

155 European cities join Bloomberg ideas contest

February 19 2014, by Jennifer Peltz

Unemployment, energy efficiency and obesity are the top concerns targeted by some 155 European cities competing to out-innovate each other in a lucrative contest launched by former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, his foundation announced Wednesday.

Municipalities from London to high-tech-friendly Oulu, in northern Finland, to the picturesque old port of Chania, on the Greek island of Crete, applied for the first-time European contest by a Jan. 31 deadline, Bloomberg Philanthropies said. The cities span 28 countries and include 19 capitals, from Dublin, Ireland, to Ankara, Turkey.

"These dynamic city leaders are working to find new ways to tackle some of our most pressing and common urban challenges," Bloomberg said in a statement.

Twenty finalists will be announced in mid-April. A 5 million euro—about \$6.8 million—grand prize and four 1 million euro awards will be bestowed in the fall.

The cities were asked for ideas that solve major social or economic problems or make government more effective. Some 12 percent focused on tackling unemployment and workforce development, 9 percent on energy issues, 7 percent on obesity and the food supply, and 5 percent each on aging and fostering social inclusion.

To some extent, the topics show concerns varying by region. Almost a

quarter of the applications from Eastern Europe concerned government transparency and democracy, for instance, while the biggest chunk of submissions from western Europe—about 15 percent—centered on [energy efficiency](#), said James Anderson, who oversees Bloomberg Philanthropies' government innovation work.

While a similar Bloomberg Philanthropies contest in the U.S. last year drew more than 300 entrants, the foundation noted that 26 percent of eligible European cities applied, compared with 24 percent in the U.S., and Bloomberg said the response "exceeded even our own high expectations."

The European contest was open to cities of 100,000 or more residents in 40 countries. Some applicants are as big as London (population about 8.2 million), others as comparatively small as Limassol, Cyprus (population 101,000).

During 12 years in office that ended Dec. 31, billionaire-entrepreneur-turned-politician Bloomberg championed the idea of cities as trailblazers for new approaches to government, through both his political office and his personal charity.

Bloomberg Philanthropies gave away \$452 million last year to support environmental, education, health, arts and [government](#) innovation projects.

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