



PURPOSE AND MANDATE

The United Nations Public Service Awards (UNPSA) celebrate excellence in public service at the local, regional and national levels. It was established in 2003 after General Assembly Resolution 57/277 designated 23 June as Public Service Day. The awards aim to promote and support innovations in public service.

In 2016, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) reaffirmed the programme’s significance “to promote and support innovation and excellence in public services for sustainable development”¹ in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The UNPSA programme remains dedicated to recognizing creativity and innovation within public institutions to enhance effectiveness, transparency, and inclusiveness. It seeks initiatives that are creative, inspiring, and committed to delivering quality public services to ensure no one is left behind.

ELIGIBILITY

The UNPSA is open to all public institutions at the national, sub-national and local levels from all UN member states. In the case of partnerships, the application must include the public institution in charge of the initiative. The UNPSA is awarded to the implementing public institution, not to a country or an individual.

The initiative must have been implemented for a minimum of two years.

To avoid conflicts of interest, the initiative must not be implemented by the United Nations System.

CATEGORIES

Submitted initiatives must be relevant to one of the categories below.

Delivering inclusive and equitable services to leave no one behind

Providing inclusive and equitable public services to all is crucial for the well-being of the population and is required to promote inclusive and sustainable development and accelerate the realization of the SDGs, including in areas such as education, healthcare, public utilities and social services. Innovation in public service design and delivery allows for the development of solutions that address the unique challenges faced by different groups of the population and ensure that no one is left behind, a central tenet of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Submissions in this category should document initiatives that have strengthened access to public services for the least favored groups of the population and those hardest to reach, including through

¹ E/RES/2016/26



new approaches to the design of services, concertation and collaboration with people, communities, civil society and the private sector, the use of technology, and approaches focused on the “last mile” in service delivery.

Gender-responsive public services

Gender-responsive public services are crucial for promoting equality and ensuring that the unique needs of women and girls are addressed. Ensuring that public services are gender-responsive is not only a matter of fairness but is also essential for achieving sustainable and inclusive development. By considering gender-specific challenges in areas such as healthcare, education, safety, and employment, public services can be enhanced to better support women's empowerment and reduce gender-based disparities. Gender sensitive design of public services can help prevent discrimination, promote equal opportunities, and enable everyone to fully participate in society.

Submissions in this category should document initiatives that have made positive changes in access to public services for women and girls, including through improving service quality, or have created new services that meet specific challenges faced by women and girls.

Transparent and accountable public institutions to achieve the SDGs

Promoting transparent and accountable public institutions is essential for fostering trust and ensuring effective governance. Transparency allows access to information on how public resources are used and how decisions are made. Accountability ensures that public institutions operate in accordance with the law and that public officials are held responsible for their actions. It provides mechanisms for people and oversight institutions to observe and analyze government decisions, policies and service delivery. Together, these principles help combat corruption, improve public services, and support a democratic system where institutions uphold the rights of people and are responsive to their needs .

Submissions in this category should document initiatives that have strengthened the transparency and accountability of governments at all levels on decision-making, policy elaboration, or public service delivery, including through legal and regulatory changes, the creation of institutional mechanisms and arrangements within government and public administration, enhanced administrative processes, and collaboration with non-State actors.

Participation and public engagement for inclusive decision-making

Participation and public engagement are vital for inclusive decision-making, as they ensure that diverse voices and perspectives are heard and considered in policy and governance processes. Public engagement promotes transparency, builds trust in institutions, and empowers individuals to



contribute to shaping the policies that affect their lives. When the public is actively involved, decision-makers gain insights into the needs and concerns of different communities, paving the way for more equitable and effective outcomes.

Submissions in this category should document initiatives that have enhanced engagement and participation of people (including initiatives that focus on specific groups of the population) in civic matters, from mechanisms for seeking input and feedback from citizens, to collaboration platforms aimed at co-creation of visions, strategies, policies, budgets and public services, to empowerment in its various forms.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

The initiative should present an innovative idea, policy, new approach, or an improved mechanism that supports the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It could be improving the delivery of public services, solving a problem of public concern, or strengthening public institutions.

Initiatives will be evaluated according to three main criteria: innovation, impact and adaptability.

Innovation

Innovation is broadly defined as adopting new approaches to problem-solving, exploring alternative methods, enhancing existing systems, and taking risks to create something original. It extends beyond technological advancements and the use of digital technologies.

Impact

The initiative should make a positive impact and catalyze change.

Adaptability

The initiative should be applicable and adaptable to other contexts for possible upscaling or replication.

AWARDS

The initiatives will be divided into one of three groups: developed countries, developing countries and least developed countries.

The most outstanding initiatives will be recognized with awards or honorable mentions. Between 2015 and 2024, an average of 12 winners were recognized in each UNPSA cycle. For more details on past winning initiatives, please visit the Public Service Innovation Hub at <https://publicadministration.un.org/unpsa/innovation-hub/>.



EVALUATION

The evaluation process will be multi-stage, including a final round of evaluation by experts from the United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA), in line with the Principles of Effective Governance for Sustainable Development².

VERIFICATION

Initiatives considered in the final round of evaluation will be vetted. The programme will continue to work with the UN Resident Coordinator system and relevant specialized agencies of the United Nations for the validation of awarded initiatives..

CONSENT

In order to be considered, submitted initiatives must include consent for the UNPSA team to use the information provided in the application form and to contact relevant individuals and organizations for validation purposes. Data related to the institution and initiative will also be included in the UNPSA database, which will be made publicly accessible after the end of the 2026 cycle to facilitate information exchange and peer learning.

LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS

The UNPSA programme will continue to accept applications in all six UN official languages. However, applicants are strongly encouraged to apply in **English and French**, the working languages of the Secretariat.

Applications **submitted in other than the six official languages will not be accepted**. For supporting documents or materials in non-official languages, **a brief summary in one of the official languages must be provided**.

While the programme will strive to engage evaluators fluent in official languages, limited resources may require the use of translation tools for evaluation.

DISQUALIFICATION AND REVOCATION

Grounds for disqualification and revocation include:

- Failure to observe the submission rules for the application
- Any conflict of interest and non-adherence to the process by those concerned
- Presenting misleading and false information or inability to provide sufficient documentation

² Principles of effective governance for sustainable development, <https://publicadministration.un.org/en/Intergovernmental-Support/Committee-of-Experts-on-Public-Administration/Governance-principles>



and supporting documents

- Unethical behavior, including undue pressure on any person involved in the evaluation and selection process

The UNPSA is awarded to the implementing public institution, not to a country or an individual. The Awards will only be conferred to **public institutions** that have conceptualized and implemented the nominated initiatives. Implementing agencies working on a consultancy basis are not eligible for the UNPSA, but public-private partnerships can be recognized.

HOW TO APPLY

An online application is required. All public institutions at the national, sub-national and local levels are encouraged to apply.

Required documents:

1. Application form
2. News articles, featured stories, case studies or reports such as audit or evaluation report which confirms the validity of the initiative (limit of 2 documents)

Optional documents (maximum of 3):

Supplementary information such as videos, outreach materials, project documents, etc.

Appendix I: Application Questions

[Common questions]

1. Description of the initiative

Please briefly describe the initiative, the issue it aims to address and specify its objectives (200 words maximum)

2. Alignment with the 2030 Agenda

Please specify which SDGs and target(s) the initiative supports (indicate up to 3 SDGs and up to 5 targets).

3. Relevance

3.a Please explain how the initiative has addressed a significant shortfall in governance, public administration or public service within the context of your country or region. (200 words maximum)

3.b Please describe who the target group(s) are, and briefly explain how the initiative improves outcomes for these target groups. (200 words maximum)

4. Innovation

4.a Did the initiative introduce a new idea, concept, or approach that had not been tried before, and does it potentially lead to transformative change? Please explain. (100 words maximum)

4.b Please describe, if relevant, how the initiative drew inspiration from successful initiatives in other regions, countries and localities. (100 words maximum)

5. Design and implementation

5.a Please describe how the initiative was implemented, including key steps and the chronology. (300 words maximum)

5.b Innovation often involves taking risks, and its implementation may require experimentation and face obstacles of a political, technical or institutional nature. Please explain whether the initiative faced obstacles and how those were overcome. (200 words maximum)

6. Institutional setup

Please describe how the initiative is situated in the relevant institutional landscape (for example, how it interacts with relevant government agencies and other actors). (200 words maximum)

7. Resources

Please describe the resources (i.e. financial, human or others) that were used to implement the initiative. (300 words maximum)

8. Stakeholder engagement



The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development puts emphasis on collaboration, engagement, partnerships, and inclusion. Please describe which stakeholders were engaged in designing, implementing and evaluating the initiative and how this engagement took place. (200 words maximum)

9. Monitoring

9.a Please describe the monitoring system that was put in place to track the results of the initiative. (100 words maximum)

9.b What are the main metrics or indicators used to measure the performance and impact of the initiative? (100 words maximum)

10. Evaluation

10.a Has the initiative been formally evaluated internally or externally? If so, how was it evaluated and by whom? (100 words maximum)

10.b What were the main findings of the evaluation (e.g. adequacy of resources mobilized for the initiative, quality of implementation and challenges faced, main outcomes, sustainability of the initiative, impacts) and how was this information used to modify the initiative's implementation? (200 words maximum)

11. Adaptability and sustainability

11.a To your knowledge, has the initiative been transferred or adapted to other contexts (e.g., other cities, countries or regions) If so, please provide details. (100 words maximum)

11.b Please explain what makes the initiative sustainable over time, including in financial and institutional terms. (100 words maximum)

12. Lessons learned

Please describe the key lessons learned, and how your organization has used those to improve the initiative. (200 words maximum)



[Category-specific questions]

Category: Delivering inclusive and equitable services to leave no one behind

C.1.1 How were the target groups for this initiative identified, and what services were developed to respond to their specific needs? (200 words maximum)

C.1.2 How does the initiative ensure that the services are accessible and affordable to the target groups? (100 words maximum)

C.1.3 If applicable, how are the target groups engaged in the design, implementation and monitoring of the initiative? (100 words maximum)

C.1.4 How has the initiative strengthened access to public services for its target groups? Please describe the results and impacts of the initiative. (200 words maximum)

Category: Gender-responsive public services

C.2.1 What specific needs of women and girls does this initiative address? How were those needs identified, and how are they addressed? (200 words maximum)

C.2.2 How has this initiative contributed to improving gender equality and women's empowerment? Please describe the results and impacts of the initiative. (200 words maximum)

Category: Transparent and accountable public institutions to achieve the SDGs

C.3.1 What specific channels, mechanisms and tools (legal, regulatory, institutional, process-related, etc.) were used to enhance transparency and accountability? (200 words maximum)

C.3.2 How has the initiative improved transparency and accountability? Please describe the results and impacts of the initiative. (200 words maximum)

Category: Participation and public engagement for inclusive decision-making

C.4.1 Please explain which groups of the population the initiative sought to engage, how those were identified, and how they were reached. (200 words maximum)

C.4.2 How does the initiative make participation accessible to all its target groups? (for example, by using digital and hybrid methods) (100 words maximum)

C.4.3 How are the inputs from public participation used in decision-making? Please provide concrete examples. (100 words maximum)



C.4.4 How has this initiative enhanced participation and engagement? Please describe the results and impacts of the initiative. (200 words maximum)