

Public Interest Entrepreneurs, why, what and how

By Etalab – July 2018

Find out how you can start your own “tech for public interest” program

OUR AMBITION: DATA SKILLS FOR PUBLIC INTEREST

Digital revolution entails many changes: a change in practices, a change in expectations, and a global change of culture. With such changes, come opportunities... and challenges. **Data**, for instance, **can be harnessed to innovate and implement data-driven policies**. It is a huge opportunity for the administration. It is also a challenge, as public service needs resources and talents in order to accomplish this digital transformation.

[Etalab](#) is the French government taskforce for open data, open gov and data-science. Our mission is to help ministerial departments in developing data-driven policies in order to make the government more transparent and to improve public service delivery.

In 2016, we were missioned to design and develop a new program, called “Entrepreneur.e d'intérêt général”, or *Public Interest Entrepreneurs*.

Inspired by the [Presidential Innovation Fellows](#), we have built a program that allows public administration to solve problems that usually arise and to give digital public service delivery a jump-start. **Public administrations often fail to attract digital talents, face insufficient funding for ambitious innovative projects, and have a complicated HR process**. Despite wanting to work for the public good, **innovators, entrepreneurs sometimes don't see the interest of working with civil servants and don't find attractive conditions** to do so.

This ambition is to champion the digital transformation of the government by attracting digital talents – such as data-scientists, developers, designers, geomaticians – to the administration. In doing so, we strive to promote innovation in the administration and to change the administration's culture from within.

We know that there are administrations that are looking to innovate. We know that there are digital talents who wish to work for the public interest. And we know that there are many exciting, data-centered, public interest projects to be carried out.

The French Public Interest Entrepreneurs program aims at heeding such calls. In this memo, you will find out more about our history, our methodologies and key success factors.

THE PROGRAM: A COMMUNITY OF ENTREPRENEURS AND CIVIL SERVANTS TO SOLVE CHALLENGES AND DELIVER IMPACTFUL DIGITAL SERVICES

In 2016, the French Government decided to create the program "Entrepreneur.e d'Intérêt Général". It is run by Etalab, the Prime minister's task force for open data, open gov and data science within the Government Digital Services (DINSIC for interministerial directorate for digital technology, information and communication system).

The key principle of the program is: during a ten months period, teams of 2 or 3 Public Interest Entrepreneurs work within public administrations on challenges linked to data and digital transformation.

Public Interest Entrepreneurs work with civil servants and not as external service providers:

- **Public Interest Entrepreneurs are employed by the department** they work for. They are not service providers;
- **Each challenge is championed by an administration** and is linked to a specific public service / public policy. The administration hosting a challenge has to facilitate contact with different units (IT, product, communications, etc.) and organize fieldwork, in order for the Entrepreneurs to have a good understanding of the problems and design the best possible products and services;
- **Each team of Public Interest Entrepreneurs is mentored** by two civil servants. On a daily basis, an "operational mentor", part of the department unit hosting the challenge, facilitate their work. A "strategic mentor", usually a director, is also sponsoring them at high level.

Public Interest Entrepreneurs form a community of « dataactivists » guided by Etalab:

- Etalab has a support team dedicated to the program. It is a resource for both the Entrepreneurs and the mentors;
- The support team accompanies them throughout the 10-month program and organizes specific workshops to equip the Entrepreneurs with the best methods, guidelines and tools they need to meet their challenges with success. This team is made of 4 people with different backgrounds: project management, development, communications, and public policy.

Why is the program attractive for technologists and digital talents?

The Entrepreneurs are hired for 10 months.
They are payed according to private-sector salaries.
They have the opportunity to work on exclusive sets of public data (open or closed) and solve public policies.
They are allowed to redefine their challenges and to show initiative.
They have to deliver a working solution after 10 months of work, and quick wins are encouraged.
They work in teams and partake in a community of public interest entrepreneurs.



Elise Laliue (entrepreneur) and Bénédicte Pachod (mentor) working on their challenge roadmap.

Why is the program attractive for public administrations/mentors?

We hire high profiles, able to understand how the public sector works and to give quick inputs.
We empower civil servants by giving them the ability to develop new skills: product management, lean UX, development, etc.
We facilitate peer-learning.
We are developing a community of civil servants from different backgrounds and departments.

HOW IT IS DONE: FUNDING, SELECTIONS, MENTORING, PROJECTS SUSTAINABILITY

No program without funding

The first thing to consider before launching such a program is funding for:

- The recruitment of entrepreneurs;
- Technical infrastructure to host projects;
- Trainings, communications, coworking spaces, etc.

There are two ways to fund it:

- Allocate a sustainable budget to the program;
- Or benefit from an investment plan, be it public funding, international trust funds, development agencies ([Department for International Development](#), United States Agency for International Development...), or multilateral agencies (World Bank, [European Bank for Reconstruction and Development](#)...)

In France, the three first editions of the program benefited from a national investment plan called "Programme d'investissements d'avenir". In order to make it permanent, we are currently considering other funding opportunities.

Key steps to select projects & entrepreneurs

Public Interest Entrepreneurs is an ambitious program that has its own dynamic. Two key steps are required to select projects and entrepreneurs:

STEP 1 - Identifying high potential challenges – Call for projects

Administrations have a month to make proposals that are compliant with the aim, the ambition and the specificity of the program:

- The project must be data-centered and must have a concrete impact on public policy or public action;
- It must give access to exclusive sets of data;
- It must be supported by a high representative of the administration;
- It must entail the constitution of a team within the administration, dedicated to the project;
- It must strive to be as open as possible. **Open data and open source must be systematically favored in order for the final product to be as shareable with the public as possible.** If the final product can't be shared with the public, it must at least be shareable with other administrations.

To select the projects, a two-step evaluation:

- **Etalab members qualify and classify the proposals** according to the criteria mentioned above and set a shortlist of challenges;
- **Pre-selected proposals are presented to a jury.** The jury is composed of Etalab members, alumni Entrepreneurs, civil servants and civil society representatives (experts, entrepreneurs, researchers, activists, etc.). The jury has a day to make the final selection. A week after the decision has been made, Etalab makes it public and moves on to the next step.

STEP 2 - Finding the right candidates – Call for applications

During one month, the candidates apply to one or two projects -and specify which one they prefer. The official selection of projects is widely advertised in order to get the attention of as many high potential profiles as possible: on [Etalab's website](#), on [the Public Interest Entrepreneurs website](#), on social media, through PR and ecosystem mobilization...

To select the candidates, a two-step evaluation:

- **Once the applications are in, they are evaluated by members of Etalab.** This two-week long evaluation leads to a first selection of candidates;
- **The candidates that have been pre-selected present themselves in front of a jury** made up of members of Etalab, alumni Entrepreneurs, civil servants and specialists of data-related questions. This final selection lasts two days. A week after the decision has been made, Etalab makes it public and moves on to the next step.

Accompanying the Entrepreneurs and their mentors – the heart of the program

During 10 months, the selected Entrepreneurs work on the selected challenges in order to deliver a turnkey solution.

Accompanying the Entrepreneurs is crucial as most of them have never worked in an administration before. Personalized support requires us to pursue two distinct goals:

- **Providing them with the guidance they need to understand how the administration works and all of its specificities;**
- **Creating a strong team-spirit in order to foster peer-learning, collective ownership, and benevolence.**

During these 10 months, Etalab organizes regular workshops, both for the Entrepreneurs themselves and for the mentors-Entrepreneurs groups. The workshops aim at giving them the tools they need to meet their challenges with success. These workshops are also an opportunity for them to spend time together and develop a team-spirit. We also achieve this team-spirit through rituals such as bootcamps, offsite sessions, and weekly updates on all of the projects...

During the 10 months, Etalab support team is always available to listen, help, support and champion the Entrepreneurs and their mentors.

Sustaining what has been delivered

As a public interest program, we have a collective responsibility: **sustaining what has been delivered ensures that the 10 month work will not have been vain**. There are two sides to this phase: **implementing the solutions** the Entrepreneurs have developed and **making sure these solutions are open for other administrations or organizations to use**.

If the solutions are not implemented, they are not useful. That is why it is crucial to prepare the implementation when entrepreneurs are still developing their projects in the administration. After the project is finished, the support team does follow-ups and keeps up with the Entrepreneurs so as to build on this growing public interest community.

All the tools that are developed during the 10 months are published in open source. All administrations can implement, enrich, spread and sustain them.



Meet the second cohort of Public Interest Entrepreneurs!

HOW TO MAKE IT A SUCCESS

“Entrepreneur.e d’Intérêt Général” has been running for two years. The achievements of the first year and the promises of the second one have been an opportunity to determine the keys to success.

We cannot stress enough the importance of having mentors that are highly invested and a strong political support; it makes the challenge much easier to meet and the solution much more significant and useful.

We believe that an appropriate technological environment is crucial; without tools and data, the Entrepreneurs cannot work. **We claim that users are at the center of any digital public service;** our Entrepreneurs are taught design thinking, agility, and iteration in order to keep the user at center of their endeavors.

We are convinced that interdisciplinarity paves the way to a better public service; our Entrepreneurs work in teams, learning and teaching from and to each other, and spreading new techniques within their host administrations.

Finally, we have witnessed how being active members of the “data for public interest” community allows the Entrepreneurs to learn more, tackle more ambitious challenges and partake in other public interest projects.

CAN WE HELP?

Building on its past experience, Etalab offers support to foreign public administrations wishing to implement EIG-like solutions at home. Such a support lays on three pillars:

- **Remote help to local support teams** on how to proceed, select and monitor a promotion of entrepreneurs;
- **In-person trainings** including reception of foreign delegations, technical and methodological trainings as well as exchange programs;
- **Communication:** presentation and political mobilization on public interest entrepreneurs programs in international fora.

We hope this memo has been useful. However, you may have questions that we would be glad to answer. Feel free to contact the “Entrepreneur.e d’intérêt général” team: entrepreneur-interet-general@data.gouv.fr.

Here are a few key resources that might be useful:

[Our GitHub](#): discover tools and scripts developed by entrepreneurs;

[Our website](#): here are the projects, entrepreneurs, guides and blogposts.