



## Call for Applications: 25 January – 12 April 2013

### Detailed Notice and Terms of the Call for Applications, Evaluation Process and Types of Recognition of the EPSA 2013

#### *“Weathering the Storm: Creative Solutions in a Time of Crisis”*

#### **OBJECTIVE OF THE CALL**

The European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA) – with the institutional and financial support of 13 European public partners – invites applications for the fourth European Public Sector Award – **EPSA 2013**. The EPSA 2013 will be awarded on the occasion of a high-level event on leading-edge public administration solutions, which will be held on **25-27 November 2013** in Maastricht (NL). This event thus again presents a significant opportunity for European administrations to showcase their innovative performance and achievements to an extensive audience, and to be recognised for being at the forefront of their field at the European level.

#### **GENERAL BACKGROUND**

Against the background of a rapidly changing social, economic and environmental context in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, EPSA aims to contribute to the progress of public administrations' performance by highlighting exemplary models of proactive approaches that address Europe's most pressing public concerns, whilst providing a platform for the public sector innovators behind these cases to disseminate their achievements.

The continuation of the economic crisis poses a real challenge, not only to the private sector, but also to the public sector. Furthermore, in alignment with the EU 2020 strategy, local, regional, national as well as European public administrations are expected to meet the ambitious vision of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth for the future of the European Union. It is therefore even more important to highlight and reward public excellence in administrations that are finding innovative responses in these times, and who are succeeding in delivering outstanding public services.

EPSA will reward those projects which address European public sector challenges and are crucial drivers for change in the way that public administrations function in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In turn, these projects will provide an insight into proactive approaches of hundreds of public administrations facing the current challenges.

## SPECIFIC CONTEXT OF THE TOPIC

In the past five years, public administrations across Europe have been faced with severe and continuing strains on their public finances.

What is unprecedented in the current crisis, when compared to, for example, the situation confronted by the United Kingdom in the 1970s, Ireland in the 1980s and Sweden in the 1990s, is the number of European public administrations simultaneously facing these pressures. The recognition of the existence of a crisis in public finances was provoked by the financial contributions needed to stabilise the financial services sector, though in fact there has been an underlying trend towards gradually reduced sustainable public finances over the past decade, arising from factors such as an ageing population, a diminishing working population and increasing competitive pressures from outside Europe. These are in addition to other pressures challenging public administrations, such as the need to make governments more responsive to society's needs and demands, and the need to (re-)establish trust between citizens and public administrations. Furthermore, it is widely recognised that there are limits to the extent to which tax increases can be used to stabilise the public finances.

In other words, the only solution in this scenario seems to be to **increase effectiveness and efficiency, to innovate, and to strive towards better and best practices**. That is why, given the continuing financial and economic crisis, the EPSA Steering Committee and the EPSA Team at EIPA have decided to choose one overarching but highly topical theme for this edition, i.e. *“Weathering the Storm: Creative Solutions in a Time of Crisis”*, in which increased efficiency and effectiveness play a central role.

However, this theme is not just about fiscal or financial stabilisation or efficiency: it is also about effectiveness and creativity; for example, intelligent action by public administrations to promote economic growth – the only way in the medium term to get back to economic stability. So far in responding to the crisis, a lot of focus has been put on efficiency, whereas it is a combination of both efficiency and effectiveness – i.e. policies for promoting economic growth – which is likely to lead to a faster route out of the economic crisis.

The overall mission of the public sector is service delivery, regulation and policy-making. But at a time of economic crisis many citizens have a greater need for public services. A strong focus has thus been placed on better service delivery and structural or process changes, which lead to better service delivery; but of course this may result from improved policy-making which is directly linked to better service delivery.

Some public authorities are responding well to the challenges of the crisis. This topic will give them the chance to be proud of their achievements, to showcase how they are responding to these challenges and balancing these competing demands in a difficult economic climate.

## **WHICH PROJECTS/CASES TO SUBMIT?**

Projects submitted should demonstrate and contain elements of proven evidence of one of the following:

*Successful cases* could, for example, demonstrate one or more of following outcomes:

- improved quality or volume of service delivery at the same or lower cost;
- maintained service delivery at a lower cost;
- delivery of higher levels of service standards at a proportionately lower level of cost increase;
- achievement of sustainable debt/deficit levels;
- achievement of wider citizen involvement in decisions;
- high economic and/or financial returns from public investment or high levels of private investment levered by well-directed public investment.

Equally, *cases* could demonstrate structural or process changes, leading to successful outcomes such as:

- re-organisation or relocation of services (e.g. mergers, centralisation or decentralisation);
- changes to service methods (e.g. from internal to external service delivery, between different types of external service delivery, public-public cooperation (including shared services), cooperation between the public sector and civil society or public-private partnership for new or upgraded infrastructure);
- different ownership models (e.g. use of mixed capital entities or privatisation);
- better external or internal communication;
- blending use of new technologies;
- using social media more effectively;
- more effective procurement.

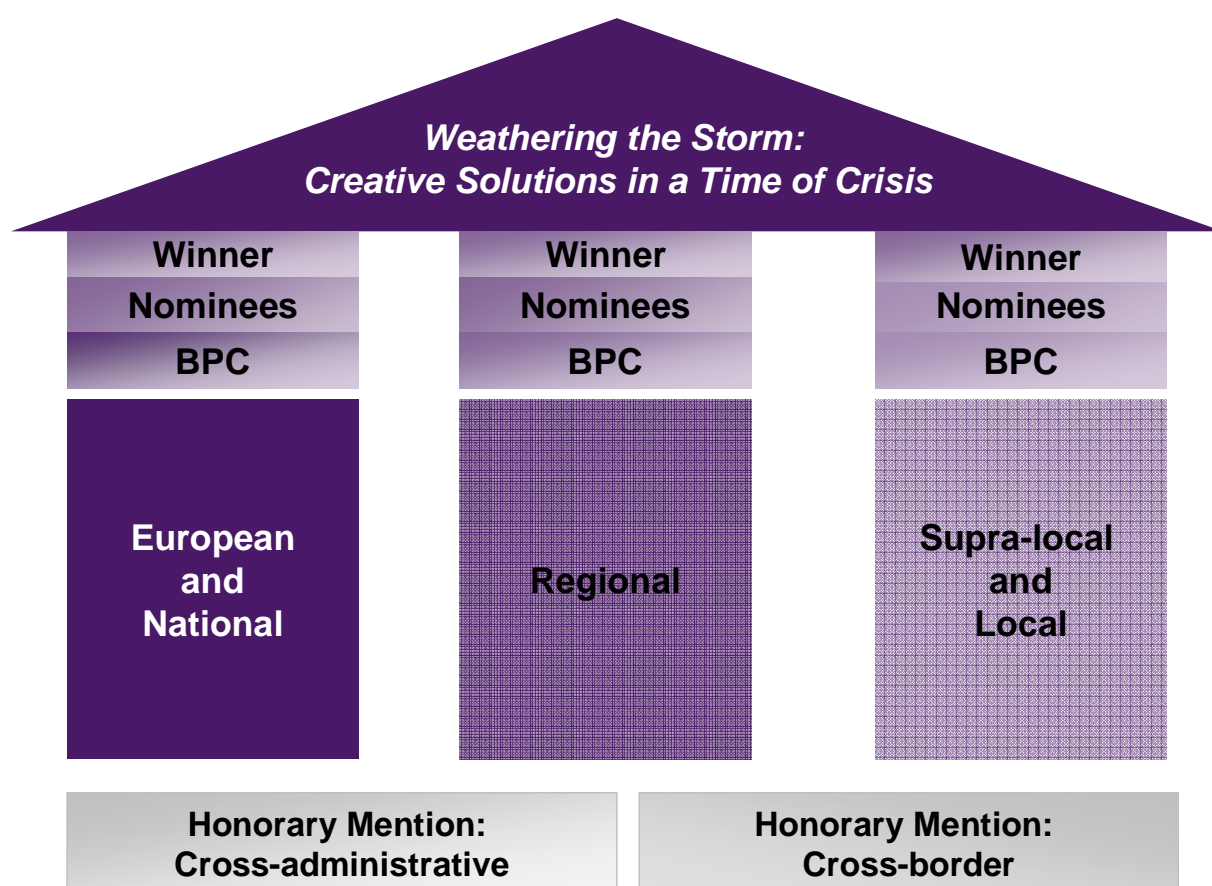
These cases can demonstrate success in the context of different levels and forms of cooperation, such as, in particular:

- between different levels of public administration within a Member State or between different Member States;
- between different regions/municipalities in the same or different Member States;
- public sector-to-business, or public sector-to-citizen interaction;
- by the public sector acting as a platform for business-to-business collaboration or citizen-to-citizen collaboration;
- by the empowerment of communities by a public administration.

In short, the theme allows for many different ways for public administrations to celebrate their achievements, not necessarily restricted to those given as examples above.

## WHAT TYPES OF REWARDS AND RECOGNITION CAN BE GAINED?

The EPSA 2013 will bestow awards in **three** categories: *European/National*, *Regional*, and *Local* (see the graphical illustration below) – so good practice at all levels will be recognised, underlining the importance of coherent actions at all levels of public administration in this overarching thematic area. In addition, successful projects resulting from cross-border or cross-administrative cooperation will also be identified and receive special recognition.



## WHO MAY APPLY?

The theme aims to be inclusive. Pressures exist across all levels of administration – European, national, regional and local – so good practices at all levels will be recognised, underlining the importance of coherent actions of all the various layers and actors.

Thus all European public sector institutions from all levels, as well as public sector enterprises, agencies or public-private partnerships are eligible to submit their projects for the award. [List of eligible countries](#)

In concrete terms, this includes all public entities from cities, local authorities, the supra-local (provincial) and regional level, as well as public sector organisations at national and European level.

Projects should be submitted by the following levels of government:

- European and National
- Regional
- Supra-local and local

While the National level refers to the level of sovereign states, the Regional level refers to the first level of administrative and political subdivision of a state. In many unitary states, the Regional level is absent. The Supra-local and Local levels refer to the administrative and political levels below the Regional level. The European level refers to projects stemming from EU institutions.

Examples:

**France** (national level): régions (mainland and overseas regions) (regional level), départements and municipalités (supra-local and local level)

**Spain** (national level): comunidades autónomas and ciudades autónomas (regional level), provincias, diputaciones and municipios (supra-local and local level)

**Poland** (national level): Voivodship - Województwo (regional level), powiaty (councils/districts) and gminy (municipalities) (supra-local and local level)

**Bulgaria** (national level): Obshtina (municipalities) (supra-local and local level)

Other relevant **eligibility criteria** to be fulfilled by the applicants are:

- European geographical origin of the application;
- Compliance with the theme of the EPSA 2013 competition;
- The working language of the EPSA 2013 is English, thus it is strongly recommended to submit projects in English;
- The lead applicant must be a public sector institution or authority (other applicants – in a consortium for example – can be private, semi-public, NGO or academic);
- The application/project/case must have been in operation long enough to have proven evidence of impact and a tangible result;
- Completed application form;
- Confirmation that the application has been submitted, i.e. notification mail before deadline 24.00 CET, 12 April 2013.

**GENERAL STATEMENT FOR PROJECT APPLICANTS**

Projects submitted by applicants are encouraged to consider aspects of gender mainstreaming, the use of ICT-enabled solutions and environmental sustainability.

In addition, those projects benefiting from EU supportive actions, such as the European Social Fund (ESF) Administrative Capacity Building priority, are especially invited to submit their achievements.

Finally, previous EPSA participants may re-submit projects from the previous editions (2009 or 2011) on the basis that they include an intelligent adaptation, update and extension of the past practice.

### **ENTRY QUALIFICATION, EVALUATION PHASES AND SELECTION CRITERIA**

The submitted applications will first be checked for eligibility. If the eligibility criteria have been met, a registration number will be allocated and the project is subsequently subject to evaluation. The project will then be reviewed and assessed online against a series of criteria (see below) by three evaluators from an internationally acknowledged, independent and impartial pool of experts. The evaluation process subsequently includes a consensus meeting and onsite visits to a small number of shortlisted projects for validation and verification purposes. Finally, a jury will select the nominees/finalists and final winners of EPSA 2013.

In addition to the nominees and category winners, best practice certificates will be awarded to the next best group of applicants. Special recognition awards will be presented to projects that embrace more than one level of public administration and also to projects resulting from cross-border cooperation (see above).

### **FOUR-STEP EVALUATION PROCESS**

#### **STEP 1: Individual online evaluation (13-17 May 2013)**

Carried out by each evaluator, in isolation and remotely based. Each project will be evaluated by three evaluators (triple evaluation).

#### **STEP 2: Consensus meeting (19-20 June 2013)**

To reach and propose a commonly agreed list of ranked projects, including the best practice certificate recipients, and to agree upon and propose a number of projects to be verified during onsite visits.

#### **STEP 3: Onsite validation visits (July to September 2013).**

To a number of shortlisted projects for verification.

#### **STEP 4: Jury meeting (25 September 2013)**

To select and decide on the EPSA nominees, winners and special recognitions.

## EVALUATION CRITERIA

Submissions will be assessed against the following group of **criteria**:

- **Innovation:** i.e. the novelty of the solution, the degree to which the case shows a leap of creativity in the practice of public administration (which may include intelligent adaptation, update and extension of past practices or actions) and demonstrates something different that goes beyond what currently exists;
- **Appropriateness of Actions Taken:** i.e. the extent to which the case demonstrates a serious response appropriate to the economic circumstances of the applicant, the scale and nature of the challenges it faces and based on an assessment of its needs and priorities;
- **Impact/Results:** i.e. the realisation of planned objectives and activities; the illustration of proven evidence of benefits and visible impact and tangible results, (which may be based on objectively high levels of achievement or a relatively high achievement related to past performance of the applicant);
- **Sustainability:** i.e. that the case shows or describes elements which allow it to be sustained beyond an initial period of the realisation of its objectives and of its activities;
- **Transferability and Learning Capacity:** i.e. that the case has potential value and lessons to teach other entities because it provides the potential for successful replication in other contexts (different Member States and levels of government); that it stimulates a learning, innovation and self-improvement culture within the entity;
- **Stakeholder Support:** i.e. that the case shows evidence of stakeholder support, e.g. evidence of intelligent engagement with civil society, evidence of public consultation, response to consultation, evidence of political support;
- **Social Equity:** i.e. that the case provides evidence of consideration and application of social equity issues, e.g. consideration in decisions of gender, age, geographical impact;
- **Effect on Economic Growth:** i.e. that the case is based on an assessment of the effect of decisions made on future economic recovery (employment, output, skills etc.): ideally positive but at least not damaging to growth in the medium term.

## EPSA 2013 AT A GLANCE

<p><b>Official Launch: 25 January 2013</b> <b>Opening of Call for Applications: 25 January–12 April 2013</b> <b>Information Days: February–March 2013</b> <b>Online Evaluation: 13–17 May 2013</b> <b>Consensus Meeting: 19–20 June 2013</b> <b>Onsite Visits to Shortlisted Projects: July to September 2013</b> <b>Final Selection: 25 September 2013</b> <b>High-level Final Conference &amp; Award Ceremony in Maastricht: 25–27 November 2013</b></p>
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## WHEN AND HOW TO APPLY?

The online application period is open from 25 January until 12 April 2013 (24.00 CET) 2013.

The online application form can be found in the “Applicants Area” on the EPSA website:  
[www.epsa2013.eu](http://www.epsa2013.eu)

Prior online registration is required.

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[Link to Register](http://www.epsa2013.eu/en/user/new/) (<http://www.epsa2013.eu/en/user/new/>)