



Declaration on Public Sector Innovation

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Date(s)

Adopted on 22/05/2019

Background Information

The Declaration on Public Sector Innovation (the Declaration) was adopted on 22 May 2019 by 35 OECD Members and 5 non-Members in the context of the OECD Council meeting at Ministerial level. The Declaration aims to legitimise innovation as a core and strategic function of public sector organisations and in the day-to-day work of public servants. The Declaration articulates a shared position for governments on how to support, improve and expand innovation to meet a variety of challenges and to take advantage of new opportunities on offer. It provides common principles, concepts and language that governments can draw upon to develop or enhance their own approach to innovation management, in ways that are relevant to their specific goals and administrative settings.

Declare to innovate

The Declaration introduces a set of five high-level principles, with associated actions that legitimise and support innovation as a core and strategic function of public sector organisations and of the work of public servants. In the context of the Declaration, innovation is understood broadly to mean the implementation of something novel to the context to achieve impact. At the time of its writing, it is acknowledged that innovation is still an emergent area of research and practice and it reflects the OECD's most current and comprehensive thinking on the subject.

Adherents signal the importance of innovation to the way they contend with routine and complex challenges and exploit opportunities. They can use the principles and actions to inform or enhance their own, contextually relevant approaches to innovation and its management.

By providing common principles and actions, the Declaration enables governments with different contexts, experiences and needs a way to speak the same language in relation to innovation so that they can better understand, share and learn from each other.

An evidence-based and inclusive process to develop the Declaration

The Declaration reflects years of discussion, research, analysis and country studies that the OECD, in particular through its Observatory of Public Sector Innovation (OPSI), has undertaken on public sector innovation. From 2014 to 2017, discussions at OPSI conferences explored the possibility of an OECD legal instrument for innovation. Throughout 2018 and 2019, the OPSI National Contact Points and the OECD Public Governance Committee (PGC) reviewed draft Declaration which reflects many conversations and forms of collaboration with OECD Members, non-Members and input from the public. It intends to spark many more.

It was important to OPSI and the PGC to open the draft Declaration to an extensive public consultation to ensure that its contents reflected the needs of its ultimate end users, with the aim to solicit meaningful feedback from key stakeholders and target audiences on the draft text of the Declaration. Quality of contribution was equally important to quantity, given that the Declaration strives to cohere concepts and language around an emerging area of research and practice for a group of people often operating largely outside mainstream activities in government.

An integrated stakeholder engagement and strategic communications campaign supported the realisation of this objective. OPSI managed a stakeholder engagement program and integrated communications campaign, under the banner 'Declare to Innovate', which encompassed content creation and marketing, media relations, webinars and social media resulting in 149k Twitter impressions on the hashtag #declaretoinnovate and high engagement in the consultation process.

Through its dedicated digital consultation platform, OPSI received 97 responses from 38 different countries to the public consultation. These responses were a mix of individual responses, from individuals reflecting on their own experience/ organisation, or group responses, which reflected the collation and synthesis of responses and presented on behalf of a group.

Next steps / How the OECD will support Adherents

To support Adherents and other stakeholders from the broader innovation community to benefit from the Declaration, the OECD can:

- Help Adherents with identifying, understanding, and providing policy recommendations for barriers and challenges to public sector innovation at system and organisational level
- Accompany Adherents in the design and deployment of system enablers (e.g. policy and legislation, networks, etc.)
- Collect and share evidence on ways the principles of the Declaration are implemented in Adherents, including bringing the voice of citizens on perceived impacts
- Support organisations with bespoke interventions such as workshops on the purpose and use of the Declaration, capacity building, and best practices.
- Advise Adherents on creating platforms for articulating country-level discussions on the benefits and impacts of public sector innovation to improve citizen outcomes.

For more information, reading materials on the theory and model of public sector innovation which forms the basis of the Declaration, and helpful guidance on how to use it visit here: <https://oe.cd/innovationdeclaration>.

WE, MINISTERS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Peru, Poland, Portugal, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States;

RECOGNISING THAT:

1. Governments play an important role in setting and implementing the legal and policy framework for sustainable economies and societies; and in creating the conditions for the effective delivery of essential public services for all;
2. As part of their work for the public good, governments have a range of goals such as the Sustainable Development Goals or societal priorities that imply a need for, or explicitly call for, new approaches;
3. Governments and their public sector organisations operate in volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous contexts and must contend with a variety of challenges, such as digital transformation, energy poverty, environmental degradation, climate change and inequality;
4. In such a context, it cannot be assumed that existing structures, processes and interventions remain the most appropriate or effective means for the public sector to achieve its purpose and deliver upon government and citizen needs and expectations;
5. Innovation, implementing something novel to the context in order to achieve impact, is a proactive strategy that governments can use to respond to, adapt to and prepare for this context;
6. The level of innovation that will happen by default is unlikely to be sufficient or sustained without confronting the systemic biases within the public sector for maintaining and replicating the status quo. The latter is a by-product of the need for government and its operations to be stable and dependable;
7. Public sector organisations therefore need to be able to innovate, consistently and reliably, so that an innovative response to any challenge (current or future) that requires a new approach can be deployed when and where needed;
8. To reliably and consistently innovate, public sector organisations need to take a deliberate approach to innovation management, one which builds on previous efforts. An example of such an approach is portfolio management which involves investing in, fostering and leveraging an appropriately diverse range of innovative activities so as to offset the risks that some innovative responses will not work or will be unsuitable;
9. A deliberate portfolio approach to innovation management recognises and appreciates that innovation is multi-faceted, and that each facet satisfies different means and ends. The portfolio entails:
 - a. Enhancement-oriented innovation, which upgrades current practices, achieves efficiencies and better results, and builds on existing structures;
 - b. Mission-oriented innovation, which achieves clear ambitions and priorities, developing new methods and approaches as needed;
 - c. Adaptive innovation, which responds to a changing environment and encourages curiosity to interpret and respond to changes in society and in technology;
 - d. Anticipatory innovation, which explores and engages with the uncertainty around emergent issues that will shape future priorities and future commitments;

10. Relying only on activity happening in one facet will not adequately prepare public sector organisations to contend with the differing nature of the challenges that arise. In a portfolio approach, there will be a diversity of activities.

RECOGNISING that the OECD has developed a strong evidence base on innovation strategies and approaches, open government, government regulation, public integrity, gender equality, digital government, resulting in international standards;

I. DECLARE that we affirm our strong commitment to:

A. Embrace and enhance innovation within the public sector

We will endeavour to:

- i. Embrace innovation as one of the ways that governments can achieve their goals and do better for the people they serve;
- ii. Draw attention to and support the innovation that is already occurring;
- iii. Appreciate the multifaceted nature of innovation and take a systemic portfolio approach to innovation that is tailored to the relevant needs, goals and priorities;
- iv. Establish or continue to provide stewardship of the innovation system, mindful of the respective responsibilities and functioning of differing levels of government, and appreciative of the differing degrees of centralisation within governments;
- v. Recognise that innovation, similar to other core functions, requires investment and support to do well.

B. Encourage and equip all public servants to innovate

We will endeavour to:

- i. Acknowledge the advantages that a culture of openness, of learning from errors and of collaboration across silos and sectors offers to the practice of innovation;
- ii. Give permission to public sector organisations and public servants to take appropriate risks and to explore and engage with new ideas, technology and ways of working as part of their core business;
- iii. Provide clarity about responsibilities for innovation, so that everyone knows how they can participate or contribute;
- iv. Recognise that innovation requires and involves a diverse range of skills and capabilities, and motivation;
- v. Ensure support structures, processes and working conditions that more easily allow public servants to innovate, and continuously reassess established routines that may be unnecessarily hindering innovation.

C. Cultivate new partnerships and involve different voices

We will endeavour to:

- i. Connect different actors (public, private, not-for-profit, and individual) in ways that allow public sector organisations to partner, collaborate and co-create new approaches or solutions to problems;
- ii. Create partnerships and link into existing networks of exchange in, out and across the innovation system to increase the capacity to innovate;

- iii. Develop a spectrum of engagement and co-creation practices, and use different forms of it, to ensure that innovation efforts are informed by lived experience and relevant expertise;
- iv. Look for opportunities to partner with other countries on cross-border challenges requiring innovative approaches;
- v. Listen for new and emerging voices to help notice weak signals that things might be changing, which can help identify an emerging need or opportunity for innovation.

D. Support exploration, iteration and testing

We will endeavour to:

- i. Support innovation that is about clear and known priorities and problems, and allow for exploratory innovation where it may not be clear what the end result will be;
- ii. Ensure exploration, iteration and testing across a portfolio, at both the level of the public sector as a whole, and at the level of individual ministries and organisations;
- iii. Recognise the benefits that can come from enabling experimentation in core systems (such as the use of digital technologies, budgeting, risk management and reporting) and explore whether and how they can be achieved;
- iv. Recognise and capture the learning that comes from exploration, and appreciate that often experimenting and innovating may not only be about fixing, but also learning.

E. Diffuse lessons and share practices

We will endeavour to:

- i. Systematically share learning arising from innovation activity (even if the innovation 'failed to deliver as expected');
- ii. Foster networking and peer learning to help public servants learn and borrow from each other;
- iii. Develop and sustain feedback loops that capture feedback from citizens and frontline staff to aid continuous learning;
- iv. Establish good evaluation practices in order to learn, to steer the innovation process and to assess the value of the innovation that occurs.

II. INVITE the OECD to support this Declaration and continue its work towards furthering and promoting public sector innovation by providing a platform for dialogue and exchange of knowledge on public sector innovation; continuing to systematically collect and analyse examples of innovative practices, and supporting countries in their efforts towards promoting innovation including through country studies.

Adherents*

OECD Members

Australia
Austria
Belgium
Canada
Chile
Czech Republic
Denmark
Estonia
Finland
France
Germany
Greece
Hungary
Iceland
Ireland
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Japan
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Lithuania
Luxembourg
Mexico
Netherlands
New Zealand
Norway
Poland
Portugal
Slovak Republic
Slovenia
Sweden
Switzerland
Turkey
United Kingdom
United States

Non-Members

Argentina
Brazil
Costa Rica
Indonesia
Peru

Other

* Additional information and statements are available in the Compendium of OECD Legal Instruments:
<http://legalinstruments.oecd.org>

About the OECD

The OECD is a unique forum where governments work together to address the economic, social and environmental challenges of globalisation. The OECD is also at the forefront of efforts to understand and to help governments respond to new developments and concerns, such as corporate governance, the information economy and the challenges of an ageing population. The Organisation provides a setting where governments can compare policy experiences, seek answers to common problems, identify good practice and work to co-ordinate domestic and international policies.

The OECD Member countries are: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States. The European Union takes part in the work of the OECD.

OECD Legal Instruments

Since the creation of the OECD in 1961, around 450 substantive legal instruments have been developed within its framework. These include OECD Acts (i.e. the Decisions and Recommendations adopted by the OECD Council in accordance with the OECD Convention) and other legal instruments developed within the OECD framework (e.g. Declarations, international agreements).

All substantive OECD legal instruments, whether in force or abrogated, are listed in the online Compendium of OECD Legal Instruments. They are presented in five categories:

- **Decisions:** OECD legal instruments which are legally binding on all Members except those which abstain at the time of adoption. While they are not international treaties, they entail the same kind of legal obligations. Adherents are obliged to implement Decisions and must take the measures necessary for such implementation.
- **Recommendations:** OECD legal instruments which are not legally binding but practice accords them great moral force as representing the political will of Adherents. There is an expectation that Adherents will do their utmost to fully implement a Recommendation. Thus, Members which do not intend to do so usually abstain when a Recommendation is adopted, although this is not required in legal terms.
- **Declarations:** OECD legal instruments which are prepared within the Organisation, generally within a subsidiary body. They usually set general principles or long-term goals, have a solemn character and are usually adopted at Ministerial meetings of the Council or of committees of the Organisation.
- **International Agreements:** OECD legal instruments negotiated and concluded within the framework of the Organisation. They are legally binding on the Parties.
- **Arrangement, Understanding and Others:** several ad hoc substantive legal instruments have been developed within the OECD framework over time, such as the Arrangement on Officially Supported Export Credits, the International Understanding on Maritime Transport Principles and the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Recommendations.