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**Open Government in Transition:
A Case Study of the
Canadian Geomatics Community Round Table**

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Executive Summary

Open Government is a new movement whereby governments around the world are making their vast data holdings available to the public to use in the development of new knowledge products, to support more evidence-based decision-making, and to make government more transparent.

Government data holdings range across every area of human interest, from health and finance to labour markets, culture and the environment. These datasets are said to be to the knowledge economy what natural resources were to the industrial economy: they are the raw material from which wealth in the knowledge economy will be created. They are among our most important public assets for the future.

The Canadian Geomatics Community Round Table (CGCRT) is a multi-stakeholder body whose members come from across the geomatics community,¹ including governments, private-sector organizations, NGOs, universities and colleges, and data/service consumers. It operates as a collaborative body that neither has nor seeks the authority to make decisions that are binding on its members or on other organizations.

At present, the CGCRT's primary focus is on the development and delivery of a *pan-Canadian geomatics strategy*. The origins of this project are rooted in major technological changes in the field of geomatics, underway for more than a decade, and in the economic opportunities created by opening up the access to government geospatial data.

In the fall of 2007, Canadian governments launched a country-wide consultation process to re-think the way the geomatics community operates in a digital world. The final report identified eight "elements" on which a new national strategy was to be based.

However, it soon became clear that these elements were less a *strategy* than elements that needed to be included in a strategy. For example, while the report called on the community to *collaborate more effectively to modernize the sector*, it provided no real direction on how to make collaboration happen.

Over the next three years, a second wave of conferences and meetings was convened to discuss what a real strategy to modernize the sector would look like. During this period, two key developments took place.

First, a Round Table was formed and eventually emerged as an independent body whose main purpose was to act as a multi-stakeholder *advisory* group to existing government bodies. However, views on this began to change quickly, which led to the second development.

Some participants argued that the geomatics community needed a credible and influential body that could propose and advocate for broad directions for the community as a whole. To compete globally and to become leaders in the global geomatics industry, the Canadian sector needed to distinguish itself; it needed to find a "Canadian niche."

¹ Geomatics is the discipline of gathering, storing, processing, and delivering geographic information.

Traditionally, a public policy strategy is a government plan to bring about change within a particular policy space by concentrating government resources and effort on some goals rather than others.

By comparison, a pan-Canadian strategy would aim at achieving far more comprehensive change within the sector by working to align the community-as-a-whole around a shared vision of its future and mobilizing its members around shared goals, the pursuit of which would help to realize this vision.

Round Table members recognized from the beginning that developing such a strategy would require an ambitious formal dialogue process to explore and assess the perspectives of key stakeholders—e.g. governments, businesses, universities and colleges, and NGOs—identify important shared interests, and develop a common plan or “strategy” that they could align around.

Such a process, they concluded, could not be led by the existing governmental bodies in the sector. It required a new kind of organization: a genuinely multi-stakeholder body that could represent private, NGO and university interests, as well as those of government. The Round Table, they decided, was the only real candidate.

Participants therefore unanimously agreed to form an Interim Steering Committee for the Round Table with a clear mandate to develop a pan-Canadian strategy. The process began with the production of a white paper. The ideas contained there were then developed and refined by Round Table members over a series of meetings.

Finally, a draft strategy was presented to over a hundred representatives from across the community at a two-day workshop held in Ottawa in June 2014, where participants vetted and finalized the strategy.

At the end of the discussion, over half the participants volunteered to serve on one or more of seven new working groups, each of which was tasked with devising a two-year plan that will leverage their members’ official positions in the geomatics community.

At the same time, the working group members will serve as advocates for the strategy and catalysts for further discussion within their own networks, reaching out to political leaders, senior government officials and those in private and third sector organizations.

In short, the working groups are intended to create a ripple effect that carries the strategy further outward into the geomatics community, resulting in increased awareness of and support for it.

At the same time, the Round Table will provide increasingly visible leadership within the geomatics community and will draw on its considerable networks to advocate for the strategy.

In summary, the Canadian Geomatics Community Round Table provides an innovative and timely example of how collaboration is moving the yardsticks on Open Government. Although the project is still being implemented, two aspects of it are highly instructive.

First, the pan-Canadian strategy is more comprehensive than many conventional public policy strategies as it takes a big step in the direction of aligning state and non-state actors behind shared goals on the management of geospatial data, which is now seen as a public resource.

Second, the Round Table establishes a new kind of formal relationship between state and non-state actors, one that allows them to collaborate not only on the management of this public asset, but in ways that will ensure that Canadian governments, business, universities and colleges, and individual citizens share in the opportunities it creates.

The lesson for Open Government generally is that community dialogue can bring shared interests to light and reveal how and where state and non-state actors might be ready, willing and able to work together to leverage such data as a critical new public resource.

What Is Open Government?

Open Government is a global movement gaining momentum from public demands for more transparency and accountability and from the opportunity new digital technologies provide. [Open Government focuses] on three related components:

- **Open Dialogue** is about using new ways to provide the public with a meaningful voice in planning and decision-making so government can better understand the public interest, capture novel ideas and partner on the development of policies, programs and services.
- **Open Information** is about proactively releasing information about the operation of government to improve transparency and accountability, and promote more informed and productive public debate.
- **Open Data** is about proactively publishing some of the data collected by government in free, accessible and machine-readable formats and encouraging its use by the public as well as within government.

From [Open by Default: A New Way Forward for Ontario](#), Ontario Ministry of Government Services - May 2014.

1. Introduction

1.1 Geomatics and the Open Government Movement

The Open Government Partnership is a worldwide movement of some 65 countries that have joined together to improve governance through principles such as transparency, openness and public engagement.² Canada's Minister of Open Government, Tony Clement, announced Canada's full membership in the organization in April 2012.

Since the Partnership was first launched in 2011, much of the work has focused on Open Data. Governments around the world are now making their vast data holdings available to the public to use in the development of new knowledge products, to support more evidence-based decision-making, and to make government more transparent.

Government data holdings are now widely recognized as a critical public asset for the future. They range across every area of human interest, from health and finance to labour markets, culture and the environment. Some people say these datasets are to the knowledge economy what natural resources were to the industrial economy: the raw material from which our wealth and prosperity will be created.

Geomatics³ provides a good example. Traditionally, governments at all levels collected and managed geospatial data - mainly to make maps. Today, thanks to the principle of Open Data, much of that geospatial data and information is available to businesses, NGOs, universities and colleges, and individuals who use it to create a vast range of products and services by blending information drawn from different data sets.

Integrating demographic, socio-economic or environmental data with geospatial data yields powerful new insights into areas such as emergency response, actuarial science, transportation, urban planning, business development, service delivery, and resource development.

² The Open Government Partnership, <http://www.opengovpartnership.org/>

³ Geomatics is defined as a modern discipline which integrates the tasks of gathering, storing, processing, modeling, analyzing, and delivering geospatial or location data and information. It encompasses the disciplines of surveying, hydrography, mapping, remote sensing (often called Earth observation) and geographic information processing (often called GIS).

But Open Government is about much more than Open Data. Open Dialogue is a second stream of activity. Putting geospatial data to use—whether for commercial or public purposes—often requires a collaborative approach to planning and decision-making. Here too, geomatics provides a timely example.

In the United States “location-based services” are a \$75 billion industry that employs 500,000 people, and the sector is growing exponentially.⁴ To help them succeed in this market, Canadian geomatics companies would like to define a “Canadian niche” that allows them to provide specialized services to clients around the world.

While experts agree the prospects for establishing such a niche are good, there is no guarantee that this will happen simply through market forces. Much hinges on key decisions that will be made in the coming years by governments and stakeholders here at home. But no government, CEO or board of directors has the authority or influence to ensure that all the right choices are made.

This is where the second principle of Open Government comes in: Open Dialogue. If leaders in the geomatics sector want to ensure a niche emerges, they must align around a shared plan or strategy designed to create one—and they must do so *voluntarily*.

Open Dialogue allows for the exchange of ideas and information, the analysis of circumstances, the setting of priorities, and the making of compromises, decisions and mutual commitments that will be needed to forge and implement a shared plan or strategy.

Finally, Open Government has a third principle: Open Information. Open Dialogue will only succeed if the participants have access to all the relevant information. They must be free to inform themselves, learn about one another’s concerns and goals, and come to trust that they are acting in good faith. This means information cannot be hidden, controlled or used to manipulate participants or circumstances. The dialogue process must be open and transparent.

All three of these principles—Open Data, Open Information and Open Dialogue—have converged in a remarkable process within the Canadian geomatics community. Over the last decade, stakeholders and governments have been engaged in a dialogue on how to modernize the sector in response to changes brought on by new technologies. The result is highly encouraging, perhaps even inspiring.

In an environment where “transformation” has become a cliché, this is a story of genuine and impressive organizational transformation. The Canadian Geomatics Community Round Table is a new kind of governance body that operates across conventional public, private and third sector boundaries, both for planning and implementation. It also provides a model for collaborative governance that is highly exportable to other policy fields.

This case study tells the story of the evolution of the Round Table and of its approach to policymaking. Along the way, it also draws out some of the parallels between the Round Table

⁴ The Boston Consulting Group, <http://www.bcg.com/documents/file109372.pdf>

and Open Government to suggest that, on one hand, this movement could learn important lessons from the Round Table; and, on the other, that the Round Table might benefit from casting its own work in the language of Open Government.

Part I traces the dialogue process in the geomatics community that was launched almost 10 years ago and that led eventually to the establishment of the Round Table. The account focuses on bringing out the rationale behind the shift to collaboration and the role dialogue played in motivating parties to participate.

Part II asks what is needed to make the Round Table sustainable over the long term. It highlights some critical elements of the model that should contribute to this, as well as some features that will require further effort and attention.

The paper closes by looking ahead to future challenges for the Open Government movement and speculates on how the work of the Round Table might point the way forward for a new and promising phase of Open Government.

PART I: The Dialogue Process

2. Articulating Shared Interests

2.1 From GeoBase to GeoBase 2.0

The Canadian Council on Geomatics (CCOG) is the federal-provincial/territorial government body that collaborates to manage our governments' geospatial information. Since its creation in 1972, CCOG organizations have provided critical geographic information to help governments plan and coordinate their efforts to respond to major changes, such as globalization, the internet and emerging economies.

In particular, CCOG was responsible for the creation of GeoBase, a portal that makes national scale, government geospatial data available to Canadians. GeoBase has been in operation for a decade. Although it brought the Canadian geomatics community into the era of Open Data, technologies continued to evolve at a stunning pace.

New tools and new sources of data are creating new options and raising new issues, so that today the discussion of geomatics revolves around such things as high-resolution imaging, real time updating, integrating crowd-sourced or volunteered geographic information, and cloud computing. As a result, CCOG is now working on the next iteration GeoBase 2.0.

Building GeoBase 2.0 is proving to be a very different exercise from GeoBase. Certainly, the principle of Open Data remains central, but the design is far more open-ended so that many of the data layers that might be included in GeoBase 2.0 are optional. They are also expensive.

Given the limited resources available to governments, choices will have to be made, but on what basis? How will trade-offs be made between different options and priorities? These are pressing questions as CCOG moves ahead and they have pushed the exercise much deeper into the two other streams of Open Government: Open Dialogue and Open Information. We'll return to this shortly.

2.2 The National Mapping Strategy

In 2007, CCOG launched a two-year, cross-country consultation process involving some 700 stakeholders. The goal was to develop a plan for modernizing the sector. The final report identified eight “elements” that were supposed to be the basis of a new “national mapping strategy” for Canada.⁵

However, if a strategy is an action plan to bring about desired change, it was quickly clear that this document was less a *strategy* than a list of things to be included in a strategy. In particular, participants talked a lot about the need for collaboration, which seemed to resonate with them but, at the time, amounted to little more than a conviction that the changing environment called for new forms of leadership and organization. People may have liked the concept, but no one was very clear how to put it into practice.

The issue came up again in June 2010 at the Canadian Geomatics Conference in Calgary. Some forty members of the community gathered for dinner, where they participated in a facilitated discussion on how to align the geomatics community and strengthen partnerships between its members. Participants talked about the challenges and opportunities posed by new technologies and how other changes in the global economy were affecting their roles.

While no clear directives were set at the meeting, by the end “collaborative governance” had emerged as a key theme for the future. Whatever this meant, people seemed to agree that it required a range of new tools, including protocols, processes and new forums for dialogue, as well as a change in “culture” based on new ways of learning and new kinds of relationships between stakeholders and between stakeholders and governments.

Still, had the discussion ended there, it is not clear what, if anything, would have changed. Fortunately, CCOG’s annual meeting for 2010 had been scheduled to coincide with the conference. When CCOG officials met the next day they quickly agreed that some kind of plan was urgently needed to respond to the issues raised at the dinner session.

⁵ The eight elements included:

- Consultative and Inclusive Governance
- National Approach, Regional and Local Decision-Making
- Common Technological Foundation
- Current and Available Data
- Geographical Data as a Public Asset
- Outreach and Communications
- A Vibrant Geomatics Industry
- An Available and Educated Labour Force

By the end of the CCOG meeting, a six-point action plan had been hammered out that was intended to finally get things moving. The first point on the list was the evolution of GeoBase to GeoBase 2.0.⁶ Up to that point, GeoBase had been treated mainly as a government initiative. Putting it at the top of the Six-Point Plan effectively linked it into the emerging discussions on collaborative governance. This was a clear sign that all the talk about collaboration was beginning to translate into action and that the principle of Open Data was becoming linked with Open Dialogue and Open Information.

In June 2011, a second meeting of the Calgary group—now dubbed the “Round Table”—was convened to allow for a multi-stakeholder discussion on the Six-Point Plan. There was agreement on all sides that questions such as those around GeoBase 2.0 would not be solved by government officials alone, but required an ongoing discussion with stakeholders from across the sector.

Four multi-stakeholder working groups were established under the auspices of the Round Table and tasked with investigating key aspects of the Plan and offering strategic direction and advice on them to Natural Resources Canada and the CCOG.

These working groups were the first real sign that the Round Table was emerging as a forum for a new kind of collaborative dialogue. Indeed, one of the working groups was explicitly focused on governance and tasked with exploring options for a formal structure for the Round Table.

2.3 From Advisors to Leaders

By the time the third meeting of the Round Table was held in Ottawa in June 2012, the participants were becoming anxious. The Round Table had four working groups, an assembly of members, and was supported by a small Secretariat from NRCan.

Participants felt it was time to clarify why it was there, how it worked and who its members were. But if there was general agreement on the need to answer these questions, there was less agreement on the answers participants offered.

In particular, members were divided over whether the Round Table should continue to see itself as a multi-stakeholder *advisory* group to government bodies like the CCOG or whether it should carve out a more ambitious role as a new multi-stakeholder, collaborative body that could do more than advise government bodies.

Those who leaned to the latter felt that the geomatics community needed a credible and influential body to propose and advocate for broad directions for the community as a whole.

⁶ The six points are:

- Evolution of GeoBase (to GeoBase 2.0)
- Development of a National Imagery Plan
- Creation of a Federal Geospatial Infrastructure (Collaborative Geospatial Architecture)
- Renewal of the national DEM
- Realization of a study on the economic impact of geomatics in Canada
- Definition of an analytical matrix to address Sustainability of geomatics (particularly HR)

For example, they argued that new opportunities for geomatics companies are emerging in the international market. Many Canadian companies are relatively small in comparison with their international competitors, which makes it hard for them to break into this market and compete globally to become leaders in the industry. The Canadian sector, they said, needs a “Canadian niche.”

They were confident that such a niche could be created, but only if the right decisions are made by governments and stakeholders here at home. This proposal went far beyond the principle of Open Data, which until then had provided much of the philosophical basis of GeoBase. The questions it raised were strategic and far-reaching: Will governments adopt the right regulations and policies? Will businesses make the necessary investments? Will post-secondary institutions provide the right education and training to the next generation of experts in the field?

The only way to ensure the answers to these questions are affirmative, advocates said, is for private companies, governments, universities and colleges, and NGOs to work together and align around a shared plan or strategy designed to create the new niche—what the participants called a *pan-Canadian strategy*—and for this they would have to redefine the basis of the Round Table.

Any effort to develop such a strategy, they concluded, would need a new kind of leadership to make it happen. The task could not be carried out by the existing governmental bodies in the sector. It requires a new kind of organization: a genuinely multi-stakeholder body that could represent private, NGO and university interests, as well as those of F-P/T governments. The Round Table, they insisted, was the only real candidate.

Further discussion around the idea of a pan-Canadian strategy quickly confirmed that it would be about much more than creating an international niche for Canadian businesses. It would also provide guidance in the development of GeoBase 2.0 and help promote the use of geospatial data as a key contributor to evidence-based policymaking in governments.

These discussions convinced many in the room that the Six-Point Plan did not go far enough. A strategy was needed for the community as a whole, and participants unanimously agreed to form an interim steering committee with a clear mandate to:

- Develop a draft **Terms of Reference** for the now deemed **Canadian Geomatics Community Round Table (CGCRT)**, including a formal governance structure that would allow it to play this new role;
- Lay the groundwork for a Pan-Canadian Strategy through the development of a **white paper**; and
- Develop a **work plan** with milestones and outputs that would advance this project.

This third meeting thus was a watershed for the Round Table. Up to that point, the sector had been engaged in a long and searching discussion about how new technologies were changing the environment and breaking down traditional boundaries; and on the need for more collaboration in the sector.

Round Table members were finally beginning to get clear on where their shared interests lay, why they were important, and why they needed a new approach to governance to manage these interests. The Round Table had taken a decisive step toward becoming a new and very different kind of public policy organization and, as a result, collaboration was starting to look like more than just an aspiration. The next step was to produce the white paper.

3. The Strategy: Shared Ownership and a Shared Plan

3.1 Scenario-Building and the Team Canada Approach

The Interim Steering Committee agreed the white paper should be based on a dialogue technique known as “scenario planning.” A scenario is a story that describes a possible future for someone or something—in this case, the geomatics sector.

In a way, adopting this approach meant returning to the beginnings of the dialogue process and getting members to retrace their steps, but this time in a much more systematic way.

The white paper starts by proposing two lists for consideration. The first one describes seven *strategic dimensions* for the sector. Each strategic dimension provides a lens through which to view some particular aspect of the geomatics sector that it would be possible to change. The current business model is an example. It involves little collaboration, but the pan-Canadian strategy could propose ways to introduce collaboration, thereby changing this “strategic dimension.”

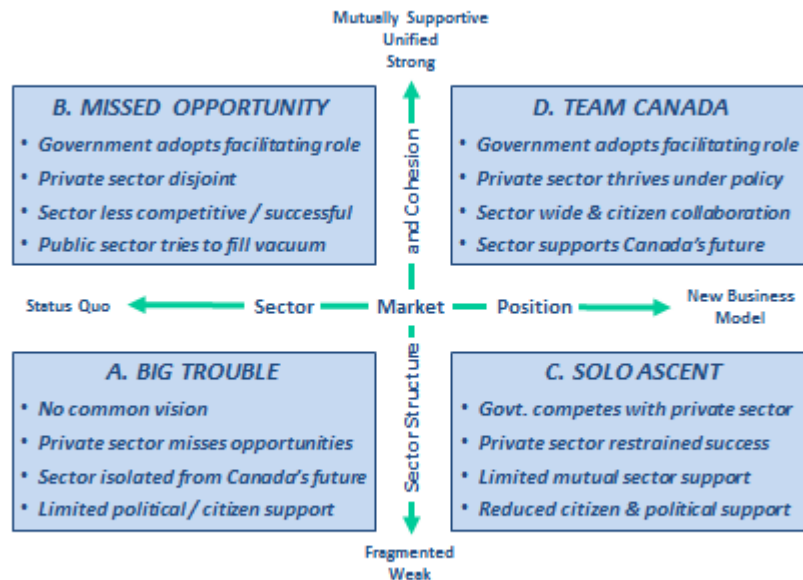
The second list is what the white paper calls *drivers* of change. These are forces set in motion by circumstances outside the control of the sector, but that are impacting on it in ways that affect organizational behaviour. Two examples are the increasing speed of communications and government deficit cutting.

Scenario planning examines how these two sets of factors—strategic dimensions and drivers—interact to shape or reshape how the sector works. More specifically, by making changes to the strategic dimensions it is often possible to change how the drivers impact on the sector. For example, adopting a more collaborative business model could make a big difference in how businesses deal with the speed of communications.

In this view, a good strategy will propose changes to the strategic dimensions that help ensure the drivers have a positive impact rather than a negative one. This brings us to the third—and most important—aspect of scenario-building: *relationships*.

The white paper goes on to ask Round Table members to consider different ways that the members of the geomatics community—governments, business, universities and colleges, NGOs and citizens as consumers and users of geomatics products—might interact in the coming years; and how different kinds of relationships between them may be instrumental in bringing about change in the strategic dimensions.

When the white paper was presented to the Round Table at a two-day workshop in Ottawa in January, 2013, members were asked to use the dimensions and drivers to explore four basic scenarios for how the geomatics sector might evolve by 2020, depending on the relationships between governments, stakeholders and citizens:



These four basic relationship-options range from a very collaborative one—Team Canada—to one in which there is little coordination or communication: Big Trouble. Which option prevails is critical because some of the desired changes to the strategic dimensions require collaboration. Failing to collaborate thus effectively ensures they won't happen.

In the Team Canada scenario stakeholders and governments agree to work together to reshape the seven strategic dimensions of the sector by adopting the following roles:

- Governments will act more as a “facilitator” for the sector and aim to create the supporting conditions for businesses to work together effectively, such as establishing common standards for data collection.
- The private sector will focus on a range of specialized, value-added services for both consumer and business markets to establish a niche in which Canada is internationally competitive.
- Universities and colleges train students in the kind of skills they will need to prosper in this environment.
- Citizens will become more informed about how they are using the data in their daily lives and how they can use it for other purposes, such as supporting discussions around climate change, sustainable natural resources or food security.

The Team Canada scenario thus envisions a future where the community is aligned and coordinated. As a result, government understands what kinds of choices it needs to make to support citizens, business and NGOs; the private sector establishes an international niche and prospers; universities and colleges can form a clear plan for training students for the future; and citizens can contribute to the collection and innovative use of data.

When Round Table members were asked to choose the scenario they thought was best suited to guide the development of a pan-Canadian strategy, they quickly rallied around the Team Canada approach, which was officially adopted at the January 2013 meeting.

3.2 Developing the Strategy

The scenario-building exercise was a milestone for the Round Table. The seven strategic dimensions laid a solid foundation for the pan-Canadian strategy and clarified the rationale for collaboration. The stage was set to begin constructing the strategy.

As a final step at the January 2013 meeting, a permanent steering committee was elected and tasked with overseeing the process. Seven Task Teams were created, one for each of the seven strategic dimensions, including:

- Identity (create profile for the sector at home and abroad)
- Market (enable industry to be more innovative, productive, and competitive)
- Business Model (define optimal roles and relationships to support the sector)
- Leadership & Governance (define the governance model to support the sector)
- Education & Capacity Building (identify skills and provide training required to build a sustainable work force)
- Data Sources (identify who has which data and how it is being managed)
- Legal & Policy (develop legal and policy framework to support the sector)

Each Task Team was charged with producing a discussion paper that would identify key issues and objectives in its area and make recommendations on what elements should be addressed by the pan-Canadian strategy.

By the spring of 2013, these discussion documents had been completed and were posted on the Round Table website. The community-at-large was invited to comment on the findings to help ensure they reflected the views and input of as many people as possible.

Finally, in November 2013, the Steering Committee met for a two-day workshop to review the seven discussion papers and the comments from the community. The goal was to integrate the findings into the first complete draft of the pan-Canadian strategy, which was divided into three main parts:

- **The Vision**, which describes the ideal state for the sector by 2020;
- **The Mission**, which captures what must be done to realize the vision; and

- **The Guiding Principles**, which defines how governments and stakeholders collaborate within the sector.⁷

In addition, the draft strategy contained:

- **Strategic objectives for the strategic dimensions:** These are the high level objectives for each of the seven strategic dimensions. They provide the primary point of reference for developing action plans to achieve the vision.
- **A draft or “straw man” version of the action and implementation plan:** This is a first draft of the actions needed to meet the strategic objectives for each dimension in order to achieve the Team Canada Vision

3.3 Finalizing the Strategy and Moving to Implementation

Once the draft strategy was in place, it was time to reconvene the Round Table. A two-day meeting was set up for June 2014 in Ottawa to finalize the strategy and develop the implementation plan.

Along with regular members, other representatives from across the sector were invited. In all, about 120 people attended from across the country—an impressive showing.

The agenda included both plenary sessions and table discussions. In the latter, participants were asked to review, discuss, prioritize and revise the “straw man” implementation plans, which were really first drafts of the action plans that were included to help start the discussion. The revised action plans were then presented to the entire group in plenary and voted on.

As many of the participants were being introduced to the Round Table and the strategy for the first time, there were lots of questions about the content. There was also some confusion about the role of the Round Table. Some wondered if it was trying to create a new association of some kind or perhaps an umbrella organization for the sector.

Nevertheless, participants rose to the occasion, engaging the material and making a serious effort to fulfil their roles. The result was a significantly revised but improved version of the draft strategy.

If the level of buy-in to the document was uncertain, participants showed genuine interest in the project. Perhaps the best evidence of this was their willingness to sign onto one or more of seven working groups that were created and tasked with leading implementation of the strategy. About 50 of the 120 participants volunteered to serve on these working groups.

Over the next year they will be reviewing, prioritizing and refining the plans adopted at the June 2014 meeting. The current plan is to reconvene in early 2015 where progress to date will be

⁷ The full text of these three elements can be found in the appendix at the end of this case study or on the CGCRT website at: www.cgcr.ca

evaluated and implementation will move to the next level under the leadership of a new steering committee.

How far will implementation progress and how quickly? That is a pressing question and the next big hurdle to be cleared. While there is no guarantee of success, much thought has been given to the conditions around success and what must be achieved if the Round Table is to be sustainable. In Part II we will examine some of the plans and possibilities.

PART II: Sustainability

4. Identity and Community-Building

Identity is first on the list of the seven strategic objectives. According to the discussion paper on Identity, the Canadian geomatics industry is increasingly fragmented and lacking in direction. In effect, it is in the midst of an “identity crisis.”⁸

Rebuilding the sector’s identity is seen as a critical step toward creating cohesion and purposefulness within the sector; and this, in turn, is essential for its sustainability. So what is required and how has the work over the last few years contributed?

At the June 2012 meeting, a facilitator was brought in to talk to Round Table members about collaboration. Most dialogue processes, he said, remain trapped in a culture of consultation and/or negotiation.

In traditional consultation, stakeholders have the opportunity to express their views on a topic to government, but once they have been aired, officials withdraw to deliberate in private over what they have heard and make decisions about what the government will do. The more complex the issue, the more difficult it is for government to explain the rationale for its choices once they have been made. As a result, decisions made behind closed doors often seem arbitrary and biased to other stakeholders, leaving them feeling manipulated and powerless.

In traditional negotiation, the parties bargain with each other over their respective interests. In such a process, dialogue appears as a zero-sum game in which the parties try to defend their position, guard information, and press each other for the best deal possible, often by strategizing about one another’s behavior and goals. Over time, such a relationship can become adversarial, tense, and suspicious, with some parties believing their interests have suffered or been dealt with unfairly.

In a collaborative approach, participants come to recognize that making reasonable compromises and concessions with one another can be a winning strategy for everyone because it moves them closer to their shared goals. Much like interest-based negotiation, the goal is to get all the

⁸ <http://cgert.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Identity-V-2.0.pdf>

stakeholders to see their interests more as interdependent and complementary so that a win for one can also be a win for the others.

As we've seen, collaboration has been a central theme in the development of the Round Table and the pan-Canadian strategy. Indeed, much of the work over the last decade can be seen as an effort to redefine and reorganize the community on a more collaborative basis. And clearly, progress has been made.

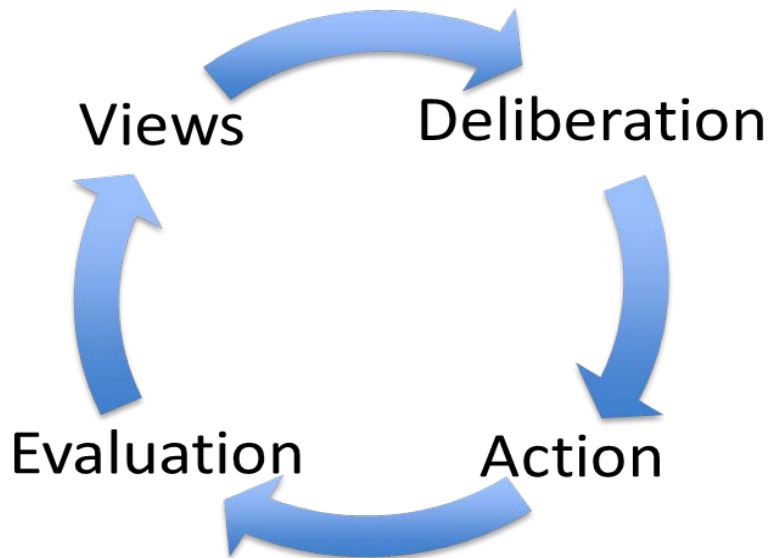
Since the discussion was launched, members of the community have explored the changing issue-space together, looked for common interests, determined where and how these interests are linked, and devised ways to work together to promote them through the Round Table and the pan-Canadian strategy.

Of course, the strategy has yet to be implemented and it is possible that the initiative collapses or peters out before this is achieved. Still, simply having produced such a strategy (and implementation plan) has already taken the members of the Round Table far beyond their early talk of protocols, forums and culture change. Together, they have defined and are now testing a highly innovative model of collaboration.

It is especially encouraging to see how governments have risen to the occasion. Although talk of collaboration is now common in most governments, often this is little more than talk. Indeed, many officials still think collaboration involves some kind of transfer of government authority to stakeholders that threatens to compromise government's independence.

As is apparent from the plan, however, nothing of the sort has occurred. On the contrary, governments have found that they can work closely with the stakeholder community to form a robust plan without in any way compromising their own roles and responsibilities. Collaboration is seen as a win-win strategy.

This leads to a second point about sustainability. While the goals of the pan-Canadian strategy are robust—even far-reaching—the implementation plan can be relatively modest in scope. The goals will not be achieved overnight, nor should we expect them to be. The partners can and should look at the strategy as a long-term enterprise that will involve an ongoing series of planning, implementation and evaluation cycles, of which this is only the first. The process is thus meant to be *cyclical*, as follows:



Looking at the project this way keeps expectations in check and makes it feel much more realistic and manageable to everyone involved. Change takes time and everyone needs to keep this in mind.

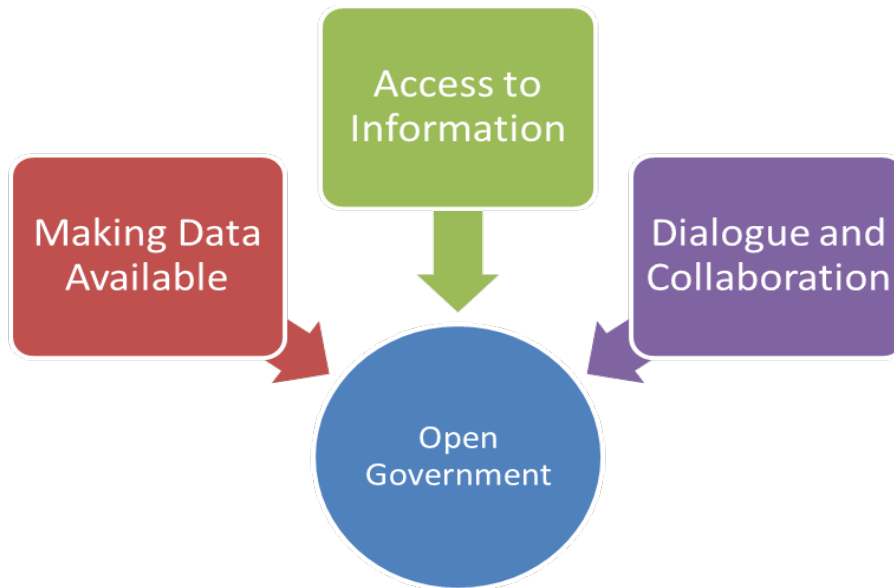
By the same token, learning to collaborate is a skill that is acquired through practice and over time. As the various subcommittees and parties carry out their work they will also be deepening their understanding of their common interests, evolving a shared language to describe new approaches, clarifying issues and opportunities, and building new tools, systems, and practices to support collaborative action.

As the cycles of dialogue and action progress, ideally, the geomatics community will become more inclusive and cohesive, issues will be more fully explored and defined, values and goals will shift and adjust, and there will be a series of successes so that openness and trust will build between the members of the Round Table and the community at large.

Collaboration thus is not just about achieving the goals of the pan-Canadian strategy; it is also a form of **community-building**. A shared identity is being forged, based on the members shared commitment to the goals of the strategy. This, in turn, creates a sense of shared purpose, trust and common interest that strengthens their commitment to the project, binds them together through this common identity, and brings about a gradual transformation of the community's culture.

In this view, the mission of the Round Table is not just to develop a pan-Canadian strategy or even a series of strategies, but to create a new and more collaborative way of managing the community's collective interests, based on an emerging sense of shared identity.

A very similar story could be told about Open Government, where the three streams of Open Data, Open Information and Open Dialogue should be looked on as slowly converging to form a new culture and a new way of doing business, as follows:



Over the last two years, Round Table members have made real progress on culture-change and community-building. Perhaps the best evidence is the impressive response at the June 2014 meeting. A significant number of the participants had little exposure to the Round Table or the strategy before the event, yet they quickly became caught up in the project. They were impressed enough with the Round Table’s work, vision and leadership that they volunteered to take on responsibilities for implementation to ensure the project continues to move forward. In short, they showed very encouraging signs of wanting to become members of the club.

5. Consolidating the Model

Over the years, there has been lots of talk about how the digital revolution has blurred conventional boundaries between government and business or NGOs. Indeed, as historians look back on this period, they may well find that the erosion of organizational boundaries and responsibilities is among the most important features that distinguish the digital from the industrial era.

But for all the talk of governments embracing collaboration in order to manage the growing interdependence, most of this “collaboration” still happens from within very conventional institutions, defined by conventional boundaries and practices. Governments may be more willing to listen to and discuss with stakeholders than a generation ago, but they still see policymaking as a government responsibility. By the same token, stakeholders may be quick to call for a collaborative approach, but when it comes to implementing the plan, many still look to government to do all of the heavy lifting.

Real collaboration is about joint decision-making AND shared implementation. This requires more than organizational change. It requires cultural change. As we've seen with the geomatics sector, this starts with shared interests. The idea of creating a Canadian niche in the global marketplace fits with governments' prosperity agenda, it is good for businesses, and it gives universities and colleges a focus for research and for training the next generation of practitioners. Everyone has something to gain.

But because no one is big enough to achieve this alone, not even government, the players began to see how and why they needed each other. The more they talked about this, the more sense it made to work together to articulate their shared goals and forge a plan to realize them. From an historical perspective, the idea that governments and stakeholders should agree to collaborate on such a project is novel and ambitious.⁹ Although some aspects of the implementation plan are still being developed, a number of important principles of the overall approach are now clear and provide important principles to guide future practice:

1. **Motivation matters:** All the parties need a clear reason to work together. Without this, collaboration will be very difficult to sustain.
2. **Community dialogue is the right starting point:** A multi-stakeholder dialogue is necessary to bring shared interests to light and the group's voices must reflect the range of interests and perspectives within the community.
3. **Action requires a shared plan:** Although shared interests are the starting point for collaboration, they are not enough. The partners need a clear plan that identifies the goals they are trying to achieve together and assigns roles and responsibilities to them.
4. **The plan must be comprehensive:** A public policy strategy is a plan to bring about change within a particular policy space by concentrating resources and effort on some goals rather than others. A community strategy works to align a community of interest around a shared vision of its future and to mobilize its members around shared goals, the pursuit of which will help to realize this vision.
5. **Leadership must be shared:** Such a process must be led by a genuinely multi-stakeholder body that can represent private, third sector and government interests fairly and as full partners.
6. **Membership should be networked:** Round Table members should come from other influential organizations/networks or nongovernment partners and have demonstrated ability to influence senior decision-makers within their own organizations to ensure that the RT's decisions will be recognized and respected by other bodies in the sector.

⁹ There are many examples where governments have designed such a strategy and then used their authority to force private and/or third sector actors to align behind it—say, by regulating them—or tried to persuade them to do so through various forms of incentives, such as tax write-offs. By and large, these strategies have been unsuccessful. The novelty in this approach is precisely the voluntary nature of everyone's participation.

7. **Participation is voluntary:** Because an organization such as the Round Table cannot make binding decisions, the effort to develop a community-wide strategy must involve and engage community members in ways that ensure they feel some real ownership of the dialogue and the decisions and some responsibility to participate in its implementation.
8. **Openness and mutual respect are essential:** Participants in the process must engage one another in a spirit of openness and mutual respect.
9. **The process is cyclical:** A community strategy should be seen as the product of a longer-term, cyclical project. This makes the task much more realistic and manageable. Not everything can or must be done immediately.
10. **The approach requires trust, but also builds trust:** As the dialogue progresses through a number of cycles, participants come to know and understand each other better. They share ideas and undertake projects together. Trust and good will develop along with the new relationship.
11. **Community engagement and leadership:** The Round Table needs to establish a high profile and respect within the community as a whole to ensure it can act as an effective and credible advocate for the community's interests.

The Canadian Geomatics Community Round Table is a remarkably innovative and potentially far-reaching step along the path of collaborative governance. It provides a timely example of how collaboration works and a model for the future. We should note, however, that the Round Table remains a work in progress. Governance is one of the seven strategic dimensions of the pan-Canadian strategy and at the June 2014 meeting the governance working group was tasked with making recommendations on how to finalize the governance structure. A number of questions have been discussed for some time:

- **Organizational Status:** Should the Round Table be incorporated? Doing so would give it an official status that might be necessary for more formalized partnerships, fundraising or other important activities.
- **Financial Sustainability:** If the Round Table is to be sustainable and an effective force in the community it will need to identify stable sources of funding. A number of options are being contemplated, such as membership fees and stakeholder contributions to specific projects.
- **The Executive:** Although a formal steering committee now exists, questions remain about the model and whether further tweaking is desirable or needed.
- **Membership:** There are a number of questions to be resolved in this discussion:
 - Who should be a member? We've seen that there is wide agreement that key organizations such as CCOG and the Surveyors should be represented. Who else would be on this list?

- How many members does the Round Table want? Is it better to keep in small—say, 30 – 40 members, or to allow as many members as wish to join? How would this affect Round Table meetings? What would be included in the duties/rights/privileges of members?
- Should membership be formalized at all? So far the Round Table has existed without formal membership and some “members” have argued that it should be more like a network. While most agree that a formal steering committee is needed, this is less clear.

A governance summit is being planned for some time in 2015, at which time a new steering committee will be chosen and the recommendations of the governance working group will be vetted and decided on. Completion of the governance structure should contribute to more effective leadership role for the Round Table as it proceeds with implementation of the strategy.

6. Open Government and the Geomatics Story

We’ve seen that the pan-Canadian strategy is more than just a comprehensive policy for the geomatics sector; it is also a community-building strategy. Still, it is one thing to have such a strategy and another to mobilize a large number of people behind it. For that, some kind of outreach program is necessary. And, indeed, the Round Table has been considering the need for a communications and engagement plan for some time.

While such a strategy has yet to be developed, some important first steps have already been taken, including the development of a Round Table website (www.cgcr.ca), the Canadian Geomatics Round Table LinkedIn Group, which has well over 600 members, and a Twitter site for the community (@CanGeoRT), which now has about 500 followers.

Still, this is only a beginning. To be sustainable, the Round Table must establish itself as a credible leadership body for the geomatics community at large, with the profile and moral authority to speak for it in a way that commands attention and respect. And to achieve this, it must inform and engage the community on the Round Table and the pan-Canadian strategy. According to the Identity discussion paper:

There is a need to communicate a more cohesive and compelling geomatics story...[and] an urgent need for taking action to identify more effective communication channels, re-thinking who should be targeted for communications and what the message(s) should be.

In this view, the starting point for an engagement strategy is a coherent, simple and compelling story about the Round Table, the pan-Canadian strategy, the role geospatial data plays in Canadians’ lives and the opportunities it creates for the future.

This case study is a step in that direction. First, it develops a storyline in which collaboration is the central theme; and then it goes on to suggest ways that this story could be re-framed in the language of Open Government. In closing, let us say a few final words about each.

Collaboration is not a new idea and over the years Canadian governments have experimented with various forms of it, from small community-based approaches to literacy to the quasi-corporatism of Quebec Inc.¹⁰

The Round Table moves the practice to a new level. In taking the step from a multi-stakeholder *advisory* body to a *policymaking* one, the members of the Round Table crossed an important threshold that transformed their relationship.

Of course, the project is still a work in progress and no one knows for sure how it will end. So what makes us believe there is really a model here that others can learn from?

From one perspective, the Round Table may seem little more than an accident or an adventure. Enough of the right people happened to come together at just the right time to make this project happen and to keep it moving ahead. As we saw, the meeting that generated the Six-Point Plan was a critical moment. But supposed the meeting had never happened? Would things have turned out differently?

Perhaps, but even so, it is hard not to see a kind of inevitability in the pathway leading to the Round Table. It started with Open Data as the driving principle. Geomatics is one of the biggest data sources in federal and provincial governments and it has enormous value. In hindsight, governments were going to make geospatial datasets available, one way or another. The journey had to happen.

But once it was underway, real progress on dialogue and collaboration quickly emerged as critical skills for managing this new public asset. That too was going to happen—at least, that appears to be the lesson of GeoBase 2.0.

From this viewpoint there is a kind of inner logic to the process, a bit like working through a puzzle. If so, it is pretty clear that there is still another stage ahead—a second shoe to drop. For the first time in history, reliable evidence-based decision making is no longer just a good idea, but a genuine possibility.

Huge amounts of high-quality data of all sorts are coming online, along with powerful new analytical tools to process and use it. Put to the right use, Big Data could transform governments' effectiveness in a host of areas, from population health and transportation to environmental assessment and city planning.

It is not an exaggeration here to speak of a new era in governance. But this next leg of the journey can't be completed on the strength of Open Data alone. That principle must be complemented by Open Dialogue and Open Information.

Real evidence-based policymaking on this scale will require the exchange of information AND ideas across all kinds of boundaries. This, in turn, will require new working relationships based

¹⁰ Quebec Inc. was a moniker given to the *Parti Québécois* government's plan in the 1980s to leverage pension funds in the *Caisse de dépôt* to build an independent Quebec economy.

on shared interests and trust. In short, Open Government is a deeply collaborative concept that must be supported by new collaborative infrastructure.

If so, the Round Table and the pan-Canadian strategy could be the first glimpse of a whole new phase in the Open Government movement, the benefits of which will reach far beyond the geomatics community.

Many sectors today lack a comprehensive vision or framework to support long-term planning and provide stability. Indeed, fragmentation and instability are reaching crisis levels. If stability is to be restored, policymaking must ascend to a higher, more comprehensive level.

The lesson from geomatics is that this journey has a pathway. It begins with a community dialogue that maps the issue-space, then identifies important shared interests, and finally forges a common vision with shared goals to achieve it.

And as this study shows, Open Data, Open Information and Open Dialogue must come together in a single, integrated and well-aligned process. If so, the Round Table may well be a harbinger or even a prototype of things to come. And that would be good news for all of us.

Appendix: The Canadian Geomatics Community Round Table Vision, Mission and Guiding Principles

- **Vision:** Canadian Geomatics will be a world class, thriving and openly engaged Sector providing reliable geospatial data and information products, technology, services and expertise underpinning Canada’s economic success in the business of “where”.
- **Mission:** We make recognizable, highly valued contributions to the Canadian economy, environment and society by providing geospatial data and information products, technology, services and expertise to address priority economic, environmental and societal needs.
- **Guiding Principles:**
 1. **Thriving and vibrant sector:** A competitive, productive Geomatics Sector, able to provide made-in-Canada solutions that strongly benefit the Canadian economy, with governments playing a facilitating role to ensure that the private sector can thrive within an enabling and stable legislative and policy framework, and new partnership models leveraged to enhance both industry’s national and international competitiveness.
 2. **Access to open core data:** Commitment to supporting Canada’s network of SDIs through open data principles and standard interoperable access and discovery protocols, supported by interoperable legislative and policy frameworks.
 3. **Collaboration:** Collaborative work by the members of the Geomatics Sector towards the development, deployment and maintenance of the Strategy and Action and Implementation Plan, recognizing and respecting the autonomy, role and responsibility of all agencies, organizations and persons.
 4. **Open engagement:** Open communication and activities tailored to engage the community (sector, public, political) in the evolution of the Pan-Canadian Geomatics Strategy and implementation plan.
 5. **Capacity Building through Education and Research:** Geospatial literacy through a flexible, adaptive, responsive education and research framework, based on the principles of life-long learning thereby contributing to the Canadian economy and enriching Canadian culture and society.
 6. **National approach to governance and leadership:** Inclusive governance with strong, shared leadership that recognizes and respects the organizations’ roles and responsibilities and provides clarity and direction for the Sector.

7. **Commitment to excellence:** Commitment to quality at the highest level at all times, in education, training, professional standards, certification, and ethics.