

# Call for Applications



## An Innovative Public Sector in 2017 New Solutions to Complex Challenges

### Invitation to the EPSA 2017

The European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA) - with the institutional and financial support of 10 European public sector partners from different levels of government - invites applications for the sixth biennial European Public Sector Award EPSA 2017.

Public administrations submitting applications for EPSA 2017 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.

The EPSA 2017 awards will be presented on the occasion of a high-level event to be held mid-November 2017 in Maastricht, the Netherlands, during the Estonian 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. Moreover, EPSA 2017 is taking place in the framework of a series of events organised by the Province of Limburg and the Municipality of Maastricht to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Treaty of Maastricht and, as such, will enjoy even broader visibility.

### Objective of the Call

Under the overarching theme ***An Innovative Public Sector in 2017 - New Solutions to Complex Challenges***, EPSA 2017 seeks to showcase and reward those cases submitted by public administrations which have demonstrated an innovative approach to public service delivery and policy-making to 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, to effectively prioritise actions. Solutions are sought where public entities contribute to the enhancement of trust in their ability. In the current context, public sector intervention is particularly needed both to address the impact of continuing economic uncertainty and to meet the needs of different stakeholders in a way that is demonstrably equitable and inclusive. Put simply, in many cases new solutions are called for by this theme where previously tried solutions to address challenges may no longer be optimal.

The EPSA 2017 thus aims to reward public innovative solutions in administrations that show how the public sector is responding effectively to major challenges and is performing efficiently.

## Specific context of the topic

The multiple challenges the public sector has been confronted with in recent years persist. 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 equality of opportunity and 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 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) and security (including maintenance of cyber security and addressing external cyber threats to the EU's security).

Even if not all public administrations will be faced by all of these challenges, many will be faced by the broadly applicable consequences of them. Examples include the need:

- to redefine their role in a world of global markets;
- to be more focused in setting priorities;
- to manage the 'hollow state' at a time of delegation/marketisation of service delivery;
- to balance decentralisation with affordability; and
- to address the combined challenge of budget constraints, limitations on managerial and other human resources to tackle issues and to control rising/difficult demand for services/social benefits.

Public administrations in Europe thus continue to face many very difficult and complex challenges. This topic will give public change agents, innovators and their institutions the chance to showcase how they developed innovative and working solutions to the interplay of political, economic, fiscal and security challenges and how they are balancing competing demands on them in an uncertain environment.

The EPSA 2017 will be a unique opportunity to celebrate their achievements.

## What projects/cases to submit?

Successful projects will contain appropriately prioritised, effectively planned and effectively executed innovation, meet the highest priority needs of stakeholders and show proven and concrete results.

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.

### What are complex challenges?

By complex challenges\*, we understand complex issues faced by the public sector in Europe such as:

*unparalleled levels of migration ~ economic uncertainty ~ low economic growth ~ high unemployment ~ uncertainty about future stability of the banking sector ~ uncertainty about the stability of the Eurozone ~ public finance constraints ~ lack of trust in government ~ pressure on external borders ~ terrorism and its challenge to the functioning of Schengen ~ security (including cyber security and external threats) ~ demographic change ~ climate change ~ the pace of technological change...*

\* It should be emphasised that these examples of complex challenges are not exhaustive and are in no particular order of priority.

Examples of **possible projects** for submission to EPSA 2017 could include those which:

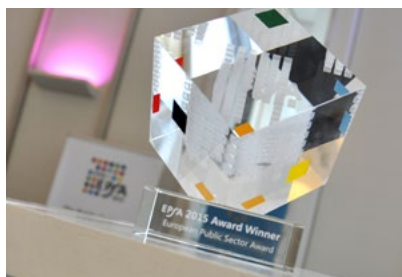
- Effectively address the societal challenges that are highest priority for their stakeholders.
- Introduce systemic changes, which improve the sustainability of successful outcomes such as the modernisation of governance and leadership within an organisation, increase the attractiveness of the public sector as an employer and take into account the diversification of the workforce.
- Improve the accountability of public sector entities to their stakeholders.
- Deal with digital transformation by applying solutions provided by new technologies 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.

The examples above are also intended to emphasise that the notion of innovation 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.

Concretely, these examples may **necessitate 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 innovation, introducing new processes for engaging staff and other stakeholders in service design, breaking down 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 2017 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 **seven 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.
- 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 Transferability and learning capacity:** i.e. the case has potential value and lessons which are relevant to other entities because it provides the potential for successful replication in other contexts (different Member States and levels of government) and 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 - gender, age, disability and geographical location.



## 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 structure 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](#));
- Compliance with the theme of EPSA 2017.
- 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 the deadline of 24.00 Central European Time (CET), 13 April 2017.

As the working language of EPSA 2017 is English, it is strongly recommended to submit projects in English.

## General statement for applicants

Projects tackling the integration of migrants and marginalised groups are especially invited for submission to the EPSA 2017 as integration represents one of the most difficult problems currently faced by public administrations in Europe.

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.

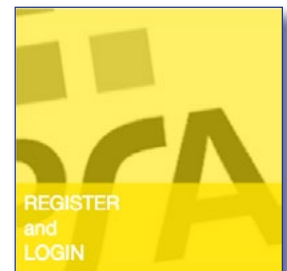
Previous EPSA participants may re-submit projects from the previous EPSA editions insofar as they are based on a material adaptation, update and/or extension of past projects, including the achievement of significant results since any previous submission.

## When and how to apply?

The online application period is open from:

**13 February 2017 until  
13 April 2017 (24.00 CET)**

[www.epsa2017.eu](http://www.epsa2017.eu)  
[REGISTER and LOGIN]



## 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.

Finally, a high-level jury will select the finalists and winners of the EPSA 2017 awards.

