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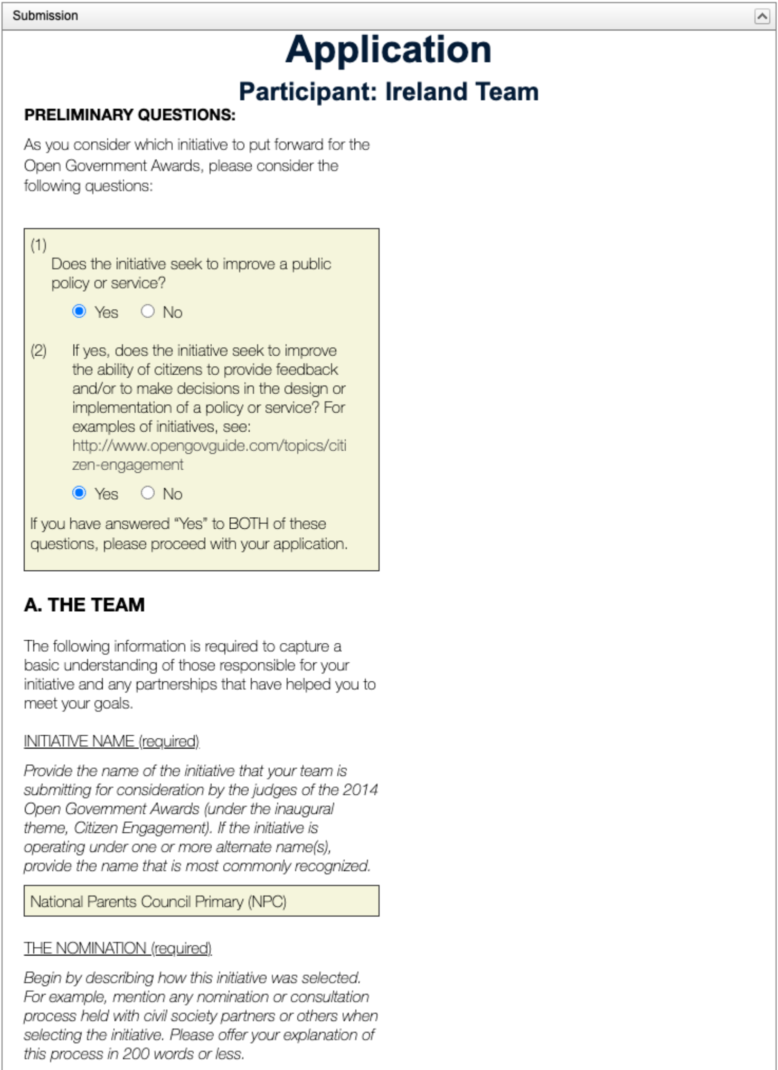

Application

Participant: Ireland 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.

National Parents Council Primary (NPC)

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.

We selected the National Parents' Council because they represent the voice of parents of our primary schoolchildren. We have frequent and regular contact with the NPC. As it is the umbrella body for Parent Associations in over 3,000 primary schools in Ireland, we know the Council to be a vital engine for community involvement in the education system. We know that the NPC is very well known and very highly thought of on national parent council equivalents in other European countries. We witnessed this at first hand last year when the NPC hosted the Annual Conference of the European association of national parent councils. We have always found the NPC to be very pro-active and constructive in identifying and addressing the most important issues facing our primary schoolchildren and their parents. They have worked, and continue to work, very closely with the Department on a number of crucial matters, for example the Anti-Bullying Campaign, the cost of schoolbooks and uniforms, and the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism. We know that Parent Associations and schools all over the country have immense regard for the NPC and the services it provides.

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).

Áine Lynch CEO National Parents Council Primary

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.

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?

Over the last number of decades there has been a wealth of research which shows the difference parental involvement can make in educational outcomes for children. This is illustrated at an individual parent/child level but also at a decision making and policy making level. The European Commission in its report on the quality of school education in May 2000 stated: "…(it) holds that the degree of parental participation is a significant indicator of the quality of schooling". Parents are a key stakeholder in the education system and it is vital that the

education system at a local, national and policy level recognise the views of parents. The problem that the National Parents Council sought to address was two-fold, firstly to support parents at an individual level in engagement with their child's education. Secondly and most relevant to this submission was how the National Parents Council could hear and organise the parents voice at a national level so that it could be coherently represented particularly within a policy making context.

NPC is a recognised partner in education. It's Government policy that all key education legislation and policy development or changes must go through a period of consultation with the education partners.

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 target population is parents of children in primary education (4-12years). The needs of this target population are to have a voice in their children's education and indeed to have a voice regarding the primary education sector.

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.

How NPC was designed to meet its objectives

Partnership is the key objective which underpins the work of the NPC, partnership between parents and schools and partnership between parents and the broader education sector. For the purposes of this report I will illustrate the later in the context of the role NPC plays in citizen engagement. There are approximately 3,300 primary schools in Ireland all of varying sizes of school population. NPC strives to give a mechanism to parents in all of these schools so that they can voice their opinions and engage with NPC in matters that concern them regarding their child's education. NPC gathers the voice of parents through a number of key activities/structures:

NPC Assembly

The Assembly is the policy developing body within NPC and is comprised of a maximum of two representatives from each NPC County branch and one representative from each of the Special interest groups, (Special Interest groups are established in NPC to hear the voice of parents who are not as significant in numbers within the general population e.g. parents of children with special education needs, parents of children from the traveller community etc.) This means that when NPC speaks on behalf of parents it can do so knowing that the issues have been considered and debated by parents

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NPC parent surveys

When policy areas are raised for consultation by the Department of Education, NPC often issues opinion survey's to parents of primary school children. Over the last number of years this has proved a very effective way of harnessing the voices of many parents on different educational issues.

At other times NPC may set the agenda by issuing parent survey's on issues that it feels need to be highlighted to the other education partners

Importantly NPC as a partner in education is represented on all Department of Education and other relevant education bodies, policy making committees. It is through this mechanism that NPC is able to represent the voice of parents in education policy.

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.

By communicating directly with parents of primary school children regarding important education policy areas NPC attempts to bring the parent who is also the key advocate for the child's voice to the policy making debate.

NPC has achieved significant influence in education policy through this representation in recent years. Significantly the cost of going to school has been an ongoing struggle for many parents in Ireland. NPC has surveyed parents on these issues and made representation to the Joint Oireachtas committee on Education, the Minister for Education and the department of Education.

Cost of going to Primary school	**900 responses**
School book rental scheme	**1590 responses**
Reducing costs to parents – school uniform survey	**976 responses**

Following these surveys and submissions the Minister has provided for a school book rental scheme in all schools whereby the parents can rent the school books at a much reduced cost. In addition the Minister has recently issued a directive to schools that they must survey parents in schools regarding their preference regarding school uniform in particular in relation to the financial implications of any such policy.

NPC also surveyed parents recently on parental involvement in children's education. This was an issue that NPC wanted to raise with the Minister and Department of Education. NPC received 508 responses from parents and from these responses NPC submitted a report to the Minister Education calling for a strengthening in legislation of the parent role.

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 National Parents Council is currently supported by Government funding to carry out the vital role that it has in representing the parent voice in primary education. The NPC has a five year strategic plan 2013-2017 which is ambitious in its aspirations in supporting and representing parents' voices. The strategic plan focuses on citizen engagement in schools by encouraging partnership structures' between not only the parents, the children and the school but also with the broader community with which the school resides. It also aims to increase its membership and grow its internal representative structures which harnesses and utilizes valuable volunteer engagement. Specifically NPC plans to employ a volunteer co-coordinator to specifically nurture the growth and impact volunteers can have within NPC.

In current economic circumstances there are risks associated with funding and volunteer engagement. NPC has a Board of Directors who is responsible for the governance of the organisation. The membership of the NPC Board is comprised of parents that have been elected from the Assembly. The Boards key objectives are to set the key strategy goals for the organisation, ensure there are sufficient funds to implement the strategy and to identify and manage risk.

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.*

Validation of Claims.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.

NPC represents hundreds of thousands of parents in Ireland. Creating a structure that supports citizen engagement within the organisation and also supports citizen engagement at a local school level and government policy level is a significant challenge that hopefully this submission illustrates NPC has taken on with some success. The challenge is that each citizen or parent that engages with NPC is able to see their voice reflected in some way in our representations. This also has to be done in a way that in its attempt to be inclusive does not weaken the parents' position. The small number of examples presented in this submission is a fraction of the influence that parents have had in the education system in Ireland through NPC. NPC is continually striving to find new ways to truly engage with its parents both within the organsiation and with its

partnerships with government departments. Although the Department of Education is the key government department that NPC works with, it also represents the parent voice in other departments. NPC was represented on the Internet Content Governance Working group in the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural resources and also was a member on the National Children's Advisory Council in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, to name a few. NPC's work in engaging and representing parents has also been recognised in other European countries. In the last number of years NPC has been asked to speak about its work.

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.