Digital government toolkit

Digital Government Strategies: Good Practices

Portugal: Portugal Participatory Budget

The OECD Council adopted on 15 July 2014 the Recommendation on Digital Government Strategies. The Recommendation provides a set of 12 principles structured around 3 pillars. The OECD Secretariat has developed a Digital Government Policy Toolkit to support OECD member countries and non-member adhering countries with the implementation of the Recommendation. This practice was submitted by the government of Portugal to be considered as a good practice in the implementation of one or more of the principles contained in the Recommendation.

Description of the practice:

Organisation: Agency for Administrative Modernization (AMA)

Name of the practice: **Portugal Participatory Budget (2017)**

                               https://opp.gov.pt/english

Description:

The Portugal Participatory Budget (PPB) is a democratic, direct and universal process that allows civil society to decide on public investments in different governmental areas.

It is the first nationwide public participatory budget in the world, enhancing its originality. PPB helps to bring people closer to politics and decision-making, while promoting a deeper connection between regions, integrating the coastline and interior areas, as well as the rural and urban areas. It allows citizens to propose and vote on ideas for public investments funded by the National State Budget of Portugal.

The PPB really brings people closer to politics and decision-making, compelling them to present sustainable proposals regarding other cities/regions besides their own, fostering an inclusive view of the country. Besides, the process of proposing initiatives and vote for them makes people more aware of the political processes, the civic responsibilities and the context of allocation of public resources, which empowers the population. Additionally, populations traditionally not so heard, as the rural ones, have now an open channel to directly participate in the policy making process.

Results

The PPB first edition was in 2017, and the projects of that exercise are already being implemented, so the innovation is happening and is already producing results. In fact, after the result evaluation of

the first edition, it was decided to do a second edition in 2018, with changes reflecting some lessons learned from the 2017 experience.

Instead of a 3 million Euros budget, the PPB 2018 now has 5 million, and instead of being limited to only six areas (education and adult training, culture, science and agriculture in the mainland, and also justice and home affairs in the autonomous regions), this new edition has been extended to all the governmental areas, which considerably expanded its field of action.

Additionally, the face-to face participatory meetings of the first edition were maintained in the second edition, but a new impetus was given to the ICT tools, namely through the online portal of the initiative, which was completely reformulated.

<div align="center">**Development**</div>

Implementation:

The PPB consists of a hybrid participatory model that combines face-to-face interactions between citizens and the State, with the use of ICT tools specifically developed to bring the initiative to all citizens and ensure that everyone can fully participate.

The face to face approach is mainly based on participatory meetings held nationwide, in which the population is able to present and discuss their ideas in person, with the assistance of specialized personnel managing these sessions. Still, the citizens can also submit their proposals at the Citizens Spots (assisted digital services counters) and at some public libraries all around the country. The citizens can use digital tools to participate, but also more traditional channels, so anyone can take part of the initiative, even the ones with fewer digital skills. Anyone can participate, which fosters social inclusion and at the same time enhances trust in the public administration.

For the ones that are more comfortable using ICTs, the proposals can be presented online at the PPB portal. In fact, the PPB 2018 web portal plays a central role in the implementation of the initiative as it presents three key features: aggregates all the info about the project; allows citizens to submit their ideas for proposals; allows citizens to vote on the final set of proposals (which can also be done through free-of-charge SMS).

The projects can be regional, or national, thus connecting different areas of the country, and encouraging a broader public participation. It has the potential for becoming an essential tool in creating national networks, and integrating coastline and interior areas, as well as rural and urban areas, since it incorporates groups of proposals with different territory scope - regional and nationwide. The voting phase, which is now in place for this second edition of the PPB, allows each citizens to vote twice: one vote for regional projects and another for national projects.

Diffusion and scaling:

The first edition of the PPB was carried out in 2017 and gathered 1015 ideas (Phase 1 – Collection of citizen's ideas), which resulted in 599 projects to be voted (Phase 2 – Technical analysis of the submitted ideas according to defined rules and criteria), 78 815 votes by the Portuguese population (Phase 3 – Voting) and 38 winning projects, to be implemented by the government and by the respective sectorial services of the Public Administration, in articulation with the proponents of the proposals.

The ongoing edition confirmed the success of the PPB model, with a total of submitted proposals (1418) and voting projects (692), surpassing the numbers of 2017. The voting phase of 2018's edition ended on September 30 and the winning projects will be known on the second week of October.

Thanks to the first edition success, and some lessons learned, the PPB 2018 edition has introduced some new features, comparing to the previous one. It has a new and improved website, it had a budget increase from three to five million Euros, and it is now open to all the governmental areas, instead of being limited to only six areas, like it happened in the first edition.

Partnerships:

Led by the Secretary of State of Administrative Modernization, and operationalized by AMA with several partners:

- Ignite Portugal/All, a platform that uses specific approaches to encourage people to present their ideas and entrepreneurial projects

- City/Parish councils and Universities: availability of public spaces for the Participatory Meetings

- Public Figures: participation on the communication campaign

- All ministries: evaluation and implementation of the projects.

The main beneficiaries of the PPB are the citizens. The PPB is an instrument to present the community needs, promoting the collaboration with public institutions and a more efficient use of resources, since it enables the investment in proposals that respond to what the citizens see as a priority. Besides, people are now more aware of the political processes, civic responsibilities and the context of allocation of public resources, which fosters transparency and empowers the population.

Lessons learned

In a nationwide participatory budget exercise, it's important to notice that the regional projects register more votes, meaning that the creation of project categories by regions with non-competing financial allocations is a good option for a participatory budget at the national level. Besides, cities

that already have local participatory budgets, and smaller communities, seem to present a higher level of citizen involvement and participation.

It is also important to engage the citizens in all the stages of the PPB, namely in the implementation phase, so that they understand the overall process and feel they're part of the solution.

Another lesson learned from the first edition that was considered into the design of the PPB 2018, is that this type of initiative can be open to all the governmental areas. The 2017 edition accepted projects only in six areas, but the 2018 edition is open to all the governmental areas, and has received very interesting proposals for the remaining areas.

The use of ICTs can also act as a condition for success. From the first edition to the second one, the PPB web portal was completely reformulated with a more user friendly approach, aggregating all the info about the project and allowing citizens to submit their ideas and to vote on a final set of projects. It has been designed to provide a simple, intuitive and dynamic "one page app"-type of user experience, including a responsive web design approach to deliver an optimized mobile experience.

Nevertheless, it is also important to maintain the face to face approach in parallel, since not all the citizens feel comfortable, or want to use the digitals tools at their disposal. The use of a hybrid model makes it a more inclusive process, open to everyone.

Challenges and Failures

To inspire a participatory mindset in the Portuguese population, but also in foreigners living in the country, and translate their ideas into sustainable and feasible proposals is not an easy task. The ideas can't be outside the scope of the State functions, have to be in line with the Portuguese legislation, be feasible, can't imply the building of infrastructures, can't exceed the 300.000EUR budget, etc. This analysis and this transformation of ideas into projects is a challenging one and the work of very dedicated teams in all the governmental areas.

Besides, to compel citizens to present sustainable proposals regarding other cities/regions besides their own, fostering an inclusive view of the country, was also a challenge. The participatory meetings held nationwide, the new PPB website and a strong communication strategy proved to be essential to explain the initiative to the citizens and promote their participation.

Conditions required

The top level political support is always an essential condition for the success of any transversal initiative to all the governmental areas and the PPB is no exception to this rule. The fact that the Secretary of State and the Minister of the Presidency and of Administrative Modernization were very active campaigning for the initiative, and even taking part in the participatory meetings, gave a big push to the project.

To raise awareness for the PPB, it is also essential to allocate sufficient time and resources to communicate the project main ideas and phases, focusing on media/social networks. In an initiative in which citizen's engagement is one of the primary goals, a good communication strategy is a key feature.

Highly skilled, multidisciplinary and motivated teams in the gathering ideas phase, and afterwards in the analysis and selection of the most relevant, suitable and feasible proposals, and in its transformation from ideas to projects are also key conditions for success.

Additional information

The PPB 2017 gathered 1015 ideas (Phase 1 – Collection of citizen's ideas), which resulted in 599 projects registered a budget increase from 3 to 5 million EUR 5 million and is now open to all areas of governance, instead of being limited to only six areas, like it happened in the first edition.

This year's edition has 691 projects to be voted, 272 with a national coverage and 419 regional ones. The top three areas, with more projects submitted to the vote are: culture (229); education and sports (98); and agriculture (64).to be voted (Phase 2 – Technical analysis of the submitted ideas according to defined rules and criteria), 78.815 votes by the citizens (Phase 3 – Voting) and 38 winning projects (2 nationals and 36 regional ones). In 2017, there were 45,531 votes in regional projects and 33,284 in national projects.

Replication

Participatory budgets, at least at the local level, are already well-known initiatives, which can be used and replicated in several contexts. The important thing to keep in mind is that there is no single recipe, and even though the project can be easily replicable, it always needs some adaptation to the context and intended beneficiary group.

Innovation

There are other examples of participatory budgets but, as far as we are aware, the PPB is the only one designed and carried out at the national level, all others being local initiatives. Besides, this is an initiative financed by the national State budget, open to all the governmental areas, so the citizens have a direct saying on how to spend part of the Portuguese state budget.

Another interesting feature of the PPB 2018 is its online portal, which plays a central role in the implementation of the initiative as it presents three key features: aggregates all the info about the project; allows citizens to submit their ideas for proposals; and allows citizens to vote on the final set of projects to be implemented by the Portuguese government (which can also be done through free SMS).

The PPB web portal has proven to be an effective way of using ICTs to promote openness, transparency and inclusiveness, at the same time that it enables citizen's engagement.

<u>Further information</u>

It's important to reinforce that by engaging the citizens in an inclusive and transparent way, the PPB gives them a sense of belonging and recognition of their power to influence political decisions, at the same time that enhance both the transparency and public trust in the policy making process.

The electronic voting system allows citizens to vote directly on the PPB website, with the civil identification number or the Digital Mobile Key, or via mobile phone by sending a free-of-charge SMS.

Regarding the last part of the process, the winning projects are carried out by the sectorial services, in articulation with the proponents, prompting confidence and increasing the responsiveness of the government initiatives to the citizen's real needs. The time of completion of the winning projects is different for each case, depending on its nature and scope, but citizens can follow up on the projects.