

The EPSA 2023-24 Award Categories: What's in the name?

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Introduction

Awards are a **powerful tool** to recognise and reward achievements in the public sector. They drive reform, innovation and creative problem-solving, and motivate civil servants to strive for outstanding performances. By sharing best practices, awards promote mutual learning and collaboration for the improvement of public service delivery. Moreover, awards enhance public trust in government institution by showcasing transparency and accountability. Hence, awards play a pivotal role for **public sector reform** and **innovation** and thus the continuous delivery of high-quality services.

Since 2009, EIPA has been organising the European Public Sector Awards (EPSA) to contribute to the agenda of public sector reform and innovation. EPSA is the only Europe-wide award scheme open to public administrations at all levels of government. As such, EPSA is in the unique position to recognise and reward achievements of the public sector across Europe. In doing so, EPSA promotes excellence and mutual learning through disseminating knowledge and sharing of best practices.

The new EPSA 2023-24 edition coincides with the European Year of Skills 2023 and, emphasising the importance of knowledge dissemination, was launched under the title "**Boosting Innovation Through Learning**".

Applications can be submitted until 1 November here.

Throughout the application phase, the EPSA team will be publishing a series of blogs to

inform in more detail about public sector innovation, the **EPSA award categories and evaluation methodologies**.

In this first blog, we want to unpack the award categories to highlight important themes and topics relevant to public sector reform. Have you been dealing with one or more of these topics lately? And did you adapt and change the way you are doing things to respond to related challenges? Perhaps aiming to streamline procedures or to improve public service delivery? Or did you adjust the management of human resources to increase individual and organisational resilience? If the answer is yes to any of these questions, consider submitting an application to EPSA 2023-24.

Be the change that Europe needs and help others learn from your success!

EPSA themes and titles over time: change and continuity

The various titles of previous editions illustrate the central objective of EPSA, namely to respond to new challenges and to innovate practices and procedures to maintain and improve service delivery to the benefit of citizens. Yet, over time, challenges evolve and new problems, often not foreseen, confront public administrations across Europe. The COVID-19 pandemic is one recent example, but the current period of high inflation and rising energy costs reminds us of the on-going challenges of service delivery under scarce resources; see EPSA 2007; 2009 or EPSA under the title "Weathering the Storm: Creative Solutions in a Time of Crisis" in the wake of the financial and sovereign debt crisis. Likewise, the theme of "Coping with Demographic Change" (EPSA 2007) becomes ever more pertinent for talent management in multigenerational public workforces, which have to deal with every more complex tasks. Since, the 2019 edition, focussing on "New Solutions to Complex Challenges", the level of complexity, arguably, has only been rising. Hence, "Leadership and

Management for Change” (EPSA 2009) remains an essential topic for Human Resources Management (HRM).

Regardless of somewhat changing emphases over time, EPSA stands for continuity in promoting “The Public Sector as Partner for a Better Society” (EPSA 2015), fostering “Collaborative Governance” (2007; 2011), “Citizen Involvement” and “New Forms of Partnership Working” (2009) as well as “A public sector citizen-centric” (2017). In one word, co-creation, meaning citizens’ participation and input to public sector reform, remains a necessary condition for robust public administrations. Furthermore, since the 2011 edition promoting “Smart Public Service Delivery in a Cold Economic Climate” and “Going Green: Concrete Solutions from the Public Sector”, the so-called “twin transition” has become a transversal parameter of policy making and administration across all areas and levels of government. To account for these continuing parameters, the 2021 edition aligned the EPSA award categories with the current policy agenda of the EU, which is aimed at spurring the “twin transition” (green and digital transformation) through, among other things, public sector reform in the context of Europe’s on-going economic recovery and quest for resilience in times of the “new normal”.

Accordingly, the EPSA 2023-24 edition welcomes the submission of projects in the following award categories: **Innovation in Public Administration, Green Transition and Sustainability, and Digital Transformation**.

In the remainder of this blog, we specify each category; please be aware that this specification includes pertinent topics but is not limited to the ones included. This specification, rather, serves as illustration to motivate the submission of your project.

Innovation in Public Administration

The capacity of public administrations to adapt and respond to new challenges by reforming

policies, structures and organisations, administrative procedures with a view to efficient and effective service delivery to citizens is at the heart of public sector innovation. This is reflected in the revised OECD Principles of Public Administration: “a comprehensive, credible and sustainable public administration reform agenda is established and successfully implemented, fostering innovation and continuous improvement” (Principle 1).

This category is looking for projects which puts into effect governments’ reform agenda through new institutional solutions, e.g. policy or innovation laboratories. These labs act as testbeds for public sector innovation by designing experimental and creative intervention prototypes, often relying on co-creation, before solutions are rolled out in larger policy settings. A similar experimental approach is taken in the context of “sandboxes”.

Furthermore, this category is looking for projects which are geared towards ensuring the sustainability of public sector innovation by providing the resources and skills for effective HRM or through the institutionalisation of Quality Management (QM), for instance, the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). Implementing QM in public administrations encourages the adoption of innovative practices and the exchange of knowledge within and across organisations.

Green Transition and Sustainability

The European Green Deal is the flagship of the EU’s agenda towards climate neutrality, sustainable and fair economic growth, building on the model of a circular economy which promotes biodiversity and a toxic-free environment. The Green Deal is encompassing in that it entails policies and initiatives in a wide range of inter-connected policy areas such as climate action, energy, transport and mobility, environmental protection and agriculture.

This category is looking for projects which are geared towards shaping the green

agenda by providing innovative policy solutions in any of the aforementioned policy areas, e.g. by providing institutional capacities to shape the policy agenda or by developing innovative instruments for policy implementation, i.e. in the implementation and enforcement of EU legislation at national, regional and local level, for instance, in the area of green public procurement, by reforming public administration towards Green HRM or by raising awareness for sustainability, incentivising action and promoting fairness among specific target groups and the general public.

Digital Transformation

Together with the Green Deal, the European Commission priority A Europe fit for the digital age is the overarching policy agenda for the twin transition. Like the Green Deal, the EU's digital agenda is encompassing with a range of interconnected policy areas such as digital market policies, industrial policy as well as initiatives in key areas of digitalisation such as the governance of data or Artificial Intelligence (AI).

This category is looking for projects which are geared towards shaping and implementing the digital agenda, potentially through implementation of EU legislation, by providing innovative policy solutions in any of the aforementioned policy areas, e.g. by developing digital-ready policies, by promoting digital infrastructures and interoperability or by promoting cyber security.). With the extension of digital services for citizens and the increasing

production and use of data by public services, issues such as digital identity and citizenship become ever more important including data protection and fundamental rights. Among other areas, this is of particular concern for development and implementation of AI solutions. Finally, the digital transformation provides opportunities but also challenges for administrations and citizens. Hence, this category is also looking for innovative solutions to master the digital transformation in the public sector, e.g. digital talent and leadership new skills and competences, as well as approaches towards digital literacy among the general public.

In conclusion, the European reform agenda aims at fostering innovation and the twin transition in the public sector by supporting creative solutions to current and future challenges. EPSA contributes to this reform agenda by showcasing and promoting innovative projects across Europe.

Join the European innovation community and submit your projects to EPSA 2023-24!

More on this topic

If you'd like to stay up-to-date on the EPSA 2023-24, have a look at our dedicated page.

The views expressed in this blog are those of the authors and not necessarily those of EIPA.