United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

UNESCO Institute
for Lifelong Learning

The UNESCO Learning City Award
Concept Note

The number of city dwellers around the world has been growing more rapidly than ever in recent years: more than half of the world's population lives in cities today, and this is expected to rise to 60% by 2030. Cities have played an increasingly influential role in national and world affairs as they have expanded. However, this expansion is also presenting 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. These cities are developing innovative strategies that allow citizens of all ages to learn new skills and competencies throughout life, thereby transforming their cities into 'learning cities'.

More and more UNESCO Member States have expressed interest in the learning city concept. It is against this background that the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), UNESCO's centre of excellence for lifelong learning, initiated the establishment of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC) in 2012. This network is an international exchange platform that allows cities to share expertise and best practices in building learning cities.

One of the outputs of preparatory work on the UNESCO GNLC was the 1st International Conference on Learning Cities (ICLC). Co-organized by UNESCO, the Ministry of Education of China, and Beijing Municipal Government, this Conference was held in Beijing, China, in October 2013. It 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 1st ICLC, the practice of building learning cities has further accelerated and expanded in communities worldwide. Many cities have started to adopt the learning city approach to tackle specific challenges, thus putting into practice the resolutions of the outcome documents of the 1st ICLC.

The **UNESCO Learning City Award** has been established in order to further promote lifelong learning for all and showcase good practice in building learning cities**.** It is conferred on cities that are implementing the *Key Features of Learning Cities* and have thereby achieved outstanding progress in building learning cities. The Award was launched at the 2nd International Conference on Learning Cities, which took place in Mexico City, Mexico, from 28 to 30 September 2015.

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 devoted to developing learning cities in communities around the world. It will be awarded to cities that, by putting in place the building blocks of a learning city, have achieved exceptional

progress in promoting lifelong learning. As the *Key Features of Learning Cities* explains, these building blocks comprise:

- promoting inclusive learning from basic to higher education;
- revitalizing learning in families and communities;
- facilitating effective learning for and in the workplace;
- extending the use of modern learning technologies;
- enhancing quality and excellence in learning; and
- fostering a culture of learning throughout life.

What form will the Award take and how often will it be awarded?

The UNESCO Learning City Award is a biennial international award conferred at an official ceremony held during either a Regional Conference on Learning Cities or at the next ICLC, depending on which takes place first.

The UNESCO Learning City Award will be awarded to cities in each of the five UNESCO regions that have demonstrated significant progress in building learning cities and promoting lifelong learning for all. Up to six cities per region may receive an Award in each Award cycle. These cities will receive a certificate, but no monetary award, as this 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. For this purpose, a city is understood as an administrative unit with a minimum of 10,000 inhabitants governed by a city council or another form of elected body. A learning city could therefore be a learning municipality, a learning village, a learning town, a learning community, etc.

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

Who is on the Award selection jury?

The selection of awardees will be made by an international jury comprising the twelve members of the UIL Governing Board.

The decisions of the jury will be made by consensus if possible, or by secret ballot until a simple majority is obtained. The Award selection jury will meet during the annual UIL Governing Board meetings or via video conferences.

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What are the evaluation criteria?

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

- Has the nominee made a firm commitment to creating and expanding learning opportunities that meet the learning needs of all citizens, and is it demonstrating strong political leadership, vision, foresight and governance in this regard?
- Does the nominee have a comprehensive, actionable working plan for mobilizing resources and involving partners across sectors?
- Does the nominee have clearly defined focus areas and phase-based goals?
- Is the nominee implementing concrete strategies that address specific challenges in the city?
- Does the nominee have effective policies, practices and projects that could be adopted by other cities?
- Have the nominee's learning city activities impacted positively on individual empowerment, social cohesion, economic development, cultural prosperity and sustainable development?

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]
    - a report on the learning city's development based on the Award Reporting Template;
    - a signed Consent Form for use and distribution of materials; and
    - any necessary additional materials (articles, videos, etc.).
- UIL will invite nominations from the National Commissions for UNESCO. Each National Commission can nominate a maximum of three cities in its country.
- National Commissions will submit to UIL an official Award Nomination Form for each nomination plus the supporting documents provided by the nominated cities.

The Award Nomination Form, Reporting Template and Consent Form will be available on the UNESCO GNLC website (http://learningcities.uil.unesco.org/home).

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

After receiving all nomination materials, UIL will select a shortlist. The shortlisted nominations will then be submitted to the Award selection jury for its final decision. UIL will announce the results on behalf of the Award selection jury one month before either the next Regional Conference on Learning Cities or the next ICLC, depending on which takes place first.

Conditions of entry

- All nominated cities will be responsible for the delivery of their materials to their respective National Commissions for UNESCO
- UIL will provide the nominated cities with written acknowledgement of receipt of their nomination. If cities do not receive this acknowledgment, they are encouraged to contact UIL to check that their nominations and supporting documents have been received.
- All nominated cities must complete a Consent Form (as an appendix to the Award Reporting Template) permitting 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 correspondence will not be entered into.

Important dates for the UNESCO Learning City Award 2017

- Closing date for nominations: 30 September 2016
- Final selection and announcement of awardees: to be confirmed
- Award ceremony: to be confirmed

The Secretariat of the Award

The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) in Hamburg, Germany, is the Secretariat of the Award. UIL is a non-profit, 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 organizational unit in the UN family that holds a global 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 in developing learning cities.