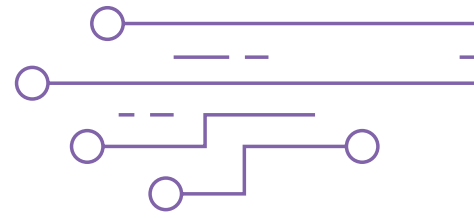


INNOVATION IMPACT STORIES COMPETITION

A guide to highlighting your
innovative work and resulting impact



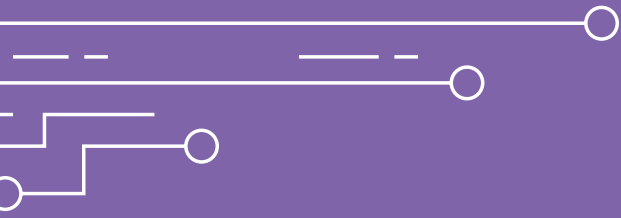
INNOVATION IMPACT STORIES COMPETITION
A guide to highlighting your innovative work and resulting impact

Copyright © United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)
All rights reserved
United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)
P.O. Box 30030 00100 Nairobi GPO KENYA
www.unhabitat.org

Disclaimer: The designations employed and the presentation of material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any county, territory, city or area or its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries regarding its economic system or degree of development. Excerpts may be reproduced without authorization, on condition that the source is indicated. Views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, the United Nations and its member states.

Acknowledgements

Project supervisor: Melissa Permezel
Author: Abdinassir Sagar
Contributors: Lars Stordal, Susannah Price, Veronika Sojkova
Design and layout: Austin Ogola



Contents

Introduction	4
About Innovation Impact Stories and Benefits.....	6
Process	8
Phase 1 – Prepare and launch	8
Phase 2 – Review Submissions	11
Phase 3 – Announce winners	11
Writing Innovation Impact Stories.....	14
What goes into an innovation impact story.....	14
Things to remember.....	15

Introduction

UN-Habitat's Strategic Plan calls for innovative funding opportunities, partnerships and methodologies to be explored. It recognizes innovation as both an organizational performance enabler and a key outcome of the strategic plan. Innovation can be a key enabler for development if it is mainstreamed in the organization and is made part of every programme and project across the organization.

In an effort to generate a better understanding and engagement on innovation and to capture important case studies of innovation in our work, the Innovation unit has formulated an innovation impact story competition process. Innovation impact stories can be instrumental in capturing the role of innovation in making a difference in people's lives, describing the positive change and the associated benefits as well as having the dual benefit of helping the organization be more mindful around innovation.

The purpose of the innovation impact stories competition is therefore to highlight innovative approaches and activities being used by UN-Habitat and partners, that contribute to efficiencies, inclusiveness and the maximization of impacts in

different urban contexts and in the different domains of UN-Habitat's work. The innovation impact stories, once disseminated and recognized for innovation, can then become a mechanism through which to strengthen a culture of innovation and inspire new innovative ideas and interventions.

This guide provides an overview of the competition and gives direction to practitioners interested in running a competition in their units, branches, communities of practices, country or regional offices. The first section of the guide describes what is considered to be innovative interventions, criteria to evaluate submissions, and benefits of running innovation impact stories competition. The second section explains the competition process, key elements to consider when designing innovation impact stories competition and the templates to capture and evaluate submissions. The third section provides tips on writing innovation impact stories.

The guide incorporates lessons from the recently completed call for innovation impact stories in collaboration with the [Urban Basic Services Community of Practice](#).



About Innovation Impact Stories and their Benefits

Well-crafted innovation impact stories in the domain of sustainable urban development are expected to highlight the innovative interventions and resulting impact in UN-Habitat's programmes and projects. These stories are expected to promote innovation in the organization and subsequently influence future interventions.

UN-Habitat's [Innovation Guidance Note](#) defines innovation in the context of sustainable urban development. It considers innovation as the process, actions and outcomes that create and deliver new knowledge, tools and sustainable solutions to improve the living conditions for all in cities. The innovation impact stories are expected to highlight one or more of the following innovative interventions.

- 1 New ways of thinking, approaching a problem or a process from a different angle or perspective.
- 2 Incremental and a process evolving over time to deliver new and improved processes and outcomes.
- 3 Disruptive and quite a radical change from what has been done before.
- 4 Technology driven, tapping into frontier or cutting-edge technological solutions.
- 5 Related to non-technological approaches such as a new way of engaging people or integrating sectors in a planning process which have not been used in that context before.

The criteria to evaluate innovative impact stories is expected to go beyond innovation and can include the following:

- 1 **Innovativeness:** How is the project, programme or activity innovative exactly? What makes it new, dynamic and potentially transformative? Is it innovative for that context, in the particular field? And how does the innovation fit in the work and mandate of the organization and in the promotion of sustainable urbanization?
- 2 **Inclusiveness:** Does the innovation engage a range of stakeholders and promote their inclusion, particularly for those considered vulnerable or marginalized?
- 3 **Impact:** How has the innovation led to change and an impact on the lives of everyday people? What has been the value-add of the innovation?
- 4 **Efficiency:** Did the innovation create more efficiencies in terms of resource use, time, process, accessibility, etc.?
- 5 **Scalability:** How scalable is the innovation? Are there prospects for new partners, replication in new areas, new clients, etc.?



Competitions for innovation impact stories are meant to highlight impactful innovation related activities and recognize them in order to inspire innovation and to facilitate knowledge exchange and lessons learned. By running this competition, you will be able to:

- 1 Document and communicate innovation impact stories to clients, donors, governments and other stakeholders.
- 2 Recognize project teams for their innovative approach and actions.
- 3 Have future initiatives be informed by the lessons and impactful innovative activities from previous projects.
- 4 Introduce an impact-oriented approach to adopting innovation in your programmes and projects.
- 5 Inspire other colleagues and facilitate the scaling of proven, impact-oriented, and innovation-driven approaches and activities.
- 6 Contribute to efforts to foster a culture of innovation and promote the adoption of impact-oriented innovation.
- 7 Encourage exchange of proven good innovative practices and peer learning among the colleagues around specific topics.
- 8 Learn more about innovation in the process of designing and running the challenge.
- 9 Opportunity to reflect on your recent work and identify initiatives that are ready for scaling and potential piloting in a new country/location.
- 10 Opportunity to collaborate with the Innovation Unit of UN-Habitat and get support with promoting and fostering innovation in your team.

It is important to note that innovation impact stories competitions are different from challenge-driven innovations that provide rewards, both financial and non-financial, and are meant to encourage innovators to propose solutions to problems where current interventions aren't achieving desired results. Unlike challenges, innovation impact stories competitions are meant to highlight existing innovative solutions that are impact-full, with the objective of purposefully recognizing an impactful solution, and using them to duplicate or scale them or even incorporate them in other solutions.

The process for innovation impact stories competition revolves around the following three phases. However, it is important to note that these are suggested steps and need to be tailored depending on the needs of your team and the environment in which the competition is to be run. Estimated timelines are also suggested for consideration during planning however it should be expected that specific contexts, resource and/or objectives will affect the timeliness of each phase.

Phase 1 – Prepare and launch

Estimated time – 4 to 6 weeks

The goal of this phase is to design the competition, launch it and invite prospective participants to submit their innovation impact stories. This phase focuses on setting the design parameters of the competition and launching the competition. It will include making the following design decisions.

Decide on the objectives and expected outcomes of the competition

The objectives of the competition should be aligned to the goals of the group running the competition and should contribute to the overall goals of fostering a culture of innovation in the organization and supporting the scaling and repurposing of proven and impactful innovation interventions in future projects.

Select thematic areas and topics of interest

Identifying thematic areas upfront focuses the competition and allows the right target group to respond to the call. It is recommended that four to five themes, which relate to the core work of the group, are identified and defined. The respondents should be asked to submit innovation impact stories related to those themes only.

Identify stakeholders and engage them

Stakeholder mapping should be conducted to understand the different types of stakeholders; 1) champions – those who can provide leadership support and can also mobilize others to respond to the call and submit stories, 2) executors – those who can assist in the execution of the call such as conducting the assessments (selection committee), outreach activities, etc. 3), and prospective applicants – the target group that are expected to respond to the call and submit innovation impact stories. A plan to engage each group should be devised.

Determine who is eligible and what projects or initiatives can be submitted

Eligibility determination exercise should be conducted to identify who can respond to the call (i.e., individual vs group, team type, country/regional offices, etc.) and what projects can be featured in the innovation impact stories (i.e. type of project, duration, project start date/end date, etc.). It is recommended that only most recent projects (e.g. projects that were started in the last 2 years), related to theme of the call, are allowed to be featured in the submissions.



Decide on prize and other incentives

Prizes and other rewards (financial or non-financial) incentivize participation and create a competitive environment that fosters creativity. Different types of rewards should be considered when designing a call for innovation impact stories competition. These may include a certificate of recognition for innovation, opportunity for the winner's work to be publicized, and expert or senior management support and advice. Consult UN-Habitat standard operating procedures for awards.

Establish competition process and timelines

A three-step process is recommended for any call for innovation impact stories competition; prepare and launch the competition, review submissions and announce the winners. Appropriate timeliness should be selected based on type of the competition, scope and resources. Sufficient time should be planned for the second step as it involves individual review of the submissions by the selection committee and a plenary discussion and deliberation.

Design submission template (what to submit) and how to submit

A template is suggested to guide the participants and inform them on what to submit. The submission template should capture basic information about the project, contact information, and a description of the innovative actions, their impact, potential for scalability, and how they contributed to achieving efficiency and inclusiveness. The template should include information on how to submit the story. The submission should also include photos and links to other materials. Refer to box 1 for an example of a template.

Establish evaluation criteria

Evaluation criteria are the measures used to assess the submissions and determine the top innovation impact stories. Defining and establishing a clear, concise and easy to understand evaluation criteria is an important step that is critical to the success of the competition. The criteria of innovativeness, inclusiveness, efficiency, impact and potential for scalability are recommended.

Develop the applicant guide which provides detailed information about the competition process

All the design elements of the call for innovation impact stories competition, including the template, should be communicated to the prospective applicants to facilitate their understanding and prepare them to respond to the call. The applicant guide should provide background information on the competition and its objectives, thematic areas, process and timelines, eligibility, evaluation criteria, prizes and guidelines on Writing Innovation Impact Stories (refer to the last section of this document for tips on writing innovation impact stories).

Determine the selection committee members and deliberation process including how rating / scoring system

Selection committee members who are diverse and drawn from different units and branches help legitimize the competition and can assist in critically and objectively assessing submissions and in the broader execution of the competition. Consider bringing external jury members if the competition is run in collaboration with partners. The committee members should be briefed on the competition and the process for deliberation. It is recommended that the members review, comment and rate the submissions individually first before participating in a group deliberation to discuss and finalize the ratings.



Box 01: Example of submission template

Urban Basic Services Community of Practice Secretariat and the Innovation Unit of UN-Habitat cordially invite you to submit innovation impact stories related to your work in urban basic services. The stories should feature key innovative interventions that were disruptive and contributed significantly to the achievement of the goals of the project / programme.

Unit/Section Name:	
Innovation Project or Activity Name:	
Brief overview of the project / Activity: (150 words or less)	

Project Location:		Target group:	
-------------------	--	---------------	--

Area(s) of work

Integrated Urban Basic Services	Water & Sanitation	Urban Mobility	Solid Waste Management	Urban Energy Solutions
---------------------------------	--------------------	----------------	------------------------	------------------------

Type of Innovation

Technological	Process	New ideas or ways of thinking	Other (please explain)
---------------	---------	-------------------------------	------------------------

Describe the innovative activities undertaken and their contributions to improved efficiency
Speaking to the criteria of innovativeness and efficiency
(300 words or less)

Explain how the innovative activities address the challenge of vulnerable target groups
Speaking to the criterion of inclusiveness
(200 words or less)

What was the impact of the innovative actions? Speaking to the criterion of impact
(200 words or less)

What are the prospects of the Innovation Project/Activity for new clients, applications, partnerships, etc.? Speaking to the criterion of scalability
(200 words or less)

Names of team members	Contact information (email)	Names of partners (internal and external)

Kindly submit photos (high-resolution and interactive) and any other materials such as reports, videos, infographics, etc.

Submit completed template to Veronika.sojkova@un.org (cc: Abdinassir.sagar@un.org) by the February 1st 2021

Launch the competition and outreach campaign

Outreach and engagement activities should be undertaken in this step to share the information about the competition and to help increase the number of applicants as well as generate enthusiasm and publicity. If possible, the launch date should be aligned to that of a big event such as [Urban October](#) and senior management should be engaged to launch the competition and spread it's information. It is recommended that the announcement, including the applicant guide, be shared via a broadcast and reminders about key dates sent as necessary.

Phase 2 – Review Submissions

Estimated time – 6 to 8 weeks

The goal of this phase is to review and assess the submissions against the evaluation criteria in order to rank them and subsequently select top 3. It involves mobilizing the selection committee to do initial review and rating and then participate in a group session to deliberate the aggregated ratings.

Catalogue the submissions and make them available to the committee members

Once submissions are received, it is recommended that they are numbered and catalogued in a spreadsheet for easy tracking and sharing (refer to box 3 for a sample). The folders hosting the submissions should be shared with the committee members along with the assessment template to capture their ratings and comments. The selection committee should review and evaluate the submissions based on the criteria set out in the first phase.

Aggregate the ratings and evaluation comments

The individual ratings and comments provided by the committee members should be aggregated and compiled to derive an average score for each criteria. The compiled information, including the aggregated scores, should be shared with the committee in advance to prepare for the deliberation session.

Conduct plenary deliberation meeting to finalize ratings and selection top 3 stories

The objective of the plenary deliberation meeting is to review the ratings collectively and for the committee to agree on the top innovation impact stories. This meeting should be facilitated, preferably, by a non-committee member. Committee members should be given a chance to change their initial ratings and also provide reasons for their ratings. The agreed upon ratings for each submission against each criterion should be compiled to arrive at an overall score that can be used to rank submissions and select top 3 stories.



Box 02: Assessment template – completed individually

Submission				Rating				Score	Comments	
No.	Innovation story / project name	Submitted by	Link to Submission	Criteria 1	Criteria 2	Criteria 3	Criteria 4	Overall Score	Substantive comments	Comments on the presentation of story

Phase 3 – Announce winners and communicate the stories

Estimated time – 3 to 5 weeks

The objective of the third phase of the competition is to announce the winners, showcase the top stories and publicize them for greater visibility.

Announce the winners

Once the top stories are selected, the applicants should be notified of the results, preferably, in advance of any public announcement. Explore different avenues to announce the winners and reach out to [UN-Habitat's communication team](#) for support in getting the announcements out. The announcement should also include information on the next steps. Unsuccessful applicants should receive feedback on the innovation impact stories.

Showcase the winning stories and award prizes

The applicants of the top innovation impact stories should be given an opportunity to showcase their work to others in the organization. In that same occasion, the prizes including a certificate of recognition for innovation should be awarded to the winning teams. The goal of the showcasing event is to foster cross-team learning and inspire others to adopt innovative approaches in their projects.

Communicate and publish the innovation impact stories

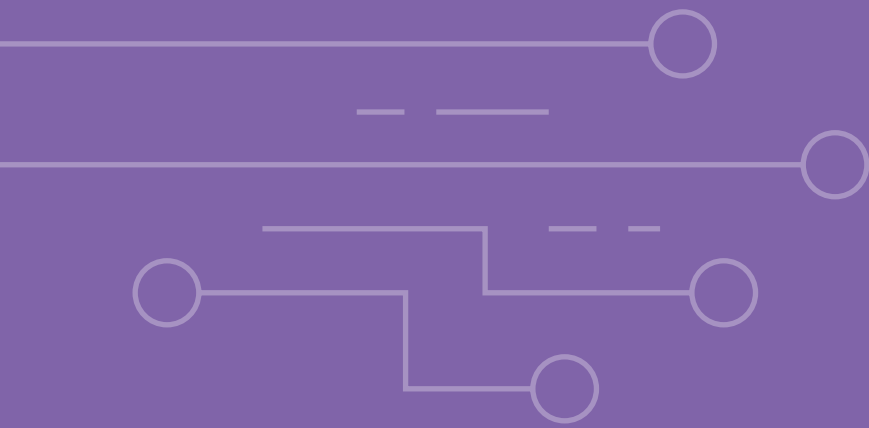
The outcomes of the call for innovation stories competition should be communicated internally and externally. Available channels include an organization-wide broadcast and the [HabPost](#) while externally, the stories can be published in the [news and stories section of the UN-Habitat corporate website](#) and also in the [news section of the UN Secretariat website](#). The key messages for each story should be highlighted focusing on the innovative aspects of the story.



Box 03: Outline of applicant guide

Urban Basic Services Community of Practice Secretariat and the Innovation Unit of UN-Habitat cordially invite you to submit innovation impact stories related to your work in urban basic services. The stories should feature key innovative interventions that were disruptive and contributed significantly to the achievement of the goals of the project / programme.

Unit/Section Name:					
Innovation Project or Activity Name:					
Brief overview of the project / Activity: (150 words or less)					
Project Location:		Target group:			
Area(s) of work					
Integrated Urban Basic Services	Water & Sanitation	Urban Mobility	Solid Waste Management	Urban Energy Solutions	
Type of Innovation					
Technological		Process		New ideas or ways of thinking	Other (please explain)
Describe the innovative activities undertaken and their contributions to improved efficiency Speaking to the criteria of innovativeness and efficiency (300 words or less)					
Explain how the innovative activities address the challenge of vulnerable target groups Speaking to the criterion of inclusiveness (200 words or less)					
What was the impact of the innovative actions? Speaking to the criterion of impact (200 words or less)					
What are the prospects of the Innovation Project/Activity for new clients, applications, partnerships, etc.? Speaking to the criterion of scalability (200 words or less)					
Names of team members		Contact information (email)		Names of partners (internal and external)	
Kindly submit photos (high-resolution and interactive) and any other materials such as reports, videos, infographics, etc.					
Submit completed template to Veronika.sojkova@un.org (cc: Abdinassir.sagar@un.org) by the February 1st 2021					



“ Innovation embraces the free flow of ideas and interactive spaces for different people to come together.



Writing Innovation Impact Stories

Innovation impact stories are means to communicating the breadth, importance and impact of our work, expertise and knowledge in relation to innovation. They demonstrate the innovative actions applied to address the challenges and the impact UN-Habitat and partners have in improving beneficiaries' lives to the public, authorities, and donors.

What goes into an innovation impact story

There are two main elements that you should have when constructing a story.

1. The narrative

The main element of a story is a clearly articulated narrative that speaks to the following components.

Introduction: Start with a catchy introduction that speaks to why the story matters and the innovation and the impact you want to highlight. Introduce the donors, the beneficiaries and partners involved in the project. The introduction should engage the reader and entice their interest to read the whole story.

Situation: The situation part stipulates the problem or the challenges that are being addressed. It captures the bigger picture and what the overall goals of the project or the program are and includes specific information such as target beneficiaries and their needs. This component is aimed at setting the scene for the reader to understand the situation that prompted an intervention.

Response: The response part highlights the interventions and the innovative actions that were designed and implemented to counter the situation and address the challenges. It highlights the interesting,

innovative and unique parts of the project approach or activities that were deemed to have made a difference.

Evidence of innovation:

This part includes evidence and proof that the interventions were innovative and new to that context and project.

Impact:

This section captures the results of the response as a result of the innovation or how the results themselves were innovative. The impact should speak to who benefited, the outcomes and the difference in the people's lives after the interventions. It explains what the impact was using clear examples, statistics and direct quotes with a clear focus and explanation around the innovative elements.

2. Photos/Videos

The story should be accompanied by vivid photos and/or videos telling the story of the project. i.e. 2 – 4 high resolution and quality photos showing a range of shots including close ups of beneficiaries and wider shots contextualizing the intervention (with people in the photos) that tell the story of this project and how it has changed people's lives.

The photos should have a caption in the present tense with names of people in the shot, basic project description/context, location and date. The photographer's name should also be included. For more information, consult [UN-Habitat's guide on submitting photographs](#).



Things to remember

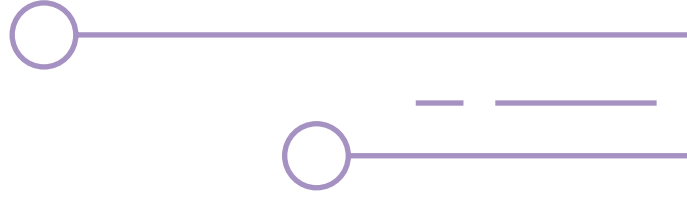
- 1 Highlight the innovative elements of the approach or project activities such as new ways of doing things, new technologies, new methods, or diverse partnerships (refer to the [Guidance note on innovation](#) for more ideas).
- 2 Focus on illustrating the impact the innovative actions had on the lives of the people. i.e. highlighting the observed outcomes as a result of adopting the new approaches, techniques or other innovation methods.
- 3 Capture innovations that are non-digital such as new ways of working or participatory methods or partnerships that result in new ideas or engaging groups that weren't active before.
- 4 The five Ws and H (who, what, where, why, and how) should be mentioned within the first three paragraphs of the story.
- 5 Tell the story like you are explaining to your parents and cut out technical language and UN terminologies. This is a story meant for everyday people to read.
- 6 Do make sure you get the spelling of names and places right (including in photo captions) using UK way of spelling and explain where a place is and do quote the beneficiaries directly. Check out [UN-Habitat's short style guide](#) for more information.
- 7 Use powerful statistics and data to illustrate how the situation was before and how it is now.

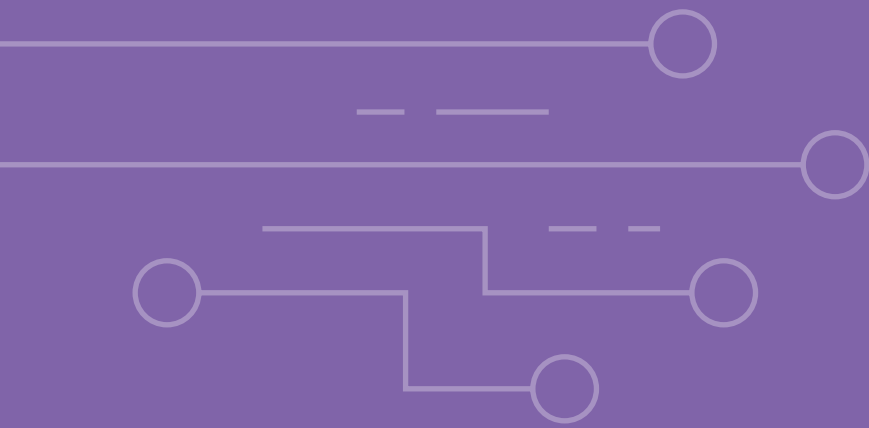


Box 04: Resources

Consult UN-Habitat's guidelines on submitting human interest stories to the communications section:

<https://trello.com/c/dF1uAbAn/144-un-habitat-guidelines-on-submitting-human-interest-stories-to-the-communications-section>





“The next generation of innovators has a responsibility to respond to urban challenges with innovative knowledge, tools and solutions.



**A better quality of life for all
in an urbanizing world**

Regular updates on UN-Habitat's
work are available on
www.unhabitat.org

   @UNHABITAT

**UN-HABITAT
INNOVATION**

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN SETTLEMENTS PROGRAMME
P.O. Box 30030, Nairobi 00100, Kenya
www.unhabitat.org
unhabitat-innovation@un.org

UN HABITAT
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE