognized that open government and digital services are closely linked, and planning for each set of initiatives should be aligned. Open data and information are sometimes considered the "minimum viable product" for a digital service, however engagement with open data and information requires a thoughtful integration with digital services.

A critical component of digital transformation is providing the right information to the user in a clear, concise and navigable way that encourages engagement, mobilization, and feedback – all of which are objectives for open government, as well. Given the

potential volume of open data and information Canadian Heritage could potentially release, a lack of alignment with its digital strategy would make it more challenging for users to find and mobilize open data and information, and negatively affect awareness and engagement among stakeholders.

To this end, Powered by Data conducted a stakeholder consultation to obtain input on Canadian Heritage's open government plans and digital strategy. As Canadian Heritage has shifted its focus from planning to implementation of open government, this consultation focused on obtaining concrete use cases and themes, which are contained in this report.

Approach

To conduct this consultation, Powered by Data and Canadian Heritage decided to conduct individual interviews with each stakeholder. Stakeholders have different levels of digital and data literacy, as well as unique needs in different domains. An individual interview format allowed users to speak more freely and thoroughly about their needs compared to other formats, such as large group workshops. We then took the following steps:

1. **Drafted a list of stakeholders**

2. **Conduct bilingual stakeholder outreach**

3. **Arranged 15 interviews and distributed a guide with questions**

4. **Conducted interviews and captured notes**

5. **Analyzed and themed notes into use cases and practices**

Stakeholders were selected for the list across different areas of Canadian Heritage's mandate, but also importantly, different types of users, such as funding recipients and researchers. Please note that government stakeholders were not included, as other work is ongoing at Canadian Heritage to engage them.

◢ FINDINGS: USER TYPES

Among the stakeholders interviewed, their desire for different data, information, or services tended to align with their function. Three clear user types emerged during our consultation, which are summarized below. Other types of potential users may include journalists and private industry, however we were not able to obtain input during this limited consultation to characterize their needs.

User Type	Description and interaction with Canadian Heritage
Funding Recipients	Organizations that deliver direct services or programs and rely on government grant funding for their operations.
Researchers	Academics or analysts that consume statistics and reports for the purpose of academic research, to provide information and intelligence to their respective constituents, or to guide their own organizations' activities and operations.
Associations and Agencies	Organizations that focus on or represent specific professions, sectors, or communities, and monitor the status of their constituencies closely.

Grouping users into these distinct functional needs allowed us to find patterns in the types of data, information, and services they are interested in across Canadian Heritage's mandate. Further research could expand these user types into more thorough personas, if desired. These types are used in the following section as part of user stories.

◢ FINDINGS: USE CASES

From our interviews, Powered by Data identified some consistent use cases identified by stakeholders as high value. These use cases are summarized here as user stories; an easy-to-understand, agile approach that captures the core needs from the user's perspective. User stories focus on what a user is trying to do and why, so that several potential solutions can be explored. They typically precede business requirements, which detail what a solution should entail.

Open data and information

◢ GRANTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS DATA

AS A FUNDING RECIPIENT...

I want to: Understand who and what a program funds

So that: I put effort toward applying for the right programs

AS A FUNDING RECIPIENT, OR ASSOCIATION OR AGENCY...

I want to: Understand where funding is being allocated

So that: I can advocate for desired types of funding

AS A RESEARCHER...

I want to: Understand where and for what purpose funding is being allocated

So that: I can study how it impacts communities and areas of interest

AS AN ASSOCIATION OR AGENCY...

I want to: Understand where and for what purpose funding is being allocated

So that: I can study how this impacts my constituents or organization

Almost all participants identified grants and contributions data as useful and desirable, consistent with Powered By Data's previous consultation findings in 2016. While some of this data is currently released through the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) and more are planned, stakeholders were interested in some fields not in TBS guidelines (see Appendix B, Table 3 of TBS guidelines), and were also interested in a time series of this data. Participants in funding programs, in particular, are aware of the types of data they and their peers report, and understandably have an interest in seeing summaries of this data.

The most common desire for this data was to help understand which funding programs to apply for and how much to ask. Participants indicated that applying to funding programs requires a great deal of time and resources, which means they must be careful about applying for funds they are unlikely to receive. By making this data open and available, funding recipients would be more likely to apply to the appropriate funds, which may enable funders to find useful new recipients. Several stakeholders expressed a desire for not just an open data set, but to make this data searchable and filterable through a web application so that they can easily conduct their desired analysis without necessarily having the requisite spreadsheet skills.

Beehive Giving is a UK-based project that leverages open grants data to reduce time spent reviewing applications for funders, and reduce time spent on unsuccessful applications for applicants.

It was not clear to some stakeholders that some grants and contributions data was available from TBS, as their default would be to search for data sets from Canadian Heritage. Canadian Heritage should consider ways to make its particular grants data easy to locate for users. This may include hosting it on the Canadian Heritage website, or releasing a supplemental open data set under its own name.

Beyond using grant data to identify new funders, all stakeholders had an interest in understanding the bigger funding picture, including how funding for different purposes and to different communities has been allocated over time. This would enable them to understand where they believe funding is sufficient or deficient in their community of interest, and what the impacts of funding are.

Stakeholders indicated data that would be useful at the "funding program-level", as well as at the "individual grant-level", listed on the following two pages. Program-level data was useful to decide whether to apply to a fund, evaluate the performance of a fund, or understand whom and what purpose a fund is serving. Grant-level data helps with the cases above as well, but also helps applicants and researches identify comparable organizations and their performance. Grant-level data can also be linked to the business number, which would enable integration with other potential data sources for further analysis.

The Canada Council for the Arts CADAC system was referenced several times as a helpful example. While not open to the public, it contains more data than existing Canadian Heritage grants and contributions data reported through Treasury Board, particularly Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and funding from other sources for each project. This data is used to gain visibility into other potential funders.

The Ontario Trillium Foundation's open data set provides an example of detailed grant data including a time series, description, geography, funding requested, population served, business number, and other useful information.

FUNDING PROGRAM-LEVEL GRANTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS DATA

Data Element	Purpose
Purpose of grant program	Provides information on what the program funds and high-level criteria
Key performance indicators of grant program	Indicates the objectives of the program and helps others evaluate it or align to its goals
Number/amount of grants by geography	Compare funding across different communities, and build a funding picture for a specific community
Project funding from other sources or levels of governments	Understand the share of funding from different entities across different communities, sectors or organizations
Existing internal categorizations or taxonomies of programs	Existing categorizations used by government would enable easier slicing of data. One example provided was project vs program vs core funding for recipients
Applicant request and award statistics (total, average, etc.)	Understand how much funding may be available from a program, and how successful applicants are
Cost categories funded	Understand what specific costs might be funded
Number of applicants to a program and their success rate	Indicates the popularity of a program, and how likely a funding recipient may be to succeed if they invest in applying
Percentage of grant recipients that are new	Informs whether a new organization should consider applying. Tracks the churn among program participants

INDIVIDUAL GRANT-LEVEL GRANTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS DATA

Data Element	Purpose
Purpose of grant	Understand how the funds were used by comparable applicants
Key performance indicators of grant program	Indicates the objectives of the program and helps others evaluate it, align to its goals or identify whether to apply
Business number of grant recipients	Enables linking to other data sets, such as CRA's charity registry, which would provide important supplementary information such as geography, primary activities, etc.
Recipient (or recipient project) geography	Identify who may be working in a community of interest and for what purpose
Project funding from other sources or levels of governments	Understand the typical share of funding from different entities to an organization
Existing internal categorizations or taxonomies of organizations	Existing categorizations used by government would enable easier slicing of data. One example provided was project vs program vs core funding
Recipient amount requested and awarded	Understand how much funding may be available from a program, and how successful comparable applicants are

RESEARCH AND STATISTICS

AS AN ACADEMIC OR ANALYST...

I want to: Know what is being researched

So that: I can align my efforts, leverage existing work and avoid duplication

AS AN ACADEMIC...

I want to: Read useful research

So that: I can build upon it in my research

AS AN ANALYST...

I want to: Read useful research

So that: My organization can provide more value to our constituency

AS A FUNDING RECIPIENT...

I want to: Read useful research

So that: I can run my program better

AS AN ACADEMIC OR ANALYST...

I want to: Obtain statistical data

So that: I can use it for my research and analysis

Many constituents expressed an interest in further research and statistical data pertinent to their missions. Findings on each subject are below.

OPEN RESEARCH

Stakeholders expressed a desire to understand the research agenda within Canadian Heritage so they can align efforts, as well as obtain new insights for other purposes, which may be analyzing particular communities relevant to Canadian Heritage's mandate, running their own operations better, advocacy, or conducting their own research and analysis. Releasing an inventory of useful research and data held by Canadian Heritage was suggested as an initial step. If publishing this is challenging under existing processes and policies, an open data set of previous Access to Information (ATI) requests may be a shortcut.

The consensus among stakeholders is that much more research is done within Canadian Heritage than is published, and there is a spectrum of access and availability to research depending on one's relationship to the department. Several stakeholders indicated Canadian Heritage researchers and analysts are quite open to informal sharing, however most of this content is not posted or searchable online.

While it is understood that research is exploratory by nature and may not be worth publication until later stages, the perception among some stakeholders is that Canadian Heritage does not formally share research that may create political risk. Researchers might understandably limit circulation or publication of some material that might be interpreted as a policy shift, even if this is not the intent. Several stakeholders indicated they had resorted to ATI requests at times.

A further barrier to the official publication of research are the expensive steps of translation and accessible design. It was suggested that Canadian Heritage could publish draft research or working papers under different requirements that could be translated on request, or formalized further if demand is sufficient.

Stakeholders also found that in the event research is published to the website, it is challenging to locate. By publishing research and statistics within a navigable content structure on the Canadian Heritage website, researchers more easily can align with, build upon, and share existing research. This issue is addressed in the "Web Content Structure" use case further on in this report.

CULTURAL AND SOCIOECONOMIC DATA

Access to Statistics Canada and other relevant cultural and socioeconomic data was another common theme among researchers. Few stakeholders indicated they obtain useful cultural and socioeconomic data from Canadian Heritage. All rely on Statistics Canada and are pleased with their experience, however several stakeholders indicated a distinct lack of cultural statistical data following a decision in 2012 to discontinue a critical Statistics Canada series. Stakeholders emphasized the continued importance of the Cultural Satellite Account as a resource. This data would be used to analyze the effects of cultural programs, engagement and funding across Canada.

Many stakeholders obtain custom data exports from Statistics Canada, and there may be cases where such data is of interest to many others. If Canadian Heritage researchers are using similar data, they could release their custom requests to make this data easier to access and use among stakeholders.

A few particular statistics were mentioned by stakeholders:

- More ubiquitous statistics on individuals by mother tongue and official language. Not all Statistics Canada surveys capture both of these (e.g., one can speak an official language but may be allophone), and in cases where they are captured, they may only be available through custom requests. Such information would be used to support activities related to official language minority communities across the country.

- Government expenditure on culture. A [Statistics Canada](#) series was discontinued in 2012. This information has been—and would be—used to understand the health of the sector and compare funding trends in different areas.

- Related to government cultural expenditure, stakeholders were also interested in the use of creative industry tax credits, such as CAVCO, across all levels of government. This would assist with research on the use and efficacy of these credits by different parts of industry.

Digital services

◢ ONLINE APPLICATIONS AND REPORTING

AS A FUNDING RECIPIENT...

I want to: Learn more about a program's purpose, criteria and application process

So that: I can decide whether it is worth it to apply and how much to ask for

AS A FUNDING RECIPIENT...

I want to: Spend less time applying for and reporting on funding

So that: I can apply to more programs or save time and money for other needs

Stakeholders emphasized how time-consuming grant applications can be, particularly if pursuing a new fund they have not worked with before. This makes applying to any new program a large internal resourcing decision and a risk for potential recipients. While grants and contributions data can help potential applicants decide if this resourcing is worth their time, lowering the process barriers to apply can help the right funders and applicants find each other more easily.

For some programs, a program officer must be contacted prior to obtaining an application form to identify whether the program is suitable for the potential applicant. Funding applicants had excellent impressions of Canadian Heritage staff that assisted them during this initial stage, however they also expressed a desire to learn more about the program online, particularly the application process and eligibility information. The Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Trillium Foundation were also referenced as good examples. Examples of useful documents they include on their websites with their applications include self-assessments, critical paths, guides, and engaging web design.

When exploring funding programs, an initially lower touch, digital-first approach may help both applicants find the right programs for them, and funders increase the number of eligible, relevant applicants to their programs. Applicants also found that, while program officers were extremely knowledgeable of their own programs,

their awareness of other suitable programs was limited, particularly compared to their provincial or municipal equivalents. Guidance to other appropriate programs would be valued.

Current application forms rely on fillable PDF forms which are challenging to read and do not always save progress. It is common practice for organizations to draft content in Microsoft Word or Google Docs and paste it into the form. Digital literacy is not ubiquitous among applicants, so a feature such as automatically saving progress through an application process can reduce burden. Fillable PDF forms also do not provide an opportunity for other types of content to explain projects, such as diagrams, audio or video. Planning for an online application system is already underway by Canadian Heritage.

Applicants also indicated that too much information was requested too soon as part of application and reporting processes, without a clear idea of why such detail is required at this stage. One example pointed to costs in the hundreds of dollars that were required to be forecasted 18 months away, a budgeting expectation that does not reflect the reasonable uncertainties of running an organization. A streamlined online initial application or self-assessment could be considered prior to more substantial requests.

WEB CONTENT STRUCTURE

AS AN ACADEMIC, ANALYST, OR FUNDING RECIPIENT...

I want to: Easily get news and announcements relevant to me

So that: I can stay on top of what is occurring in my area of interest, such as funding programs, policy changes, or major news

AS AN ACADEMIC, ANALYST, OR FUNDING RECIPIENT...

I want to: Easily get data and research relevant to me

So that: I can find new insights that I can use

Stakeholders also indicated that, even if they are aware content has been published, relevant information is challenging to find on the Canadian Heritage website. Some content, such as grants and contributions data, is actually hosted by TBS, which would

not be obvious to stakeholders searching for PCH information. They expressed a desire for a web design that is more functionally aligned to user needs and their relevant subject areas (e.g., arts, language, sports etc.). Areas of the website aligned to their interests would contain summaries and links to relevant research content, data, policy papers, government news releases, events, and programs from Canadian Heritage, as well as other government entities and key stakeholders.

Navigating the existing website was described as challenging and "siloed", and several stakeholders indicated useful content links broke following the transition to Canada. ca and are no longer findable. Stakeholders also indicated that the only way to find out that some things have been published is to be on the "right" e-mail list. Items are made public through different channels, such as different government websites or different areas of Canadian Heritage's own website. There is a need for new items to be curated to relevant user interests in a new web content structure and proactively communicated (e.g., via relevant email subscription lists).

As suggested in Powered by Data's 2016 report, there is a critical role for communications within Canadian Heritage to develop a more user-aligned web content structure that would empower different areas of Canadian Heritage to share more information. Such a structure would help communicate the extent of Canadian Heritage's data and information beyond grants and contributions, which was not clear to some stakeholders, and help build engagement, mobilization, and feedback around open data and information.

◢ BEST PRACTICES TO MEET USER NEEDS

Based on stakeholder input from this consultation, as well as others that Powered by Data has conducted, we find that the following relevant best practices would help ensure that Canadian Heritage implements its open government and digital plans in a way that generates value and meets the needs of its users.

Publish an inventory of data and information holdings

Canadian Heritage's seven current open data sets have been included in an open data inventory, however, publishing all holdings, even those released through other channels (i.e., TBS grants and contributions), as well as those that have not or will not be released, can create an "open-by-default" culture, and help stakeholders understand what data might be useful to them. Such lists should included detailed descriptions of data, information or other content. This is the current practice in the province of Ontario, which indicates whether data is open, to be opened, under review or restricted.

Publishing is a good start, but data and information must be mobilized

While publishing data and information to the web is a key first step, there are real challenges to make that data and information useful, findable, and widely distributed. As Canadian Heritage has recognized by aligning open government and digital strategy work, it should consider how end-users of the data and information being published could find it via multiple paths they might pursue by mapping their journeys (e.g., navigating to/from different government websites, following inbound hyperlinks, outbound e-mail lists, etc.). Stakeholders indicated they find email lists from the government useful, and wondered if there may be others, formal or informal, they could join.

Make data easy to use

Some more technical or advanced users require little beyond a data dictionary and a .csv file, but most need more to understand how data could be used. Data dictionaries for open data sets are a minimum, but a simple example analysis on

an open data set can help users see possibilities. A high-touch approach may even include contact information for experts on each particular data set.

Furthermore, consider what data and information may be for audiences that want quicker answers via a searchable web application, and develop digital services around these use cases. Grants and contributions data may be an excellent use case – a searchable tool is available from the Treasury Board Secretariat alongside an open data set.

Use digital transformation to simplify user processes

As Canadian Heritage undergoes a digital transformation, it has an opportunity to simplify and streamline processes. Digital technology enables capabilities like frequent stakeholder/user input/surveys, exploration of data and information, online consultation, or low-touch self assessments, applications and reporting prior to more onerous requirements. With a mandate as diverse as Canadian Heritage's, digital services make it easier to serve more stakeholders and communities more efficiently.

◢ CONCLUSIONS

As Canadian Heritage continues to implement its open government plans and embarks on a digital transformation, its stakeholders are highly engaged and interested in a variety of data, information and services. As more of its activities are conducted online, stakeholder needs are sure to evolve, and a user-centered approach will ensure the department continues to meet them.

Beyond the ways Canadian Heritage can serve stakeholders, open government and digital services can also make it easier for stakeholders to help Canadian Heritage. Digitizing services can free up staff time for areas of need. Furthermore, publishing research online makes it easier for stakeholders to build upon it and generate new insights for everyone. Open government and digital services present an opportunity to engage new and more Canadians, which can help generate innovative solutions for Canadian Heritage.