

# TUTORIAL on FISCAL TRANSPARENCY PORTALS

A USER-CENTERED DEVELOPMENT



# Tutorial on Fiscal Transparency Portals

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## Acknowledgements

Throughout the years, the Network has witnessed the multiple efforts, many extra work hours, frustrations and celebrations behind each development of a fiscal transparency portal. We'd like to express our recognition of and, above all, our gratitude to those we call champions of transparency, who from their desks own the battle and serve as a source of inspiration to others in the search of ways to build better countries for the people.

You know, in each country of the Network, who we are talking about. **Thank you!**

## Global Initiative for Fiscal Transparency

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# TUTORIAL on FISCAL TRANSPARENCY PORTALS

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In line with the core tenets of fiscal transparency, information pertaining to how governments collect taxes; acquire debt; and allocate, spend, invest and manage public resources should be made available to the public in a **clear, reliable, frequent, timely, relevant, comprehensive** and **accessible** manner. Information technology advancements mean that this is now more achievable than ever before. This is also facilitated by legislation in a large number of countries now guaranteeing the right to access information; the existence of internal financial management information systems, whether comprehensive or not; and transparency and open data technological innovations. All of these factors have unlocked an enormous potential for growth.

Fiscal transparency portals have emerged in recent years as a digital solution to release information to the public in a proactive, simple and consolidated manner, in formats that allow for faster and easier analyses. These portals decrease the asymmetry of information between government and society, thereby facilitating a genuinely informed dialogue that has the potential to improve public finances and consequently enhance service delivery and development. The publishers of such portals however frequently face challenges with their configuration and implementation; and subsequently with their dissemination, acceptance and use by wide audiences. This often emanates from a mismatch of expectations from those that supply, and those that demand fiscal information.

Currently, numerous government and civil society institutions worldwide are developing or planning to develop some form of fiscal transparency portal, or launching new platforms for already existing ones. Alternatively, in many other institutions, the frequent analyses of results is leading to redesigns in the manner in which fiscal information is published. Regardless of the form of the portal, this tutorial has been developed to assist in bridging the gap between the supply and demand for fiscal information, by proposing a route to publish fiscal information that reflects user needs and options. To do this, the tutorial presents a series of techniques to identify and segment various user audiences, thereby enabling user experience-driven development; an array of considerations for creating a plan that examines the publishing team's capabilities (e.g. human, technological and informational); and a number of tools to facilitate an iterative design process<sup>1</sup> based on monitoring and evaluation.

1. Iterative design is a software development methodology based on small, repetitive stages (iterations) as part of a cyclical process of investigation, conceptualizing, prototyping, user testing and refining.

# I. Objective

The main objective of this tutorial is to provide a basic guide to publishing fiscal information using a user-centered approach. To do this it describes the concepts and actions to be considered throughout the process.

By the end of this tutorial, participants will be able to:

- Understand the importance of publishing fiscal information designed for target audiences.
- Recognize the different stages and steps required to develop a fiscal transparency portal or platform with a user-centered approach.
- Identify potential users and segment the audience of a fiscal transparency portal.
- Discover tools that assist in leveraging current technological progress for a user-centered publication.
- Acquire techniques to monitor the results of a publication, or of an objective-oriented iteration.

# II. Target audience

This tutorial is aimed at those responsible for managing or implementing fiscal transparency policies. While it focuses mainly on providing governments with tools, being that they are the primary generators and publishers of such fiscal data, its contents can also be useful to civil society organizations that seek to use digital tools to disseminate analysis and interact with particular communities for advocacy purposes.

# III. Methodology

Despite the absence of vast literature on fiscal transparency portals, the GIFT network, through its constant exchange of research and experience, has witnessed and supported the evolution of numerous portals. The network has participated in the creation and improvement of portals in Argentina, Brazil, El Salvador, Indonesia, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, South Africa and Uruguay. Moreover, the network

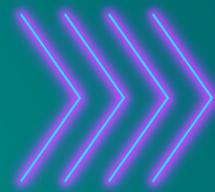
has also benefited from the experiences of Chile, Colombia, South Korea, Guatemala, Ireland and the United States.

This tutorial systematizes the process of developing or updating a fiscal transparency portal or platform using a user-centered approach. It forms part of the network's practical tools for achieving greater fiscal transparency globally.

# III.1. Instructional design

The tutorial consists of nine modules, each containing videos and a supporting document. Its theory is based on methodologies and techniques applied in social sciences (conceptual framework); international examples; and recommendations aimed at facilitating the process of implementation. Its structure has a sequential design, following the premise that omitting certain steps could lead to a less successful implementation. If a publishing team has however assessed its position and considers only certain topics as relevant, it can consult these modules separately.

# The **MODULES** are organized as follows



1

## **Introduction to fiscal transparency portals and the importance of taking the user into consideration.**

This introductory module presents what fiscal transparency portals are and what their purpose is. It also defines the analytical segmentation of six basic elements of fiscal transparency portals, recognizing their progress and limitations in terms of the supply of information, interaction with the demand, publication formats, update mechanisms, design and communication channels.

2

## **Introduction to user-centered design**

The essential goal is to generate portals and platforms that not only *account for users* in their development, but that *engage them*. This module presents the user-centered design philosophy, as well as its implementation steps. User-centered design, which through five iterative development levels will be the axis of the following chapters, aims to achieve a high level of satisfaction in terms of *user experience*, allowing different audience segments to meet their goals and needs with minimum effort as they interact with the portal.

3

## **Definition of a general purpose, objectives and indicators**

This module explains the importance of having a clear purpose prior to the development or the upgrade of a portal and provides tools to generate one. Fiscal transparency can have different objectives and benefits; and as such, the objectives of fiscal transparency portals and platforms can vary according to a country's context, priorities and public finance management capabilities. Despite this, having objectives facilitates the prioritization of a critical route, providing for the establishment of indicators to measure progress and, further on, to evaluate results and inform subsequent iteration.

4

## **Identifying and segmenting the audience**

This module provides tools and techniques to conduct research on, understand and engage the demand for certain outputs of portal development from a user-centered design perspective, with the purpose of identifying and segmenting different potential users (audiences) from within and outside government. Furthermore, the "personas and scenarios" technique will be put forward as a method to segment different profiles. Finally, the benefits of applying a *progressive disclosure* of information based on the identification and segmentation performed will be explained.

5

## **Internal coordination for external publication**

### **5.1 Team Coordination**

Before developing or upgrading a fiscal transparency portal or platform, an assessment should be undertaken of the current resource status, including in respect of the availability of tools, team capabilities, and other complementary resource availability. In this section, frequently asked questions within the GIFT network will be used to explain the importance of coordination among the different areas that generate the data to be published, allowing for sustainable publication. This module also discusses existing internal organization options.

### 5.2 Systems and data connectivity

To enable publication, it is necessary to map where the data requiring extraction is stored, as well as to note its structure and storage format. This information is required to design a publication that releases data that meets the main objectives, while considering its disaggregation, integrity and comprehensiveness.



#### Development of the portal or platform

Structure design, information design and visual design are the three architectural levels in a portal or platform. Aside from these three levels, this module addresses concepts like user interface (UI) and user experience (UX), and introduces tools which can be used during the prototype testing and refinement stage prior to the conclusion of programming, and which, in a cyclical manner, ensure a more user-centered development. Finally, this module presents a *developer's toolkit* containing tools, sources of inspiration, outputs, open code, trends, libraries, and other helpful resources.



#### Amplifying the audience

Fiscal information publishers, as well as development teams, constantly face a lack of engagement from users within fiscal transparency portals and platforms. To handle this issue, this module proposes--in four steps and as part of a comprehensive strategy in the development of a user-centered portal--strategies for communication and engagement, as well as tips and examples on implementation.



#### Monitoring and evaluation to improve

What can be measured can be improved! This is why it is important to monitor both the initially proposed indicators and the functional/operational activity of the platform. In this penultimate module, a handful of monitoring methods will be explored, including the use of Google Analytics as a tool to enable analyses of user behavior. Subsequently, methodological options are introduced to allow for the evaluation of a publication's processes, cost-benefit and impact, providing for the gathering of evidence to inform decision making on subsequent improvements.



#### Iteration to accomplish a living portal

A fiscal transparency portal developed or upgraded through user-centered processes becomes a living and reactive portal that adapts in an agile and constant way according to objectives and results over time. Accordingly, such reactive portals guard against the possibility of inconsistencies due to changing local context, international advances in related matters and technological evolution, among other factors.

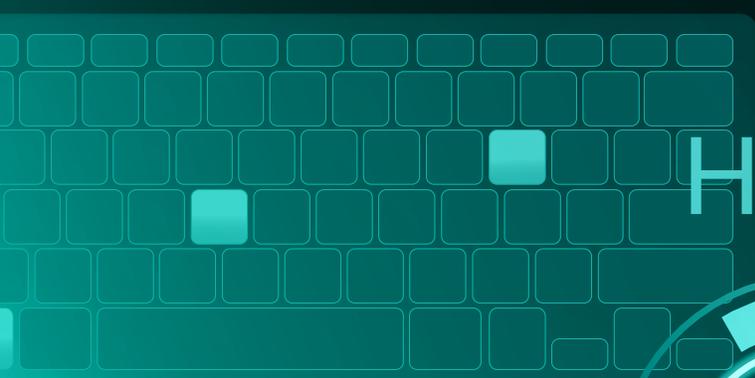
## III.2. Limitations of the tutorial

This tutorial presents standard techniques and focuses on sharing open tools. Its successful implementation will however depend on resource capabilities and local contexts. It is of paramount importance that publications are customized to the context and expectations of their respective country, community or target audiences.

Regarding the technological aspects of portal creation, while the tutorial does suggest certain useful tools and applications, its main purpose is to reflect on how a fiscal transparency tool can be planned-- rather than to simply define the technologies that should be used in its making. It is essential that readers consider that disruptive techniques have begun to emerge at a faster speed than ever before. Therefore, publishers must always keep account of the user's varying needs, and react to them by iterating with respect to change.

Finally, while the tutorial offers a general overview of the different topics to consider when creating or upgrading a fiscal transparency portal, it should not be considered as being a complete guide. Publishers will however acquire information to identify the different fields of expertise necessary for the process of implementation.

UX



HTML >>



<CSS>

