Call for Applications

"New solutions to complex challenges – a public sector citizen-centric, sustainable and fit for the future"

Invitation to the European Public Sector Award EPSA 2019

The European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA) invites applications for the seventh biennial European Public Sector Award (EPSA) 2019.

EPSA 2019 has the institutional and financial support of 10 European public sector partners from different levels of government - Austria, Denmark, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, the Province of Limburg, the City of Maastricht in addition to the European Commission via its Secretariat General - Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS).

Public administrations submitting applications for EPSA 2019 will become part of an extensive European network of public sector excellence, in which they can benchmark their achievements with their peers, whilst at the same time learning from each other.

EPSA 2019 will be a unique opportunity to celebrate your achievements.

The EPSA 2019 awards will be presented on the occasion of a high-level event to be held on 4-6 November 2019 in Maastricht, the Netherlands, during the Finnish presidency of the Council of the EU. This event offers a significant opportunity for European public sector bodies to demonstrate innovative performance and outstanding achievements to an extensive audience and to be recognised for being at the leading edge of public sector innovation across Europe.

Objective of the Call

Under the overarching theme *"New solutions to complex challenges – a public sector citizen-centric, sustainable and fit for the future"*, EPSA 2019 seeks to showcase and reward those cases submitted by public administrations which have found new solutions in public service delivery and policy-making for the increasingly complex, difficult to address and often multi-dimensional challenges faced by the public sector in Europe. These challenges come at a time of an increasingly rapid pace of change, requiring public sector bodies to address both immediate needs and issues with important future consequences and to effectively prioritise their actions.

In many cases the new solutions called for by this theme are needed because previously tried solutions may no longer be able to respond to "wicked" problems in many areas where resources are often dispersed among different stakeholders and citizens have multiple needs and growing demands that require different approaches.

EPSA 2019 thus aims to reward creative solutions in public administrations that show how the public sector is responding effectively to major challenges.

Specific context of the topic

Public administrations in Europe at all levels continue to face many very difficult and complex and often multiple challenges, many of which are not susceptible to rapid resolution.

Historically low levels of growth, increasing competitive pressures from outside Europe, constraints in public finances, pressures on demand for both services and social benefits as a means of enhancing social inclusion are still in the focus of public entities across Europe. Furthermore, demographic change, climate change and the pace of technological transformation, continuing austerity and the resultant austerity fatigue add to the highly complex context the public sector has to navigate in and in which it strives to provide the most appropriate solutions.

Public administrations are also faced more than ever with continuing challenges to economic and social stability and social cohesion such as uncertainty about the future stability of the banking sector, uncertainty about the stability of the Eurozone, historically unprecedented levels of migration from outside of Europe's external borders, the increased threat of terrorism and its challenge to the functioning of Schengen (and thus one of the core principles of the EU - free movement of people) cyber security and the maintenance of social security (i.e. the need to enhance social protection for vulnerable groups through innovative solutions in public service provision).

In response to these challenges public administrations need to show competence through, for example, effective policy-making and strategic and operational planning, ensuring that policies are actually delivered through effective performance management of service delivery (including securing value for money and addressing corruption in public procurement) and ensuring that policies can continue to be delivered (i.e. are sustainable), including when faced by unexpected events (i.e. are resilient).

This topic will give creative public administrations the chance to showcase how they have developed new and effective solutions to the interplay of political, economic, fiscal, security and social security challenges and how they are balancing competing demands on them in an uncertain environment.

What projects/cases to submit?

Successful projects will need to be appropriately prioritised, effectively planned and executed, meet the highest priority needs of stakeholders and show proven and concrete results over a sustained period.

In this broad context, some exemplary areas have been set out which might give applicants an orientation on what projects to submit and assist them when preparing their submissions.

Possible projects for submission to EPSA 2019 could include those with objectives such as to:
- Effectively address the societal challenges, including economic and social inclusion, that are highest priority for their stakeholders;
- Introduce systemic changes, which improve the sustainability of successful outcomes such as the modernisation of governance and leadership within an organisation, increase the attractiveness of the public sector as an employer and take into account the diversification of the workforce;
- Deal with digital transformation by applying solutions provided by new technologies (using, for example, artificial intelligence, robotics and machine learning) as well as by facilitating the way into a digital future for society and businesses;
- Address very poor past levels of service and/or critical service failures, which may arise in response to unexpected events outside the control of the public sector entity such as high levels of migration or natural phenomena;
- Enhance trust in government by delivering better results for stakeholders;
- Introduce innovative solutions that rely more closely on citizen engagement and on partnerships with the private or non-profit sector for better public service delivery.

The examples above are also intended to emphasise that projects may be related to organisational change, policy formulation, service design and delivery and monitoring of outcomes that may involve digital transformation, while recognising that this is not the only dimension of innovation.

These objectives may be achieved by methods such as:
- New policy approaches, better service design, more effective and transparent means of monitoring outcomes and more effective engagement with stakeholders;
- Co-operation across national borders, between different levels of government within a country and/ or between different entities at the same level of government;
- Embedding openness to creative solutions, introducing new processes for engaging staff and other stakeholders in service design, promotion of co-operation across silos, embedding a culture of transparency and openness both internally and with external stakeholders and enhancing the ability of the entity to recruit and retain sufficient numbers of appropriately diverse skilled personnel;
- Strategic changes to service methods (e.g. from direct to delegated service delivery, between different types of delegated service delivery, public-public cooperation (including shared services), co-operation between the public sector and civil society or public-private partnerships for new or upgraded infrastructure);
- Inclusive approaches to budgeting, operational and financial management as well as reporting.

What types of rewards and recognition can be achieved?

EPSA 2019 will present awards in three categories

based on the level of administration.

Category 1: Projects/cases submitted by organisations from the **European or National level.**
The European level refers to European institutions or agencies and the National level refers to the level of sovereign states.

Category 2: Projects/cases submitted by organisations from the **Regional level.**
The Regional level refers to the first level of administrative and political sub-division of a state.

Category 3: Projects/cases submitted by organisations from the **Supra-Local or Local level.**
The Supra-Local and Local level refers to the administrative and political levels below the regional level.

In case of projects that include partners from different levels of government, the administrative category will be defined by the status of the lead applicant as designated by the partners.

This will enable the recognition of good practice at all levels of government, which may include co-operative actions between different levels within the public sector.

There will be three levels of recognition in each administrative category - category Award Winner, Nominees for category award winner and Best Practice Certificate winners.

Evaluation criteria

Submissions will be assessed against the following **six 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 and demonstrates a different approach which goes beyond what was previously applied and how this results from a learning, innovation and self-improvement culture within the entity.
2. **Stakeholder involvement:** i.e. the case shows evidence of stakeholder involvement, e.g. evidence of citizen, business and civil society co-operation and/or response to consultation, evidence of political support, evidence of intelligent engagement with stakeholders that can influence the design and production of services and of intelligent partnership and governance models.
3. **Relevance of actions taken:** i.e. the particular needs and constraints of the context, the core needs of 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 by the illustration of proven evidence of benefits, visible impact and tangible results (which may be based on demonstrably high levels of achievement or the achievement of significant improvements from a low base).
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, including considerations of financial sustainability.
6. **Potential for adaptability by other entities:** i.e. the case has potential value for, and lessons relevant to, other entities because it provides the potential for successful adaptation to other contexts (different Member States and levels of government).

Who may apply?

The theme aims to be inclusive. All European public sector entities from all administrative levels, as well as public sector enterprises and agencies, 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. Some examples of administrative structures in different countries.

Projects can be submitted jointly by more than one applicant but must designate a lead applicant.

The lead applicant must be a public sector entity - other applicants can, however, be private or mixed-capital entities, not for profit/third sector organisations or academic institutions.

Eligibility criteria to be fulfilled by the applicants are:

- The lead applicant is a public sector entity.
- European geographical origin of the applicant. (see the list of eligible countries).
- Relevance to the theme of EPSA 2019.
- The application/project/case must have been in operation long enough to have proven evidence of impact and a tangible result.
- Application form completed in English.
- Confirmation that the application has been submitted, i.e. notification mail before the deadline of 24.00 Central European Time (CET), 18 April 2019.

General statement for applicants

Projects benefitting from EU supportive actions, such as the European Social Fund (ESF) Thematic Objective 11 ('Enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration'), are asked to identify any such support during the registration process.

EPSA is looking for projects which will assist the European Commission, Secretariat General - Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS) in their objective of spreading good practice in public administrations across the EU.

Previous EPSA participants may re-submit projects from the previous EPSA editions insofar as they are based on a material adaptation, update and/or extension of past projects, including the achievement of significant results since any previous submission.

When and how to apply?

The online application period is open from:

25 February 2019 until 18 April 2019 (24.00 CET)

www.epsa2019.eu
[REGISTER and LOGIN]

REGISTER & LOG IN ►

Evaluation phases

The submitted applications will first be checked for eligibility. If the eligibility criteria are met, a registration number will be allocated and the project is subsequently subject to evaluation. The project will then be reviewed and assessed on-line against the evaluation criteria (see above) by evaluators from an internationally acknowledged, independent and impartial pool of experts.

The evaluation process subsequently includes a consensus meeting and on-site visits to short-listed projects for validation and verification purposes. These on-site visits are planned to take place in the weeks of 1 July, 8 July, 15 July, 26 August, 2 September and 9 September to allow for time to ensure the availability of the necessary stakeholders.

Finally, a high-level jury will select the finalists and winners of the EPSA 2019 awards.