



**Telecommunication
Development Bureau (BDT)**

Ref.: Circular BDT/DNS/DSD/027

Geneva, 12 April 2024

To:
Administrations of ITU Member States

Subject: Call for Expressions of Interest (Eoi) to host an Open Source Programme Office (OSPO) for Public Services in the context of ITU-UNDP Open Source Ecosystem Enabler (OSEE) initiative

Dear Sir/Madam,

Digital innovation is vital for global sustainable development, as highlighted at the 2023 UN General Assembly. Digital technology plays a significant role in achieving 70% of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs) targets - fostering opportunities, prosperity, and partnerships. With 67% of the global population online and increasing annually, digital services are essential for effective government service delivery.

In 2022, ITU and UNDP supported over 100 countries in enhancing connectivity, digital literacy, and safe online practices, and driving better public service delivery. Despite progress, challenges such as gender disparities in online access, constraints in driving deeper digital transformation, and underutilization of open-source software persist.

The Open Source Ecosystem Enabler (OSEE¹) initiative, supported by ITU, UNDP, and the European Commission, aims to promote open-source tools, technologies, and ways of working and thinking in order to catalyze digital public service delivery. The initiative will support the establishment of an Open-Source Program Offices (OSPO) in two selected countries for an initial period of two years, with strong planning from the outset for future sustainability.

ITU and UNDP are seeking Expressions of Interest (Eoi) from low- and-middle income countries committed to leveraging open-source technologies for public service delivery. Ideal OSPO hosts are entities embedded in the local digital ecosystem – including universities, thinktanks, and other organizations - with strong links to government and deep experience in translating technology for public impact. Funding will cover essential operational needs, with host organizations expected to provide infrastructure support – principally electricity and hosting.

¹ See: <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/ICT-Applications/Pages/Initiatives/OSEEPSI/home.aspx>

For governments and organizations interested in seeking support from the OSEE initiative to establish a national OSPO for Public Services, please visit the [OSEE website](#)¹ for more information. The deadline for submitting the EoI is May 15th 2024. An informational webinar will be hosted in April (date to be confirmed later on project website¹) to provide additional details. To register your interest for the webinar, please provide your contact details to Mr David Manset, ITU Senior Project Coordinator (email: david.manset@itu.int).

Timeline and Next Steps

- April 15th: Online form opens for Expressions of Interest
- April: Informational webinar and Q&A, exact date will be announced on the project website¹
- May 22nd: Online form closes for Expressions of Interest
- June 10th: Selection of the two countries

Yours faithfully,

(Original signed)

Cosmas Luckyson Zavazava
Director

Annex: Background information about the OSEE initiative and the application process

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Digital innovation is vital for global sustainable development, as highlighted at the 2023 UN General Assembly. Digital technology plays a significant role in achieving 70% of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs²) targets, fostering opportunities, prosperity, and partnerships. With 67% of the global population online and increasing annually, digital services are essential for effective government service delivery. In 2022, ITU and UNDP supported over 100 countries in enhancing connectivity, digital literacy, and safe online practices, driving better public service delivery. Despite progress, challenges such as gender disparities in online access and underutilization of open-source software persist.

Open-source can be defined both in a strict technological context, but also in the context of broader processes, workflows, and institutions. There are different kinds of openness that governments can consider incorporating into their procedures and working cultures. For instance, governments can prioritize seeking and acting on feedback, to ensure that residents' needs are addressed as best as possible. They can work with open technology standards, to maximize the interoperability of their systems and ease any processes involving external stakeholders. They can adopt open data approaches to stimulate economic growth and innovation, allowing the private sector to offer supplemental and complementary services to those provided by government. In a recent working paper by the Harvard Business School, estimating the value of open source in society, the authors find organizations would need to spend 3.5 times more on software than they currently do if open-source software did not exist³. With thoughtful investments, strong planning and strategy, dedicated resources, and effective change-management, adopting open-source can yield substantial societal and broader benefits.

However, despite known advantages of open-source technologies and approaches, they have proven tricky to embark upon for countries. Open-source can require new skill sets, embracing sometimes unfamiliar software development lifecycles, and developing sustainable business plans around the maintenance of systems. Whilst engagement with open-source communities can require new capacities and resources in governments, as well in the local ecosystems.

The Open Source Ecosystem Enabler (OSEE) initiative

Through the Open Source Ecosystem Enabler (OSEE⁴) initiative, ITU and UNDP, with support from the European Commission, aim to foster improved knowledge and action on using open-source for digital public service delivery. One of the main outcomes of OSEE is the establishment of two Open Source Program Offices (OSPOs) in two selected countries, one OSPO in each country residing within a host institution. An OSPO is a designated place within an organization that oversees the open-source efforts of that entity or broader ecosystem.

The role of an OSPO is to facilitate and coordinate the use, contribution, and release of open-source software. This can include setting open-source policies, ensuring compliance with open-source licenses, guiding the organization and ecosystem on open-source best practices, and fostering an open-source culture. While relatively new in the development landscape OSPOs are becoming increasingly frequent in private and public institutions. They are instrumental in maximizing the benefits that open-source can bring to an organization, such as promoting innovation, transparency, and collaboration, while managing potential risks and ensuring alignment with the organization's goals. The OSPO will be:

- Physically placed in-country, within a hosting institution.
- Staffed with local staff, plus supported by local host institution, consultants, UNDP and ITU.

² See: <https://www.undp.org/publications/sdg-digital-acceleration-agenda>

³ Hoffmann, Manuel and Nagle, Frank and Zhou, Yanuo, The Value of Open Source Software (January 1, 2024). Harvard Business School Strategy Unit Working Paper No. 24-038, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4693148> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4693148>

⁴ See: <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/ICT-Applications/Pages/Initiatives/OSEEPSI/home.aspx>

- Operational for 2 years, with plans to ensure future sustainability.
- Overseen by a local project leader, while overall project management will take place from ITU (Senior Project Coordinator, David Manset, email: david.manset@itu.int) and UNDP (Digital Programmes Strategic Manager, Calum Handforth, email: calum.handforth@undp.org).

Some of the key activities the OSPO will undertake are to:

- Map the current national state of open-source in government ministries, departments, and agencies to assess maturity, capabilities, gaps, and design a relevant plan to go forward, either in one selected institution or across the public sector.
- Provide direct technical assistance to government ministries, departments, and agencies on active or planned digital implementation projects using open-source technologies.
- Convene and provide virtual and in person meeting locations for local digital ecosystem stakeholders, and interact through meetings, collaborations, lectures, workshops, and other channels and platforms.
- Raise awareness and build capacity in government ministries, departments, and agencies and local digital ecosystem on opportunities provided by open-source, leveraging state of the art open-source technical, legal, operational, and architectural approaches.
- The OSPOs can either take a broad view and serve the host country, focus on a specific sector, or serve a specific government agency or implementation program. Each OSPO will receive support and guidance from the OSEE project management team (a joint ITU-UNDP initiative) which will provide further connection the global open-source and technology landscape. The OSEE global project will fund the operational cost of the OSPOs covering local staff, events organizations, training costs, external experts, etc. In addition, each OSEE will lead the recruitment of project officers who will serve as the local leads of each OSPO.

Costs not covered by the OSEE global project are: office rental, equipment purchasing, electricity/internet or other infrastructure costs as these are expected to be provided by the host entity as in-kind contributions.

Participation Criteria and Operational Structure

ITU and UNDP are looking for low- and-middle income (LMIC) countries with:

- Strong commitment to leverage open-source technologies for public services, as demonstrated in their digital transformation policies or strategies, with actual implementation of at least one digital public service,
- A suitable OSPO host that has strong connections to government while being embedded in the local digital ecosystem, such as a public, academic, or non-profit organization focusing on open technologies to advance the SDGs.
- A willingness to share their experience and learn from others.
- An open-source ecosystem – even if nascent.

Webinar

For more information, please visit the [OSEE website](#)⁴. More information will come with a webinar that will be announced at the OSEE webpage.

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