

OPENCOESIONE

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“OpenCoesione-Monithon”
application for the
Open Government Awards 2014

The three sections of the application for the Open Government Awards:

Section A: THE TEAM

This section should take up to two pages of narrative text and provide a series of basic facts about the selected initiative and any associated partners responsible for submitting the application.

Section B: THE INITIATIVE

This section makes up the bulk of the application. There are seven required responses, which should take three to five pages, including a requirement to upload letters of endorsement to validate claims made in the application.

Section C: THE PITCH

This section allows applicants to present their most compelling case for why the initiative deserves to be recognized. It should take a maximum of one page, and it includes an optional video presentation of ~3-4 minutes.

A. THE TEAM

INITIATIVE NAME

OpenCoesione-Monithon

THE NOMINATION

The Italian Department for Public Administration, in consultation with the public administrations involved in the OGP activities, nominated four best practices for the selection of a national candidate to the OG Awards: "La Bussola della Trasparenza", "Partecipa!", "Sportelli in Rete" and "OpenCoesione-Monithon".

A public consultation took place from May 21st to May 28th 2014, through the website of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers www.partecipa.gov.it.

The invitation to vote and send comments was sent via email to Italian CSOs and government representatives.

Information and access to the survey were also available on the Department for Public Administration homepage (www.funzionepubblica.gov.it) and the representatives of the four nominees were invited to give notice of the survey through their networks.

Furthermore, a discussion about the consultation was developed in the Italian OGP online community hosted on the network Innovatori PA (Innovators in the Public Administration, www.innovatoripa.it).

The OpenCoesione-Monithon partnership (www.opencoesione.gov.it, www.monithon.it) was finally selected as the national candidate with 82% of the votes and received many comments of appreciation ("the most innovative citizen engagement project in Italy", "promotes concretely the active involvement of citizens without the requirement of specific skills", "praiseworthy because schools are involved").

GOVERNMENT POINT OF CONTACT

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OTHER PARTNERSHIPS

OpenCoesione and Monithon have been partnering with several non-governmental organizations, media and government agencies and have also been acknowledged by the **World Bank** as one of the most interesting examples of open government platforms worldwide. They are mentioned in [the independent report on the Italian OGP Action Plan](#) compiled by civil society organizations as highly valuable for improving democracy and quoted as best practice in the [national guidelines on public sector information re-use](#) released by the **Agency for Digital Italy**.

Main partnerships:

Non-governmental organizations

- **Ahref Foundation**: supporting multimedia data journalism investigations (forthcoming)

- **Libera:** mapping, on the Monithon platform, of the cohesion projects that are directed to re-using properties seized from organized crime
- **ActionAid:** joint project on youth civic engagement and shared methodologies of civic engagement

Public bodies

- **Permanent Representation of the EC in Italy:** involvement of the Europe Direct network in the OpenCoesione School project and provision of material for European civic education lessons
- **Ministry of Education, University and Research:** OpenCoesione School project and publication of additional open data on schools
- **Union of the Chambers of Commerce:** citizen forum for active involvement in control of public expenditure and fight against corruption
- **Italian Association of Municipalities (ANCI-IFEL):** analyses on the use of European Funds in metropolitan cities and other areas

Training

- **School of Administration of the Ministry of Interior:** training aimed at public servants of the managerial career (directors and vice-prefects)
- Data journalism courses with **Ahref Foundation** and **School of Journalism of the University of Salerno**.

B. THE INITIATIVE

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) is prepared to celebrate a range of successful applicants to the Open Government Awards. This year's theme is "citizen engagement." To qualify for recognition, we need to understand the various elements of success for your initiative and its sustainability over time.

PROBLEM DEFINITION

The lack of transparency and accountability on how public money is spent, and the resulting limited control that citizens may enact on the agencies in charge of the funds are among the main reasons for the slow pace in implementing cohesion policy and in understanding whether investment projects actually respond to local demand. Cohesion policy projects can raise the quality of life of citizens and provide a better environment for business to flourish: in Italy the overall cohesion budget, made up of national and European funds, is worth approximately 100 billion euros on 7-year periods, which on a yearly basis account for as much as 1% of GDP.

This explains why cohesion policy is a particularly hot topic in Italy, net contributor to the EU budget and the third biggest beneficiary country of the EU structural funds (after Poland and Spain). It is also among the countries with the lowest absorption rates of the funds.

Since 2012 OpenCoesione-Monithon are addressing these issues within an open government strategy by launching various awareness and citizen engagement initiatives, setting a standard for open data on public investment and also anticipating transparency issues in 2014-2020 EU regulations on the use of cohesion funds.

TARGET POPULATION

Cohesion policy is nationwide. Nevertheless, OpenCoesione-Monithon address the following specific target groups:

- **Citizens and Civil Society Organizations** can find out projects of interest, follow implementation through monitoring updates and on-site visits and press forward public administrations towards the expected outputs and outcomes.
- **Public administrations**, as a result of data publication and citizen feedback, are urged to an efficient use of resources and an increased quality of monitoring data.

- **Students** learn how to become engaged citizens and contribute to an open government society.
- **Media** and **researchers** gain better understanding of territorial cohesion and supply shareable knowledge on cohesion policy.

INITIATIVE DESIGN

The OpenCoesione initiative started in 2012 as an open government strategy on cohesion policy, jointly operating on **all the three dimensions** of open government: transparency, participation and collaboration.

www.opencoesione.gov.it is the **first national portal** on cohesion policy with transparent information on each funded project: regular bimonthly updates have nurtured open data on almost 800k projects so far, which can be freely re-used (CC 3.0 BY-SA license) and explored interactively on the portal using maps, filters and detailed forms on projects and recipients.

Institutional collaboration went through the establishment of a "Technical Group" for dissemination and re-use of public data and information on cohesion policy, comprising delegates from all 30 public administrations in charge of Programmes, aimed at increasing the quality of monitoring data fed into OpenCoesione according to agreed data standards.

OpenCoesione data are published so as to promote greater public participation and to enable citizens to evaluate whether resources are employed effectively. **Monithon** (www.monithon.it) takes this effort to the next level.

Moni-thon (literally "monitoring marathon"), promotes citizen monitoring of cohesion policy through active involvement of communities and a shared methodology. The monithon idea, initially conceived by the OpenCoesione team, was presented to the "civic hacking" community and soon transformed into a civil society, independent initiative by an enthusiastic group of developers, activists and journalists.

Monithon has rapidly evolved from being an innovative new platform into a transferable civic engagement format. Through "monitoring marathons", groups of citizens, sometimes under the guide of local CSOs, set out on explorations around their area, to gather information on specific projects of interest. In doing so, participants collect useful material to evaluate the effectiveness of public spending and practice bottom-up modes of control over public policies and collaboration with all the actors involved.

Monithons are also carried out within the OpenCoesione School project (www.ascuoladiopencoesione.it), an innovative course first experimented in 2013-14 school year, aimed at engaging high school students, through practice-based learning that results in a data journalism and storytelling project on OpenCoesione projects' impact. OpenCoesione School stems from the awareness that **education is the "necessary next stage" of open data for engagement.**

INITIATIVE OUTCOMES

OpenCoesione-Monithon set a standard as a 5-star initiative according to the Open Data Engagement Model.

OpenCoesione regularly receives [coverage on printed and online media](#), including a prime-time focus with Monithon on TG2, one of the main national TV newscasts and a [chapter inside a book](#) by a leading Italian journalist.

This year "OpenCoesione School" students engaged local communities by presenting their project-work in public events, opened new channels of communication with local institutions for closer follow up on projects, and teamed up with local associations for demands of more open data on public services at the local level.

Since its launch in September 2013, Monithon has drawn dozens of national and local communities (some formed on purpose, other based on existing associations) and around 500 people into civic monitoring activities, mostly in Southern Italy, where cohesion funds are more concentrated. Specific activities are carried out by established citizen groups, like Libera, a national anti-Mafia association, who became Monithon partner, focusing their monitoring on the rehabilitation of Mafia-seized properties. Action Aid is now partnering with Monithon to promote citizen empowerment. Existing, local groups of activists are

using the Monithon methodology to test local transportation systems that benefited from EU funding, while new groups have formed to begin monitoring social innovation and cultural heritage projects. Now more than 50 “citizen monitoring reports”, which take the form of collective investigations on project development and results, are publicly available on the Monithon website, many of which spurred further dialogue with public administrations.

INITIATIVE SUSTAINABILITY

The initiative's long-term perspective is ensured on three levels: administrative, data and civic sustainability.

OpenCoesione is an institutional initiative of the Italian Department for development and economic cohesion and the activities are carried out by a team of civil servants, reinforced since 2013 with external professionals and new skills, including the OpenCoesione School team, thanks to additional financial support available until 2015, to be confirmed until 2023.

The monitoring system that feeds OpenCoesione will be upgraded in the programming cycle 2014-2020, and flow into the OpenCoesione portal (500k unique visitors since launch and 1,000 visits per day) which is the national website on cohesion policy envisaged for all Member States by 2014-2020 EU regulations.

Monithon, started by a handful of volunteers, has activated a growing number of local communities performing independent civic monitoring activities. Technical improvements of the platform are under way in order to make civic monitoring easier and more inclusive.

OpenCoesione School is ready to scale-up in 2014-2015 and reach a target of 100 schools.

Extending from established partnerships, the 2014-2015 OpenCoesione operational plan sets new initiatives for further involvement of researchers and data journalists and synergies with other data producers for enriching available information on projects and policy.

VALIDATION OF CLAIMS

C. THE PITCH

BEST CASE

The fundamental ingredient for a successful open government initiative is the establishment of a permanent and dynamic synergy between a public mandate for transparency and the collective energy of citizens and civil society.

As a core output, OpenCoesione allows everyone to **find out** what EU and national cohesion policy does and **follow** on a regular basis the development of each funded project: how funds are being spent, on what kind of things, in which places, who is receiving the money, what progress is being made, when they are expected to be completed.

This enabled the generation of a large-scale digital common, a significant public interest and a durable and effective collaboration among administrations. Nevertheless, the awareness that widespread civic engagement requires a stronger connection between governmental information and local communities, triggered the availability of proper tools.

The Monithon platform adds to this dimension as a method and a model whereby citizen monitoring may be initiated and as a tool for civic partners to **press forward**, to report on malpractice, but also to collaborate in making all these projects work, in accelerating their completion and understanding whether they actually respond to local demand.

OpenCoesione empowered by Monithon, reinforces this model with the involvement of the largest and most precious constituency, school students, in OpenCoesione School project: raising a future generation with greater civic awareness and the ability to exercise public debate and scrutiny is the best way to produce durable results for an effective policy.

VIDEO SUBMITTED