



Using the OBI 2008 to Advocate for More Open and Accountable Budgets

The Open Budget Index can be a powerful tool to advocate for greater transparency, public participation and accountability in government budgets. Below are some ideas for ways to use the OBI in advocacy efforts in your country. Not all of these suggestions will be appropriate for all contexts; focusing on one or two might be the most effective strategy for you to create the political space in which further efforts might be undertaken. You are the best judge of what might work best in your country.

1. Be **SMART**—your advocacy objective should be:
 - **Specific:** Don't just define the problem—specify an action or policy that will address it. The OBI can assist in identifying practical measures that you can recommend to government officials to improve budget transparency and accountability. For example, if your government fails to make budget documents available to the public, you might focus on advocating for changes in the budget process law that would require the public disclosure of documents or for a Freedom of Information law.
 - **Measurable:** You need to be able to measure progress toward your goal to make sure that your campaign is on track.
 - **Attainable:** Impractical goals are hard to communicate, unlikely to garner widespread support and even less likely to result in effective policies or solutions.
 - **Realistic:** Significant change does not happen overnight. Propose a plan or a way of getting there that makes your goal realistic.
 - **Timely:** Set a realistic timeframe for achieving the goal. For big or long-term goals, break them down into intermediate steps. As each step is achieved, your campaign will be re-energized and able to garner more support.
2. **Identify your target audience**
 - **Who are they?** After you've identified your advocacy goal, you need to determine who your campaign needs to reach in order to achieve that goal. This is the person or institution with the power to make the changes you seek. In addition to your primary audience, you might want to identify a secondary audience that might be able to influence the ultimate decision maker.
 - **How can you motivate them?** Once you've identified your target audiences, the next step will be to think about what motivates them. This will help you determine effective messages and will guide your strategy. For example, if you know that your executive is motivated by the country's status within your region, you might want to emphasize how the country measured up on the OBI compared to its neighbors as an incentive to be more transparent. Alternatively, if you identify department-level civil servants as a secondary audience, you might choose to emphasize how greater transparency will improve their ability to do their jobs. Although the specifics of your messages will probably vary from audience to audience, the underlying message should always relate directly to your advocacy goals.

3. **Bring others onboard**

- **Who else can help?** An advocacy effort that has broad-based support is more likely to succeed and achieve sustainable results, so use the OBI release as an opportunity to raise the issues of budget transparency and accountability with a wide range of potential stakeholders, including other civil society organizations (CSOs), community and professional associations, business organizations, religious groups and youth groups. You can discuss the issues raised by your country's OBI results in broad terms and then ask these groups to talk about how they are affected by the lack of transparency in the budget process. Although it can take longer to do so, if you try to involve these groups in identifying your advocacy goal, you will increase the likelihood of success. The more ownership the community feels for the goals, the stronger a campaign ultimately will be.
- **How can we reach them?** These discussions can take place individually or at a meeting of all or several of the groups. Also, don't assume opposition; invite all to the table. If someone raises questions or concerns or outright opposes your efforts, it can be an opportunity for you to identify weaknesses in your argument or proposal and address them before you move forward.

4. **Get the word out:** The strategy or combination of strategies that you choose and the timing of those activities again will depend on the particular context in which you are working. Whatever strategies you choose, remember that your message is most effective when it is delivered in straightforward, accessible language that is concise and free of jargon.

- **Formal presentations to government bodies** – Use the OBI findings to strengthen testimony at legislative and administrative hearing and briefings. *Suggested materials:* OBI Key Findings, your country summary, and policy brief with your recommendations.
- **Presentations to stakeholder groups** – Arrange to give presentations to potential allies, including government agencies, CSOs, academia, legislative staff, central banks, business groups, etc. *Suggested materials:* OBI Key Findings, country summary, your policy brief with recommendations, OBI postcards and wall charts.
- **Meetings with potential allies** – Conduct one-on-one meetings with supportive members of the legislature or civil service. *Suggested materials:* OBI Key Findings, country summary, policy brief with your recommendations, OBI postcard and wall chart.
- **Presentations to members of the public** – Conduct interactive presentations with members of the public as a way to increase awareness of the issues of transparency and accountability and build their capacity to participate in important public debates and decision-making processes. For example, you could conduct community-based public hearings or a series of “house parties.” These are informal events that can be held at the home of a member of your organization or at a public meeting place. (If your organization does not have a broad base in the community, this is an excellent opportunity for you to partner with another organization that does.) The person organizing the party invites his or her friends to come and hear someone speak about the issue and answer their questions or hear their stories. If your advocacy goal is to pass a specific law or have the government take some particular action, these events are a great place to ask people to sign petitions, write letters or attend rallies, hearings, etc. *Suggested materials:* CD of “It’s Your Money,” OBI

Key Findings, country summary, policy brief with your recommendations, postcards and wall posters.

- **Outreach to media** – The release of independent research that shows how your country compares to others in your region and around the world on open and accountable government is a big opportunity to generate media coverage of the issue. **Radio** has the potential to reach a broad audience, so contact the stations in your country and ask them to cover the story and play “It’s Your Money.” Let them know you are available for an interview. *Suggested materials:* CD of “It’s Your Money,” press release, OBI Key Findings, country summary, and policy brief with your recommendations.

You can hold a **press conference** that features a presentation of the OBI findings and comments from various stakeholders, such as civil society leaders, legislators or researchers. Keep in mind that including some real people who are affected by the lack of transparency in your country can be very powerful additions to these events. For example, in the late 1990’s Fundar, a CSO in Mexico, advocated for greater public access to budget information as part of an effort to increase funding for health care for pregnant women to prevent complications, disability and death related to motherhood. In such a case, it would be very powerful for a woman who had suffered from a lack of such care to speak at a press conference about her experience. *Suggested materials:* media advisory and press release, CD of “It’s Your Money,” OBI Key Findings, country summary, policy brief with your recommendations, postcards and wall posters.

An **alternative to a press conference** might be to invite media to an event that centers on you and your allies delivering the OBI results and related materials to a legislator or other national government official, a school, a local government official or a library. As you present the materials, you will have an opportunity to deliver your message. *Suggested materials:* media advisory and press release, OBI Key Findings, country summary, policy brief with your recommendations, postcard and wall poster.

You should include **non-traditional media outlets**, such as relevant websites and blogs, in your outreach efforts. For instance, you may be working to improve access to maternal health services, and the OBI revealed that a lack of budget transparency makes it difficult to track the extent to which the government and donors can be held accountable for their promises to improve such access. You could contact a popular blogger who writes about health care issues and ask them to write a posting.

And remember to post the OBI findings, the audio file of “It’s Your Money” and other supporting materials on **your organization’s website**. *Suggested materials:* media advisory and press release, link to audio file of “It’s Your Money,” OBI Key Findings, country summary, and policy brief with your recommendations, postcards and wall posters.

Conduct a **training for journalists** on the OBI and budget transparency. Invite reporters from print and broadcast media to a capacity-building workshop at which you explain how the OBI is conducted, what the results are for your country and different ways to interpret those results in stories they might develop, including how they might look at them in a regional context and, most important, how to look at them in the context of what is

happening in your country. *Suggested materials:* OBI Key Findings, methodology document, country summary, policy brief with your recommendations, postcards and wall posters.