

DG INFORMATION SOCIETY AND MEDIA

eParticipation

Work Programme 2007

*ePARTICIPATION in
legislative and decision-making processes*

eParticipation is a Preparatory Action to promote the development and use of Information and Communication Technologies in legislative and decision-making processes within parliamentary and government environments, aiming to enhance the participation of citizens and contribute to better legislation.



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Introduction

The European Commission's Communication¹ "i2010 eGovernment Action Plan: Accelerating eGovernment in Europe for the Benefit of All" includes an action for "strengthening citizen participation and democratic decision-making in Europe". As they mature and become widespread, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can play an important role in helping to address new challenges in involving citizens in decision-making, to cope with the increasing complexity of legislative processes and to improve legislation. Today, more than 50% of EU citizens are Internet users, while all 27 Member State parliaments and the European Parliament have parts of their work accessible on the web. Other European institutions, such as the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions, can benefit from ICTs in their dialogue with civil society and the regions to identify more effectively the views and needs of European citizens.

There are major political challenges for the participation of citizens in the EU's decision-making processes. They include: the *perceived democratic deficit*, which requires a new relationship between politicians and citizens and is particularly challenging *at EU level*; *reconnecting citizens*, especially young Europeans, with politics and policy-making, e.g. with a view to the next *European elections*; the *complexity of decision-making and implementing legislation* in a 27-member EU, especially the increasing number of cross-border issues.

ICT research on eParticipation and eDemocracy has made a significant contribution over the past 10 years with around 30 major projects. It has paved the way for significant technological advances², and is already starting to transform governments. The eTen programme has been supporting deployment actions within this field in recent years. The new CIP ICT programme also provides for regional networking activities in this area.

At the same time, we are witnessing the emergence of powerful new ICT applications that will transform the way citizens and civil society interact and participate. Social networking technologies, e.g. Web 2.0, are emerging as a powerful way of connecting citizens. In other words, it is now possible to have citizen-driven initiatives for participation in decision-making, as exemplified by a large number of initiatives taken by civil society. This possibility complements and enhances the openness of decision-makers to public participation. How such technologies can be used for understanding and handling complex political processes remains to be seen, however.

This Preparatory Action was first launched in 2006 based on the budget amendment approved by the European Parliament on 15 December 2005³. It aims to harness the benefits of ICTs to improve legislation and legislative processes at all levels of government decision-making and to enhance public participation in such processes.

¹ COM(2006) 173 final.

² 8 new research projects have been launched in January 2006 and 3 more in January 2007 (see http://europa.eu.int/information_society/activities/egovernment_research/index_en.htm)

³ Amendment No 4729 to the budget by the European Parliament of 15 December 2005: Preparatory action for the creation of an Internet-based system for better legislation and for public participation.

The successful launch of the 2006 action led to increased interest in another for 2007⁴. This Work Programme builds on the achievements of the projects started in 2006 and will aim to further strengthen public participation in EU decision-making.

I. Objectives for 2007

The overall objectives are to demonstrate concrete cases where, with the help of modern ICT tools and applications, the legislative process and the resulting legislation can be improved and the participation of the public (citizens, businesses, civil society, NGOs, socio-economic and political groups, etc) in the decision-making process can be enhanced, for example through improved interaction with decision-makers. Both topics, legislation and public participation, are relevant at EU, Member State and local levels.

The action addresses the legislative and decision-making processes from *two perspectives*: citizen-driven, or proactive, civil society initiatives and decision-maker driven initiatives to open up to public participation. *From both perspectives, the focus will be on key issues of clear EU relevance.*

With the citizen-driven approach, the aim is to empower citizens to form, debate and voice opinions as input for decision-makers and politicians on concrete, significant topics. These may range from high-level issues (e.g. the debate on the future of the EU and aspects like European citizenship or the future of the European Constitution) to the impact of EU legislation and decision-making on local and regional policy. Actions from this perspective should reach a critical mass of public involvement in the area concerned.

With the decision-maker driven approach, the core aim is to enable citizens and politicians to better appreciate the impact of legislation, making the complex political debate meaningful and interesting for all citizens. Whether legislation is being drafted, implemented or amended, citizens and politicians should be given tools to see through the complexity of texts and grasp their content in a variety of contexts.

Given the preparatory nature of this action and the fact that in 2007 it is being implemented for the second time, a supplementary aim is to explore the possibilities and conditions for scaling up these efforts towards a mature and sustained implementation.

II. Programme operation

The Work Programme will provide funding through the following two instruments:

Call for proposals:

Proposals will address projects to test state-of-the-art ICT-based tools in concrete legislative and decision-making processes.

Consultation and dissemination activities:

Support for targeted seminars, workshops and conferences.

⁴ Amendment No 0616 to the budget by the European Parliament of 14 December 2006.

III.Call for Proposals

The call for proposals covers two types of projects: trial projects and one support action.

Trial projects

eParticipation trial projects will aim to test state-of-the-art ICT-based tools and solutions in concrete legislative and decision-making processes. These trials should typically define the precise conditions to be fulfilled, the desires and needs expressed by citizens for collective participation in major EU issues, and the specific barriers to be overcome for deployment, demonstrate possible solutions, document practices, and assess the benefits, drawbacks and critical success factors.

A trial project will include the following activities:

- Tailoring the tool, application or solution to the specific requirements of the intended objective.
- Implementing the trial with real-life users for a period of typically one year.
- Analysis of the results and assessment of the impact of the trial.
- Dissemination of the project objectives and results, and joined-up activities with other initiatives in the field of eParticipation.

These trials should follow one or both of the two approaches defined above (in “II. Objectives for 2007”) and developed further below.

1. Citizen-driven initiatives

Proposals should cover tools, applications or services that empower citizens to contribute to legislative and decision-making processes and address at least one major EU legislative or policy issue⁵ of direct relevance to at least one EU institution (e.g. the European Parliament). Proposals should involve key stakeholders, i.e. actors from both civil society and public institutions. Emphasis should be on one of the following topics:

- Tools and applications that enable proactive citizen involvement in concrete European decision-making processes (e.g. Web 2.0 and other technologically enabled social networking)
- Tools and applications that capitalise on existing practices for political engagement by civil society to provide structured input for European decision-making systems
- Tools, applications, or solutions that help to create structures and rules allowing social networks and civil society to operate effectively in providing input to legislative and decision-making processes in the EU
- Field trials where an initiative can be tested in terms of its relevance and capacity to build on social networking technologies to provide input to legislative and decision-making processes in the EU.

⁵ Proposers may choose to address one of the high-level political issues, such as European citizenship or the European Constitution, or alternatively may choose to address one of the EU policy areas defined e.g. at http://www.europa.eu/pol/index_en.htm.

2. Decision-maker driven initiatives

Proposals should cover tools, applications or services that enable decision-makers to improve the transparency, legitimacy and outcomes of legislative and decision-making processes through the enhanced participation of citizens in these processes. Here, the emphasis will be on making these processes accessible and understandable to the public, reducing their complexity, and demonstrating their relevance to the daily life of citizens. Proposals should address at least one major EU legislative or policy issue⁶ of direct relevance to at least one EU institution (e.g. the European Parliament). Proposals should involve key stakeholders, i.e. actors from both civil society and public institutions. Emphasis should be on one of the following topics:

- Visualisation of arguments, dialogues and impacts of legislation
- Tools to assess the costs and benefits of proposed or adopted legislation
- Tools and services to enable interaction between members of parliaments and citizens, socio-economic groups and civil society organisations on cross-border EU-level issues

Support action

- A coordination action, running for up to three years, will put together a network of existing and new projects in order to help collect and consolidate their results and disseminate them to all relevant institutions in the EU (e.g. all national parliaments plus the European Parliament) and to all interested civil society actors. This action should also attempt to pull together existing experiences and applications beyond those funded by this Preparatory Action with a view to overcoming fragmentation and helping to focus on participation in concrete EU-level decision-making processes for the benefit of all.

Funding:

- Community funding is in accordance with the co-financing and non-profit principles for funded activities.
- Community funding will not exceed 75% of eligible costs incurred by each partner.
- The indicative contribution to a trial project may range between €600 000 to €800 000 (up to €600 000 for the support action).

Common requirements:

All proposals must address a number of common policy aspects. These common aspects derive from the objectives of the overall policy framework as laid down in the i2010 Initiative and the relevant objectives of the eGovernment Action Plan.

All proposals should clearly and expressly indicate how they will take these aspects into account and in particular explain how they will improve legislative processes, the participation of citizens and their interaction with policy-makers.

All proposals should include actions to ensure joined-up implementation among all selected proposals (cross-project cooperation) and avoid isolated or disconnected implementation.

Where possible, synergies with other projects in the area concerned should be developed, especially with IST research projects, eTen projects and projects funded through the various national and European programmes. Relevant experience from other Commission-funded programmes or applications should also be considered, where appropriate. These include e.g.

⁶ As above.

research projects funded by DG-RTD, the Interactive Policy Mechanism (IPM) application and the European Business Test Panel (EBTP), the Eur-lex portal, the “Europe for citizens” programme, etc.

Proposals should have built-in success criteria to allow the monitoring of tangible results and impacts. Their timely implementation is also important, which should typically take between 18 to 30 months.

In order to be eligible for Community funding, all proposals must be consistent with competition policy in the European Union and with the institutional rules governing the decision-making bodies. For the institutional partners in the proposal or those institutional actors concerned by the proposal's results, each proposal should state or define clearly their competence to act.

Equally, proposals should define and explain the governance issues involved: proposals should address a real decision-making process, which should be described in the proposal.

Proposals must demonstrate how they will achieve sustainable operation beyond their lifetime. Each proposal should therefore include a sustainability plan.

The “eParticipation Guide for Proposers 2007” provides specific guidance on how to prepare a proposal.

Making a proposal

A call for proposals in the Official Journal of the European Union will be published in May 2007. Guidelines for the preparation of proposals and other information for proposers will be available at the following website:

http://europa.eu.int/information_society/activities/egovernment_research/eparticipation/index_en.htm

Proposals should be submitted in paper in accordance with the procedure defined in the text of the call. Pre-registration of proposals is compulsory in order to help the Commission's services best prepare for the evaluation phase.

Structure of consortia

The call is open to proposals from legal entities in the 27 EU Member States. Legal entities are:

- Legal persons.
- Natural persons, who may, however, participate only where required by the nature or characteristics of the action.

Exceptionally, entities that do not have legal personality under the applicable national law may participate, provided that their representatives have the capacity to undertake legal obligations on their behalf and assume financial liability. Subject to these conditions, such entities will be considered as legal entities for the purpose of this Work Programme.

Consortia must comprise **a minimum of three independent, legal entities from at least two EU Member States intending to participate as signing beneficiaries of the grant agreement with the Commission.**

Proposers should ensure that all stakeholders, including in particular **stakeholders from civil society and decision-making bodies** in the public sector, are actively present in the consortium in order to secure the best possible prospects for *sustainable implementation of the trials*. The consortium must have at least one participant organisation responsible for *testing* the trialled service.

Consortia must have sufficient expertise and resources (personnel, equipment, finances) to carry out the proposed project and these should be convincingly integrated to form a coherent action. All the participants must have the financial means to bear their co-financing share of the project and have an adequate number of staff to implement the project. It is essential to have adequate and skilled project management resources available. The participants must be committed to the tasks assigned to them and there must be sufficient complementarities between participants to ensure that all tasks can be adequately addressed.

Structure of proposals

The proposal should be structured in two parts:

Part A is a set of forms containing basic information on the proposal and the proposers, e.g., proposal name, proposers' names and addresses, brief description of the work, total funding requested, etc.

Part B contains a description of the project, including three mandatory activities (work packages): project management, project implementation, and viability and dissemination of results.

Evaluation and selection of proposals

The evaluation of proposals will be based on the principles of transparency and equal treatment. It will be carried out by the Commission with the assistance of independent experts. Each proposal will be assessed on the basis of the evaluation criteria, which are divided into three categories: eligibility criteria, selection criteria and award criteria. Only proposals meeting the requirements of the eligibility criteria will be evaluated further. These criteria are described below.

Eligibility criteria

On receipt, all proposals will be subject to an eligibility check to ensure that they conform to the requirements of the call and to the submission procedure.

The following checks will be carried out:

- Receipt of proposal by the Commission on or before the deadline (date and time) established in the call.
- Proposal completeness. Proposals that are substantially incomplete — i.e. the forms do not include sufficient information to identify the partners or their legal status or to evaluate the scope of the proposed project — will be excluded.

Proposers will be excluded from participation if:

- (a) they are bankrupt or being wound up, are having their affairs administered by the courts, have entered into an arrangement with creditors, have suspended business activities, are the subject of proceedings concerning those matters, or are in any analogous situation arising from a similar procedure provided for in national legislation or regulations;
- (b) they have been convicted of an offence concerning their professional conduct by a judgment which has the force of res judicata;
- (c) they have been guilty of grave professional misconduct proven by any means which the contracting authority can justify;
- (d) they have not fulfilled obligations relating to the payment of social security contributions or the payment of taxes in accordance with the legal provisions of the country in which they are established or with those of the country of the contracting authority or those of the country where the grant agreement is to be performed;
- (e) they have been the subject of a judgment which has the force of res judicata for fraud, corruption, involvement in a criminal organisation or any other illegal activity detrimental to the Communities' financial interests;
- (f) they are currently subject to an administrative penalty imposed by the Community in accordance with Article 96(1) of the Financial Regulation
- (g) they are subject to a conflict of interest;
- (h) they have made false declarations in supplying information required by the Community as a condition of participation in a procurement procedure or grant award procedure or fail to supply this information.

Proposers **must certify that they are not in one of the situations listed above.**

Applicants making false declarations are liable to financial penalties or exclusion from grants and contracts⁷.

Selection criteria

Selection criteria are initially applied on the basis of the information supplied in the proposal.

Successful proposals accepted for negotiations will be the subject of a formal legal and financial validation as a requirement for the issuing of a grant agreement. If at that stage financial weaknesses are identified (e.g. in terms of financial capacity), compensating actions such as financial guarantees or other mitigating measures may be required.

⁷ Article 175 of Commission Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 2342/2002 of 23 December 2002 (OJ L 357, 31 December 2002, p. 1), as last amended.

S1) Financial and operational capacity to carry out the project

Proposers must have stable and sufficient sources of funding to maintain their activity throughout the period during which the action is being carried out. They must have the:

- a) Capacity to co-finance the proposed project as demonstrated by the organisation's accounts;
- b) Capacity to allocate adequate human resources to carry out the project in question. In particular, proposals where any of the partners envisage subcontracting of the main parts of the work, or subcontracting that does not appear justified with regard to the nature of the project and what is necessary for its implementation, will risk rejection on this criterion.

S2) Professional competences and qualifications

Proposers must demonstrate the professional competences and qualifications required to complete the proposed project. They must provide:

- a) Documented relevant experience in the field of the proposed action (e.g. technical, commercial and financial expertise or references to previous or ongoing projects).

Award criteria

Award criteria are grouped into five categories described below. In their proposals, proposers are required to explain in a systematic manner how their consortium addresses each award criterion. Further instructions, a checklist and the format for providing this information are included in the Guide for Proposers 2007.

A1) Nature of the proposed activity

- a) Alignment with the objectives of the Work Programme.
- b) Importance of the proposed activity in terms of its public interest and its anticipated impact.
- c) Clear definition of an EU legislative or decision-making process addressed directly by the proposal
- d) Clear definition of the institutional environment concerned and the civil society actors involved.

A2) Implementation potential

- a) Maturity of the technical solution, i.e. state-of-the-art technologies and applications.
- b) Completeness of the activity in terms of operational and institutional requirements.
- c) Demonstrated capability and commitment of the consortium to deploy the tool, application or service and sustain its operation. Attention should be given to the involvement of all relevant stakeholders (including decision-makers) and appropriate support from public entities.
- d) The legislative or decision-making process addressed.
- e) Potential for wider deployment and scalability beyond the scope of the proposal.

A3) Contribution to relevant EU policies

- a) Contribution of the proposal to improving the legislative or decision-making process concerned and to increasing the participation of the public.
- b) Inclusiveness and accessibility of the tool, application or service, in terms of both its nature and the way it is to be provided.
- c) EU dimension of the tool, application or service(s) (e.g. EU-level legislation, cross-regional or cross-national relevance).
- d) Contribution of the proposal to the implementation or evolution of other relevant EU policies.
- e) Appropriate attention to security and privacy issues; appropriate use of interoperable platforms; open standards and open-source components.

A4) Planning

- a) Adequacy of the chosen methodology to achieve the goals of the proposed project.
- b) Clear work plan with well-defined work packages, schedules, partner roles, deliverables, validation and built-in success criteria and measures.
- c) Effectiveness of the management approach.
- d) Effectiveness of the dissemination plan, especially in terms of the impact at European level.
- e) Viability of the tool, application or service beyond the phases of work sponsored by the Community, demonstrated by the inclusion of a sustainability plan.

A5) Use of resources

- a) Appropriateness of the financial package, including the allocation of resources, for achieving the objectives of the proposal.
- b) Credibility and justification of project cost estimates based on realistic prices and labour costs.

Scoring and thresholds for award criteria

A score will be given for each of the five award criteria. If a proposal fails to achieve one or more of the threshold scores (see below), it will be nevertheless be evaluated against all the criteria in order to provide feedback to the consortium, should they wish to respond to a subsequent call for proposals.

For each award criteria, a score from 0 to 5 is given:

- 0 - The proposal fails to address the criterion under examination or cannot be judged against the criterion due to missing or incomplete information.
- 1 - Inadequate
- 2 - Fair
- 3 - Good
- 4 - Very good
- 5 - Excellent

The respective thresholds for the award criteria are:

Criterion	Threshold
A1	3
A2	3
A3	3
A4	3
A5	3

IV. Consultations and dissemination

Constituency building:

A crucial step in this preparatory action, in particular for its possible continuation in 2008 and the preparation of a legal basis, is to identify and bring together the key stakeholders in the use of ICTs in legislative and decision-making processes. These stakeholders include e.g. the chief information officers of parliaments, members of Parliaments, the representatives of Ministers as well as local and regional authorities — where applicable — in their role as users of the proposed technological solutions. NGOs with their increasing contribution in this field should also be involved, including civil society organisations working in relevant fields. Also to be included are ICT industry experts with experience in developing, installing and maintaining relevant ICT systems and tools.

Through targeted workshops and expert seminars with the actors listed above, future requirements for tools and applications can be defined based on the exchange of experiences and the needs and opportunities identified.

These requirements should cover the legislative and decision-making processes themselves (operations involved, process analysis, roles of actors, scope for public participation, multi-lingual aspects); the phases in these processes (proposals, debate, decisions, implementation, follow-up) and the scale and scope of public participation in them; the legal and institutional aspects (rights and obligations, rules governing the legislative and decision-making processes); and finally, the technological requirements (ICT infrastructures and networks, aspects of content management, privacy and security, interoperability, multi-modal access).

Roadmap development:

Based on the identified requirements, a working group will be set up to draft the technical specifications and to establish a road-map for further developments. This will include the production of an expert report on the state-of-the-art and current level of developments in the EU, with international comparisons.

Dissemination activities:

Information and awareness-raising activities will be supported in the form of ad hoc information events, publications of brochures and reports for the wider dissemination of results and perspectives, including appropriate reporting to the European Parliament.

The Support Action will make an appropriate contribution to these activities.

V. Timetable

1. The Commission plans to launch one call for proposals under the eParticipation Work Programme 2007 with a timetable as outlined below:
 - The call for proposals is to be published in May 2007⁸ in the Official Journal. It will be open until the 13 September 2007, 17.00 hours, Brussels time.
 - The Commission, assisted by independent experts, will evaluate the proposals in the month after the closure of the call.
 - The Commission aims to finalise grant agreement negotiations within 5 months after the closure of the call.
 - The implementation of the projects will start after finalisation of the negotiations.
2. The Commission plans to initiate the consultation and awareness activities from May 2007 onwards.

VI. Indicative budget

The programme budget for 2007 is set at €5 million.

- The indicative budget allocated to the trial projects is set at €4.1 million.
- The indicative budget allocation for the support action is set at €0.6 million.
- An amount of approximately €0.3 million is allocated to consultation, dissemination, awareness activities and to costs for experts.

The experts who are chosen to assist the Commission and accept this task may claim, in addition to the reimbursement of travel and subsistence expenses, a payment of €450.00 in the form of a lump sum for each full working day spent assisting the Commission's services. These experts will be chosen from the lists of registered experts for the relevant DG-INFOS programmes.

VII. Further information

For further information on this Work Programme see:

http://europa.eu.int/information_society/activities/egovernment_research/eparticipation/index_en.htm

⁸ The Director-General responsible may open the call for proposals up to one month before or one month after this date.