

A CoST Panama story: From public procurement to open contracting for infrastructure

Introduction

CoST – the Infrastructure Transparency Initiative (CoST) promotes transparency, participation, and accountability in the delivery of infrastructure projects. It does this through multi-stakeholder working, disclosure of data, an independent review known as the CoST assurance process, and social accountability.

In 2020, CoST Panama's through the World Bank, won an Open Government Partnership (OGP) grant to implement a project titled *"Open Contracting and Transparency in Panama's Public Infrastructure"*.

As a result of this effort, the Government of Panama, through the General Directorate of Public Procurement (DGCP) and the National Authority for Transparency and Access to Information (ANTAI), designed an ambitious project that involves three fundamental pillars, including innovation and digital transformation, actions supported by legislation and regulations that allow the implementation of various technology in the *"PanamaenObras"* and *"PanamaCompra"*. These innovations were driven by the need to increase citizen access to data from the entire life cycle of public infrastructure projects. CoST Panama included commitments in the OGP National action plan, the commitments focused on transparency in public procurement, data use, and accountability.

Components of the Commitment

1. Strengthening transparency in public procurement.
2. Capacity building for the use of data.
3. Accountability for public infrastructure projects.



FROM PUBLIC PROCUREMENT TO OPEN CONTRACTING

Its main objective is to support the implementation of an open contracting approach that strengthens the availability and use of data on public procurement, with an emphasis on public infrastructure.

[PanamaenObras](#)



[PanamaCompra](#)



Achievements

The project enabled CoST Panama to enhance transparency of infrastructure projects, through the creation of the “**PanamaenObras**”. The information platform has been used to disseminate data on approximately **3,800** projects. Citizens are able to access information and documents of the entire life cycle of public infrastructure projects in Panama. The platform offers citizens options to download infrastructure data for use and reuse, in addition to having a real opportunity of monitoring of compliance by the entities.

Enabled creation of the “PanamaCompra” a transactional platform of the State that has had important improvements as a result of the project and the legal reforms that update the portal to its third version; The disclosure of information from the implementation phase is a significant step forward that we highlight.

Innovative development of the “PanamaCompraenCifras”, the Public Procurement Observatory, detached from “**PanamaCompra**”, which allows the visualization of data on all public purchases of the State from 2008 to the present, allowing business intelligence to the private sector, the inspection of control entities and provides relevant simplified information for monitoring of citizens and journalists.

“....there will be a better dissemination of information on purchases made, at all stages of the contracting process, in open and standardized formats, in order to strengthen access to and use of data by public institutions in decision-making, and by citizens for monitoring and commercial opportunities.”

...reads in part, the Panama OGP commitment.

New legislation. The latest reform to Panama’s procurement law provides for disclosure of open data throughout the life cycle of infrastructure projects. The reform was established by the DGCP through its regulations committing to disclose infrastructure data inline with the CoST indicators in Panama’s portal.

Enhanced capacity of stakeholders on disclosure.

Through continuous efforts and the strengthening of legislation, more than 400 public servants from all central government agencies, decentralized entities and local governments have been trained on how to disclose data through the **PanamaenObras**. A training and mentorship programme for journalists, civil society, academia and the private sector was commissioned in 2023 reaching approximately 200 people. These have been empowered on how to use disclosed data to engage in infrastructure development.



The Infrastructure Transparency Index (ITI). In 2023, with the support of the British Embassy in Panama and in the context of continuous improvements in government transparency, the first Infrastructure Transparency Index was carried out with the support of the CoST International Secretariat, obtaining an overall rating of **48.06**, enabling environment score was **81.60%**, capacities and processes score was **33.03%**, citizen participation score was **22.68%** and information disclosure score was **54.14%**. This study opened up the conversations on the need to increase transparency, the ITI results provided evidence that facilitated sector improvements, that would later inform changes on the **PanamaenObras**. In the first half of 2024, CoST Panama will undertake the second ITI to identify current changes in regards to the level of implementation and uptake of recommendations from the first index.



Next steps

Assurance study. CoST Panama will be commissioning its first assurance study on a sample of disclosed projects, and validate the accuracy and completeness of the data disclosed turning it into convincing information, highlighting issues of concern and areas of good practice. This will help strengthen accountability mechanisms, addressing individual gaps within projects, and sectors while making it easier for decision-makers to be held accountable.

Developing a strong social accountability system. CoST Panama is developing a strong social accountability programme that will facilitate series of trainings for stakeholders on the use of data from the “**PanamaenObras**” and “**PanamaCompraenCifras**” portals for the different use cases in all sectors of the country. In addition, to implementing improvements in the portals, integrating sustainable aspects for infrastructure projects, based on multisectoral roundtables as part of the Public Procurement Observatory, as forums for soliciting feedback and proposals for public policy reforms.

Infrastructure Transparency Index 2024. Implementation of a second version of the index to measure the improvements achieved by the evaluated entities and the changes implemented by the DGCP and ANTAI in strengthening transparency, access to information, accountability and citizen participation in public works. The focus is to see improvements in how infrastructure projects are planned, procured, delivered and maintained.

Learn more at:

www.dgcp.gob.pa/contrataciones

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