Byron Sheldrick
Department of Political Science
University of Guelph
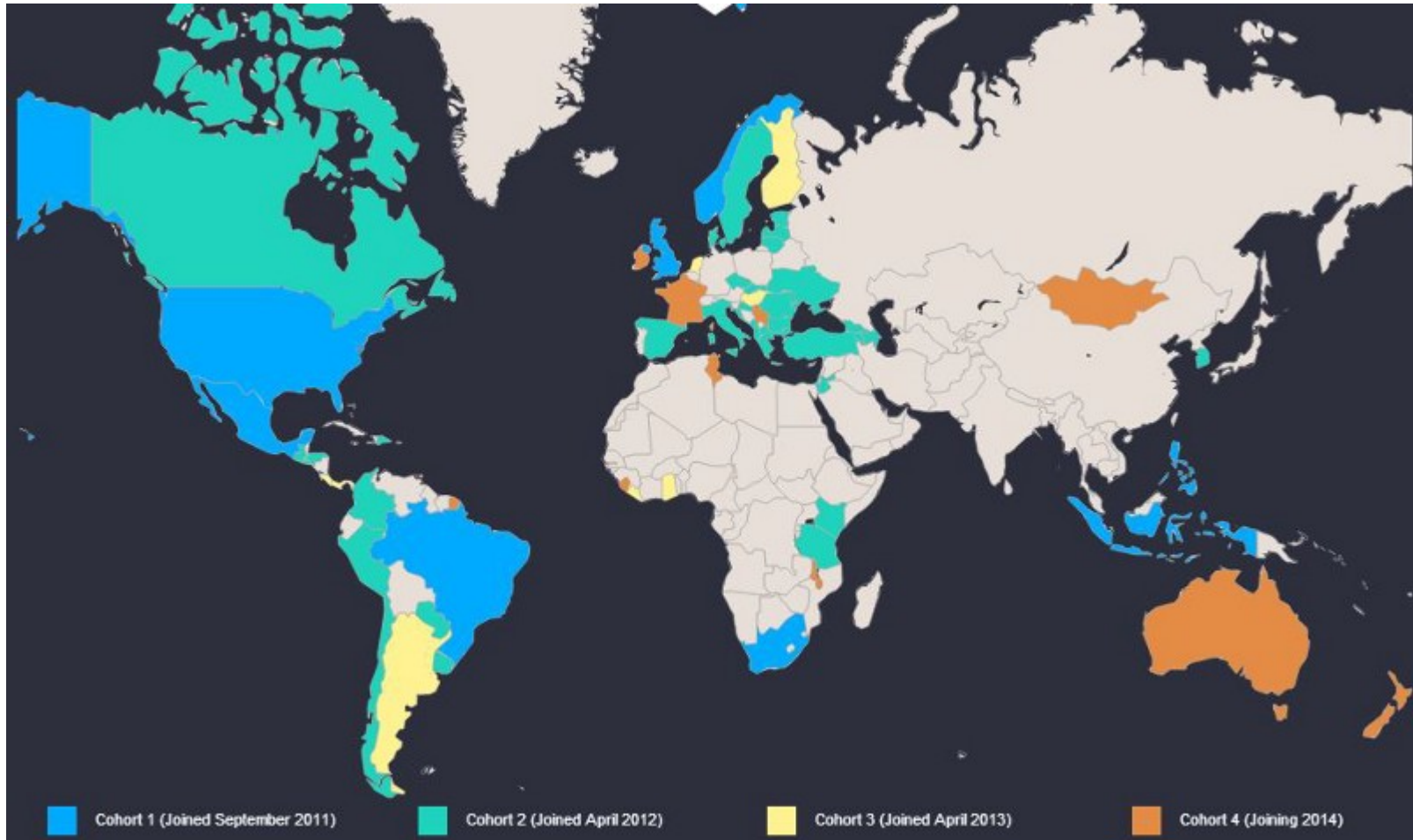
City of Guelph, November 20, 2015

Open Government and Local Politics

- Open Government: Long history dating back to the 1950s; linked to Freedom of Information debates and seen primarily as linked to accountability. (Parks 1957)
- Since Obama's Open Government Directive after taking office in 2008, in general the term has seen a revival.
- Clarke and Fancoli (2013); ambiguity in how the term has been used. Several different dimensions.

Open Government Partnership

- Launched in 2011
- International platform for sharing open government initiatives
- Originally 8 countries; grown to 64 countries
- Each government has an Action Plan which can be accessed from the Partnership website:
http://www.opengovpartnership.org

Member countries of Open Gov Partnership

Cohort 1 (Joined September 2011)   Cohort 2 (Joined April 2012)   Cohort 3 (Joined April 2013)   Cohort 4 (Joining 2014)

- Canada's open government plan:

Commitments around:
- Access to information
- Aid Transparency
- Citizen participation
- Open Data
- Public Service Delivery

Fairly typical range of initiatives:

Clarke and Francoli: content analysis of 7 national action plans (Canada, UK, US, Netherlands, Azerbaijan, Brazil, Kenya.

Most frequently referenced priorities:

- Access to Information
- Accountability
- Public Participation
- Open Data

- Other frequently referenced priorities (in order)
  - Reuse of government information and data
  - Drive economic growth/promote innovation
  - Improve information management
  - Improve public services
  - Protect civil liberties
  - Transparency
  - Alternative service delivery
  - Government efficiency
  - Prevent corruption
  - Promote corporate accountability

- Formal Plans:
  - plan adopted by city council or provincial government
  - Should include at least 2 of the 4 characteristics (access to information; participation; accountability ; open data)
  - So, a formal open data plan would not be considered a formal open government plan

Elements of Open Government

- Access to information/accountability/participation; difficult to assess since these are frequently discussed; linked to very traditional notions of representative democracy

- Open Government: generally means going beyond base-line elements of electoral democracy and bureaucratic accountability.

- Access to information: in open government terms means more than standard willingness to share information upon request (freedom of information).

  - Rather involves proactive disclosure of information on regular basis

- Accountability; often referred to on government websites. Open government involves some commitment to enhancing accountability and transparency.
  - Often through social media and new information technologies
- Participation: commitment to expanding opportunities and vehicles for citizen involvement and participation.
  - Often through new modes of participation in combination with social media

Provincial

- 3 provinces have Open government frameworks, or have embarked on developing a framework:
    - Ontario
    - British Columbia
    - Newfoundland (launched March 2014)

- Open Data: all 10 provinces have open data portals

Municipal

- Examined the 50 most populous municipalities in Canada
- Categories:
    - Greater than 1 million people
    - 500,000 – 1 million
    - 200,000 – 500,000
    - 100,000 – 200,000

- Is not a random sample
- Some provinces better represented than others.
- More municipalities from British Columbia (9), Ontario (23), Quebec (10).

- 6 municipalities had formal plans:

- Toronto, Vancouver, Edmonton, Kitchener, Regina, Guelph
- 5/6 had an emphasis on all 4 elements examined
- Regina: only Access to Information and Open Data

Results:

Size	Formal Plan	Access to information	Accountability	Participation	Open Data
>1 million n = 3	1 (33%)	2 (66%)	2 (66%)	2 (66%)	3 (100%)
500,000 – 1 million n=8	2 (25%)	3 (37.5%)	1 (4.6%)	1(4.6%)	8 (100%)
200,000 – 500,000 n=12	1 (8.3%)	1 (8.3%)	1 (8.3%)	1 (8.3%)	6 (50%)
100,000 – 200,000	2 (7.4%)	2 (7.4%)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	12 (44%)
Total	6 (12%)	8 (16%)	5 (10%)	3 (6%)	29 (58%)

Open Government themes by Province

	BC	Alta	Sask	MB	ON	QC	NB	NS	PEI	NL
Formal Plan		1	1		4					
Access to info.	1	2	1		4					
Accountability	1	1			3					
participation	1	1			3					
Open data	4	2	2	1	18	3		1		1

Conclusions

- Generally the concept of open government has not penetrated municipal levels
- Open data as a concept has wider acceptance
- Existence of a formal plan tends to lead to emphasis on more characteristics of Open Data

Future Questions

- What are the obstacles/impediments to the adoption of open government in municipalities?
- What are the range and quality of open government initiatives?
- Moving beyond: Democratic administration and capacity-building?