



The UNESCO Learning City Award 2021

Concept Note



Background

The number of city dwellers around the world has grown rapidly in recent years: today, more than half of the world's population lives in cities, and this figure is expected to rise to 60 per cent by 2030. Cities have played an increasingly influential role in national and world affairs as they have expanded; however, this expansion also presents municipal governments with multiple challenges relating to social cohesion, economic development and sustainability. A growing number of cities see the implementation of a lifelong learning strategy for inclusive, sustainable urban development as key to tackling these challenges. They are developing innovative ways to allow citizens of all ages to learn new skills and competencies throughout life. In doing so, these cities become 'learning cities'.

An increasing number of UNESCO Member States have expressed interest in the learning city concept. It is against this background that the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), the only entity in the UN family that holds a specific mandate for lifelong learning, launched the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC) in 2012. This network is an international exchange platform, where members can share expertise and best practices in building learning cities.

One of the outputs of preparatory work on the UNESCO GNLC was the first International Conference on Learning Cities (ICLC), held in Beijing, China, in October 2013. Co-organized by UNESCO, the Ministry of Education of China and the Beijing Municipal Government, the conference brought together 550 mayors, city education executives and experts from 102 countries as well as representatives of UN agencies, regional organizations, non-governmental organizations and multinational corporations. The conference adopted two key documents: the *Beijing Declaration on Building Learning Cities*, which affirms the vital importance of learning for the future of all urban communities, and the *Key Features of Learning Cities*, which serves as a comprehensive checklist of action points to help stakeholders build learning cities.

Since the first ICLC, the practice of building learning cities has accelerated and expanded worldwide. Many cities have started to adopt the learning city approach to tackle specific challenges, thus putting into practice the resolutions of the conference's outcome documents.

The **UNESCO Learning City Award** was established to further promote lifelong learning for all and showcase good practices in building learning cities. It is conferred on cities that have thereby achieved outstanding progress in learning city development. The award was first conferred on 12 UNESCO GNLC member cities during the second ICLC, which took place in Mexico City, Mexico, from 28 to 30 September 2015. Two years later, in 2017, 16 members received the award at the third ICLC in Cork, Ireland. Finally, during the fourth ICLC that took place in Medellin, Colombia in 2019, ten GNLC members have received the award. All awardee cities have demonstrated best practices that lay the foundation for sustainable development.

What is the purpose of the award?

The UNESCO Learning City Award is not an award of excellence, nor does it constitute an official label. Instead, its purpose is to recognize and reward outstanding efforts and achievements in developing learning cities in communities around the world. It is awarded to cities that have achieved outstanding progress in promoting education and lifelong learning opportunities for all.

What form will the award take and how often will it be conferred?

The UNESCO Learning City Award is a biennial international award conferred at an official ceremony held during an ICLC.

No more than one city per country can receive the UNESCO Learning City Award in any given award round. These cities will receive a certificate. However, this award is not a UNESCO prize.

Who is eligible for the award?

The UNESCO Learning City Award is open to all UNESCO GNLC member cities in UNESCO Member States across the five UNESCO regions. Only members of the UNESCO GNLC are eligible to apply for the UNESCO Learning City Award 2021.

Past awardees will not be eligible for the award for a period of six years following the receipt of a UNESCO Learning City Award.

Who is the selection jury?

The selection of awardees is made by an independent jury comprised by international experts in the field of lifelong learning.

What are the selection criteria?

All applications received for the UNESCO Learning City Award 2021 will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- Progress in their learning city plan
- Creation of a coordinated structure (e.g. committees) involving all stakeholders
- Effective mobilization and utilization of resources
- Ensure that learning is accessible to all citizens.
- Organization of celebratory events to promote and maintain the process of building the learning city
- Establishment of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms
- Demonstration of best practices in the scope of the learning city project that could be adopted by other cities

How should nominations for the award be submitted?

Nominations for the award must be submitted to UIL according to the procedure described below:

Cities wishing to apply for the award must submit the following documents to the National Commission for UNESCO in their respective countries ¹:

- An application form illustrating the learning city's development.
- A signed consent form for use and distribution of materials (available as part of the application package).
- Five high-resolution photos (original, uncompressed and not resized) depicting learning city actions. Each photo must be accompanied by a short description as well as copyright information.
- Any additional materials (articles, videos, etc.) that may support the application.

National Commissions can nominate a maximum of two cities per country.

¹ Please find a list of the National Commissions for UNESCO at <http://en.unesco.org/countries/national-commissions>

National Commissions must submit to UIL an official award nomination form plus the supporting documents provided by the nominated cities.

The award nomination form is available on the UNESCO GNLC website :

<https://uil.unesco.org/lifelong-learning/learning-cities/unesco-learning-city-award/award-2021>.

After receiving all nomination materials, UIL provide acknowledgment of receipt of the applications and will submit them to the award selection jury for its final decision. UIL will announce the results on behalf of the jury in early September 2021.

Conditions

- All applicant cities are responsible for the delivery of their materials to their respective National Commissions for UNESCO.
- All nominated cities must complete a Consent Form (part of the application package) authorizing UIL to publish and share the submitted materials free of charge on the understanding that the cities will be clearly credited as the owners of these materials.
- Submitted materials will not be returned.
- The jury's decision is final and there is no process for appealing the decision.

Important dates for the UNESCO Learning City Award 2021

- Closing date for applications: 25 June 2021
- Closing date for nominations: 16 July 2021
- Announcement of awardees: Beginning of September 2021
- Award ceremony: At the fifth ICLC in 2021 (27-30 October)

The Secretariat of the Award

The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) in Hamburg, Germany, is the Secretariat of the award. UIL is a policy-driven, international research, training, information, documentation and publishing centre of UNESCO. UIL holds a unique position within UNESCO and the United Nations: it is the only entity in the UN family that holds a specific mandate for lifelong learning. As the Secretariat of the International Conference on Learning Cities and the coordinating body of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities, UIL is taking a leading role in providing capacity-building activities, technical support and communication channels for cities in order to help them exchange ideas and experiences with regard to learning city development and support their strategies to that end.