Short-term contract opportunity

Terms of reference (ToR) for researcher: User research on reporting complex ownership structures

November 2026

About Open Ownership

Open Ownership (OO) is driving the global shift towards transparency over who owns and controls legal vehicles. OO enables beneficial ownership disclosures which are accurate, well structured, complete, and machine-readable. We support governments to make high-quality beneficial ownership data available, and work with governments, businesses, and citizens to use the data. This reduces risks such as corruption and tax evasion and builds trust and development opportunities.

Our multidisciplinary team works closely with technical and policy implementers, advising them on all aspects of beneficial ownership implementation. To support our donor-funded technical assistance programmes, we have developed a broad range of implementation tools and products, including the Beneficial Ownership Data Standard (BODS) and the OO Principles for effective beneficial ownership disclosure.

Background and objectives of the assignment

Information on full ownership structures, not just the individuals who indirectly own and control a company, is important to users of beneficial ownership (BO) data. Increasingly, BO reporting regimes require companies to declare more details on intermediaries in ownership chains:

- All EU Member States will be required to collect information on all intermediaries as part of the 2024 AML Package, starting from July 2027.
- A number of company registrars OO works with, including the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission (CIPC) in South Africa and the Securities and Exchange Commission in the Philippines have expressed an interest in collecting this information.

- The Armenian company registry, with which OO has a working relationship, already collects information on full ownership structures.

Evidence from OO's work with company registrars shows that they are unsure how best to collect this information. There is also limited understanding of how companies with complex structures keep track of their ownership information and comply with reporting requirements. Complex structures here include those that are multi-layered, include different legal vehicle types or agreements, or span international borders. Where a group spans countries with markedly different reporting requirements for similar information, this can create a significant compliance burden for companies. It can also reduce the usefulness and comparability of the information collected by registrars.

OO has developed the BODS and an associated visualiser for over seven years. These have largely been developed for publishing information that has already been collected, but could also be used to support how information is reported.

The purpose of this consultancy is to design and conduct qualitative user research to better understand:

- How multinational companies manage and store information on their complex ownership structures, and comply with different obligations in the countries they span;
- How company registers collect, or plan to collect, complex ownership information from companies; and
- What tools or support would help company registers collect this information in the least burdensome ways.

The findings will inform how OO supports governments to collect this information. They may also guide the development of recommendations and tools to support governments and businesses in collecting and sharing it. In particular, the research will provide evidence on:

- The processes, resources, third-party solutions and costs involved in companies keeping track of their ownership structures;
- Frictions created by diverging reporting obligations, such as differing approaches to determining indirect ownership;
- The barriers registers face in collecting, storing and making available full ownership chains; and
- Opportunities for standards, tools and guidance to reduce compliance burden and improve data quality.

Scope of work

The consultant will design and conduct the research in collaboration with the Senior Manager, Digital & Data Support and other OO staff as needed, through the following areas of work.

Review background materials and draft a research plan

The consultant will review relevant OO materials, including the research concept note and relevant reporting requirements, and agree on a timeline, risks, and expected outputs. This will include developing a research approach based primarily on semi-structured interviews with two user groups:

- Companies (primary user group): including multinational groups, complex single-country companies, structures that include trusts or other legal arrangements, and companies with and without existing obligations to report their full structures.

- Company registers: including registers in the EU (such as Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark, with others approached via the European Business Registers Association), South Africa and Zambia.

Indicatively, we anticipate around 15–20 company interviews and 6–8 registry interviews. Applicants are invited to propose an appropriate sample and methods. We will be able to provide introductions to company registers that OO works with, and help with recruitment for companies. However, OO's connections with the latter are more limited and any connections or networks the chosen contractor can provide will be highly desirable. As part of this area of work, the consultant may need to develop a pitch to convince companies to participate in the research.

Conduct research and analysis

The consultant will conduct interviews, primarily remotely, with:

- People responsible for statutory reporting and ownership information in companies, for example company secretaries, legal and compliance teams, and corporate service providers; and
- Register staff.

With companies, the research will explore:

- How ownership information is stored and maintained;
- How different legal definitions of BO and guidance are applied;
- How common non-shareholding interests are, and the business logic behind them;
- How information is provided to AML-regulated entities;
- Other uses of ownership information; and
- How sensitive companies consider this information.

With registers, the research will explore:

- Previous and planned collection methods;
- Pain points; and
- How registries intend to store the information and make it available to end-users.

Where participants agree, the consultant may review examples of the forms, spreadsheets, systems or other tools used to record and submit ownership information.

Synthesise findings and practical recommendations

The consultant will analyse findings across user groups and jurisdictions, and identify key recurring issues, patterns and opportunities. Based on these findings, the consultant will develop practical and prioritised recommendations on:

- How registers can collect full ownership chains; and
- How OO's standards, tools and guidance could support governments and businesses.

All research will be conducted in line with OO's Research Ethics and Data Protection policies, operating on the basis of informed consent.

Deliverables

The consultant will provide the following outputs:

1. Research plan and materials

Including participant profiles and sampling approach, possible pitch materials for companies, interview guides for each user group, consent and data-handling materials, timeline, and safeguards. OO will broker introductions to participants through its existing networks. The consultant will be responsible for liaising with participants to schedule interviews.

2. Analysis and draft report

Conduct a thorough analysis to identify key findings, current practices, pain points, patterns across user groups and jurisdictions, and areas for improvement. Based on the analysis, prepare a clear and well-structured draft report that presents the findings, highlighting key insights and actionable recommendations. Time permitting, findings should be validated with participants and reviewed by relevant OO staff.

3. Final research report and presentation

Prepare a final research report and a presentation summarising the key content and findings of the final report, for stakeholder engagement and discussion with OO and partner registers.

Consultant profile

We are open to bids from individuals or consulting firms. Applicants should take into consideration the proposed budget while preparing their applications. Please note that we can only consider applications from those based in UTC+0 - UTC +2 for this project.

The successful supplier must demonstrate experience of having delivered qualitative research project(s) in the past, ideally with businesses, regulated entities or government.

We welcome applications from those with the following attributes:

- Essential: Experience designing and conducting qualitative research, including semi-structured interviews with professional or organisational participants.
- Experience analysing qualitative data and producing clear, evidence-based reports and recommendations.
- Languages: English (required);
    - Strongly preferred: Professional working proficiency in German.
    - Proficiency in other European languages would be an advantage.
- Understanding of BO transparency, corporate ownership structures, or related areas such as company law, AML/KYC or corporate services.
- Familiarity with data, forms or digital tools for collecting or managing structured information, for example registry filing systems, entity management software, or data standards.
- Experience conducting research with senior or specialist professionals, such as company secretaries, legal and compliance teams, or public officials.
- A demonstrated approach to ensuring businesses' participation in the research is desirable.

Given the budget for this project, we expect an individual contractor to apply. However, we are open to receiving applications from research or digital agencies. We do not accept applications from recruitment agencies; applications must be made by those delivering the work.

Supervision and coordination

The consultant will report to the Senior Manager, Digital and Data Support at Open Ownership and will work closely with other OO staff and partner registries. The working approach will include:

- Kick-off and planning meeting: To agree the scope, objectives, timeline, research approach, participant profiles, roles and responsibilities, and expected outputs.
- Regular progress check-ins: Meetings to discuss participant scheduling, completed interviews, emerging findings, risks, and any adjustments needed.
- Findings and wrap-up meeting: To review findings, discuss implications, confirm final recommendations, reflect on the collaboration, and agree next steps for using the findings.

Application process

To apply, contractors should submit:

- A CV highlighting at least one specific example of a relevant project or piece of work that demonstrates the applicant's experience in qualitative research, relevant experience of research with businesses, regulated entities or government, and any relevant language skills.
- A written proposal of 500–1,000 words on how you will successfully deliver on this contract.
- A proposed budget for the work, including a breakdown of days and rates, up to a maximum of £25,000.

Based on the bids received, we will include at least one round of interviews with selected applicants as part of the selection process. The contract is anticipated to start in December 2026 and finish on 31 March 2027, with final deliverables due by 31 March 2027. These dates are indicative and may be adjusted in consultation with the selected candidate at project kick-off.

Please send your application to recruitment@openownership.org before **23:59 UTC on 15 November 2026**. We will confirm that your application has been received. We will also tell you how long it will take us to review applications and when to expect to hear back about the next stage of the process. This is typically within 10 working days, whatever the outcome.

Please note, we may interview suitable candidates on a rolling basis during the application period.

Please note that our opportunities are for direct applicants only; we will not accept applications from recruitment agencies or any third-party agency.

Payment schedule

Payment is subject to satisfactory completion and approval of agreed deliverables. Any pre-approved travel and accommodation expenses required for in-person activities will be reimbursed by Open Ownership, subject to the organisation's travel policy cap.

Privacy

Open Ownership is committed to protecting the privacy of all applicants. Personal data submitted as part of this recruitment process will be collected and processed solely for the purpose of selecting candidates for this specific role. This includes CVs, cover letters, contact details, interview notes, and any other information provided.

Your data will be treated with strict confidentiality and accessed only by those directly involved in the selection process. It will not be shared with third parties outside the organisation without your explicit consent. All personal information will be retained securely in compliance with applicable data protection laws. By submitting your application, you consent to the processing of your personal data under these terms. If you have any questions regarding how your data is handled, please contact the Director of Finance and Human Resources.