

ITSA EXCELLENCE IN TAX STAMP AND TRACEABILITY AWARDS

Guidelines and Criteria

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1. BACKGROUND

The ITSA Excellence in Tax Stamp and Traceability Awards have been established to recognise and promote excellence in tax stamp, track and trace, production monitoring and related excise control programmes around the world.

Governments and revenue authorities are increasingly using a combination of physical security, digital technologies, data management, production monitoring, authentication, track and trace, enforcement and public engagement to protect excise revenues, combat illicit trade and improve regulatory compliance.

The awards recognise outstanding achievement across this increasingly integrated environment and provide an opportunity to share examples of innovation, effectiveness and good practice among revenue authorities internationally.

The awards are intended primarily to recognise the achievements of government authorities and government-led programmes. Technology providers, security printers, system integrators and other suppliers that have contributed to an award-winning programme may also be recognised as project partners.

2. PURPOSE OF THESE GUIDELINES

The purpose of these guidelines is to explain the requirements, eligibility conditions, nomination procedure, judging process and criteria for the ITSA Excellence in Tax Stamp and Traceability Awards.

ITSA aims to operate an awards programme that is transparent, credible and accessible to authorities of different sizes and from countries with differing levels of resources and market complexity.

Projects will therefore be assessed in the context in which they operate. Judges will consider the scale of the achievement relative to the size of the jurisdiction, available resources, nature of the market and challenges being addressed, rather than relying solely on absolute measures such as revenue collected, number of products marked or number of consumer scans.

The most recently published version of these guidelines will apply to the relevant round of the awards.

Indicative process timeline: Call for Nominations opens → Nomination deadline → Judging Committee assessment → Finalists notified → Winners selected by the Judging Committee → Winners announced at the Tax Stamp & Traceability Forum. Exact dates for each round are published in the Call for Nominations.

3. AWARD CATEGORIES

The ITSA Excellence in Tax Stamp and Traceability Awards comprise the following five categories:

1. Best Tax Stamp Design and Security
2. Best Public/Consumer Engagement Programme
3. Best Outcomes
4. Best Technology Innovation
5. Best Policy and Enforcement Framework

ITSA reserves the right to amend the categories in future award cycles in response to developments in tax stamp, traceability and excise control programmes.

4. ELIGIBILITY

4.1 Eligible organisations

The awards are primarily intended to recognise projects and programmes undertaken by:

- National and sub-national revenue authorities
- Customs and excise authorities
- Ministries of finance or other relevant government ministries
- Government agencies responsible for tax stamp, traceability, production monitoring or related regulatory programmes
- Other public authorities with responsibility for excise control, enforcement or associated activities.

4.2 Industry partners

A programme may have been developed or implemented in conjunction with one or more private-sector technology providers, security printers, system integrators, equipment manufacturers or other suppliers.

These organisations may be identified and recognised as project partners, but where the nominated project is a government programme, the award will be made principally to the relevant government authority or authorities.

For the Best Technology Innovation category, nominations may relate to technologies developed by an industry supplier but must demonstrate their implementation or application within a tax stamp, traceability, production monitoring or related government excise control programme. The award will recognise the government authority responsible for implementing the innovation, with the technology provider recognised as a project partner.

4.3 Eligible programmes and products

Nominations may relate to programmes covering tobacco, alcohol, beverages, fuel, pharmaceuticals, cannabis or other products subject to taxation, excise control, fiscal marking, production monitoring, traceability or comparable government regulation.

Eligible programmes may incorporate physical tax stamps, direct marking, unique identification, serialisation, track and trace, production monitoring, authentication, data analytics, enforcement tools or combinations of these technologies and processes.

4.4 Eligibility period

The eligibility period for each awards cycle will be specified in the Call for Nominations.

Unless otherwise stated for an individual category, the nominated project, initiative, technology or regulatory framework must have been introduced, substantially enhanced, implemented or have produced the results on which the nomination is based during the specified eligibility period.

A programme does not necessarily have to have been originally launched during the eligibility period to qualify for the Best Outcomes or Best Public/Consumer Engagement Programme categories, provided that the achievements on which the nomination is based occurred substantially within that period.

5. NOMINATIONS

5.1 Who may nominate?

Nominations may be submitted by:

- The government authority responsible for the programme
- Another government organisation
- An organisation that supplied technology, products or services to the programme
- Another organisation or individual with sufficient knowledge of the programme.

Self-nomination is permitted and encouraged.

Nominations may be submitted by organisations that do not plan to attend the Tax Stamp & Traceability Forum, where the winners will be announced and the awards presented.

5.2 Third-party nominations

Where a nomination is submitted by a supplier or other third party, the nominator must obtain the permission of the government authority or programme owner before submitting the nomination.

The nomination must clearly identify the government authority responsible for the programme and the principal organisations involved in its implementation.

5.3 Joint projects

Where a programme involves several government authorities, technology providers or other organisations, all principal participants should be identified in the nomination.

The nomination should explain the respective roles of the participants sufficiently clearly to enable judges to understand who was responsible for the principal elements and achievements of the programme.

5.4 Multiple categories

A project may be nominated in more than one award category where it genuinely meets the criteria for each category.

However, a separate nomination should be submitted for each category and should specifically address the criteria for that category rather than submitting identical material for several awards.

5.5 Duplicate nominations

Where more than one nomination is received for the same project in the same category, ITSA may select the submission that provides the most complete and useful information for judging.

Where one of the nominations has been submitted by the responsible government authority, ITSA may give preference to that nomination.

6. NOMINATION MATERIALS AND EVIDENCE

6.1 Submission requirements

Nominations must provide a concise but sufficiently comprehensive description of:

- The project or programme
- The problem or requirement it was intended to address
- The principal organisations involved
- When and how it was implemented
- The technologies, policies or processes involved
- What is innovative, distinctive or particularly successful about it
- The results or benefits achieved.

Nominators should address each of the published judging criteria for the relevant category.

6.2 Supporting evidence

Claims should be supported wherever possible by appropriate evidence. Depending on the award category, this may include:

- Official statistics and reports
- Revenue and compliance data
- Illicit trade estimates
- Enforcement statistics
- Before-and-after comparisons
- Audit or evaluation reports
- Consumer research

- Scan and authentication data
- Smartphone application download and usage statistics
- Photographs and videos
- Physical tax stamp samples
- Technical documentation
- Legislation or regulations
- Published government information
- Independent research
- Other material that substantiates the achievements described in the nomination.

Judges will take account of the quality and credibility of the evidence provided and not simply the claims made in the nomination.

6.3 Comparability of data

Where quantitative results are provided, nominators should wherever possible:

- Identify the period covered
- Provide an appropriate baseline or previous-period comparison
- Explain the source of the data
- Distinguish absolute figures from percentage changes
- Explain other factors that may have materially influenced the results.

This is particularly important for claims concerning increased tax revenue or reductions in illicit trade.

6.4 Confidential information

Nominators may identify any information submitted as confidential and not for public disclosure. Such information will be used solely for the purpose of evaluating the nomination and will be made available only to Reconnaissance International (the organisers of the Tax Stamp & Traceability Forum), ITSA and members of the Judging Committee, who will be subject to appropriate confidentiality obligations.

Where requested, additional confidentiality arrangements, including an NDA, may be agreed.

If a nomination is selected for an award, only a high-level, non-confidential summary of any confidential information will be used in announcing or publicising the award, unless otherwise agreed with the nominator.

By submitting a nomination, the nominator grants ITSA a non-exclusive, royalty-free licence to use, reproduce and publish **non-confidential** information, images and video submitted in connection with judging, promotion of the awards and communication of the achievements of nominees, finalists and winners.

6.5 Language

Nominations must be submitted in English.

Supporting material may be submitted in another language, but nominators are encouraged to provide an English translation or summary of the relevant information.

6.6 Data protection

Nomination and supporting materials may include personal data, for example the names of officials, photographs or consumer research data. ITSA will process such data solely for the purposes of administering, judging and promoting the awards, and will retain nomination materials only for as long as reasonably necessary for those purposes and for its records of past winners.

7. JUDGING AND SELECTION OF WINNERS

7.1 Awards Judging Committee

ITSA's Awards Judging Committee will review and assess all eligible nominations.

Judging Committee members will comprise ITSA members, former or serving representatives of revenue, customs and excise authorities, independent experts in the tax stamp, traceability, production monitoring, authentication, security printing and related industries, or individuals with other relevant expertise.

The range of professional and geographical experience represented on the committee is intended to bring expertise, independence and objectivity to the judging process.

Members of the Awards Judging Committee will be appointed at the discretion of ITSA.

Judges must declare any material conflict of interest relating to a nomination. A judge will not participate in the assessment of a nomination where they, their organisation or an organisation with which they are closely associated has a direct interest in the nominated project.

7.2 Judging Committee assessment

Judging Committee members will assess nominations using the Award Force online awards management platform.

Each eligible nomination will be scored against the published criteria for the relevant award category.

The assessment will take account of:

- The quality and relevance of the nominated project, programme, initiative or technology
- The extent to which it meets the individual criteria for the award category
- The significance of the achievement in the context of the jurisdiction and market concerned
- The quality and credibility of the evidence provided
- The quality, relevance and completeness of the nomination and its supporting materials.

Following completion of the assessment, the Awards Judging Committee will determine the winner in each category on the basis of the scores awarded and its collective assessment of the nominations against the published criteria.

The nomination receiving the highest overall score will normally be declared the winner of the ITSA Excellence in Tax Stamp and Traceability Award for that category, subject to Sections 7.3 and 7.4 below.

Details of individual judges' scores, deliberations and voting will normally remain confidential.

7.3 Selection of winners

Winners will be selected solely by the Awards Judging Committee. ITSA members who are not members of the Judging Committee will not participate in the selection of finalists or winners.

Each judge will exercise their judgement independently and objectively, applying the published criteria and taking account of the evidence provided with each nomination.

ITSA may establish such scoring, moderation or other procedures as it considers appropriate to ensure consistency and fairness in the judging process.

7.4 Tied votes and joint winners

Where two or more nominations receive the same highest overall score in an award category, the Awards Judging Committee will review the tied nominations and determine the winner through further deliberation.

Where the Committee considers that two or more nominations are of equal merit and that selecting a single winner would not appropriately reflect their achievements, it may declare joint winners. Each joint winner will receive an ITSA Excellence in Tax Stamp and Traceability Award for that category.

7.5 Submission materials and judging

All nominations and supporting materials must be submitted electronically through the Award Force platform and must be readily accessible to the Awards Judging Committee. Where physical samples are requested or permitted for a particular category, separate submission instructions will be provided by ITSA.

Nominators should bear in mind that the Awards Judging Committee will assess the nomination solely on the basis of the materials submitted and will therefore need to be able to understand the significance of the nominated project from those materials.

Supporting material intended primarily for the general public may not provide sufficient technical or contextual information for this purpose. Nominators should therefore provide concise explanations of the features, achievements and results that make the project exceptional and explain their relevance to the applicable award criteria.

ITSA and the Awards Judging Committee will assess nominations on the basis of the information and supporting materials submitted through Award Force. They will not be

required to undertake independent research or investigation to substantiate claims made in a nomination.

7.6 Results and presentation

The results of the awards will remain confidential until their official announcement.

Finalists will be notified in advance of the official presentation of the awards.

The awards will be presented at the Tax Stamp & Traceability Forum.

Following the announcement, ITSA may publish details of the finalists and winners through its website, publications, social media and other communications.

8. AWARD CRITERIA

The following criteria are intended to guide nominators in preparing their submissions. Nominations do not need to address every point equally; judges will consider the overall strength of the submission, taking account of the objectives, scale and circumstances of the nominated programme or initiative.

8.1 Best Tax Stamp Design and Security

This award recognises excellence in the design and production of a physical tax stamp or fiscal marking solution.

Nominations should explain how the stamp or marking combines:

- **Design quality and originality** – a distinctive and effective graphic design appropriate to its purpose.
- **Security** – effective integration of overt, covert and/or machine-readable security and authentication features.
- **Authentication** – the ability of relevant users, including inspectors, customs officials, retailers or consumers, to authenticate the stamp or mark.
- **Fitness for purpose** – effective performance in its intended environment, including where relevant durability, application, tamper evidence, resistance to removal or reuse, and integration with serialisation or track and trace.

Nominators are encouraged to provide physical samples, high-resolution images and information on security features that may appropriately be disclosed to the judges.

8.2 Best Public/Consumer Engagement Programme

This award recognises an outstanding programme that engages consumers or the wider public in identifying legitimate products, understanding product authentication, avoiding illicit products and/or reporting suspicious activity.

Nominations should explain:

- **The objective and target audience** of the programme and the problem it was designed to address.
- **How consumers participate**, including the accessibility and ease of use of any authentication, reporting or digital tools.
- **The reach and level of engagement** achieved, supported where possible by relevant participation or usage data.
- **The impact achieved**, such as increased awareness, changes in behaviour, increased product authentication, useful intelligence or contributions to compliance and enforcement.

8.3 Best Outcomes

This award recognises a tax stamp, track and trace, production monitoring or related excise control programme that has delivered significant and demonstrable results.

Nominations should explain:

- **What the programme set out to achieve** and the principal challenges it was intended to address.
- **The results achieved**, which may include increased revenue, improved compliance or formalisation, reduced illicit trade or other measurable outcomes.
- **Improvements in enforcement or operational effectiveness**, where relevant.

Nominations are not expected to demonstrate improvement against every possible outcome measure.

8.4 Best Technology Innovation

This award recognises the innovative application of technology to improve the effectiveness, security, efficiency or integrity of a tax stamp, track and trace, production monitoring or related excise control programme.

Nominations should explain:

- **What is innovative** about the technology or its application and the problem it addresses.
- **How it improves security or effectiveness**, for example through better authentication, traceability, monitoring, data integrity, fraud detection or enforcement.
- **How it has been applied in practice**, including evidence of successful operation in a government programme or operational environment.
- **The benefits achieved**, supported where possible by measurable evidence.

The emphasis is on innovations that have progressed beyond concept or laboratory development and demonstrated practical application.

8.5 Best Policy and Enforcement Framework

This award recognises an outstanding new or substantially enhanced policy, legislative or regulatory framework that has entered into force and begun implementation in support of a tax stamp, track and trace, production monitoring or related excise control system.

Nominations should explain:

- **What the framework was designed to achieve** and the risks, weaknesses or forms of illicit trade it addresses.
- **How responsibilities and requirements are defined** for economic operators, authorities and other relevant parties.
- **How compliance can be enforced**, including appropriate powers, sanctions, access to information and procedures for dealing with non-compliance.
- **How the framework is being implemented in practice**, including relevant operational arrangements and coordination between authorities.
- **Evidence of implementation and early effectiveness**, such as industry compliance, registrations, inspections, enforcement activity, improved data availability or achievement of implementation milestones.

As this category may recognise recently introduced frameworks, long-term outcome data is not required.

8.6 General Principles Applying to All Categories

In addition to the category-specific criteria, the Judging Committee will apply the following principles:

Evidence

Claims should be supported by credible evidence wherever possible. Judges will distinguish between stated objectives and demonstrated achievements.

Context and proportionality

Achievements will be considered in the context of the jurisdiction concerned. Large absolute numbers will not necessarily receive higher scores than smaller but proportionately more significant achievements.

Practical effectiveness and transferability

Judges will consider the extent to which an initiative works effectively in practice and provides useful lessons or good practice that could be applied or adapted in other jurisdictions.

9. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

Participation in the ITSA Excellence in Tax Stamp and Traceability Awards constitutes acceptance of these guidelines and the decisions of ITSA and its appointed Judging Committee.

ITSA reserves the right to:

- Determine whether a nomination meets the eligibility requirements
- Request clarification or additional information concerning a nomination
- Move a nomination to a more appropriate category with the agreement of the nominator
- Reject incomplete or ineligible nominations
- Determine the number of finalists in each category
- Withhold an award where entries do not meet the required standard
- Amend the awards process or these guidelines where reasonably necessary.

A nominator who wishes to raise a procedural concern about the conduct of the awards process, as distinct from disputing a judging outcome, may do so in writing to ITSA within a reasonable time of the event giving rise to the concern. ITSA will consider and respond to any such concern at its discretion.

All decisions of ITSA and the Awards Judging Committee concerning eligibility, judging, finalists and winners are final.

Enquiries concerning these guidelines or the nomination process should be directed to info@tax-stamps.org, or to the named awards contact for the relevant cycle if one is specified in the Call for Nominations.