



EPISA 2021 – BUILDING A BETTER EUROPE FOR CITIZENS

HOW TO APPLY FOR THE EPISA 2021



Introduction

This guide provides information about the EPSA 2021 and sets out for applicants how to apply for the EPSA 2021, including how to complete the application form.

What is the EPSA 2021?

EPSA - the European Public Sector Awards - is a Europe-wide award scheme for public sector entities that have been organised every two years since 2009 by the European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA).

Since 2009, more than 1350 projects have been submitted to the EPSA from 39 countries, EU institutions, agencies, and international organisations.

The EPSA 2021 has the institutional and financial support of 8 European public sector partners from different levels of government - Austria, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, the Province of Limburg, and the City of Maastricht in addition to the European Commission via DG REFORM (Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support).

Public administrations submitting applications for the EPSA 2021 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 2021 will be a unique opportunity to celebrate your achievements - the EPSA 2021 awards will be presented on the occasion of a high-level event to be held in November 2021 in Maastricht, the Netherlands, during the Slovenian 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 a vast audience and to be recognised for being at the leading edge of public sector innovation across Europe.

The highest-ranking projects in each theme will be invited to present their projects in workshops at the final EPSA 2021 event, which will be web-streamed across Europe.

Key steps

There are six stages to the submission of applications for the EPSA 2021.

An applicant needs to:

1. Confirm eligibility to apply
2. Decide what project(s) to submit
3. Decide who will submit the application
4. Decide for which theme an application will be submitted
5. Complete the EPSA 2021 application form
6. Submit the EPSA 2021 application form before the closing date/time

1. Confirm eligibility to apply

All European public sector entities from all levels of government and public sector enterprises and agencies are eligible to submit their projects for the award.

In concrete terms, this includes, for example, all public entities such as EU institutions, departments, divisions or agencies of EU institutions, national governments, national government departments, divisions or agencies, 100% state-owned enterprises, cities, regions, provinces and other forms of sub-national authorities as well as departments, divisions or agencies of them or enterprises 100% owned by them.

It also includes those responsible for scrutiny of public sector entities such as regulatory, audit or judicial authorities.

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 be other public sector entities eligible to be lead applicants and/or private or mixed-capital entities, not for profit/third sector organisations or academic institutions.

The lead applicant must be of wholly European geographical origin (i.e., EU, EEA, EU candidate countries and other administrations wholly geographically located in Europe, i.e., Andorra, Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Moldova, Monaco, San Marino, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Ukraine, Vatican City).

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

Applicant entities may submit more than one project for the EPSA 2021, but as noted below, any one project can only be submitted for one of the three themes set out below.

Projects which receive EU Funds are asked to indicate this in the application form, but this is not a condition of eligibility.

2. Decide what project(s) 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 considering which projects to submit, applicants should consider:

- How any project submitted is likely to fit with the evaluation criteria, and, in particular, the innovation and impact/results criteria which will be used in the first stage of the remote evaluation to select the projects which will be subject to

evaluation against all criteria in the second stage of the remote evaluation. The experience of past EPSA editions is that a project must have been in operation long enough to have proven evidence of impact and tangible results for the benefit of citizens.

- Whether or not to submit a project which is an entirely new development, i.e., not closely linked to any other initiative by another entity, a case of adaptive innovation where the project has identified an initiative by another entity and has adapted it for use in its own context or has enhanced and further developed another of its own earlier initiatives. Past EPSA editions have included high ranking projects in all of these types of innovation.
- As part of the process of determining which project to select, applicants could, for example, undertake a review of entities that are recognised as having taken leading edge and successful initiatives in areas relevant to the theme.

3. Decide who will submit the application

While the lead applicant must be a public sector entity, applications can be submitted jointly with other entities, including with other entities defined above as being eligible to be lead applicants, and/or other applicants such as private or mixed-capital entities, not for profit/third sector organisations or academic institutions.

The choice will be influenced by factors such as the extent to which an application is rendered a better fit with the evaluation criteria through a joint application and how far the joint applicants have common needs and objectives which can be better achieved through co-operation on the project, can demonstrably be seen to have created management and operational structures to enhance the effectiveness of the project, have contributed resources to the project and have a common commitment to the continuity of the project.

4. Decide for which theme an application will be submitted

Applications for the EPSA 2021 may be submitted for any of the three themes that the EPSA 2021 Steering Committee has set out for the EPSA 2021.

The choice of theme is for the applicant to decide - a project can only be submitted for one of the three themes, and the choice of theme should be indicated on the application form.

There will be the same number of prizes in each theme, i.e., a 1st, 2nd and 3rd prize winner and a minimum of 9 other Best Practice Certificates.

The winners for all three themes will be selected by the same process, i.e., remote evaluation, shortlisting, validation and selection of prize winners by the jury.

The three themes for the EPSA 2021, which are linked to the European Commission's priorities, are:

- Digital Public Administration

- Innovation in Public Administration
- Green Public Administration.

Digital Public Administration

https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age_en

Innovation in Public Administration

https://ec.europa.eu/info/departments/structural-reform-support_en

Green Public Administration

https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en

The definition of past EPSA themes has always been intended to be inclusive, i.e., to maximise the number of eligible projects. The EPSA 2021 Steering Committee has again emphasised the need for a definition of the theme as broad as possible.

Further details of the scope of the themes, including examples of high-ranking projects from recent past EPSA editions which might, potentially, have been relevant to the EPSA 2021 themes, are shown in the “EPSA 2021- Call for applications”.

5. Complete the EPSA 2021 application form

Applications for the EPSA 2021 must be submitted in English.

The EPSA 2021 application form is in four parts, all of which need to be completed for applications to be valid.

Part 1 – Base project information

Part 2 – Project executive summary

Part 3 – Project information relevant to the evaluation criteria

Part 4 – Declaration

Guidance on completion of Part 1 – Base project information

The first decision to be made is the title of the project - the first indication that the project is relevant both to the selected theme and citizens' needs.

It may be helpful to check, for instance, the titles of the EPSA 2019 and 2017 highest ranked projects which are available on the EPSA publications section of the website:

https://epsa2019.eu/files/repository/20191105092657_EPSA2019_publication_web.pdf

https://epsa2019.eu/files/repository/20171123095828_EPSA2017_Publication_web.pdf

Guidance on completion of Part 2 – Project executive summary

As regards the balance of the content of the executive summary, it should primarily focus on the key points relevant to the evaluation criteria since these will form the basis of the decisions in the assessment process.

It is nevertheless helpful to explain the context of the project within the applicant entity (or entities) - the evaluators come from different nationalities and professional backgrounds and may not be fully aware of the project's background.

It is also essential to connect the project application to the overarching theme of the EPSA 2021, i.e., how well the project application reflects the desire to build a better Europe for citizens.

This will be of particular importance to the final stage of the assessment process, i.e., the decision of the high-level jury who will be making their decision on which projects will receive 1st, 2nd and 3rd prize between projects which have already been ranked highly by the evaluators and been validated by the EPSA Team in the validation process after the shortlisting meeting.

The experience of past successful projects is that it can be helpful to write the initial draft of the executive summary at the start of the application process – this will enable the application to be focused on the factors which help to distinguish the project from others (the "unique selling points") and is an opportunity to include, for example, a key point for each of the evaluation criteria which is further explained in Part 3.

Evaluators are not mandated to read the projects they are evaluating in any particular sequence, but it is possible to imagine that they may read the executive summary first.

Guidance on completion of Part 3 – Project information relevant to the evaluation criteria

The information relevant to the evaluation criteria is the key to assessing the project since these are the basis for the assessment made by both the evaluators.

There are six evaluation criteria for the EPSA 2021.

Innovation: e.g., evidence of 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 that goes beyond what was previously applied and how this results from a learning, innovation and self-improvement culture within the entity and/or adaptation/evolution of innovative solutions by other entities.¹

¹ i.e., for the purpose of evaluating EPSA 2021 projects, the scope of the innovation criterion is not restricted to entirely new developments, i.e., ones not linked to any other initiative by itself or by another entity. It can also include adaptive innovation cases where the project has identified an initiative by another entity and has

Impact/results: e.g., evidence of realisation of planned objectives and activities by an illustration of proven evidence of benefits, visible impact/tangible results (which may be based on demonstrably high levels of achievement/ achievement of significant improvements from a low base).

Stakeholder engagement: e.g., evidence of citizen, business and civil society co-operation and/or response to the consultation, evidence of intelligent engagement with external and/or internal stakeholders that can influence the design and production of services and of intelligent partnership and governance models.

Relevance: e.g., evidence of the particular needs and constraints of the context, the core needs of target groups and final beneficiaries and how the actions address those needs.

Sustainability: e.g., evidence of how the case shows elements that allow it to be sustained beyond an initial period of the realisation of its objectives and of its activities, including considerations of financial and operational sustainability and of senior administrative level support/political support.

Transferability: e.g., the case has potential value and lessons relevant to other entities because it provides the potential for successful replication in/adaptation to other contexts (e.g., different Member States and levels of government and peers).

The assessment process for the EPSA 2021 will take place in five stages:

- All projects in each theme will be assessed in the first stage of the remote evaluation by expert evaluators.² Against the innovation and impact/results criteria - both are equally weighted for this purpose. **Applicants should thus give particular attention to ensuring that their applications effectively represent the achievements of their projects against these two criteria.**
- The highest-ranking projects from the first stage will then be subject to remote evaluation against all six evaluation criteria in the second stage of the remote evaluation - all six criteria are equally weighted at this stage.
- Following the second stage of the remote evaluation, the evaluators will convene to discuss the initial remote evaluation and select the shortlist. The shortlisting meeting will be organised by theme and will discuss in detail the 12 top-ranking projects evaluated in the second stage of the initial remote evaluation. The shortlisting meeting will determine the four shortlisted projects for each theme.

adapted it for use in its own context or where it has enhanced and further developed another of its own earlier initiatives.

² The EPSA evaluators will be selected based on their professional competence and take account of the need to ensure gender balance, the geographical balance of evaluators from different countries and balance of professional background between those from an academic background, practitioners (i.e., those currently or formerly working in public service) and those active in public sector consultancy.

- The four shortlisted projects for each theme will be subject to the validation process between July and September 2021 prior to the jury meeting in October 2021. **Availability for the meetings associated with the validation process (normally one day, including the project sponsors, project team and external stakeholders) is an essential requirement for applicants**
- The high-level jury will determine which projects will receive 1st, 2nd and 3rd prize in each theme.

Guidance on completion of Part 4 – Declaration

The application form needs to be completed by being signed by the lead applicant entity.

By submitting this project application, the project applicants confirm that in their understanding that they comply with the eligibility criteria for the EPSA 2021 set out in this application guide.

By submitting this project application, project applicants also consent to the terms of EIPA's General Data Protection Policy and the Copyright Statement.

LINK to EIPA's General Data Protection Policy and the Copyright Statement

In particular, the project applicant(s) consent to the use of the data included in this application for any lawful purpose associated with EPSA 2021, including but not restricted to the assessment of the application for the purpose of the award process and the use of the data by EIPA, the institutional partners of EPSA 2021 and by any third party, for publicity and knowledge dissemination purposes, including the addition to an openly accessible digital platform and database of cases.

Other guidance

It may help read the executive summaries of projects successful in recent past EPSA editions that are available by accessing the publications section of the EPSA website <https://www.epsa2019.eu/en/publications/>.

During the preparation of the application, it is helpful to invite stakeholder inputs - stakeholder engagement is one of the evaluation criteria, and the validation of shortlisted projects will include validation of the scope and nature of stakeholder engagement, which may, according to the nature of the project, also be based on internal stakeholders.

Having finished the final draft, it can be helpful invite comments from a senior expert colleague from within your organisation who has no connection with the project - this will provide an independent opinion on whether the application is easily understandable and to ensure that the application demonstrates both its fit with the evaluation criteria and optimises the way in which it does so.

The experience of past successful projects is that it is helpful to prepare the application over a period of elapsed time with several periods of preparation separated by time intervals to enable reflection and improvement - this applies in particular to allowing time for reflection on the revision of the final draft of the application.

Linguistic perfection is not an evaluation criterion, but it might be helpful, since the evaluators and jury members will come from different nationalities, to use a translation tool such as DeepL Translate to review the linguistic quality of the application <https://www.deepl.com/translator> or invite review by a native English speaker.

In preparing the application, it should be noted that the assessment process has two dimensions, i.e., the decision of the evaluators in the remote evaluation and shortlisting and the decision of the high-level jury. To make their decision, the jury will be provided with the application forms submitted as well as the assessment of the evaluators and the validation process reports. The validation process will take place between July and September 2021.

The four projects in each theme that are shortlisted at the shortlisting meeting will be invited to prepare a short video (typically 2-3 minutes maximum), which will also be shown to the jury. This video will be an opportunity to focus the deliberations of the jury on the key points of the project - the EPSA team will provide further guidance on the format etc., of the video at a later stage of the process.

Projects will be evaluated solely on the basis of the information submitted on this form, and any other accompanying materials submitted in whatever form will not be taken into account in the evaluation process.

6. Submit the EPSA 2021 application form before the closing date/time

Applications can be submitted at any time before the closing date/time for applications.

The closing date/time for applications is 10 May 2021, 23:59 hours CET.

When completed, the application form should be returned in pdf format by email to:

Jolanda Peters, Project Assistant, EPSA 2021 (j.peters@eipa.eu)

cc Clara Cotroneo, Project Co-ordinator, EPSA 2021(c.cotroneo@eipa.eu)

When applications have been received, they will be acknowledged by the EPSA Team

Support for completion of applications

The EPSA Team has included within the timetable a time window within which applicants can ask general questions about the application process or how to complete the application form.

These questions should be submitted no later than 30 April 2021, and the EPSA Team will aim to reply by no later than 4 May 2021.

Do not miss a chance to participate in the EPSA 2021 Info Day on 26 April, 12:00 – 13:00 CET.

Registration via link:

[https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJ0tdO6ppzltH9XdoAUdov27zk2DTROLy04Z](https://zoom.us/join/zoom/register/tJ0tdO6ppzltH9XdoAUdov27zk2DTROLy04Z)

In the interests of transparency and equality of treatment, the EPSA Team cannot provide project-specific advice about how to improve the quality of project applications, including, in particular, parts 2 and 3 of the application form.

Questions to and answers from the EPSA Team will be circulated to all projects which have submitted questions.

Contact details for the EPSA 2021

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