

NYC's Bloomberg launches European city contest

24 September 2013, by Jennifer Peltz



From right, Florence Mayor Matteo Renzi, New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, London Mayor Boris Johnson, and Warsaw Mayor Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz, during the launch of the Mayors Challenge competition, at City Hall in London, Tuesday, Sept. 24, 2013. New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg is offering European cities millions of dollars to be government groundbreakers, tapping his personal fortune to extend his cities-as-civic-laboratories campaign overseas as the end of his own tenure nears. (AP Photo/Matt Dunham)

New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg is offering European cities millions of dollars to be government groundbreakers, tapping his personal fortune to extend his cities-as-civic-laboratories campaign overseas as the end of his own tenure nears.

The billionaire businessman-turned-politician invited about 600 sizeable European cities Tuesday to compete for 9 million euros—about \$12 million—in prizes, from his personal foundation, for novel plans to improve urban life.

The competition could signal how Bloomberg aims to maintain and broaden his impact on government after his 12-year tenure ends in December.

"I am a big believer in the power of cities to shape the future," Bloomberg said in a statement to The Associated Press ahead of a news conference at London City Hall. He said the contest would spotlight "bold ideas which can take root in Europe and spread around the world."

Modeled on a Bloomberg Philanthropies contest that awarded \$9 million to five U.S. cities this year, the European competition seeks ideas that solve problems or make government more efficient or citizen friendly.

It's open to cities with 100,000 or more residents in 40 countries. Winners of a 5 million euro grand prize and four 1 million euro awards will be announced next fall.



New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg speaks as he launches the Mayors Challenge competition during a press conference with London Mayor Boris Johnson, Florence Mayor Matteo Renzi and Warsaw Mayor Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz, at City Hall in London, Tuesday, Sept. 24, 2013. New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg is offering European cities millions of dollars to be government groundbreakers, tapping his personal fortune to extend his cities-as-civic-laboratories campaign overseas as the end of his own tenure nears. (AP Photo/Matt Dunham)

"Cities have a vital role to play in the recovery of struggling nations across Europe," Mayor Matteo Renzi of Florence, Italy, said in a statement. He and London Mayor Boris Johnson and Mayor Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz of Warsaw, Poland, joined Bloomberg at Tuesday's news conference.

Some other foundations give governments money to try new approaches in various areas. Still, "flexible funds for early-stage innovation are hard to come by in cities in the United States and Europe and around the globe," said James Anderson, who oversees Bloomberg Philanthropies' government innovation work.

In the recent U.S. version of the Mayors Challenge, the \$5 million top prize went in March to Providence, R.I. Its project aims to improve poor children's vocabulary by outfitting them with recording devices if their parents agree to it, counting the words the children hear and coaching parents.

Providence officials say they hope to start working with families in January. White House officials are watching with interest, said Tom Kalil, a technology adviser to President Barack Obama.

Four other cities that won \$1 million apiece—Houston, Philadelphia, Chicago and Santa Monica, Calif.—also are gearing up their projects.

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As mayor, Bloomberg isn't shy about encouraging others to follow New York's lead on such new initiatives as trying to ban many eateries from selling super-size, sugary drinks. Meanwhile, he's borrowed bicycle-sharing and some other ideas from elsewhere.

Bloomberg's philanthropy, which he has said will be his focus after leaving office, counts promoting government innovation among its priorities.



London Mayor Boris Johnson, left, and New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg pose for photographers with a personalized London Underground sign Johnson presented to Bloomberg after a press conference for the launch of the Mayors Challenge competition, at City Hall in London, Tuesday, Sept. 24, 2013. New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg is offering European cities millions of dollars to be government groundbreakers, tapping his personal fortune to extend his cities-as-civic-laboratories campaign overseas as the end of his own tenure nears. (AP Photo/Matt Dunham)

From right, Florence Mayor Matteo Renzi, New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, London Mayor Boris Johnson,

The organization also supports environmental, education, health and arts projects. It gave away a total of \$370 million last year.

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