

Application

Participant: Croatia 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.

Improving Government responsiveness – key to meaningful 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.

Since the beginning of Croatia's participation in the OGP, it is our progress in developing meaningful involvement of citizens and civil society and improving Government responsiveness to inputs from public consultations that received strong support and attention from Croatian civil society organizations, but also raised interest of a number of partners from the OGP participating countries. It is through Croatia's OGP Council, gathering both Government and CSO representatives, that we identified the improved quality of Government feedback on public consultations during as an initiative worth nominating. Also, results of the self-evaluation and while considering the feedback from the implementing bodies, the civil society and the independent researcher; there was a consensus that OGP in Croatia left the most significant impact in the field of citizens involvement, public consultations and the right to access information as interrelated areas crucial for success of OGP initiative. The potential wider recognition of Croatia's progress in this area would greatly contribute to durability and visibility of our efforts in this area within wider public.

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).

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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.

It is especially important to mention two bodies that have been key partners in Improving Government responsiveness: First of all, the Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs has been a key partner in promotion of set standards regarding the public consultations, implementation and monitoring of the process of public consultations, as well as creating an annual survey in order to quantify the achievements made in the area of public consultations. Secondly, the newly established Croatian Information Commissioner - Anamarija Musa, has been both as an individual and a member of the Croatian OGP Council as well as the new Commissioner elected by the Parliament, a key figure for promoting and ensuring the right to access information, as a basic prerequisite for conducting effective dialogue with citizens and civil society on key public policies. Additionally, it needs to be mentioned that the Croatian OGP Council, gathering representatives of both the Government and CSOs, was also a very important actor in providing support for the implementation of 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?

The general problem we wanted to tackle was the wide spread attitude among citizens and CSOs that taking part in public consultations is meaningless as they rarely find out what happened with the comments the send to Government bodies. So, the focus was on regaining public trust and motivating citizens and CSOs to get involved in public policy making. In addition to improving the legal framework for the right to access information and establishing an independent Commissioner for access to information, it was essential to improve how the Government responds to citizens' comments on laws, other regulations and acts. Therefore, a new requirement was integrated in the Government's Rules of Procedure obliging all Government bodies to submit, with their draft legislation, a report on the process of public consultations, containing feedback on all received comments - whether they were accepted or not, and if not, explaining reasons why not. We basically institutionalized the concept "We asked - You said - We did" in everyday practice of Croatian Government bodies.

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 initiative targets the public as a whole or rather all the citizens. In that sense it was the very idea behind the initiative to involve as many citizens as possible and to do it in a way that is open to all. Specifically, building the process of consultations the procedures in place were designed not only for citizens as individuals but also for groups of citizens, such as interest groups, organizations and businesses.

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.

Implementing the 2012-2013 OGP Action Plan, the Croatian Government adopted the Amendments to the Rules of Procedure of the Government of the Republic of Croatia (Official Gazette 121/2012), stipulating that all draft proposals of acts and other regulations that are part of the governmental procedure have to be accompanied by reports on consultations with the interested public. The goal was to create an obligation for the public bodies to provide citizens with the information on the policies they are proposing but also to integrate their input into the final drafts of legislation. Thus the decision was made that a draft legislation cannot be submitted to the Government without also reporting on the process of public consultations. Moreover, the new Law on Access to Information, which entered into force in March 2013, introduced additional requirements for all public bodies (at national, regional and local level) not only to proactively publish all draft acts for public consultations, but also to publish reports on outcomes of consultations. Reports must include feedback on all received comments, which includes explanations in cases when comments are not accepted. These new normative requirements proved to be essential for Government responsiveness and a key factor of regaining citizens' trust and willingness to engage in a meaningful dialogue with the Government in procedures of developing new public policies. The second complementary part of the OGP reform process pertained to establishing an institution which will effectively promote and ensure the right to access information. The goal was to not only change the legislation in order to enable the best possible standard for accessing information but also to provide a mediator between the Government and the citizens and an office where citizens can report their requests have not been answered. In order to ensure sustainability and to reduce the problems with Government responsiveness in this field a new Act on the Right to Access to Information (Official Gazette 25/2013) describes in detail 15 items which have to be published by a public authority in an easily searchable format on its web page.

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 goal was to engage citizens on one hand and to ensure that their requests and their input is taken under consideration in the best and quickest possible manner. In 2013, a total of 374 public consultations were held. This is a big increase - almost 160% compared to 144 consultations in 2012 and 675% compared to 43 consultations held in 2011. A more proactive and responsive approach of Government bodies to public consultations also resulted in increased interest of citizens, as 8,299 legal and natural persons submitted their comments to draft proposals of acts or other regulations in 2013 (an increase of 73% from 2012 and of 4,697% from 2011). In order to ensure that the citizens receive the information they require the Act on the Right of Access to Information was harmonised with the the Croatian Constitution for the purpose of exercising the principle of transparency and access to information, and elements of the European Commission Directive 2003/98/EC on the re-use of public sector were integrated into it. The Office of the Information Commissioner has been established. Croatia thereby gained a government official elected by the Croatian Parliament for a 5-year term. In this way, not only has the function of an independent body for the protection of the right of access to information as a body of second instance in resolving complaints been strengthened but its competences have been defined in detail, particularly concerning access to classified data and implementation of the test of proportionality and public interest.

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.

In addition of ensuring legal requirements for Government responsiveness, we have developed training workshops on conducting meaningful and effective consultations that have been integrated in the regular program of the State School of Public Administration and are continuously conducted and very well attended by all government bodies. Public consultation coordinators have been appointed and trained in all ministries and government bodies, as champions of consultations across public administration. Regular coordination meetings of all public consultations coordinators are organized in order to ensure continuous peer-to-peer support. Based on previous efforts and lessons learned, new central system of public consultations will be soon integrated into the new Government portal. Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs produces regular annual reports (adopted by the Government) on performance of all ministries in regard to accepted standards of public consultations, with special emphasis on the quality of feedback. It is through combination of all these measures that sustainability of this initiative will be ensured. The Constitutional Court brought a landmark decision abolishing an act that didn't pass proper public consultation stating that "It is democratic character of procedure of adopting an act that can make it constitutionally acceptable or not", thus contributing to optimism regarding sustainability.

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.

Open Government Awards - Croatia - validation of claims.zip

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.

Looking back, it is clearly visible that the dynamic between the citizens and the Government has changed. Croatian citizens have increased their participation in policy-making for 160% in a year and 675% in two years. The number of citizens' comments in public consultations increased for 4,875% in just 3 years. Changing the system of public consultations, opening it up and making reporting on public consultations a legal requirement has been crucial. Additional impetus to Government responsiveness has been insured by appointing, training and providing peer-to-peer support to public consultation coordinators in all Government bodies, who are essential for implementation of set standards. Important was also the establishing of the Office of the Information Commissioner, which has the authority to ensure the Government bodies really do make a substantive step towards openness, proactive publication and communication with citizens. The Government's continuous online campaign through social networks on possibilities of citizens' involvement in public consultations serves as important tool for motivating citizens to get involved. We believe that our initiative proves that responsiveness is of particular importance and that if citizens and CSOs who participate in the consultations feel that their contributions are valued, it builds their confidence in consultation process and motivates them to engage again. As such, our initiative works on opening a space of joint action in creation of policies which are of direct interest to citizens, by encouraging transparency and openness of work od Government bodies and by motivating citizens and civil society to participate in policy making.

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.