Award for Innovation in Transparency to Improve Institutional Management

Documentation of the New National Registry of Professionals

Winner of the First Edition of the Award for Innovation in Transparency to Improve Institutional Management
The findings and conclusions in this document do not necessarily reflect the views of the Federal Institute for Information Access and Data Protection, the Ministry of Public Administration, the National Institute of Public Administration, or the World Bank.

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I. Introduction

The first edition of the Award for Innovation in Transparency to Improve Institutional Management in Mexico was presented in August 2010 by the World Bank, the Mexican Federal Institute for Information Access and Data Protection (IFAI), the National Institute of Public Administration (INAP), and the Ministry of Public Administration (SFP).

The purpose of this award contest was to identify and disseminate, nationally and internationally, good practices and/or innovations related to the disclosure of government data and access to information, information management systems, and mechanisms for facilitating access to public information in Mexico.

Participation was open to public administration offices and entities at the federal, state, and municipal level; the federal and state legislative and judicial branches; as well as federal and local autonomous agencies.

A total of 75 proposals were submitted, of which 24 were listed as finalists. The jury was composed of specialists in public administration, transparency, accountability, and the right of access to information.¹ A technical committee, consisting of staff from the sponsoring institutions, assisted the jury in on-site verification of finalists’ proposals. The initiatives selected were:

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¹ Rosa Isabel Montes Mendoza, Anáhuac University; Miguel Carbonell Sánchez, Instituto de Investigaciones Jurídicas, National Autonomous University (Institute for Legal Research); Ernesto Isunza Vera, Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social (Center for Research and Higher Studies on Social Anthropology); Miguel Treviño de Hoyos, journalist; Aurelio Álvarez Orozco, Colegio Nacional de Educación Profesional Técnica (National College of Professional Technical Education), State of Mexico; Óscar Guerra Ford, Chairman, Conferencia Mexicana para el Acceso a la Información Pública (Mexican Conference for Access to Public Information—COMAIP); Mauricio Merino Huerta, Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (Center for Research and Teaching in Economics—CIDE); and Juan Pardinas Carpizo, Instituto Mexicano para la Competitividad (Mexican Institute for Competitiveness—IMCO).
1. “New Search Platform for the National Registry of Professionals,” presented by the Ministry of Education: an online search tool that makes consultation of the National Registry of Professionals easier and more efficient;

2. “Web-based Transparency project” presented by the Office of the Attorney-General of Mexico City: a Web-based tool for locating individuals in the custody of the Office of the Public Prosecutor;


II. Description of the Project

The New National Registry of Professionals, which is available on the Ministry of Education’s website at the federal level, is a public online inquiry system that makes consultation of the National Registry of Professionals easier and more efficient.

III. Institutional Context

The Ministry of Education is the federal body tasked with, among others, the oversight of Mexico’s educational institutions. This ministry also accredits academic programs and degrees, and grants authorization to use the skills certified by those institutions.²

The Ministry of Education is responsible for issuing professional licenses, a legal instrument by which the Department of Professions in the Ministry recognizes that an individual possesses the knowledge to practice a profession. In accordance with the Law of Education, which is applicable throughout Mexico, “any individual to whom a professional diploma or an equivalent academic qualification has been issued may obtain a license to practice his or her profession and for the purposes of identification while exercising all professional activities.”

The Department of Professions is responsible for registering professional degrees, issuing the corresponding professional license to the individuals concerned, publishing an annual list of persons who earned professional degrees the previous year, and providing reports to interested parties on matters within the department’s purview. The regulatory law stipulates that the archives of the registry of professionals shall be public and that the Director of the Department of Professions is required to issue certificates attesting to the registration of degrees whenever such a request is made in writing.

The registry is public and provides citizens with information pertaining to the proper practice of a profession and the skills that individuals have acquired in order to provide professional services or practice a profession, whenever required by a legal or administrative provision or under the terms and conditions stipulated by the party hiring the professional.³ The registry contains 26 data items for each individual with a professional license.⁴

IV. Background

In Mexico, “many individuals display degrees and in particular licenses that they do not have”⁵, and which have been falsified. Prior to June 2003 when the Federal Law on Transparency and Access to Government Information (LFTAIPG) allowed individuals to file access to information requests⁶, persons seeking information relating to the National Registry of Professionals had to go directly to the Department of Professions located in Mexico City, or to the Ministry of Education’s office in their state so the request would be then submitted to the central office, a procedure that could take as long as six months.

After the LFTAIPG came into force, 10 percent of the requests for information submitted to the Ministry of Education pertained to information on professional licenses. It is worth noting that, after the Mexican Social Security Institute, the Ministry of Education is the federal government office that receives the second highest number of requests for information.⁷ The processing time for requests for professional license information under the Law on Transparency was between 20 and 40 business days.

In response to the high volume of requests relating to this database,⁸ in 2006, the Ministry of Education incorporated a

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² In accordance with Article 38 of the Organic Law of the Federal Government.

³ Resolution No. 4712/10 of the Mexican Federal Institute for Information Access and Data Protection (October 20, 2010).

⁴ The registry’s data fields are as follows: (1) professional license number; (2) national identification number; (3) public register; (4) pages; (5) father’s surname; (6) mother’s maiden surname; (7) name; (8) date of birth; (9) date of professional examination; (10) date of registration; (11) gender; (12) birth state number; (13) country of birth; (14) state of residence; (15) country of residence; (16) place of origin; (17) line, number, and name; (18) institution; (19) occupation; (20) authorization; (21) date of issue; (22) document; (23) date of authorization; (24) professional license; (25) name; (26) type.

⁵ Remarks by the Minister of Education, Alonso Luisambo Ibarra, at the presentation ceremony for the Award for Innovation in Transparency to Improve Institutional Management held during National Transparency Week (September 7, 2011).

⁶ As stated in the eighth transitory article of the Federal Law on Transparency and Access to Government Information (LFTAIPG).

⁷ According to IFAI statistics, the Ministry of Education received 33,032 requests for information between June 2003 and November 3, 2011.

⁸ In accordance with the provisions of Articles 25 and 32 of the Regulations of the Regulatory Law of
public query system for the National Registry of Professionals into its website. This application allowed users to conduct searches using the license number, as this was the sole search field available.

However, most of the people who consulted the registry did not have the license number, as this number does not appear on the professional degrees displayed in the offices of physicians and attorneys. This system also did not provide access to the entire registry to facilitate comparative and statistical analysis. As a result, citizens had to follow the aforementioned procedures to verify if an individual had been issued a professional license.

In June 2010, an individual used Infomex⁹ to request the following information on electronic file or compact disc:¹⁰

The contents of the “National Registry of Professionals” database, excluding confidential information

The Ministry made the search system for the National Registry of Professionals available to the requester. Due to the fact that the response from the Ministry of Education did not meet the requested information because the system did not provide access to roughly six and a half million records in the database, the requester filed an appeal for review with the Mexican Federal Institute for Information Access and Data Protection.¹¹

Back then, the Ministry of Education had printed records containing the requests for inclusion in the registry and the names of those who were registered, as well as an electronic database for the registry. It did not, however, have an alternative public access system or database that did not include confidential information. The Ministry explored the following options to facilitate access to the registry:

- Provide on-site access. This was not possible as the records contained confidential data.

- Provide access to the entire database. This was equally unfeasible because the database contained confidential information and existed in a format that did not allow for re-use of specific information.

- Prepare public versions,¹² for payment, of the more than six million records available in the database.

These records would have to be printed, at a cost of 3 million pesos (approximately US$236,000) to the requester.

This situation sparked a discussion at the Ministry with the Legal Affairs Unit, the Education Policy Planning and Evaluation Unit, the Office of the Chief of Staff through the Department of Technology, and the Office of the Deputy Minister of Higher Education, to which the Department of Professions reports. The key focus of the discussion was “whether or not the way in which information is sought from the National Registry of Professionals should be broadened to allow any interested party to gain access to this information in an easy and coherent manner.”¹³

After these meetings, the Ministry decided to work on a database that would enable not only the appealing party “but also all citizens to have easier access to the database of the National Registry of Professionals,”¹⁴ in strict compliance with the right to data protection. On October 20, 2010, IFAI gave the Ministry sixty business days “to provide the public with more search criteria for looking up information on the website of the National Registry of Professionals.”¹⁵ It also decided that information pertaining to place of birth, date of birth, nationality, residence, and the national taxpayer number was confidential information that the Ministry of Education is obligated to protect, unless it received the express consent of the persons in question to disclose such information.

v. Project Details

The New National Registry of Professionals project differs entirely from the previous inquiry system. The New Registry allows users to conduct an initial search of professionals via a user-friendly system with different search fields that provide complete, downloadable access to the public information in the registry. It is worth noting that the system facilitates access to the information, while protecting the personal data of the professionals.

It is important to emphasize the fact that online search results have no legal effect. Anyone who so desires may later submit a formal request for professional background information to the Department of Professions. In addition to the professional license number, the search fields for the New Registry are as follows:

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Article 5 of the Constitution Relative to the Practice of Professions in the Federal District.

⁹ Infomex is an Internet portal through which it is possible to capture and submit requests for information, receive responses, and register objections. This system is used to contact the Federal Executive Branch, other agencies subject to the Transparency Law, and most of the states in the country. According to IFAI statistics, 96 percent of requests submitted to the Federal Executive Branch have been sent through Infomex.

¹⁰ Article 42 of the LFTAIPG stipulates that access will be provided only in the manner permitted by the document in question, but will be provided, in part or in total, at the request of the interested party.

¹¹ In accordance with Article 49 of the LFTAIPG, the requester who is notified by means of a committee resolution of the denial of a request for access to information or of the non-existence of the requested documents may file, on his or her own behalf or through a representative, the appeal for a review with the IFAI or the liaison unit acquainted with the matter, within fifteen business days following the date of notification.

¹² A document from which reserved or confidential information has been removed to allow access.

¹³ Resolution No. 4712/10 of the Mexican Federal Institute for Information Access and Data Protection (October 20, 2010), which can be found at: http://www.ifai.org.mx/Sesiones/Consulta.

¹⁴ Idem.

¹⁵ Idem.
The registry’s interface has several features that users with information on the data to be consulted\textsuperscript{16}, as well as tips for improving searches. The project not only meets the needs of anyone who wants to consult the Registry, but also provides an easy system for requesting the correction of personal information, an obligation for federal agencies under the terms of the LFTAIPG.\textsuperscript{17}

![Fig. 1 Example of a search of the National Registry of Professionals](image)

It is worth noting that the site allows users to download the entire public database of professionals registered with the Department of Professions. Users can also filter information in order to download customized databases or generate statistics, for example, the records for a specific profession in a single educational institution for a specific timeframe.

In terms of security measures, under the new system, the database used by the Department of Professions was separated from the one for the New Registry, thereby avoiding the risk of compromising the personal information contained in the original database. The new system allows for the creation of daily backup copies of the database, which are transferred to a separate server. If the public database is compromised, the most information that could be lost would be the information captured over a 24-hour period.

The New Registry of Professionals became operational on December 12, 2010, in accordance with the timeframe stipulated by IFAI in Appeal No. 4712/10. The system was publicized via the Ministry of Education’s Twitter account (@SEP_mx). On November 15, 2011, user statistics for this portal were as follows:

- 1.5 million searches using the license number
- 1.7 million searches using other search fields
- 6.5 million pages visited on the website
- 84,000 data exports\textsuperscript{18}

The average time spent by users on the portal is 19 minutes, during which they visit an average of 7.5 pages. The site abandonment rate is 5 percent and users from 95 countries accessed the site.

VI. Implementation Process

The Educational Policy Planning and Evaluation Unit (UPEPE), the Department of Professions, the Department of Information Technology (DIGITEC), and the Liaison Unit of the Ministry of Education participated in this project.

The two-month implementation process did not generate costs for the institution, which used in-house resources since DIGITEC staff manages the project. This project had the full support of the Minister of Education\textsuperscript{19}(who served previously as President Commissioner of the IFAI) and the former Director of the UPEPE.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{16} For example, this refers to the possibility that the individual about whose information is being sought could be registered as a professional with a state authority; could have a degree awarded in another country; or that the individual never requested registration of the professional degree or issuance of the license to practice.

\textsuperscript{17} Article 20, paragraph 5, of the LFTAIPG stipulates that bodies mandated by this law shall be responsible for handling personal information and shall replace, correct, or complete, on their own initiative, any personal information that is inaccurate, in part or in whole, or incomplete, once they become aware of this situation.

\textsuperscript{18} Data from the Google Analytics Panel for www.cedulaprofesional.sep.gob.mx with statistics from 12/12/2010 to 11/15/2011.

\textsuperscript{19} Alonso Lujambio Irazábal.

\textsuperscript{20} Francisco Ciscomani Freaney was Agreements Secretary of the Mexican Federal Institute for Information Access and Data Protection. He is currently the Deputy Minister of Basic Education in the Ministry of Education.
The project had seven implementation stages:

1. **Planning.** Meetings were convened to determine the feasibility and conceptualization of the project; needs and the desire to resolve the issue raised in Appeal No. 4712/10 were stated.

2. **Analysis.** A detailed study of the project’s objectives was conducted, and technical options, teams, resources, and costs were identified.

3. **Design.** The procedure for developing the application and its parameters were identified, adopting the measures necessary for project implementation.

4. **Construction.** Proposed tasks/activities for execution of the project were carried out.

5. **Tests.** Tests were conducted to determine the actual functioning of the new portal. The project was evaluated by the Department of Professions and DIGITEC.

6. **Implementation.** The implemented project was presented to the UPEPE and the Liaison Unit; searches were conducted to verify the efficiency of the various aspects of the platform.

7. **Monitoring.** Site use was monitored; for example, questions frequently asked by users were compiled. It is worth noting that the old and new systems co-existed for three months until March 2011, when the old one was closed.

### VII. Benefits

The new inquiry system for the National Registry of Professionals “provides access, for the first time in Mexico’s education history, to the database of professionals registered with the Department of Professions.” The benefits of this project were evident both inside and outside the Ministry of Education, the most notable of which are presented below.

#### External Benefits

The **New Registry** provides certainty that professionals are qualified to practice in the country, as it provides access to the database of the relevant public authority. An easy-to-use, completely cost-free system also provides access to the public database of the National Registry of Professionals, thus preventing “the potential sale of information in the informal market.”

Before the project was implemented, the process for consulting the National Registry of Professionals took between 20 and 40 business days (under the Law on Transparency) to six months (consultations at the Department of Professions). Now this process can be immediately executed via the Internet. For individuals unfamiliar with the system who wish to submit a request for access to information, the Ministry provides a standard step-by-step guide on how to use the **New Registry**. The average response time is between one and three business days.

This project developed a tool that guarantees anyone complete access to public information available in the National Registry of Professionals, while using the established security features to protect the confidential information of the registered professionals, thus striking a balance between two individual rights: the right to know and the protection of personal information.

This system has proved beneficial not only to the Mexican people but also to other government agencies that use the **New Registry** on a daily basis, such as the Ministry of Public Administration that manages the federal Government’s employment bureau and the US Embassy in Mexico to verify information on visa applicants.

Lastly, Ernesto Villanueva, a researcher at the Institute for Legal Research of the *Universidad Autónoma de México*, noted that the **New Registry** allows all persons “to verify, before going to see a primary care physician or a specialist, that this individual does indeed have a professional license.” It also allows persons to verify that staff of the judiciary, including attorneys at the Office of the Public Prosecutor, have the license as established by Law: “knowledge of this information... is a tool for curbing corruption in the public service and fostering a culture of citizen oversight of the professionals’ competency.”

#### Internal Benefits

The Head of the Liaison Unit in the Ministry of Education noted that “the benefits derived from opening up access to information would outweigh those ones from maintaining restricted access, and there was little point in having a modern and updated database if access was not provided to it.”

As a result, there was a 66 percent reduction in the number of queries of the National Registry of Professionals under the Law on Transparency, which fell from 500 in 2010 to 58

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21 Remarks by the Minister of Education, Alonso Lujambio Irazábal, at the presentation ceremony for the Award for Innovation in Transparency to Improve Institutional Management, held during National Transparency Week (September 7, 2011).

22 Interview with Zaira Cisneros Rosado, Director of the Call Center (TELSEP) at the Ministry of Education (November 16, 2011).

23 Interview with Adi Izaza Barrera, Head of the Liaison Unit of the Ministry of Education (November 16, 2011).


25 Idem.

26 Information gathered by the Liaison Unit of the Ministry of Education.
during the first quarter of 2011. This resulted in less work for the Department of Professions, the Liaison Unit and the IFAI, which will receive fewer related appeals for review.

This project re-affirmed the commitment of the Ministry’s staff to transparency and accountability, and showed civil servants that “we can share more effectively the information we have.” It also opened up a line of communication with citizens using the interactive features of the New Registry, which serve as “a gauge for their requests for information.”

VIII. Lessons Learned

The units that participated in the project learned a number of valuable lessons that they have put into practice to improve the New Registry, as well as to design and implement other initiatives.

The Director of DIGITEC’s Administration of Information System Projects indicated that the greatest difficulty they faced “was for someone to decide to create the system.” He noted that the most important aspect of this type of project was the ability to help users understand institutions as complex as the Ministry of Education, stating that “the problem is that we in government believe that the person in front of us has a PhD in how our office works and that this person will automatically understand everything we are doing.”

In keeping with the user-friendly vision of the New Registry, an effort was made to “translate technical terms,” ever mindful of the fact that the user in front of a computer is requesting specific information and has no need for complex terms. “This is the most important recommendation that can be made to a third party,” the Director of Administration of Information System Projects added, noting further that “information is as simple as the form in which it is presented.”

The Head of the Liaison Unit added that during the project’s design and implementation phases, civil servants “put themselves in the shoes of the citizens,” raising doubts that users may have and developing features that provide additional information in a clear and simple manner.

Lastly, civil servants underscored the project’s cost-benefit appeal and its guarantee of continuity, as it does not require external support or additional human, economic, or material resources. They also noted that the system can be replicated in other government agencies that manage public registries, such as the Property and Commercial Public Registries. This system could also be implemented by private actors such as the General Notarial Records.

IX. Looking Forward

The New Registry is being continuously improved. After receiving the Award for Innovation to Improve Institutional Management, several new features were added to the system. DIGITEC developed a three-minute video that provides users with information on the data contained in the National Registry of Professionals. A Q&A section that is continuously being updated was added as well.

The Director of DIGITEC’s Administration of Information System Projects indicated that the next step would be to provide universal access to information, and that efforts were underway to design applications for mobile telephones for BlackBerry, iPhone, and Android platforms, which account for 90 percent of the smartphone market in Mexico. These tools would be the first mobile applications offered by the Ministry of Education, which hopes to make them available by early 2012.

Lastly, the New National Registry of Professionals is now part of the applications on the Federal Government’s Citizen Portal, a website managed by the Ministry of Public Administration, which allows users to customize and consolidate federal government services in a single portal. The New Registry is one of the first projects incorporated into the portal, and the first to be offered by the Ministry of Education.

Given its success, the members of this project’s team “do not want to sing the praises of one single topic” and are supporting various initiatives “with a view to replicating this model, because we at the Ministry of Education have vast information that we can place at the disposal of individuals through a similar model.”

X. Contact Information

Persons wishing to obtain more information on the New National Registry of Professionals can contact the Ministry of Education’s Liaison Unit at: unidaddeenlace@sep.gob.mx.

9 Interview with Jorge A. Gutiérrez Garcia, Director of Administration of Information System Projects in the Department of Information Technology (DIGITEC) of the Ministry of Education (November 16, 2011).
10 Idem.
11 Idem.
12 Idem.


XI. Bibliography

(1) Resolution of the Appeal for Review from File 4712/10 of Commissioner María Marván Laborde. Institute of Information Access and Data Protection (October 20, 2010).

(2) PowerPoint presentation prepared by the Liaison Unit of the Ministry of Education, used for the panel “Presentation of Projects for Awards for Innovation in Transparency to Improve Institutional Management at the Federal Level,” held during the Eighth National Transparency Week (September 8, 2011).

(3) Transcript of the panel, “Presentation of Projects for Awards for Innovation in Transparency to Improve Institutional Management at the Federal Level,” held during the Eighth National Transparency Week (September 8, 2011).

(4) Screenshot of the New National Registry of Professionals (printed copy provided by the Liaison Unit of the Ministry of Education on November 16, 2011).

(5) Standard response provided by the Liaison Unit of the Ministry of Education to guide persons requesting public information in the use of the New Registry of Professionals (printed copy provided by the Liaison Unit of the Ministry of Education on November 16, 2011).

(6) Screenshot of the system prior to access to the National Registry of Professionals (printed copy provided by the Liaison Unit of the Ministry of Education on November 16, 2011).


(8) Transcript of the panel, “Presentation of Projects for Awards for Innovation in Transparency to Improve Institutional Management at the Federal Level,” held during the Eighth National Transparency Week (September 7, 2011).

(9) Application form for the project “New Query System for the National Registry of Professionals,” Award for Innovation in Transparency to Improve Institutional Management.