Digital Nations membership Terms of Reference

I. Introduction

As of 2022, Digital Nations is composed of ten-member states – Republic of Korea, United Kingdom, Estonia, Israel, New Zealand, Canada, Uruguay, Mexico, Portugal, and Denmark. Since Denmark joined Digital Nations in 2019, the group has suspended accepting new members although many non-member states have expressed their interest in joining Digital Nations.

At the Steering Committee in Lisbon in July 2022, the members agreed that Digital Nations is a small and informal group, and it will prioritize focusing on achieving the group's shared goal over membership expansion.

The Digital Nations Charter describes the criteria to join Digital Nations including that members must be a member of the Open Government Partnership and work towards fulfilling the ten principles outlined below. Upon consensus, the members will jointly make decisions on all matters relevant to the membership through discussion.

The membership task force, composed of the Republic of Korea, New Zealand, Portugal, United Kingdom, and Uruguay, was launched at the Steering Committee hosted by Portugal in 2022. The task force has established the requirement for members and the evaluation process. This document describes membership criteria, evaluation process, and requirements for members, which are established by the membership task force and adopted at the Ministerial Summit in Seoul. If necessary, this document may be amended in consultation with members.

II. Criteria for joining Digital Nations

Criteria to join Digital Nations is described in the Digital Nations Charter. Members of Digital Nations should be a member of Open Government Partnership and committed to fulfilling the following ten principles.

1. User needs - Strive to ensure that the design and delivery of public services through the use of data, digital and other technologies, takes a human-centered approach, and promotes the global public good

2. Necessary safeguards - Strive to ensure that the design, development and deployment of digital technologies, especially the use of data and artificial intelligence, is:

a. subject to adequate and necessary safeguards to uphold public trust and protect personal data and privacy.

b. underpinned by human rights, and guided by effective ethical, legal, or other frameworks

3. Open standards - Promote interoperability of digital technologies, including by adopting a credible royalty free open standards policy

4. Open source - Strive to create future Government systems, tradecraft, manuals and standards as open source and shareable between Participants

5. Open markets - Promote competition in digital markets, for all enterprises regardless of size, including in government procurement, encourage and support a dynamic start-up/scale-up culture in the digital and technology sectors, and promote sustainable economic growth through open markets

6. Open government - Be a member of the Open Government Partnership, promote digital technologies to facilitate transparency and citizen participation, and use open licenses to produce and consume open data

7. Digital inclusion and accessibility - Strive to ensure the opportunities and benefits offered by digital tools, technologies and services are available to all by taking inclusive approaches to tackle digital divides, including through efforts to improve connectivity, promote access to digital infrastructure, and support and adopt high quality web and other accessibility standards

8. Digital skills and training - Strive to support children, young people and adults in developing digital competencies and skills, and also promote innovative learning environments for public servants

9. Co-creation and experimentation - Promote a culture of innovation and experimentation where new ideas and experiences take place, including through a multi-stakeholder approach inclusive of industry, academia and civil society's engagement and participation

10. Sustainability - Promote a sustainable approach to digital government, make effective use of digital technologies to contribute to climate targets, and strive to reduce the negative environmental impacts of digital operations while delivering responsible, resilient digital services

Digital Nations, as a group of leading digital governments, has committed to developing digital government in the international community. As part of such efforts, members should work towards improving a better culture and environment for digital by actively sharing policies and best practices.

III. Evaluation Process

Preparatory steps: Countries can express their interest in joining Digital Nations. The Secretariat will provide guidance on membership criteria and expectations from the Digital Nations members. The Secretariat responds to matters related to membership on behalf of the group. Countries will be asked for information that shows that they are aligned with the Digital Nations principles, such as digital strategies, implemented projects, Open Government Partnership membership or relevant reference to legislation.

Step 1. The Secretariat responds to matters related to membership on behalf of the group, and clearly discloses the matters to the member states.

Step 2. The Secretariat receives expressions of interest six weeks prior to the yearly midterm steering committee, and reports on the status of membership requests and whether the interested countries meet the criteria at the Steering Committee meeting.

Step 3. At the midterm Steering Committee meeting, senior officials receive reports on the interested countries and discuss whether to accept a new member or not in the following year. Every decision on membership will be based on consensus.

Step 4. If the Steering Committee decides to accept a new member, it will set up the evaluation committee for two months, to evaluate the eligibility

of an interested country. The evaluation committee will report the result in written form through the leads before the end of the year.

Step 5. The evaluation committee debrief on the year-long process at the Steering Committee meeting at the end of the year. Upon consensus, members make a provisional decision on whether to accept a new member.

Step 6. In the case of accepting a new member, the decision will be presented at the Ministerial meeting. Unsuccessful applications will not be discussed at the Ministerial meeting.

IV. Requirements to maintain the membership

Requirements to maintain Digital Nations membership are as follows.

1. Members must attend the virtual or in-person ministerial meeting held once a year. In the case that an executive level official is absent from the ministerial meeting for two consecutive years, in the following year, the official may receive a letter urging participation from the Secretariat. If the executive level official does not participate in official events in the year in which the letter is received, which means if the official does not attend for three years in a row, the country can be disqualified from being a member of Digital Nations.

2. Digital Nations Steering Committee meeting takes place twice a year before the Ministerial Summit. A senior official or a designated deputy and lead of each country attend in-person or virtual Steering Committee meetings. If representatives of a country cannot attend the meeting, the country should deliver its opinion on matters of decisions to the host country and the Secretariat before the meeting takes place. In the event that a senior official is absent from Steering Committee meetings twice a year, in the following year, the official may receive a letter urging participation from the Secretariat. If a senior official is absent for two consecutive years, the country can be disqualified from being a member of Digital Nations.

3. The member states should actively participate in and contribute to the thematic working groups and projects. Member states should

designate an appropriate person with expertise and participate in at least one working group.

4. Political, religious, and diplomatic matters are not considered as part of the criteria for joining Digital Nations or requirements to maintain the membership.

Digital Nations membership Terms of Reference was adopted as an annex of the Digital Nations Charter at the Ministerial Summit held on November 3rd, 2022, in Seoul. This document may be revised upon the consensus of Digital Nations member states.