

UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC)

Membership Concept Note

1. BACKGROUND

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 municipalities see the implementation of a lifelong learning strategy for inclusive, sustainable urban development as key to tackling these challenges. This is why they are taking action towards becoming 'learning cities'. In order to support local governments develop concrete strategies for building learning cities, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) has established the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC).

The UNESCO GNLC is an international policy-oriented network providing inspiration, know-how and best practice. Its mission is to support and accelerate the practice of lifelong learning in the world's communities by promoting policy dialogue and peer learning among member cities, forging links, fostering partnerships, building capacities and developing instruments to encourage and recognize progress in building learning cities.

The network is based on the *Beijing Declaration on Building Learning Cities* and the *Key Features of Learning Cities*. These two documents were adopted at the first International Conference on Learning Cities (ICLC) in 2013. Important additional documents include *Learning Cities and the SDGs: A Guide to Action* and the *Guidelines for Building Learning Cities*.

The UNESCO GNLC opened for membership in 2015, and since then the number of member cities in the network has increased to 170 active cities from all five UNESCO regions. UNESCO GNLC members are engaged in building learning cities and believe that lifelong learning for all is crucial for their cities' future. In applying to become a member of UNESCO GNLC, each city acknowledges its commitment to continue developing into a learning city, sharing experience and best practice, developing partnerships, and strengthening its policies for and implementation of lifelong learning for all.

City mayors or other formally endorsed stakeholders serve as representatives of UNESCO GNLC members. For the purpose of this Concept Note, a 'city' is an administrative unit governed by a city council or another form of elected body, and recognized as a city by the national government of the country it is located in. A learning city can therefore be a learning municipality, a learning village, a learning town or a learning community.

2. BENEFITS OF BECOMING A MEMBER OF THE UNESCO GNLC

The key benefits of becoming a member of the UNESCO GNLC include:

1. Receiving guidance and support during the journey towards building a learning city by:
 - a. accessing tools and strategies for developing learning cities (e.g. training modules and video tutorials on how to build a learning city);
 - b. gaining insight into best practice from the latest research and practice reports;
 - c. receiving news updates on learning city developments around the world from the UNESCO GNLC Coordination Team.
2. Being part of a dynamic network and strengthening your own partnerships and networks by:
 - a. receiving support when hosting international conferences and regional meetings;
 - b. connecting with learning cities with common interests, tackling similar issues and envisioning similar development agendas;
 - c. communicating with a network of experts and professionals specializing in the field of lifelong learning for sustainable development;
 - d. receiving technical support from member cities.
3. Receiving recognition for your efforts and showcasing the actions of your city by:
 - a. sharing your milestones and progress through the communication channels of the UNESCO GNLC;
 - b. participating in learning city case studies to showcase your city and its actions, innovative measures, best practice and lessons learned;
 - c. being eligible for the UNESCO Learning City Award.

Based on UNESCO's inclusive approach and open-source policy, all publications and documents are published on the UNESCO GNLC website and are freely accessible to all.

3. MEMBERSHIP REGULATIONS

Who can apply?

Authorities from a city located in a UNESCO Member State that wish to adopt the learning city concept may apply for membership. An application may only be submitted to the National Commission once it has been formally endorsed by the city's mayor or relevant authority.

Who is a UNESCO GNLC member?

A UNESCO GNLC member is the city itself, represented by the mayor and/or the relevant authority representing the city. All official representatives act as delegates of the city.

What are the requirements for becoming a member?

In order to join the network, the municipality should pursue the vision of providing lifelong learning and becoming a learning city. The strategies set out in the key documents, the *Beijing Declaration on Building Learning Cities* and the *Key Features of Learning Cities*, must be adopted by the mayor of the city, who needs to endorse the membership application. The city needs to complete the membership application form and submit it to its National Commission for UNESCO for endorsement. In addition to this, members are required to submit a progress report on their learning city project every two years to the UNESCO GNLC Coordination Team. This is a requirement to renew membership.

Application procedure

1. Applicants must complete an application form, which is available on the UNESCO GNLC website (<http://uil.unesco.org/learning-cities>). The form must be filled in electronically and must include the mayor's signature.
2. The application form should be sent by the applicant by email to the responsible National Commission for UNESCO for endorsement, copying in the UNESCO GNLC Coordination Team at the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) (learningcities@unesco.org). For the National Commissions' contact information, please visit the [Database of National Commissions for UNESCO](#). Please note that National Commissions may request additional documents and records from the city if necessary in order to endorse the application.
3. National Commissions for UNESCO endorse the applications by signing it before submitting the completed application, copying in the city, to the UNESCO GNLC Coordination Team at UIL (learningcities@unesco.org). UIL may request additional documents and records from the city if necessary in order to assess the application.

How many cities can be designated as members per year?

National Commissions for UNESCO can endorse applications from up to **three cities** per country per year to join the UNESCO GNLC.

When can an application be submitted?

Due to the coronavirus outbreak, the deadlines for submission of applications have been extended.

There is one open call for applications per year, **from 1 March to 30 June 2020**, during which time cities may submit their membership applications to their National Commission for UNESCO. After this application period has ended, the National Commission for UNESCO **has up to one month (1 to 31 July 2020)** to send the endorsed applications to the UNESCO GNLC Coordination Team (learningcities@unesco.org).

GNLC Strategy 2019–2021/ Learning Cities Multi-donor Funding Modality (MDFM)

The UNESCO GNLC does not ask for a membership fee. However, to support the implementation of the strategy of the network adopted by member cities in October 2019, UIL established a dedicated funding modality to attract financial contributions from cities and partners.

GNLC Strategy 2019–2021

In accordance with the UNESCO GNLC strategy, which was adopted at the fourth International Conference on Learning Cities in Medellín, Colombia, in October 2019, seven thematic clusters have been devised based on the issues and concerns deemed by members of the network to be of highest priority.

The strategy was developed to strengthen the network by improving knowledge production and sharing, tools development, policy learning and capacity development.

The Learning Cities Multi-donor Funding Modality (MDFM)

The Learning Cities Multi-donor Funding Modality (MDFM) is intended to support cities in their efforts to promote lifelong learning through the GNLC strategy. The MDFM is a pooled fund managed by UIL. Through the MDFM, UIL can receive contributions from cities and partners to implement the UNESCO GNLC's strategy.

Communication with the UNESCO GNLC Coordination Team

Member cities are expected to inform the UNESCO GNLC Coordination Team of changes and initiatives relevant for the network (e.g. new mayor, new contact person, new learning city plan, events organized within the scope of the network etc.), so that the Coordination Team can update their online profiles accordingly.

Submission of Learning City Progress Report

Member cities are requested to submit a (biennial) progress report detailing how they are implementing their learning city strategy. The collection of submitted reports serves to support the monitoring of the concrete achievements of member cities by underlining effective policies, strategies, measures, partnerships and progress. These progress reports should be submitted every two years by email to learningcities@unesco.org, using the progress report template provided by the UNESCO GNLC Coordination Team on the dedicated

website (<http://uil.unesco.org/learning-cities>). Submission deadlines for the next reports is 31 March 2021.

Non-submission of progress reports, submission of an incomplete report or parts showing weak progress will result in the non-renewal of the GNLC membership.

Please note that cities whose membership is not renewed will be notified by the UNESCO GNLC.

Learning City Award

The UNESCO Learning City Award is a biennial award given to member cities that have achieved outstanding progress in building a learning city. A maximum of one city per country can be awarded per cycle. The next award ceremony will take place in 2021.

How to apply for the Learning City award

Member cities may apply for the award through their National Commission for UNESCO. The National Commissions are invited to nominate a maximum of two cities per country for the biennial award. For the National Commissions' contact information, please visit the [Database of National Commissions for UNESCO](#). More information about the Learning City Award can be found at the following link: <http://uil.unesco.org/lifelong-learning/learning-cities/unesco-learning-city-award>.

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