

Application

Participant: Norway 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.

OEP (Electronic Public Records) www.oep.no

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.

The initiative was chosen after a joint process between governmental and civil society organizations. More than 70 entities from governmental and civil society organizations were invited to submit their suggestions for a Norwegian initiative, and attend a meeting on the subject in May. After the meeting two possible initiatives was identified, and a taskforce consisting of two governmental representatives and two representatives from Civil Society were tasked with deciding which initiative should be nominated. This taskforce decided on the final initiative after a review process on the criteria mentioned in the Awards brief.

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.

Jon Håkon Odd,
 Manager OEP/ Senior Adviser
 Agency for Public Management and eGovernment (Difi)
 Tel: (0047) 477 06 922
 Maitto: jod@difl.no

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).

Kristine Foss
 Organization Secretary
 Norwegian Press Association
 Maitto: Kristine.foss@presse.no

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 Norwegian team is a partnership between Difi, the agency in charge of the service, and the Norwegian Press Association. The nomination is supported by the Association of Norwegian Editors, the International Records Management Trust and the Norwegian Union of Journalists.

Difi has managerial responsibility for the initiative on behalf of the government. The Norwegian Press Association, the Association of Norwegian Editors and the Norwegian Union of Journalists have been deeply involved in developing strategic plans, principles for and the design of the OEP-service.

There are annual meetings between Difi and these organisations, where user needs and further development of the service is discussed. The organisations also participate in the design and specification of all new iterations for OEP, user testing and evaluating the effects of the service. They were also consulted in the process for making a regulatory framework for this service.

The collaboration between these Civil Society Organisations and the executing agency has been crucial for developing and maintaining this one-stop shop for access to public documents in Norway.

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?

OEP was launched as a one-stop shop for access to Public Documents. The goal was to provide user friendly access to Public Sector Information and Public Documents - whereby improving Citizen Oversight and enabling the citizen to become more engaged in Governments affairs.

OEP provides a dual function; Users can search the metadata about every archived document that the Government has in its possession, and request access to documents electronically via the service. This can be done anonymously, free of charge and with no requirement to justify why they require access.

These functions were identified to address the huge challenge of findability. Prior to the introduction of OEP it was difficult to know what documents existed and to request access. Findability is now hugely improved. This is crucial for enabling users to be able to affect decisions in the Government before they are made.

There is also the added benefit that by digitizing the process and adding technical solutions for handling requests in the Case-Handling Systems, the time spent on handling requests has been greatly reduced and requests are handled in a matter of days.

The FOIA-request process in Norway is as user friendly as online shopping.

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.

The Press and Media were primary target population for the initiative and key stakeholders in initiating the service. A decision was made jointly by the government and the stakeholders early in the planning phase that universal access be granted to the system.

Journalists are heavy users of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), and make large quantities of requests for documents. OEP reduce their workload significantly. In order to fully understand the user groups needs for the service, they and other Civil Society representatives were invited to participate during the entire process.

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.

OEP's goals and objectives are outlined in two Norwegian White Papers to the National Assembly. It is to (a) make access to Public Sector Documents more easily available, and (b) Streamline the Governments handling of FOIA-requests.

In the development phase it was decided that the system should be agile, based on iterative and incremental development. By doing this we facilitated a more participatory design and better collaboration between the users of the system and the government, responsible for designing the service.

The target population was defined from the outset and different interest groups were invited to participate in the project. This invitation was embraced by Media and Academic Organisations. The collaboration was institutionalised by creating a reference group which lasted throughout the project period. These organisations are still consulted at all iterations.

The reference group has been deeply involved in all stages of developing the service, from deciding on the key functionality, making the necessary specifications, user testing and evaluating results.

Much work was put into making a regulatory framework for the service, which consisted of revising the Freedom of Information Act and its associated regulations. Again all user groups were consulted.

Governmental Authorities are partners in making this service. The Data Inspectorate, The National Archives and the legal department at the Ministry of Justice were key participants. Other entities were consulted as users of the system, responsible for publishing their Records and receiving and processing the FOIA-requests.

There was also a point in streamlining the case processing of the FOIA-requests in the governmental entities. By implementing a common standard it was possible to make technical alterations to the case handling systems, and add functionality to handle FOIA-requests within these systems. The collaboration and co-designing of OEP has been a key factor in achieving the goals for the service. Cooperation on the initial design and in later iterations has made the service more user-friendly and better suited to make public documents easier available and improve the findability of them.

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.

The intended outcome of the initiative was to make public documents easily available for the citizenry. Usage statistics prove that this approach has been highly successful. After launching the service the number of FOIA-requests for Ministerial documents has increased by 400%. In 2010 when the system was launched it forwarded 56 000 requests. In 2013 this number increased to 203 000.

For journalists and other users, the OEP has contributed to making access to public documents easier and more streamlined. The digital access to public documents allows for greater oversight of the government. This has also paved the way for more citizen engagement and participation in many cases.

User surveys show that Journalists account to approximately 50% of its use. Amongst the other users we can identify are concerned Citizens, NGOs, Businesses and Civil servants. Common access to the OEP has ensured equal and unbiased access to public information as an imperative recognized by the Norwegian Constitution. This also gives citizens a unique opportunity to control what the media writes, by allowing them to check the relevant documents for themselves.

The initiative contributes to a more participative democracy by empowering citizens, civil society and the media to completely inform themselves about ongoing files dealt with by public administration and the government. OEP increases the transparency for public processes and governmental agencies and facilitates contact between civil society and government.

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.

OEP is deeply rooted in Norwegian Law, and funded by the National Budget. The decision to implement the service was made by the National Council and its sustainability is regarded as solid.

Two major plans are being considered for future development of OEP.

The first is to accelerate publishing of entire documents to the service. This is possible today, and about 6 000 documents are available directly within the portal. Thus allowing for more 'open by default' action and reducing the need to go through the FOIA-process, by providing the user with direct access to the available documents. Automated systems for making the documents available in a large scope are being considered.

The second is to broaden the scope and include municipal and county municipal entities into the service. This will provide the citizenry with even broader access to all public documents and case proceeding in Norway from one place.

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.

letter of support for OEP nomination.docx

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.

OEP is a fully operational digital service, which offers one stop shop access to all metadata on public records held within Ministerial Departments and public agencies. It creates a seamless flow of information to all interested citizens, civil society, journalists and even to the public sector itself, which contributes significantly to political and administrative transparency in Norway.

To grant access to public records is not unique and is enshrined in FOI laws in many countries, but to introduce an electronic public records system open to everyone is innovative. The originality of the solution is not that OEP is a database of public records, but a record of entry data for each document, thus a platform allowing for contact between diverse users.

OEP provides users with the unique opportunity for familiarising themselves with public sector activities. It allows users to follow a case over time - view cases involving several government agencies - allows for swifter access to information, enabling journalists and other users to and comment upon and influence current issues, and it allows public information to be shared equally with all members of the public at the same time.

Digitizing this process has great advantages; users can receive any document they request electronically by e-mail, thus shortening the wait period for gaining access.

The partnership between the Media and Government has resulted in a sustainable service which greatly improves citizens ability to engage and interact with the government on current issues.

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?
 - Home 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.