

Application

Preliminary Question

In which language are you submitting the application (check one)?

Please note that each country has the option of either submitting an application in English, or in their native language if they are unable to pay for translation into English. For applications submitted in the native language, OGP will pay for the translation into English before passing on to the judges.

- English
- Native language (please mention)

If you are submitting in your native language and it is non-Latin based language, you will have the option of uploading a PDF file at the end of this application. Please follow the questions and word limits mentioned in the application template.

A. THE TEAM

The following information is required to capture a basic understanding of those responsible for your initiative and any partnerships that have helped you to meet your goals.

INITIATIVE NAME (required)

Provide the name of the initiative that your team is submitting for consideration of the 2015 Open Government Awards. If the initiative is operating under one or more alternate name(s), provide the name that is most commonly recognized.

My eMunicipality
estrazagora.info

THE NOMINATION (required)

Begin by describing how this initiative was selected. For example, mention any nomination or consultation process held with civil society partners or others when selecting the initiative.

[100 words]

The initiative was selected following an online consultation process with 25 leading CSOs and relevant government units who were given an opportunity to make nominations. Of a total number of 8 nominations this initiative was endorsed almost unanimously by both the government officials and the CSO representatives.

Is this initiative included in your country's OGP National Action Plan?

(Applicants can choose initiatives from within OR outside their OGP National Action Plans)

- Yes
- No

GOVERNMENT POINT OF CONTACT (required)

Provide the name, title, phone number(s), email address(es) and mailing address of a single point of contact for the purposes of communicating with your team. The person should be the senior most individual responsible for overseeing the application requirements.

Please also provide the name and professional title of the government official responsible for implementing the initiative, if different from above.

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TYPE OF APPLICATION (required)

We strongly encourage applicants to submit a joint application from a government agency and a civil society organization. Only submit a joint application if a civil society organization was involved in either designing, implementing or monitoring the initiative jointly with the government.

Is this a joint application?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please fill out the "civil society point of contact" field below.

CIVIL SOCIETY POINT OF CONTACT

Please provide the name and title of a single point of contact at the organization. By providing these details you acknowledge that you are jointly applying with a civil society organization for the 2015 Open Government Awards.

Zhivka Alexandrova, co-founder of My eMunicipality

OTHER PARTNERSHIPS (optional)

If you are partnering with one or more other government agencies, private sector entities, media etc., please list each partner. In 250 words or less, provide a brief narrative of the partnership and the role each partner plays in your initiative.

The local ombudsman of the Municipality of Stara Zagora Pavlina Delcheva. She was involved as a consultant in the development process for the My eMunicipality platform and moderates all incoming publications forwarding them to the competent agency/utility company.
Municipality of Stara Zagora – receives, processes and responds to all publications dealing with issues within its competences.
District Court of Stara Zagora – receives, processes and responds to all publications dealing with issues within its jurisdiction.
Water Supply & Sewerage Company of Stara Zagora - receives, processes and respond to all publications dealing with issues relating to its functions.
EVN Local Electricity Provider - receives, processes and respond to all publications dealing with issues relating to its functions.
Corlete Ltd. - development, design and implementation of the software component of the project.
Zaralab - local hackerspace community

A Partnership Memorandum was signed with the institutions and utility companies taking part in the project. The platform is open to all institutions that provide services to the citizens and are willing to maintain an ongoing dialog with their customers.

B. THE INITIATIVE

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) is prepared to celebrate a range of successful applicants for the Open Government Awards. This year's theme is Improving Public Services through Open Government. Please visit here for more clarification on the theme. To qualify for recognition, we need to understand the various elements of success of your initiative and its sustainability over time. Please answer the following questions:

PROBLEM DEFINITION (required)

In 200 words or less, please identify the specific problem your initiative intended to solve. Why was this problem important to solve at a particular time and what were the challenges posed by your national (or local) economic or political context?

The key problem that the platform is designed to address is the lack of a modern, effective, equitable and transparent communication tool that citizens, and regional and national institutions can employ. Finding a solution to this problem is important as it creates a favorable environment for:

- reducing and overcoming the lack of trust by the citizens in their regional and national authorities;
- optimization and transparent use of public funds by the institutions and allocation of funds in areas that the citizens perceive as priority areas;
- overcoming the lack of transparency in the operation of the institutions;
- reducing the lead times in solving specific problems that the individual citizens and communities are faced with;
- making it easier for the citizens to receive services and information from the institutions;
- aligning the priorities of the citizens and the local administration with regards to the further development of the city;
- encouraging civic engagement

INITIATIVE DESIGN (required)

In 250 words or less, describe your initiative's goals and objectives. How did it aim to improve public service delivery, who was it intended to benefit (specify the target population), and why was it important to use open government approaches to achieve this goal? If your initiative was designed to improve access or services for disadvantaged or marginalized groups, provide details on this here. Describe any innovations in the design of the initiative.

Objectives:

- To create an independent and accessible platform designed to ensure a transparent, two-way interaction between the citizens and the public institutions;
- To encourage the citizens to be actively involved in improving the city government;
- To support the institutions by providing them with fresh information about the issues important for the citizens and to encourage the public institutions to use the analysis of this feedback for more efficient use of public funds for urban development;
- To establish an effective mechanism for rapid and public response to the issues, questions and proposals of the community.

In order to achieve these objectives an easy-to-use online platform of the One Desk type was developed in which every citizen can deliver a message to the institutions using their computer or mobile device.

It is an innovative model based on an open communication algorithm – a set of transparent rules and procedures for each participant to ensure an effective two-way communication.

Based on the existing administrative set-up and the regulations, an electronic tool was created which streamlines and forwards the incoming information, making it possible to aggregate and extract strategic data. A key element in the model is boosting the role of the local ombudsman as a liaison for the incoming information.

The initiative allows for each and every citizen irrespective of their age, gender or ethnic origin to be actively involved. It also significantly contributes to improving the access of people with disabilities to public services.

INITIATIVE OUTCOMES (required)

In 450 words or less, explain how your initiative was able to demonstrate one or more of the following results:

- Citizens have better access to information on the public services to which they are entitled, and/or information on the performance of public service providers
- Governments are better at asking for and responding to feedback or complaints by citizens on the quality of public services
- Citizens have ways to actively participate in the design and delivery of public services
- Citizens have mechanisms to monitor and oversee public works and services

Initiatives should also provide evidence if the initiative was able to expand access to public services to a larger population than before or if the quality and efficiency of public services has improved.

If there are any baseline indicators to measure the outcomes of the initiative, please describe them in detail. If the initiative was included in the OGP Action Plan, please describe how this did (or did not) contribute to the initiative's success.

The web-based platform makes it possible for the citizens to pose a question or submit a complaint to the institutions at any time and from any device. The user-friendly design and the platform workflow algorithm allow for significantly reducing the lead time between receiving a problem alert and solving the problem. The fact that the information and the workflow are public enables the community to monitor the functioning of the administration. Every citizen can demonstrate the importance of a given issue or alert by joining it. A public archive is kept on the platform containing the issues raised and the solutions found.

The incoming complaints, questions and proposals make it possible for the administrations of the participating institutions and companies to track customer satisfaction in real time and to develop urban development strategies accounting for the citizens' feedback. By monitoring the responses published on the platform the mayor of the city can assess the quality of work and the competences of the municipal officials. The option for the citizens to be able to make proposals to the institutions using the platform makes them active participants in the efforts to improve the urban environment and the work of the local authorities.

The analysis of the local ombudsman of Stara Zagora of the citizens' complaints, proposals and questions posted on the platform from the date it started operation to 28.10.2013 shows that a total of 1187 posts were uploaded with 1052 of them being marked as solved. This means that an average of two publications per day were posted on the platform. In comparison the ombudsman office reported receiving between 320 and 350 questions, complaints and proposals per calendar year or an average of 0,89 – 0,95/day. It is noted in the report that the response times have been considerably shortened as compared to the conventional methods of communication between the citizens and the institutions. The average lead time from posting a publication to receiving a response by the institutions is seven to ten days, and in many cases it is even shorter – one or two days.

More than 2000 hits per day are registered by the platform which is a clear indication that the citizens of Stara Zagora show interest in the development of their city and are willing to get involved in solving the local problems.
As a partner of the initiative the Municipality of Stara Zagora received the 2013 annual prize for best practice for partnership between the municipal administration and civil society for transparency in the actions of the administration from the Foundation for Transparent Regulations.

INITIATIVE SUSTAINABILITY (required)

In 200 words or less, please describe any plans for scaling up or sustaining the initiative. Base your description of the strategy on the information provided in the previous sections, such as how you intend to leverage your current success and increase your reach or capacity. Address any threats or operational challenges to your initiative and describe how you manage those risks on a regular basis.

The web-based platform is a prototype and has been operating for an year and a half. The information collected so far would make it possible to improve the model and develop a scaling up strategy:

- Cooperation with Zaralab - part of the national hackerspace network. This will allow the team to intensify its outreach activities and find partners in the larger open source community for further development;
- Sources of funding for the further development will be sought;
- Pilot phase – establishing partnerships with other cities for development and testing of the system;
- Developing a feature rich cloud based solution which will make it possible to roll out the platform at low cost in many cities.

The prototype operation demonstrated that the best approach is the platform to be maintained as a public and independent initiative supported by the government agencies and having credibility among the citizens.

The sustainability risk for the project could be found in unsatisfactory responses by the institutions, their refusal to use it and the loss of credibility with the citizens. These risks are managed by relying on an active civil society and applying a participatory approach in resolving disputes and overcoming skepticism on both sides.

VALIDATION OF CLAIMS (required)

While it is strongly encouraged that each initiative includes an implementing partner, such as a Civil Society Organization, private sector agency, media entity, etc., it is not a requirement. However, you are required to secure and upload documents from at least two credible nongovernmental actors, who can attest to the veracity of the claims made in your application.

You are only allowed to upload one file. If you have multiple documents, please zip them into a single file first. The file types that are allowed to be uploaded have an extension of .ZIP, .PDF, .DOC, .DOCX, .XLS or .XLSX.

ngos_open_awards.pdf

C. THE PITCH

The following information allows each applicant to make their strongest (and final) case for consideration.

BEST CASE (required)

In 250 words or less, please present the most compelling facts for why your initiative should be recognized. This is an opportunity to distinguish your initiative, based on any factors that you have not had the opportunity to describe in the previous sections. What is your best argument for why your initiative has achieved a meaningful outcome? What elements of the initiative make it different and better than others that have been tried and tested? Be creative and concise.

Just two years ago a team of enthusiasts and civic activists realised the need of a communication channel that the citizens can use to voice their problems which meets the modern technological requirements. In the development process it became clear that the team could offer even more than that – a state-of-the-art solution which to be useful by both the citizens and the city government. The ombudsman and the city government accepted the idea as very useful and declared their will to participate. The fact that the local ombudsman is actively involved lends credibility to the platform among both the citizens and the institutions. The platform was tested and proven to be suitable for improving the services provided by multiple institutions and utility companies locally and nationally.

This initiative is a purely volunteer effort and was fully funded by donations from the team. The platform is available for use to all citizens and relevant institutions. The use of an open source system and open data contributes to the establishment of a community of like-minded activists and developers and hence to the constant improvement of the tool.

From Open Source through Open Data to Open Government.

VIDEO SUBMISSION or ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS (optional*)

OGP does not offer a venue for applicants to meet our judges during the application process. In order to provide the opportunity for making a personal connection, you are encouraged to upload a short video to complement your application. You may also depict an individual participant in your initiative and describe his or her experience. We do not need to know actual names or personal details. Take this opportunity to tell a story, to connect with our panel of experts, so that they might better understand your attention to specific needs.

Video submissions should follow these guidelines:

Maximum length of 3-4 minutes.

Please focus on personal presentations; it's not necessary to develop a sophisticated or polished video.

Here are some logistical and technical suggestions:

Video cameras, digital cameras, and phones are easy ways to record a video.
Laptop and desktop computers can typically record video through Skype or other software.
If possible, set to a low resolution to reduce file size. This will enable an easier video uploading process.
If you are having difficulty uploading the video file, try logging out of the application and logging back in using another Internet browser.

Here are general suggestions for delivering a high-quality video pitch:

Introduce yourself and your initiative. Focus on describing your intended benefits and/or services and how they have been effective. What is unique about your initiative, partners, or technical approach? Keep your description and language simple.

* NOTE

If the burden of developing a video presentation is either prohibitive or might not reflect the best characterization of your initiative, then you are not required to submit one, and the judges are instructed not to discount your application because it may not include a video. You may upload additional documents instead, such as proof of implementation and results if you wish. This could take the form of evaluation or audit reports, citizen surveys, media reports etc. that would provide additional validation for judges. We hope that this option offers a new and inventive way in which you can best express the results of your work.

You are only allowed to upload one file with a maximum of 3 pages. This file must be in English or in your native language. If you have multiple documents, please zip them into a single file first. The file types that are allowed to be uploaded have an extension of .ZIP, .PDF, .DOC, .DOCX, .XLS or .XLSX.

Full Submission Of non-Latin Based Native Language

If your language is Latin based, DO NOT use this upload field. Please use the application above.

You are only allowed to upload one file with an extension of .PDF