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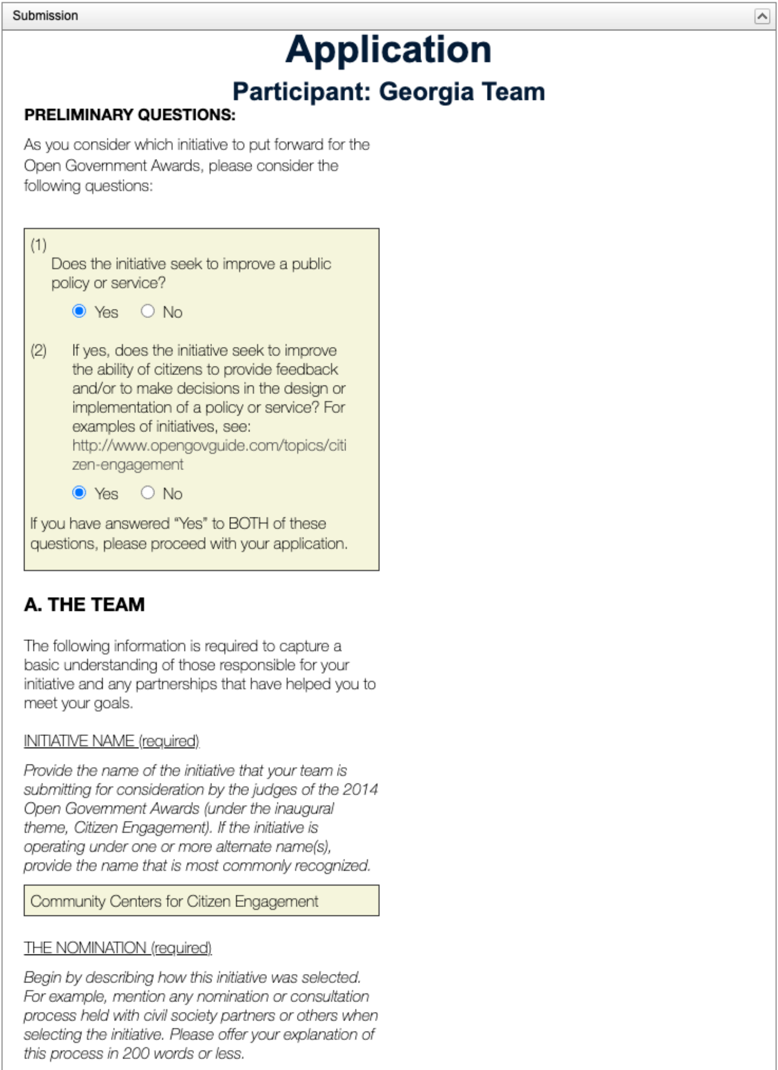

Application

Participant: Georgia 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.

Community Centers for Citizen Engagement

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.

This initiative has been selected for nomination by Open Government Georgia's Forum (Forum) which is a national coordination mechanism for OGP. The composition of the Forum includes responsible agencies representatives of local and international organizations and is led by two co-chairs – one of them representing the Government and another representing civil society. Selection was made through the procedure which involved several stages.

On April 17 Secretariat of Open Government Georgia (OGG) circulated Briefing Materials of the competition by email within the Forum. The Secretariat requested ideas for initiatives related to this year's theme. After delivering needed materials, discussion on selecting initiatives was in the agenda of 3 meetings of the Forum.

The final decision to nominate Georgia's successful experience of civic engagement at the regional level was made on the 7th meeting of OGG Forum on June 6.

In the process of choosing the suitable initiative for the Open Government Award, the Forum took into consideration the feedback received from Public Consultations as Community Centers were highly welcomed and its impact vastly acknowledged by everyone participating in the meetings. Moreover, Government was encouraged by citizens to strengthen the initiative and spread it across the whole country.

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).

Mr. Giorgi Kldiashvili

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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.

Cooperation with the central government agencies and private companies is essential for successful implementation of the initiative. Currently, four partner agencies and private companies are represented in the Community Centers offering variety of services to the local population. Local citizens can receive public and private services provided by: the Public Service Development Agency (PSDA), the National Agency of Public Registry, the Social Service Agency and the National Archive, agricultural institutions, banks and telecommunication companies. PSDA - LEPL of the Ministry of Justice of Georgia, responsible for Community Centers signed long-term cooperation and lease agreements with these agencies ensuring the sustainability of the project through incomes generated in the form of lease payments.

Involvement of stakeholders, particularly civil society is of utmost importance to promote civic engagement activities on the local level. To institutionalize cooperation and ensure its sustainability, MoUs have been signed between PSDA, the Municipality and the most successful service provider organizations, such as the NGO "Multinational Georgia for Strengthening Democratic Values". Moreover, in order to encourage civic engagement and ensure implementation of locally most demanded educational and other community-oriented events, PSDA cooperates with the following international/civil society organizations and the academia: National Examinations Centre, Tbilisi State University, Ilia State University, Swedish Agency for International Development (SIDA), which is currently developing special project for Community Centers to further promote civic engagement, training Center ELCML, National Library, Organization "First Step Georgia", NGO "Go Group Media", State Fund for Protection and Assistance of Human Trafficking Victims, Centre of Electoral Systems Development, etc.

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?

There are two main challenges Community Centers (CC) aim to address: ***first,*** the level of citizen engagement in the decision making processes in the regions of Georgia is very low. ***Second,*** unlike big cities, regions particularly face the challenge that arises from so called "digital divide" as access to the internet and modern technologies still remain problematic in Georgia.

It was crucial for Government to find innovative solutions to ensure that regions follow the rhythm of development in the country. In fact in the absence of services delegated to the local authorities and people living in villages had to travel long distances to access services provided by central authorities; On the other hand, there was no sound mechanism for informing citizens about the ongoing reforms, social programs, and most importantly ensuring their inclusion in the decision-making processes.

To ensure that regions are indivisible part of development processes, local citizens have an access to information and their involvement in decision-making processes is high, Georgian Government designed a creative and unique concept of Community Centers unifying modern technologies, public and private sector services, transformed functions and roles for the libraries and venues for civic engagement in one space.

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 populations in the regions of Georgia are the target of the initiative. CCs are open to multiple stakeholders, such as public agencies, International organizations, local NGOs which conduct various discussions and consultations in this space. Among the main target groups of the initiative particular emphasis is placed on people with disabilities, ethnic minorities (for whom special module of Georgian lessons is available to promote their social integration).

Within the Public Consultations 2014 of the Open Government Georgia CCs hosted several meetings where representatives of local government, media, political parties, librarians, students, teachers and lecturers were among the target population.

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.

This initiative is unique as it combines multiple functions to meet the various challenges existing at the local level. In particular, it aims at increased civic engagement and inclusion in the decision-making processes at the local and central level, better access to public information and efficient delivery of public services in the regions; it serves educational purposes through training activities delivered in the Community Centers and modernized libraries, it helps as wide policy discussions as possible and finally, it is the place for the locals for the facilities they might need or even for entertainment which stimulates them to visit the Centers as often as possible.

As a part of this initiative, Government took commitment to transform public libraries for regional development. According to the strategy, along with the traditional purposes libraries will acquire functions of Community Centers and will allow libraries to serve the populations and become Community Engagement Spaces – places where residents can come together with local businesses, NGOs, or government official's to address various issues at the local level.

Local Governments and local population have been actively involved at all stages of the project design and implementation. More Specifically, Public Service Development Agency (PSDA) of Ministry of Justice of Georgia – responsible for designing and implementing the initiative held a number of meetings with all local government representatives, such as: governor's office, municipal administration, village trustees and local citizens. Based on surveys local needs were identified and proposed project activities were discussed in a participatory manner.

Thus, the initiative is a product of an intense cooperation between the government and target groups. It combines mutually reinforcing solutions tackling a number of problems, such as digital exclusion and low level of citizen engagement in regions. Furthermore the very concept of the Community Centers coupled with e-Governance solutions brought locally is a novel way Government can interact with citizens through multifunctional spaces.

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.*

With 12 Community Centers opened to date, the rural population has access to public services organized according to the 'one-stop-shop' principle. Through modern technologies and new infrastructure citizens can easily interact with Government and receive up to 200 public services locally. Additionally, locals have opportunity to access free internet, computers, and video conference equipment, attend distance English language courses and Georgian language programs designed for local minorities offered free of charge. The latter has a strong impact on fostering integration of local minorities into the community; whereas the English language courses allow the local youth to increase their employments prospects. Most importantly, CCs are platforms for stimulating civic engagement activities.

To date PSDA has been actively promoting the centers among other government agencies, CSOs and various interest groups as a shared facility which could serve different purposes benefitting the local community at large. Consequently the centers have hosted a multitude of events aiming at raising awareness of local population concerning matters of local importance, such as the recent Local Government Reform, Election Procedures, agricultural co-operatives and small enterprise opportunities, gender issues, EU integration, etc.

For the period of one year, more than 37000 Public Services were delivered through Community Centers, a total of 150 trainings, seminars, conferences and exhibitions were organized and more than 2000 local citizens participated in the events hosted by Community Centers.

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.*

The initiative proved to be successful in achieving the broader goal of the Government of Georgia- “bringing government closer to people”. Hence, the Government is strongly committed to sustain and upscale it. The initiative has been highly acclaimed by international organizations allowing Georgian Government to secure additional support to further expand the initiative.

Based on the results of surveys and consultations with local citizens Government of Georgia defined its vision and the strategy for development of CCs. Moreover, highlighting importance of Community Centers for regional development, Government of Georgia included this initiative as a commitment in OGP Action Plan for 2014-2015. This initiative is very much demanded by the citizens of Georgia and has the highest level political support of the Prime Minister of Georgia.

Construction of 6 additional community centers is underway. The action plan for the development of the CCs and transformation of libraries includes further steps.

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.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.

The Community Centers are unique and most creative ways that achieve multiple objectives at a time and have the potential of widest possible inclusion of population. They are not only civic engagement centers and places to access public information or desired public services, but the space where the people gather to address their multiple needs. The initiative is prioritized by the Government, commended by civil society, supported by international organization and other partners, enjoyed and demanded for by citizens of Georgia. We strongly believe that this initiative with its functions ranging from exhibition space to place where euro-Atlantic aspirations of Georgian people are being expressed widely shared, where openness and engagement, accountability and transparency policy of the government is designed and space where the people can even entertain themselves by watching the movies or engaging in video-conferences, is the initiative that has the potential to become exemplary for the world for regional civic inclusion.

One of the latest successful examples of civic engagement in designing Government strategies is Public Consultations of the Open Government Georgia involving wide range of target groups: students, academia, ordinary citizens, local government, political parties, local NGOs, local media etc. discussed how government can become more open, transparent and accountable to its citizens. Citizens’ feedback was presented to the Anti-Corruption Council of Georgia and much of it was ultimately included in the OGP Action Plan for Georgia.

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.