National Evidence Award 2027

Recognising Excellence in the Use of Routine Data and Research for Decision-making in Government

Overview

The National Evidence Award is a recognition established by the Institute for Development (IfD) to celebrate and promote the use of routine data and research evidence in governance, policy making, and service delivery within national government ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) in Sierra Leone.

This Award recognises and honours MDAs that have demonstrated credible, practical, and sustained use of evidence in shaping policies, improving planning, guiding resource allocation, and achieving demonstrable results for citizens. It is rooted in the belief that decisions guided by reliable data and research lead to better governance outcomes, increased transparency, and stronger public institutions.

The purpose of the Award is to recognise and promote the practical use of routine data (regularly collected through government systems such as DHIS2, EMIS, IFMIS, and sector dashboards) and applied research findings, evaluations, or analytical studies to inform policies, resource allocation, and service delivery decisions. In addition to recognising successful applications of evidence, the Award also encourages MDAs to reflect on the **institutional, technical, and operational challenges** encountered when using data and research to inform decisions, and the lessons learned in addressing these constraints. This award is part of IfD's mission to build a culture of evidence-informed governance in Sierra Leone, where data and research are consistently used to guide planning, budgeting, and implementation. To recognise and reward outstanding performance, a total cash prize of USD 5,000 will be awarded to the top-performing MDAs as follows:

1st Place: USD 2,500

2nd Place: USD 1,500

3rd Place: USD 1,000

The goal is to spotlight and reward leadership and systems that embed evidence into national decision-making.

Eligibility

- Open to national-level MDAs of the Government of Sierra Leone.
- Entries must describe a policy, reform, or management decision implemented between January 2022 and December 2026.
- The initiative must demonstrate clear use of routine data and/or research in informing the decision.
- Joint submissions with technical or donor partners are allowed — but the lead applicant must be a national government MDA.

Award Criteria (100 Points Total)

Submissions will be assessed based on the following criteria to ensure that the use of evidence in decision-making is credible, impactful, transparent, and sustainable. The criteria also recognise that institutions often face structural and operational barriers when attempting to use data and research in governance. As such, MDAs are encouraged to highlight both achievements and the challenges encountered in applying evidence.

No.	Criterion	Description	Points
1	**Use of Routine Data or Research**	The submission must clearly demonstrate how administrative data (e.g., DHIS2, EMIS, IFMIS, HR data, or other routine systems) or research evidence was analyzed and applied to inform a real decision. Examples include using DHIS2 data to target malaria prevention activities in high-risk districts or applying evaluation findings to redesign a social service delivery process.	**20**
2	**Decision-Making Impact**	Evidence use must be linked to a measurable outcome such as a policy shift, improved service delivery, resource reallocation, or operational improvement. Submissions should clearly describe the situation before and after applying the evidence (e.g., improved vaccination coverage following data-driven outreach adjustments).	**20**

3	**Quality and Transparency of Analysis**	The analytical methods used must be credible and transparently documented. Supporting materials such as dashboards, analytical reports, briefing memos, or meeting minutes should be provided to validate the process and findings.	**15**
4	**Institutionalisation and Sustainability**	The evidence use should demonstrate integration into routine organisational processes, such as planning cycles, meeting templates, or formal decision-making frameworks, rather than being a one-off activity.	**15**
5	**Collaboration and Learning**	Submissions should demonstrate effective collaboration among technical units, decision-makers, and partners. For example, joint work between an MDA data team and the Ministry of Planning to co-design an analytical dashboard that informs budget allocations.	**10**
6	**Innovation in Evidence Use**	The submission should demonstrate whether the institution introduced a new or improved way of using data. This may include the use of digital tools, AI, community-generated data, behavioural insights, real-time dashboards, or creative dissemination methods such as data storytelling or visual analytics. The approach should show adaptability and be problem-driven, meaning the innovation responds to a clearly identified challenge rather than being technology for its own sake.	**10**
7	**Challenges and Lessons in Using Evidence**	The submission should clearly describe the key challenges the institution faced in accessing, analysing, or applying routine data and research evidence for decision-making. These may include issues such as limited data quality, capacity constraints, technological barriers, coordination difficulties, or institutional resistance. Submissions should also outline how these	**10**

		challenges were addressed or what lessons were learned, demonstrating organisational reflection and potential for system improvement.	

Examples of Eligible Entries

To help us understand what kinds of submissions are appropriate, the following concrete examples illustrate what strong evidence use looks like in practice. Also, MDAs may also highlight challenges encountered in using evidence and how these challenges were addressed or what lessons were learned.

1. **Ministry of Health and Sanitation using DHIS2 data for outbreak response: The** Ministry could describe how data from eIDSR improved detection of disease clusters and led to faster emergency responses, including specifics on reporting improvements, decision thresholds, and the actions taken as a result. These are concrete improvements, backed by measurable data quality gains. The submission may also highlight operational challenges such as delayed reporting, data completeness issues, or capacity constraints in analysing surveillance data, and how these were addressed to strengthen outbreak response.
2. **Ministry of Agriculture using agricultural data to inform rural investment planning:** Through AgriData SL, the Ministry could show how improved agricultural statistics, combined with research analysis, informed targeted investment in seed distribution, market access programmes, or climate resilience initiatives — and how these decisions are reflected in improved productivity or farmer incomes. The entry may also discuss challenges such as gaps in agricultural data coverage, difficulties in integrating datasets, or capacity limitations in rural data collection, and the lessons learned from addressing these issues.
3. **Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education using EMIS data to support teacher deployment:** An entry might show how routine EMIS data was analysed to identify staffing gaps, inform deployment of teachers to underserved districts, and improve student–teacher ratios, with supporting evidence of changes over time. The submission may also note challenges related to data accuracy, timeliness of school reporting, or coordination between central and district education offices, and how these challenges were managed to improve evidence-informed planning.
4. **Ministry of Finance using IFMIS data to enhance budget execution efficiency:** An example could describe how financial data analytics revealed

inefficiencies in expenditure patterns, leading to process reforms that increased the timeliness and accuracy of budget execution and reporting. The entry may further highlight institutional or technical challenges, such as system integration issues or delays in financial reporting, and explain how these challenges informed improvements in financial data use and decision-making processes.

5. **Ministry of Gender using national survey data to shape protection service delivery:** This entry could highlight how data from national surveys on domestic violence or women's economic participation influenced policy decisions on service provision, resource allocation, or awareness campaigns. The submission may also describe challenges such as limited availability of gender-disaggregated data, difficulties translating research findings into policy action, or coordination constraints across institutions, and the lessons learned in strengthening evidence-informed gender policy.
6. **Monuments and Relics Commission using heritage and visitor data for preservation and engagement:** The Commission could describe how data from its national heritage inventory, site condition assessments, and museum visitor registers were analysed to identify at-risk monuments and under-visited heritage sites. This analysis informed prioritisation of restoration funding, maintenance schedules, and targeted outreach campaigns to schools and low-engagement sites. The entry could include measurable results, such as increased museum attendance, faster responses to site deterioration, and integration of heritage data into planning and budgeting, showing how routine data shaped real preservation and engagement decisions. The submission may also highlight challenges such as incomplete heritage records, limited digital data systems, or resource constraints for data collection and analysis, and how these challenges were addressed.

Application Process

Step 1: Call for Entries

- Entries submitted via:
    1. Email to rmyillah@ifdsl.org
    2. WhatsApp to +44 7539 819282
    3. Hard copies - please call Mr Emmanuel Foray: +078 455521/ Mr Issa Kanu: 088 508855
- Deadline: **Monday 11th January 2027** (Applications clinics offered to all applicants and applications may be revised during this period)

Step 2: Required Materials

Each submission must include:

1. **Completed application form** (provided by IfD)
2. **Summary** *(max 500 words)* of the decision or policy area
3. **Description of the data or research used** *(sources, how analysed, how applied)*
4. **Results achieved and lessons learned** *(max 1,000 words)*. Submissions are also encouraged to briefly highlight **key challenges encountered in using evidence or data for decision-making**, and how these challenges were addressed or what lessons were drawn from the experience.
5. **Supporting documentation** *(e.g. reports, dashboards, memos, policy documents)*
6. **Letter of endorsement** from the Permanent Secretary or Director-General

Selection Process

Stage	Description	Lead Responsibility	Timeline
1. Screening	Check eligibility and completeness.	IfD Secretariat	Mon 19th Jan
2. Technical Review	Independent reviewers score entries using award criteria.	Independent Review Panel	Mon 2nd Feb
3. Panel Deliberation	Panel reviews top five entries and selects 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place.	Judging Panel	Mon 9th Feb

4. Awards Ceremony	Winners announced at the National Evidence Summit 2027.	IfD	24-26 February

Award Panel

The National Evidence Award Panel will comprise national and international representatives to ensure credibility and fairness.

Proposed Composition (7–9 members):

1. Chair: Cabinet Secretariat (TBC)
2. Statistics Sierra Leone
3. Ministry of Planning and Economic Development
4. Institute for Development (IfD) – Secretariat
5. International donor agency representative (e.g. FCDO, Irish Aid, IDRC)
6. International evidence organisation in Africa (e.g. Africa Evidence Network,
7. International evidence organisation (e.g. ODI, 3ie, Campbell Collaboration)
8. Academic or research institution (University of Sierra Leone, Njala University)
9. Civil society or media representative (optional for transparency)

All panel members will sign a confidentiality and conflict-of-interest declaration.

Recognition and Benefits

- Cash Prizes
    - 1st Place – USD 2,500
    - 2nd Place – USD 1,500
    - 3rd Place – USD 1,000
- ‘Highly Commended@ certificates for strong entries that didn’t place in the top three.
- Certificate of Excellence presented by senior government and donor representatives.
- National recognition at the National Evidence Summit, 24-26 Feb 2027.
- Feature profile on Sabi Salone and inclusion in the National Evidence Compendium.

- Peer learning opportunity — top three MDAs will be invited to share their approach at the National Evidence Learning Roundtable at NES 2027.

Timeline

Activity	Timeline
Finalise framework	November 2026
Launch call for entries	December 2026
Finalise panel members	December 2026
Submission deadline	12th January 2027
Screening & review	19th January 2027
Panel deliberation	9th February 2027
Award presentation (NES 2027)	24-26 February 2027

Post-Award Learning

IfD will produce a short Evidence Insight Brief for each of the three winners, documenting:

- The data or research used,
- How it informed decision-making, and
- The impact or outcome achieved.

These briefs will be published on Sabi Salone and shared with ministries, donors, and universities to encourage replication of best practice.

IfD will also create a public repository of all submissions (with permission) so that MDAs can learn from each other.