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Submission

Application

Participant: Estonia Team

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS:

As you consider which initiative to put forward for the Open Government Awards, please consider the following questions:

(1)
Does the initiative seek to improve a public policy or service?

● Yes ○ No

(2) If yes, does the initiative seek to improve the ability of citizens to provide feedback and/or to make decisions in the design or implementation of a policy or service? For examples of initiatives, see: http://www.opengovguide.com/topics/citizen-engagement

● Yes ○ No

If you have answered "Yes" to BOTH of these questions, please proceed with your application.

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 by the judges of the 2014 Open Government Awards (under the inaugural theme, Citizen Engagement). If the initiative is operating under one or more alternate name(s), provide the name that is most commonly recognized.

RAHVAKOGU (in English: "People´s Assembly")

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. Please offer your explanation of this process in 200 words or less.

RAHVAKOGU (People´s Assembly) initiative was proposed, discussed and finally selected at Estonian National OGP Steering Committee meeting in May 2014 by unanimous vote. The Steering Committee - responsible for overseeing the drafting of the new national OGP action plan - membership was equally divided between the government agencies and non-governmental organizations/NGOs, (6 votes each). The Steering Committee then requested the Office of the Estonian President to officially submit Rahvakogu as the Estonian entry to the Open Government Award international panel.

GOVERNMENT POINT OF CONTACT (required)

Provide the name and title of a single point of contact for the purposes of communicating with your team. The person should be the most senior individual responsible for overseeing the application submission. Provide the phone number(s), email address(es), and physical address of your designated point of contact. You may provide alternate contact information, if it is a direct means for reaching the designated point of contact.

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CIVIL SOCIETY POINT OF CONTACT (strongly recommended)

We strongly encourage applicants to submit a joint application from a government agency and a civil society partner. If submitting a joint application, please provide the name and title of a single point of contact at the partner organization. If not, please be sure to focus on the "validation of claims" in Section B (see pg. A-3).

Coordinator of the RAHVAKOGU process

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OTHER PARTNERSHIPS (optional)

If you are partnering with one or more other government agencies, private sector entities, media, or other organizations, please list each partner. In 250 words or less, provide a brief narrative of the partnership, including the roles that each partner assumes in the initiative.

The People's Assembly was/is originated, organized and led by volunteers from various non-governmental organizations (Coordination Council):

1. Estonian Cooperation Assembly - independent think-tank,
2. Praxis Centre for Policy Studies - independent think-tank
3. Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations (NENO)
4. e-Governance Academy (independent, non-profit)
5. Open Estonia Foundation (independent, non-profit)
6. IT and communications professionals

The People's Assembly had/has Partners from all major 4 political parties and also from the national Parliament, mainly the Committee of Constitutional Affairs. The Assembly did have voluntary help from legal experts and advisers.

The Coordination Committee was not officially "established" by anybody. It was a group of active citizens, representatives of above-mentioned organizations, who wanted to find a solution to the complex and complicated problem and do it in an "Estonian way", i.e use innovative and creative methods and out of the box thinking. Each member of the Committee was given a specific task and deadline, due to tight time-frame the designing and working process was extremely intensive, but at the same time very concentrated and effective. The Committee was basically given *carte blanche*: find a solution, the originator (i.e the President and the Office of the President) will support and defend you (if required).

B. THE INITIATIVE

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) is prepared to celebrate a range of successful applicants to the Open Government Awards. This year's theme is "citizen engagement." To qualify for recognition, we need to understand the various elements of success for your initiative and its sustainability over time.

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 for the particular context in which you are working?

A former Estonian MP announced in May 2012 that the party's officials gave him 7600 euros of unknown origin that he then had to donate to the party. He claimed that dozens of members had donated funds to the party this way, including MPs.

Although the party rejected the accusations and the subsequent investigation collapsed due to lack of hard evidence, the public did not find party's denials convincing. Widespread protest yielded to the street demonstrations demanding **more transparency in party funding** as well as **more dialogue** and **openness in the political system**. Estonia is not a country famous for anti-government street protests, quite the opposite.

A petition, Charter12 co-authored by leading Estonian intellectuals, declared the moral bankruptcy of party-political system and demanded reforms. More than 18 000 people signed the Charter within the next 8 days.

How to turn this wave of protest and activism into something constructive? Civil society activists proposed **crowdsourcing as a method** for finding solutions to these complex problems. The original idea was conceived at a meeting convened by the President of the Republic. Main political parties, representatives of protesters, NGO representatives, authors of Charter12, and experts of constitutional law were invited to take part.

TARGET POPULATION (required)

In 100 words or less, please identify the target population who may benefit from this initiative. Highlight your understanding of the needs or demands of the target population that were addressed by your initiative.

One might consider the whole society as target population of RAHVAKOGU initiative, as far as the main aim of the initiative was to give the general public their share in designing new laws and making the participation in politics and public policy making easier in the future. Rahvakogu is a meeting point, a deliberation platform for activists, politicians, experts as well as for general public. The idea was to channel the popular discontent into constructive suggestions and proposals to the Parliament.

INITIATIVE DESIGN (required)

In 350 words or less, describe your initiative's goals and objectives. Focus specifically on how the initiative was designed to meet those objectives. For example, identify stage(s) of the policy/service design or implementation when you solicited citizen participation. What kind of participation did you seek from citizens (e.g., feedback, consultation, joint decision-making, monitoring of activities, etc.)? Explain why this particular approach was best suited to achieve the initiative's goals. How did you encourage citizens to participate? Describe any innovations in the design of the initiative.

People´s Assembly had/has 2 main goals:

1. PROCESS - to prove that change in decision making process is possible by combining online crowd-sourcing with smaller seminars and big deliberation day conference;

2. RESULTS - to have laws amended or new laws passed by the Parliament.

A new website was launched early January 2013 where everyone could propose ideas for improving the situation in the areas such as elections, public participation, political parties and their funding. Within three weeks, it gained 60,000 visitors; 1,800 registered users posted nearly 6,000 ideas and comments. All these were grouped and provided with impact assessment by scholars and practitioners.

Thematic workshops were held to prioritize proposals in each topic category. Participants in seminars totalled 150 persons, including authors of presented proposals, political party representatives, experts in political science and electoral regulations. The outcome of these prioritized proposals were sent to the Deliberation Day on 6th of April, where a recruited representative sample of 500 (of which 314 actually turned up and participated) people discussed the pros and cons of ideas and cast then their preferences.

The outcomes of People´s Assembly – 15 proposals for legislative amendments - were presented to the Parliament who set a timetable when these regulations would be discussed in the formal process.

Two legislative amendments have been adopted within a year of the deliberation process.

If legislative process is usually considered (and is) a "for members only" event even in democracies, Rahvakogu created a model of doing the legislative work with maximum openness (everybody was invited to participate) and transparency. The initiative received massive media coverage during the whole 3 months process. Later the Rahvakogu Coordination Committee (together with its media partners) held the Parliament under permanent scrutiny for doing their part of the job, i.e discussing the proposals and amending laws.

The most critical part was overcoming the public pessimism and even cynicism, it was not easy to prove that Rahvakogu was just not another futile attempt to bring politicians and people "together", another attempt by political parties to make promises and then fail to deliver.

INITIATIVE OUTCOMES (required)

In 250 words or less, describe the intended outcomes and the actual outcomes that the initiative achieved. Who were the ultimate beneficiaries, and what benefits did they experience? For example, list any concrete improvements in policy, services, behaviors, or power relations between the government and citizens. Try to present your case from the perspective of the various stakeholders involved (e.g., your agency, citizens, Civil Society Organizations, media, et al.). If there are any baseline indicators or standards to measure the outcomes of the initiative, such as the breadth of depth of engagement, please describe them in detail.

Despite the fact that only 3 of the 15 Rahvakogu proposals have been implemented and laws amended within the first year (4 more proposals are pending), the process as a whole is considered as a success.

Thanks to the People´s Assembly the public has acquired a possibility to bring their proposals directly to the Parliament for discussions (Law on Petition). It is easier to create a new political party and take part in national elections. The legal barriers for newcomers have been lowered. And there is a possibility that 2-3 new parties will be created before the next elections in March 2015.

But the most important thing - participatory democracy has become a mainstream idea in political discussions. Estonian Parliament and Government are themselves making proposals for opening up the political process and giving up their monopoly for agenda-setting and offering solutions. What a revolutionary development in less than 18 months!

INITIATIVE SUSTAINABILITY (required)

In 200 words or less, please describe any plans for scaling up and/or sustaining the initiative in the future. Base your description of the strategy on 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 intend to manage those risks on a regular basis.

People´s Assembly Coordination Committee submitted a joint proposal to include the upgraded version of Rahvakogu as part of Estonia´s next OGP national action plan. The proposal was accepted, and has since become one of three Estonian "flagship" projects:

Creating a non-governmental web-based discussion environment to give citizens an opportunity to initiate, compile and then submit, digitally signed, collective memoranda to state and local authorities (Priority 1, Commitment 2.6)

This commitment has a direct link to one of Rahvakogu initial and accepted proposals (Law on Petition). While giving first the public the right to send legislative initiatives to the Parliament, the government now is making a commitment to create the necessary environment for implementing the law on the basis of Rahvakogu. Given the strong and well-established brand, Rahvakogu has clear potential to score another success while becoming a permanent actor at the national and local political scene.

The details of this arrangement are under discussion at the time on submission of this application. But original elements of the Rahvakogu idea will remain at the core of the development: openness, bipartisanship, and crowd-sourced initiative.

VALIDATION OF CLAIMS (required)

While it is strongly encouraged that each initiative includes partners, such as Civil Society Organizations, private sector agencies, media entities, etc., it is not a requirement. However, you are required to secure and upload documents from one or more credible nongovernmental actors who can attest to the veracity of any 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.

NENO_validation_UPDATED.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.

In established democracies it seems to happen now and then that public participation in politics stops to be as sexy as it was at the times, when Estonia re-gained its freedom. Democracy will become a professional affair for elected officials, party bureaucrats, media hacks and lobbyists. People tend to mind their own business, and one day they might find out that power by many, as scripted in our constitutions, has become a privilege for the few.

That awakening may be rude or even violent. Disillusioned people may start questioning the values of democracy and seeking "better" solutions. Populists of every kind and color offer these solutions and use the protest for their own ends.

A far better way to fight that kind of fatigue is to be innovative, creative and find common ground by bringing activists, ordinary citizens and politicians together. People´s Assembly in Estonia did just that by offering the people the possibility to offer their ideas and solutions and at the same time make the politicians first to listen and then to act. Deliberative democracy and using modern communication technology might be one of the few possible ways for governance problem-solving during the 21st century, the era of fragmented societies.

Estonian initiative Rahvakogu offers a clear proof that it is possible to change the ways political decisions are made, it is possible to change the mindset of political establishment, as well as turn all the interested parties into participants of the future.

VIDEO SUBMISSION (recommended*)

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:

Include the following:
- 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?

Hone your content:
- Keep your description and language simple.
- Demonstrate passion through your words and enthusiasm.

*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. We hope that this option offers a new and inventive way in which you can best express the results of your work.