

Application

Participant: Finland 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 names(s), provide the name that is most commonly recognized.

Online Democracy - services: demokraati.fi, with special focus on online Citizens' initiatives

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 Finnish national OGP committee agreed that the online democracy services, with special focus on Citizens' Initiative, would be the Finnish initiative, provided that it would get the support in open vote at democracy-portal. Alternative suggestions arising from the community would be considered as well.

The national OGP committee consists of five ministries, two government agencies, different associations of local and regional authorities, one city development unit, five CSOs and one outside expert. The initiative was open for vote in the democracy -portal from 9th of May to 21st of May 2014. Information about the Gallup was sent by e-mail to CSOs that are members of the committee of CSOs chaired by the Ministry of Justice. The result of the Gallup was 11 votes supporting the initiative and none against. No alternative suggestions arose, and a couple of comments suggested, that the initiative should have a clear focus.

Results of the vote can be seen at democracy -portal (https://www.otakantaa.fi/fi-Fi/Selaa_harkkelta/Avoimen_hallinnon_loimintasuunnitelman_toimeenpano)

Free form answers were gathered additionally in a Facebook poll (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/391544210900505/permalink/634545219933735/>)

There was wide consensus, that this nomination is the best possible.

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.

Due to vacation season in Finland we have two contact persons. See dates below.
 27.6.-15.7. 2014: Ira Alanko, Ministry of Finance, ira.alanko@vm.fi, +358295530370
 1.7.-9.7. and 16.7.-31.7.2014: Arja Terho, Ministry of Finance, arja.terho@vm.fi, +358405011775

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).

Joonas Pekkanen, civil society representative on the Finnish OGP committee
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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 Finnish OGP working group, which is behind the nomination of this initiative, has members from: Open Ministry (CSO), Open Knowledge Finland (CSO), Soste (Finnish federation of social affairs and health, CSO), Transparency International, Finland (CSO), Verkko-demokratiasuora (Finnish Association for Online Democracy, CSO). The association of Finnish local and regional authorities, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Transport and Communications, Ministry of Education and Culture, Center of National Languages, and the National Insurance Institute.

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?

According to OECD study Governments at a Glance citizens' trust in government in Finland is among the highest in OECD: 76% of citizens have confidence in national government. However, the percentage has decreased by 16 points in five year. Also polarisation of political and societal citizen participation has raised concern.

The problem is, how to get citizens aware of, and excited about, taking part in democratic processes and agenda setting on a mass scale. Need for the government to act directly in the field of e-participation was seen as a solution to counteract the progressive reduction of citizens' engagement in public affairs.

The Finnish Citizens' Initiative law was issued in 2012 to launch a new form of democratic participation on the state level. The law states that Ministry of Justice must offer citizens' initiative eService with strong electronic identification. The objective of offering an online service free of charge for launching and signing citizens' initiatives was to ensure that there would be no thresholds for launching or signing initiatives.

Another central goal was to guarantee different forms and stages of democratic participation would be covered by democracy online services, hence Citizens' initiative service was accompanied by other online democracy services.

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 is truly the whole population - all Finnish citizens, civil society organisations and enterprises. Civil servants in government and municipalities are also among the beneficiaries.

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.

The initiative's goal is to enhance, and enable, dialog and interaction between citizens, politicians, and public servants, plus improve e-participation possibilities at a local and national level. The long-term objective is to build an ecosystem of e-services with commercial and non-profit add-on services complementing the services developed. The main objective is to foster citizens' participation in public life and their engagement in political and legislative initiatives.

The Democracy online services consist of four parts: 1) www.kansalaisaloite.fi, a system for the electronic collection of signatures for citizen's initiatives. 2) www.kuntalaisaloite.fi, a system for the electronic collection of signatures for initiatives to municipal authorities 3) www.otakantaa.fi, a channel for participation and interaction open to all. Consultations can be initiated by government, municipalities, CSOs, citizens. This tool is meant to be used at the very beginning of law-drafting process to collect citizens' views. 4) www.lausuntopalvelu.fi, a service for responding electronically to an official statement process. This is to be used in law-drafting process when the draft of government proposal is officially open for consultation.

The building of these services is based on the active involvement of a variety of actors, such as state authorities, municipalities, joint municipal authorities, companies and third-sector organisations.

These services have been built with a customer-orientated approach. A customer panel, composed from the participators of a competition to be part of the panel, and a developer community were utilized from stage one of building each service. Workshops were arranged for hacktivists and developers, giving them a chance to test the prototypes and give comments on service design, usability of the services, etc. The customer panel tested and gave feedback at certain checkpoints while building the new e-services. Stakeholders (CSOs, government organisations, municipalities, interested citizens) participated in the drafting of the services' requirement specifications in preparation of the acquisition of the service, plus the Ministry of Justice held numerous open sessions to get feedback during the design- and implementation phase of the services, and arranged testing and presentation sessions open to all before the launch of the new services.

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 your case 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 initiative has brought modernized web-based tools and processes, a toolbox easy to use for numerous players including citizens, associations, government agencies, municipalities and other ministries.

The actual outcome of the initiative is a big step forward. Hundreds of thousands of people, many of whom were previously unengaged in politics, have participated in citizens' initiatives. Six national citizens' initiatives have reached the threshold required for parliamentary proceedings. Many initiatives have sparked public interest and deliberation. In addition, many municipalities have opened up their decision-making processes and asked for feedback via the otakantaa.fi-portal.

Citizens have created local initiatives to make suggestions on how to improve different matters in their own community. The municipal citizens' initiative, which has been in legislation for long time has now reached a new level of activity, since collecting signatures is easy and cost-efficient even for small CSOs and citizens' movements.

The ultimate beneficiaries are Finnish citizens. Officials at government and municipal level have found the tools useful and have enjoyed taking on the challenge of getting closer to citizens in their preparatory processes. Civil Society Organisations have used the services to promote discussion on their current issues. National and local media have taken an interest in citizens initiatives, plus local media have also covered local initiatives and ongoing discussions in the otakantaa.fi-portal.

The Citizens' Initiative service and the otakantaa.fi-portal have about 300 000 visitors/ month and the Local Initiatives service has about 30 000 visitors/ month.

INITIATIVE SUSTAINABILITY (required)

In 200 words or less, please describe any plans for scaling up and/or sustaining the initiative in the future. Based on the 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 creation of online democracy services started as a pilot in year 2001 by the Ministry of Finance. The service included a consultation portal and online chats with ministers. The government launched a citizen participation policy-program in 2004. A small unit was founded in the Ministry of Justice and democracy services found a permanent home there. The government launched in 2009 eServices and eDemocracy development program (SADE-programme), which gave a new boost to online democracy services.

The maintenance of these services requires the already active parties to carry on in the same manner. Central funding for the maintenance and development of these services has been secured.

The source code of kansalaisaloite.fi was opened as open source on github in January 2014 to promote openness and enable further use of the source code and to allow development ideas for the site. The input is maintained and updated based on service and ideas from users and developers

In spring 2014 Ministry of Justice Finland opened a questionnaire on kansalaisaloite.fi -webservice to collect feedback about the service and citizens' initiative process. Almost 1000 respondents answered the questionnaire. The responses are taken into account when designing further development for the web portal.

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.

Letters of recommendation to OGP Awards_Finland_4 recommendations.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.

Online democracy services are used widely within the administration and by the citizens and CSOs.

Online citizens' initiative has reached wide scale citizens' awareness and participation. 6 initiatives have reached parliament and many have received wide-scale public visibility. The citizens' initiative has constitutional support and therefore actual influence on the political agenda. Being able to participate online makes campaigning without big budgets possible for grass-roots citizens' movements. Before the collection of physical signatures required too much resources. Unlike in any other country, the law proposals that reach the necessary support get full parliamentary proceedings, similar to government bills. Online citizens' initiative was opened in December 2012 and has so far activated more than 300 000 users per month. More than 500 000 people have signed one or more of the 246 initiatives made electronically. This is a high percentage in a country with a population of 5.4 million. Many of the citizens who have participated have previously been uninterested in politics.

Citizens, CSOs and media have found the services, therefore making active marketing efforts unnecessary.

Permanent State Secretaries have stated, that online democracy services should be used when drafting significant legislation. Civil servants both in government, and municipalities, have been educated on how to use these services.

All demokraati.fi (democracy.fi) services are centrally financed and can be used free of charge by government, municipalities, CSOs and citizens.

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 your 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 deliver a sophisticated polished video.

Here are some logistical and technical suggestions:

- Video cameras, digital cameras, and iPhones 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 dragging out the application, then dragging 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 intentions, benefits and/or services and how they have been effective.
 - What is unique about your initiative, partners, or technical approach?
 - Highlight 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 detract 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.