

SMARTER STATE CASE STUDIES

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD): Observatory for Public Sector Innovation

This Library Connects Distributed Innovators to Information and to One Another



TOOLKITS

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SMART CITIZENS SMARTER STATE



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BASIC INFORMATION

BASICS

Owner

The Observatory for Public Sector Innovation

Project Contact

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Project Summary:

“A place for sharing, discussing and co-creating solutions that work.”

Sector

Intergovernmental Organization

Audience

Innovators within, across and outside OECD member governments.

Problem that OPSI is Trying to Solve

The lack of a one-stop place for learning about public sector innovation initiatives and from public sector innovators.

Platform

Online library and toolkit.

Design Basics

Innovations are searchable across level of government, sector, stage of innovation, region, and other criteria. Each innovation page has tabs showing the project description, results, development and lessons learned.

Users can compare innovations from different contexts against one another based on a number of criteria. Users can submit their own innovations and share knowledge through a collaboration forum.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

What's new?

Previously, information on public sector innovations were dispersed. It was not only difficult to learn about innovation initiatives across countries, but also to identify the actors responsible.

Incentives for Participation

Sharing information on OPSI gives innovators the opportunity to communicate the ideas, impacts and lessons learned from innovation projects to a broad, expert audience of innovators across the world, with the potential for subsequent collaborations to arise.

Challenges

The ambition of the project – creating an exhaustive library of instructive public sector innovations across OECD countries – is massive and will require broad and deep buy-in from innovators across dozens of nations.

Anticipated impact/Metrics

Likely the central anticipated impact of OPSI is the uptake of innovation projects as a result of lessons learned (and collaborations forged) through the platform.

Why is this project interesting?

Unlike many of the projects examined in these case studies, the central aim of OPSI is to connect individuals to the expert knowledge and codified best practices of innovators from around the world. While government users of the platform can access the contact information for the champion of a given innovation, the platform is testing the hypothesis that innovation will expand when people are connected to content, not necessarily connected to other people.



Developed and maintained by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Observatory for Public Sector Innovation (OPSI) aims to be “your gateway to a library of innovation experiences from around the world” that is “tailored to your needs.”¹ The platform was launched in 2014 by the OECD’s Public Governance Committee (PGC), which “helps countries strengthen their capacity to govern by improving policy-making systems and the performance of public institutions.” The PGC comprises government-nominated senior civil servant delegates from across the OECD’s 34 member countries.²

In some ways, OPSI was created to extend the central benefits of membership in the PGC – namely, the ability to share and learn about public sector innovations from around the world – to a wider pool of public sector innovators. In the PGC Handbook, the OECD notes that participants in the PGC are provided with “first-hand exposure to innovative practices and a network of senior management practitioners who can provide the benefits of their experience.”³ This knowledge-sharing traditionally takes the form of twice annual two-day meetings held at OECD headquarters in Paris.⁴

Indeed, at the OECD’s Innovating the Public Sector: From Ideas to Impact conference in 2014 the need for a knowledge- and best-practice-sharing platform for innovators was reiterated. Hannah Kitchen, an OECD policy analyst working on OPSI, notes that, “the overwhelming consensus was that innovation in the public sector is still no easy feat. It’s difficult to get support from above, it’s difficult to have the time and space to come up with innovative solutions, it’s difficult to find the resources for unproven approaches, and it’s difficult to rally others.”⁵

The PGC developed OPSI in collaboration with OECD member countries Canada, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Korea, Netherlands, and Sweden. OPSI was, however, not developed exclusively with input from government actors. Prior to its launch, OECD convened an Associate Group of “individual experts and representatives

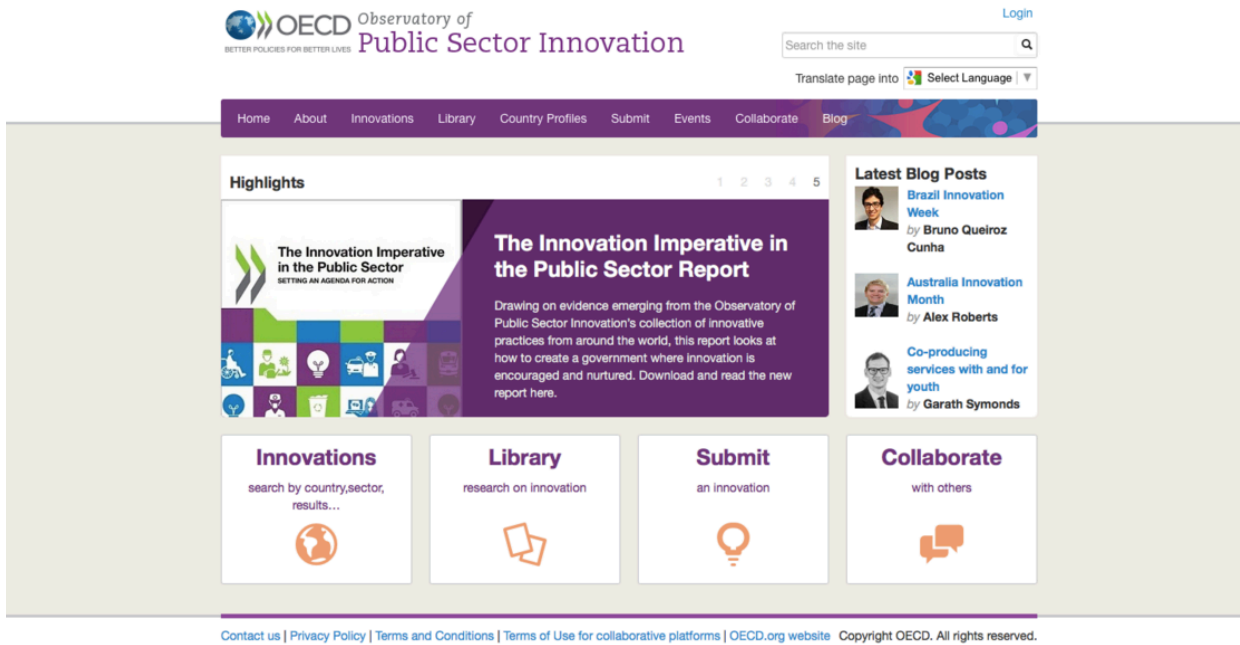
1 <https://vimeo.com/143725056>

2 <http://www.oecd.org/gov/Handbook.pdf>

3 <http://www.oecd.org/gov/Handbook.pdf>

4 <http://www.oecd.org/gov/Handbook.pdf>

5 <http://oecdinsights.org/2014/11/22/an-innovative-public-sector/>



OPSI Website

from a variety of organisations including academia, international organisations, non-governmental organisations and the private sector” to provide their diverse, specific knowledge to the effort.⁶ The platform is currently led by a Task Force of OECD countries chaired by Canada and France.⁷

Kitchen described the development as an “agile, staged approach. Users in countries were involved throughout, testing and retesting prototypes to ensure that it delivers on user needs and to enhance the user experience. More importantly it is a direct interface with innovators themselves – from local schools and hospitals to central government offices – anyone working in the public sector with a story to tell about innovation can use the Observatory to reach an international audience.”⁸

6 http://www.epsu.org/IMG/pdf/OECD_OPSSI_Associate_Group_provisional_agenda.pdf

7 <https://www.oecd.org/governance/observatory-public-sector-innovation/about/>

8 <http://oecdinsights.org/2014/11/22/an-innovative-public-sector/>

WHAT OPSI DOES

The OPSI platform provides users interested in public sector innovation with the ability to: access information on global innovations, share details about their own innovation experiences, and identify potential collaborations with other OPSI users. These features are built around the platform's three central goals:⁹

- **Inspiring.** Providing a unique collection of innovations from across the world, through an online platform, to inspire innovators in other countries.
- **Connecting.** Building a network of innovators, both virtually and in person through events and conferences to share experiences.
- **Promoting.** Turning analysis of concrete cases into practical guidance on how to source, develop, support and diffuse innovations across the public sector.

OPSI is a place to house and search for detailed case studies on public sector innovations from around the world – from the Peer-Employment-Training Approach of Recovery Innovations in Arizona¹⁰ to I Paid a Bribe in India¹¹ – submitted by official representatives of the government of the home country. OPSI is neither a wiki nor a crowdsourcing project, but a vetted library of shared content. Each of the case studies on OPSI has its own landing page with tabs featuring a project description, results to date, information on the project's development and lessons learned, as well as information on the innovation's implementer(s). The case studies are free and available as HTML content as well as a downloadable PDFs.

Users can search for innovations a number of ways, including by level of government, sector (e.g., health and education), or the current stage of project development. Each member country has its own dedicated profile page with all of its innovations, and users can also browse using an interactive map.

⁹ <http://www.oecd.org/governance/observatory-public-sector-innovation>

¹⁰ <http://www.oecd.org/governance/observatory-public-sector-innovation/innovations/page/thepeer-employment-trainingapproachofrecoveryinnovationsinarizona.htm>

¹¹ <http://www.oecd.org/governance/observatory-public-sector-innovation/innovations/page/thepeer-employment-trainingapproachofrecoveryinnovationsinarizona.htm>

Beyond the highly granular search and browsing capabilities, perhaps the most useful feature of OPSI is the ability to compare innovations. The platform allows users to compare up to three innovations across a number of criteria, like the results of the intervention, tools used and resources invested. So the site not only allows a user interested in implementing a new public sector innovation with the most relevant examples of similar efforts from across OECD states, but also helps her to differentiate between similar innovations to the end of better identifying the learnings and best practices that are most relevant to her situation.

The content-focused features – OPSI also hosts a blog on innovation – are supplemented with a number of functionalities aimed at fostering collaboration among users. Kitchen notes that, “Through its interactive features users can make their views heard by voting in regular polls, discuss with other users to learn about their experiences, ask questions, and even create their own groups for collaborative projects.”¹² OPSI is not, however, a social or professional networking platform.

IMPACTS AND NEXT STEPS

Beyond page views, it is currently difficult to assess the on-the-ground impacts of the nascent platform in terms of the new public sector innovations it has inspired and enabled to date. That, however, does not mean that the site has not already had an impact on the innovative capacity of OECD countries.

OPSI’s case studies have informed the writing of *The Innovation Imperative in the Public Sector: Setting an Agenda for Action*, a book published by OECD in 2015. The book “provides a framework for understanding and analysing public sector innovation, and identifies the main capabilities that determine an organisation’s capacity for innovation: empowering the workforce, generating ideas, adopting new methods of work and reducing regulatory complexity. Finally, it sets out specific actions that governments can take to strengthen their capacity to innovate.”¹³

¹² <http://oecdinsights.org/2014/11/22/an-innovative-public-sector/>

¹³ http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/the-innovation-imperative-in-the-public-sector_9789264236561-en;jsessionid=1v6bysmse0vn.x-oecd-live-02

Among other contributions to the field – including a list of organizational factors affecting innovation and a three-pronged definition of an innovation (novelty, implementation and impact) – The Innovation Imperative in the Public Sector provides four key action items for government decisionmakers based on the lessons learned from OPSI:¹⁴

- **Focus on People.** Governments must invest in the capacity and capabilities of civil servants as the catalysts of innovation. this includes building the culture, incentives and norms to facilitate new ways of working
- **Put Knowledge to Use.** Governments must facilitate the free flow of information, data and knowledge across the public sector and use it to respond creatively to new challenges and opportunities.
- **Work Together.** Governments must advance new organizational structures and leverage partnerships to enhance approaches and tools, share risk and harness available information and resources for innovation.
- **Rethink the Rules.** Government must ensure that internal rules and processes are balanced in their capacity to mitigate risks while protecting resources and enabling innovation.

Going forward, OPSI will, of course, benefit from continued use and submission of new innovations. Additionally, the platform could potentially benefit from an increased focus on the targeted matching of innovators to each other, in addition to the existing capabilities for targeted matching of innovators to content, and open fora for collaboration. Finally, OECD has also expressed an interest in expanding OPSI outreach activities beyond OECD member countries, and, importantly, ramping up its efforts to measure the costs and benefits of innovations described on OPSI.¹⁵

14 http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/the-innovation-imperative-in-the-public-sector_9789264236561-en;jsessionid=1v6bysmse0vn.x-oecd-live-02

15 <http://www.slideshare.net/adamlrouge/opsi-presentation-to-respa-04feb>



ABOUT THE GOVLAB

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ABOUT SMARTER STATE

New tools—what GovLab calls technologies of expertise— are making it possible to match the supply of citizen expertise to the demand for it in government. Smarter State is a GovLab initiative to design and test how public decision-making could improve if institutions knew how to use the technologies of expertise to tap the wisdom of citizens' and civil servants.