CALL for Applications
for the European Public Sector Award - EPSA 2015
The Public Sector as Partner for a Better Society

1. Invitation to the European Public Sector Award – EPSA 2015

The European Institute of Public Administration - EIPA - with the institutional and financial support of 12 European public partners – invites applications to the fifth **European Public Sector Award – EPSA 2015**. This is a well-established award scheme which has taken place every two years since 2007.

Public administrations submitting applications for EPSA 2015 will become part of an extensive European network of public sector excellence, in which they can benchmark their achievements with their peers, and at the same time learn from each other.

The EPSA 2015 will be presented on the occasion of a high-level event on leading-edge public administration solutions, which will be held on **17-18 November 2015** in Maastricht, the Netherlands, under the auspices of the Luxembourg EU Presidency. This event offers a significant opportunity for European administrations with innovative performance and outstanding achievements to reach an extensive audience and to be recognised for being at the leading edge of the European public sector.

2. Objective of the call

Under the overarching theme '***The Public Sector as Partner for a Better Society***', the EPSA 2015 seeks to showcase and reward those cases from Europe's public sector that embrace public administrations as partners in integrated and participatory governance approaches to public service delivery, that show increased effectiveness and efficiency in the context of maintaining social cohesion, innovative public management and leadership approaches, as well as sound public finances or intelligent action by public administrations to promote economic growth.

Changes towards more collaborative ways of working, developing new approaches, from service design to delivery, considering sound public finances and new leadership models, can be found in many administrations and across all administrative levels. The EPSA 2015 thus aims to reward public excellence in administrations, and public innovators behind the cases that are reflecting this 'new' role in society, and who are finding novel solutions by providing outstanding public services and by ensuring that consideration of social inclusion underpins their decisions.

This topic will therefore give public administrations across Europe the opportunity to be proud of their achievements, and to showcase how they are responding to these challenges and balancing these competing demands.

3. Specific context of the topic

The public sector accounts for almost 50% of countries' GDP in the EU28 and has a crucial role to play in Europe's socio-economic development, progress and competitiveness.

However, most public administrations across Europe have experienced continued strains on their public finances, with the first signs of tentative recovery appearing only recently; meanwhile, they are being persistently confronted with rising welfare costs due to the effects of the financial crisis and societal changes. Limited resources have also coincided with a wider questioning of the legitimacy of public administrations at all levels to make decisions impacting on society. These challenges – coupled with the importance of the public sector's role in Europe's growth and recovery – call for stable and strong institutions, but which are at the same time flexible, agile, and open to change, and thus scale up capacities and boost innovation.

Hence, there is a need for public administrations to **increase effectiveness and efficiency, and to strive towards best practices in order to maximise the likelihood that a degree of social protection can be maintained**. As a result, there is a growing trend towards a greater use of alternative service delivery models, designed around the needs of service users and with a more strategic focus. The efforts to **build user-centric public services** require both new knowledge and skills, as well as innovative policy-making structures for **co-design and co-management of public services and for working in partnership for a better society**. It is necessary to develop a new digital public service architecture to facilitate open innovation across a range of actors and services. The opportunity to deliver more and better services together with society is a powerful way to reconnect citizens with policy-making and government.

Now is the unique moment to respond to the strong need to 're-define', or in other words **to re-fresh and re-stress, the prominent role of the public sector in leading to a better society**.

4. What projects/cases to submit?

Applications submitted should demonstrate changes leading to successful outcomes, for example effective engagement of stakeholders for user-centric services and improved public service delivery, increased effectiveness and efficiency in the context of maintenance of social cohesion, innovative public management and leadership approaches, sound public finances or intelligent actions by public administrations to promote economic growth. Below a few **cases for inspiration** – it should be noted, however, that this list is not exhaustive and is in no particular order of priority.

Effective engagement by government with stakeholders
- Models of cooperation between the public sector and civil society or public-private partnership through co-design and co-management mechanisms;
- Participatory approaches for policy formulation, strategy development, evaluation and/or improved transparency in the policy cycle;
- Better policy coherence and new means of effective collaboration between departments and sectors, or between administrative levels (European, national, regional, local and supra-local);
- Efficient multilevel governance mechanisms ensuring stakeholder consultations leading to successful implementation of EU regulations;
- Improved systems and methods for evidence-based policy-making including diversity-sensitive analysis (e.g. relating to gender, age, disability etc.).

New service delivery approaches
- New service delivery methods and ownership models, including public-private cooperation for modernisation of public services in areas such as education and training, social care, employment and labour market, health, business development, regional development, environment and customs, etc.;
- Reforms to reduce administrative burdens through integration of services;
- Innovative examples of client-centred one-stop solutions and self-help measures;
- Adaptation of e-Government and e-Participation for improved public service delivery, e.g. through e-Learning, e-Health, e-Procurement, e-Invoicing, e-Justice, etc.;
- Effective solutions ensuring equal access to public services.

Innovative knowledge management and new leadership approaches
- Methods for overcoming innovation barriers and management of innovation processes and initiatives;
- New structures for public learning organisations, evaluation methodologies and establishment of a learning culture in the public sector;
- Innovative leadership and new management approaches, including co-leadership and network governance;
- Leadership training methodologies to build new critical leadership skills for success at different levels of management;
- Effective measures for career development and skills development methodologies of staff in the public sector, such as traineeship programmes, coaching and e-Learning networks.

Sound public finance
- Optimisation of the management of public funds, e.g. through new public procurement practices and effective budgeting and financial management practices;
- Efficient methods and approaches for implementation of large public investment and development projects;
- Innovative partnerships in budget preparation between service managers and finance staff, including establishment of forward planning and policy coordination mechanisms;
- Innovative measures for developing ethical conduct and combatting corruption, including robust and effective arrangements for whistle-blowers.

These cases can demonstrate success in the context of different levels and **forms of cooperation**, such as, in particular:

- Between different levels of public administration within a Member State or between different Member States;
- Between different regions/municipalities in the same or different Member States;
- Public sector-to-business, or public sector-to-citizen interaction;
- By the public sector acting as a platform for business-to-business collaboration or citizen-to-citizen collaboration;
- By the empowerment of communities by a public administration.

5. What types of rewards and recognition can be achieved?

The EPSA 2015 will present awards in two categories based on the level of administration:

Category 1: Projects/cases submitted by organisations from the **European, national or regional administrative level**;

Category 2: Projects/cases submitted by organisations from the **Supra-local or local administrative level**.

In addition, a **third award** will be presented to a successful and outstanding project or case - drawn from both categories - with a significant, **cross-cutting perspective**, e.g. cross-border, cross-administrative, cross-sector, etc.

Besides the three above-mentioned awards, **Best Practice Certificates (BPC)** will be presented to a number of top-ranked projects in each category.

This means that good practice at all levels will be recognised, underlining the importance of coherent actions, coordination and monitoring of the actions, creative mechanisms of accountability, and/or models of decentralisation and partnership at the various levels of public administration.

6. Evaluation criteria

Submissions will be assessed against the following **eight criteria**:

1. **Innovation**: i.e. the novelty of the solution, the degree to which the case shows a leap of creativity in the practice of public administration (which may include intelligent adaptation, update and extension of past practices or actions), and demonstrates something different that goes beyond what currently exists.
2. **Stakeholder involvement**: i.e. the case shows evidence of stakeholder involvement, e.g. evidence of public and civil society cooperation and/or response to consultation, evidence of political support; in particular, evidence of intelligent engagement with stakeholders which can influence the design and production of services, smart partnership and governance models.
3. **Relevance of actions taken**: i.e. the particular needs and constraints of the context, the target groups and final beneficiaries, and how the actions address their real needs.
4. **Impact/results**: i.e. the realisation of planned objectives and activities; the illustration of proven evidence of benefits, visible impact and tangible results, (which may be based on objectively high levels of achievement).
5. **Sustainability**: i.e. the case shows or describes elements which allow it to be sustained beyond an initial period of the realisation of its objectives and of its activities.
6. **Transferability and learning capacity**: i.e. the case has potential value and lessons to be learnt for other entities because it provides the potential for successful replication in other contexts (different Member States and levels of government); it stimulates a learning, innovation and self-improvement culture within the entity.
7. **Social inclusion**: i.e. the case provides evidence of consideration and application of diversity issues, including, but not restricted to, consideration of gender, age, disability and geographical location.
8. **Effect on financial sustainability and economic growth**: i.e. the case is based on an assessment of the effect of decisions made on public finances (e.g. deficit/debt) and future economic recovery (employment, output, skills, etc.).

7. Who may apply?

All European public sector institutions from all administrative levels, as well as public sector enterprises, agencies or public-private partnerships are eligible to submit their projects for the award. In concrete terms, this includes all public entities from cities, local authorities, the supra-local (provincial) and regional level, as well as public sector organisations at national and European level.

The **lead applicant** must be a public sector institution or authority (other applicants – in a consortium, for example – can be private, semi-public, NGO or academic).

Projects/cases have to belong to one of the two administrative categories:

Category 1: European, national or regional administrative level.
The European level refers to European institutions or agencies; the national level refers to the level of sovereign states; and the regional level refers to the first level of administrative and political subdivision of a state.

Category 2: Supra-local or local administrative level.
The supra-local and local level refers to the administrative and political levels below the regional level.

Examples
France: national level; regional level: régions (mainland and overseas regions); supra-local and local level: *départements, municipalités*.
Spain: national level; regional level: *comunidades autónomas, ciudades autónomas;* supra-local and local level: *provincias diputaciones, municipios*.
Poland: national level; regional level: *Voivodship - Województwo*; supra-local and local level: *powiaty* (councils/districts), *gminy* (municipalities).
Bulgaria: national level; supra-local and local level: *Obshtina* (municipalities).

Eligibility criteria to be fulfilled by the applicants are:
- European geographical origin of the applicant; List of eligible countries;
- Compliance with the theme of the EPSA 2015 competition;
- The application/project/case must have been in operation long enough to have proven evidence of impact and a tangible result;
- Completed application form;
- Confirmation that the application has been submitted, i.e. notification mail before deadline 24.00 Brussels local time (CET), 17 April 2015;
- The working language of the EPSA 2015 is English, thus it is strongly recommended to submit projects in English.

8. General statement for applicants

Projects submitted by applicants are encouraged to consider relevant aspects of gender equality, the use of ICT-enabled solutions and/or environmental sustainability.

In addition, those projects benefiting from EU supportive actions, such as the European Social Fund (ESF) TO 11 ('Enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration'), are especially invited to submit their achievements.

Finally, previous EPSA participants may re-submit projects from the previous EPSA editions on the basis that it includes an intelligent adaptation, update and extension of past projects.

9. When and how to apply?

The online application period is open from **5 February until 17 April 2015** (24.00 Brussels local time, CET) at www.epsa2015.eu in the Applicants' Area.

REGISTER

10. Entry qualification and evaluation phases

The submitted applications will first be checked for eligibility. If the eligibility criteria have been met, a registration number will be allocated and the project is subsequently subject to evaluation. The project will then be reviewed and assessed online against a series of criteria (see above) by evaluators from an internationally acknowledged, independent and impartial pool of experts. The evaluation process subsequently includes a consensus meeting and onsite visits to shortlisted projects for validation and verification purposes. Finally, a high-level jury will select the nominees/finalists and final winners of the EPSA 2015 awards.

In addition to the nominees and category award winners, best practice certificates will be presented to the next best group of applicants.

Four-step evaluation process:

STEP 1: Individual online evaluation (11-16 May 2015)
By each evaluator, in isolation and remotely based. Each project will be evaluated by impartial evaluators.

STEP 2: Consensus meeting (18-19 June 2015)
To reach and propose a commonly agreed list of ranked projects per category, including the best practice certificate recipients, and to agree on and propose a number of projects to be verified during onsite visits.

STEP 3: Onsite validation visits (July-September 2015)
To a number of shortlisted projects for verification/validation purposes.

STEP 4: Jury meeting (24 September 2015)
To select and decide on the EPSA 2015 nominees and winners.