

Do transparency advocacy groups practice what they preach?

A discussion paper produced by Transparify to stimulate and inform debates at the 3rd Open Data Conference in Ottawa #IODC15

Transparify, Tbilisi/Georgia, 28 May 2015

www.transparify.org

SUMMARY

Transparify assessed a total of 34 non-profit organizations sending speakers to the #IODC15, rating the extent to which they publicly disclose through their websites where their funding comes from.

Of the 34 organizations we assessed:

- 12 are already transparent about who funds them
- 7 told us that they plan to become transparent in the near future
- 15 are opaque and seem not to want to disclose more funding data

We believe that non-profits should embrace transparency for a variety of reasons:

- non-profits are key actors in democratic societies
- non-profits enjoy tax free status
- transparency builds credibility with donors, clients, policy-makers and other stakeholders
- the sector as a whole is huge, e.g. in the United States it accounts for over 8% of GDP
- voluntary transparency is the best way to dissuade burdensome external regulation

Transparify assessed and subsequently contacted non-profits participating in the #IODC15 because pro-transparency organizations are an ideal entry point, and because #IODC15 itself seems a great forum for non-profits already engaged with transparency issues to reflect and debate on their own sector's transparency.

Overall, the feedback we received was very positive. We will re-assess all 34 institutions later this year to track and document their progress. [Sign up here](#) to receive the follow-up report by email.

ABOUT TRANSPARIFY

Transparify first rated organizations' funding transparency in 2014 when it assessed 169 think tanks worldwide. A follow-up rating conducted in early 2015 showed that 44 institutions had improved their transparency against the pre-assessment baseline, proving the effectiveness of our general approach. Our work has been covered by major media outlets including the NYT, WaPo, and FT.

This paper was produced by the Transparify team, led by Hans Gutbrod and Till Bruckner, as a side project. For details on Transparify's general organizational setup and funding, [see here](#). Transparify is proud to be part of the [On Think Tanks Labs](#), a collection of innovative ventures in policy research.

WHICH TRANSPARENCY GROUPS PRACTICE WHAT THEY PREACH?

Transparify assessed a total of 34 organizations attending the #IODC15.

Eleven of these were highly transparent, achieving 5-star transparency, and one was broadly transparent, as of May 26:

TRANSPARENT ORGANIZATIONS	SCORE	
Development Initiatives (UK)	*****	HIGHLY TRANSPARENT
Global Integrity (US)	*****	
Global Open Data for Agriculture and Nutrition [GODAN] (International)	*****	
GovLab @ NYU (US)	*****	
Natural Resource Governance Institute (US)	*****	
Open Contracting Partnership (US)	*****	
Publish What You Pay – Canada	*****	
Publish What You Pay – US	*****	
Sunlight Foundation (US)	*****	
Transparency International – EU Office in Brussels	*****	
World Wide Web Foundation (UK)	*****	
Renewable Energy & Energy Efficiency Partnership [REEP] (Austria)	****	BROADLY TRANSPARENT

Highly transparent organizations list their donors with the exact amounts (and typically the purpose) of funding received. The information is easily accessible on the website, typically less than four clicks from the main page. Citizens can easily find out who funds their research and advocacy.

Of the 22 currently non-transparent organizations, 7 had told us by May 26 that they will place more funding data online soon:

ORGANIZATIONS ON THE ROAD TO TRANSPARENCY
CIVICUS (South Africa)
Code for South Africa [Code4SA] (South Africa)
ILDA (Panama)
Open Corporates (UK)
Open Data Enterprise (US)
Open Institute (Kenya)
Open North (Canada)

Of the remaining 15 non-transparent organizations, 9 had not replied to repeated messages by May 26. A further 6 replied to us but did not report plans to update their funding information soon.

RATING CRITERIA AND METHODOLOGY

Transparify rates the extent to which non-profits publicly disclose through their websites where their funding comes from. Organizations that receive five or four stars are considered transparent.

RATING		CRITERION
Five stars	*****	highly transparent: all donors listed, identifying funding amounts for, and sources of, particular projects
Four stars	****	broadly transparent: donors above USD 5,000 listed in 4+ precise funding brackets
Three stars	***	all or most donors listed in 2 or 3 broad contribution brackets [e.g. "USD 5,000 to 15,000, the following donors"] ¹
Two stars	**	all or many donors listed, but little or no financial information
One star	*	some donors listed, but not exhaustive or systematic
Zero stars	0	no relevant or up-to-date information

Our director, Dr Hans Gutbrod, visited the websites of 34 prominent #IODC15 participant non-governmental organizations and looked at the funding information disclosed online, including in annual reports. We then contacted the 34 organizations assessed via email, and in some cases via Twitter. During the engagement, five organizations increased their transparency, illustrating the value of sustained dialogue. The ratings in this paper capture the status quo as of May 26, 2015.

Transparify will soon re-assess all 34 organizations, to see how transparency in this sector evolves.

JOIN OUR DRIVE FOR GREATER NON-PROFIT TRANSPARENCY

1. Make your own organization 5-star transparent.

Start by looking at our simple guide on how to become [fully transparent](#). Transparify's team has helped dozens of organizations to become more transparent and is happy to assist.

2. Work with us.

We have a proven approach that we want to use to make even more sectors transparent. Contact us to discuss potential collaboration.

3. Independently assess the transparency of non-profit organizations.

During 2014-2015, people working independently from us on six occasions rated more than 180 non-profits using our approach. Please see our 2015 Think Tank report for more details.

4. Follow our work and spread the word about transparency.



Sign up for [Email Updates](#)
Engage..... [on Twitter](#)
Connect... [via Facebook](#)

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¹ Transparify also awarded three stars to institutions that were fairly transparent yet did not fully meet four star criteria, for example by not explaining more than 15% of their funding.