

AWARDS TO SHOWCASE INNOVATIVE WORK BY LOCAL AUTHORITIES

The Innovation in Politics Awards initiative offers a great opportunity for local authorities to showcase their work and gain national and international recognition, according to Fidelma Joyce, Irish Representative for Europe's Innovation in Politics Awards. Here she outlines details for nominating political projects, becoming one of 1,000 European jurors or submitting your own project for the 2018 awards scheme.

The Innovation in Politics Awards initiative, recognises innovative work by politicians across Europe in promoting citizen participation, achieving results and strengthening human rights, social balance, democracy and prosperity.

The Innovation in Politics Awards were developed by the Innovation in Politics Institute based in Vienna, Austria. This private and non-partisan organisation is supported by a group of citizens from a broad political spectrum across Europe, whose concern is borne out of the growing lack of trust by citizens in the political process.

Results of a recent Eurobarometer survey indicate that more than half of all Europeans (54%) say that their interests are not taken into account by the political system in their country. In response, the Institute wishes to improve the work of politicians and their engagement with citizens by highlighting and exchanging best practice across borders. This should foster greater co-operation, positive outcomes for our societies, and ultimately a stronger feeling of connectedness in Europe.

The Institute has representatives across 14 countries to promote the Awards – Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK.



Speakers and guests pictured at the Irish launch of the Innovation in Politics Awards 2018 at the Helix in Dublin City University on 10 May. (Pic: Shauneen Armstrong)

It also has a diverse range of partners that support the Awards. Its Irish partner is the School of Law and Government in Dublin City University (DCU). In 2017, most of the projects nominated were carried out by local or regional government. Therefore, the awards scheme is a great opportunity to showcase exceptional work at local level in Ireland.

The most innovative aspect of this initiative is that anyone can apply to be a member of the European Jury of 1,000 citizens that will decide who wins these awards.

And anyone can nominate an innovative project by a politician or group of politicians at local, national or European level from across the political spectrum. Politicians can also submit their own projects. The winners will be announced at an awards ceremony in Vienna on 17 November 2018.

IRISH LAUNCH OF 2018 AWARDS

This year's Innovation in Politics Awards were launched in DCU on 10 May. At the launch, politicians and civil society had the chance to have a conversation on the kind of political innovation that encourages citizen participation and has positive outcomes for our democracy.

Opening the launch Prof Gary Murphy, Head of DCU's School of Law and Government, said: "Public engagement is a cornerstone of Dublin City University's identity and being a partner of The Innovation in Politics Awards reflects our commitment to supporting civic and political leadership both in Ireland and internationally."

Ronny Zuckermann, a co-founder of the Innovation in Politics Awards noted that the Awards support courageous and creative politicians in Europe that engage in a meaningful way with citizens and civil society and so build a greater understanding of and confidence in the political process. "We make every effort to ensure that successful and effective solutions to societal issues are seen by a wider public and across borders, so they may serve as inspiration for others," he added.

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

In 2017, Eamon Gilmore, former Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, was shortlisted as a finalist for his political leadership in progressing the Constitutional Convention and Marriage Equality Referendum.

Mr Gilmore spoke of the uniqueness of citizens and politicians deliberating together and a positive outcome of those discussions was the strong support for a referendum on marriage equality.

He said he was honoured to be nominated for the awards by Dr Grainne Healy, Chairperson of Marriage Equality and Co-Chair of Yes Equality.

The former Labour leader talked warmly of his experience of taking part in the awards ceremony, highlighting it as a great showcase for exceptional projects from across Europe and he encouraged entries for this year's awards.

Another 2017 finalist, Solenn Pleurmeau of the French Association Parliament and Citizens explained that her organisation provided a digital platform that enables politicians and citizens to draft laws together. "Parliament & Citizens is convinced that democracy will find a new dynamic only if politicians have the courage to rely upon collective intelligence to make better decisions. The Innovation in Politics Awards gives recognition to such innovative politicians," she added.

Supporting such collaboration Deputy Frances Fitzgerald, former Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality, also emphasised the value to her of discussions with and inputs from community and voluntary organisations and academic legal experts when drafting the ground-breaking Criminal Justice (Sexual Offences) Act 2017.

The legislation includes a detailed definition of consent, criminalises the purchase of sex and introduces new offences related to the sexual exploitation of children.

Encouraging submissions to the 2018 Awards from local politicians, Cllr Guss O'Connell, last year's Mayor of South Dublin County Council, presented his council's successful

EIGHT AWARD CATEGORIES

Civilisation: Promotes a thriving European civilisation and stimulates progress in the arts, education and science.

Democracy: Increases participation of citizens – in opinion forming and in decision making.

Human Rights: Promotes human rights, women's rights, minority rights and equality

Community: Local and regional political work that promotes civic engagement in community development and enhances mutual respect, cooperation and peaceful coexistence.

Ecology: Takes a responsible approach to reconciling our need for energy, mobility, housing and food with the needs of our environment.

Prosperity: Supports a functioning business environment in Europe, open for new opportunities and secures our prosperity, our independence and our European self-determination.

Jobs: Supports equal job opportunities, coupled with the fair working conditions and distribution of income, essential for a balanced society; creates jobs and material security for all ages.

Quality of Life: Provides adequate social security, easy access to quality health services, housing and a safe and secure living environment.



Participatory Budgeting initiative '300k - Have Your Say', the first in Ireland.

Participatory Budgeting (PB) allows citizens in a local community to directly decide how to spend a portion of a public budget in their area. The initiative was successfully piloted in the Lucan Electoral Area (Adamstown, Lucan and Palmerstown), and the benefits cited were the range of projects identified and the positive experience for people in the communities who participated in this deliberative democracy exercise.

Praising innovation at local level, Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin emphasised that sometimes local government is merely seen as a stepping stone to national politics, but this is wrong, she said. "Local government is vitally important in its own right, and is the cornerstone for many services within society," she noted.

Senator Alice-Mary Higgins explained the uniqueness of the Civil Engagement Group in the Seanad, which brings together six senators from civil society backgrounds. She highlighted the valuable experience and insights which they each bring to deliberations and law-making in the Oireachtas and how they strive to reflect the concerns and priorities of people and groups from across Ireland.



Pictured at the launch of this year's Innovation in Politics Awards were (l-r): Prof Gary Murphy, DCU's Head of the School of Law and Government; Eamon Gilmore, former Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs & Trade; Frances Fitzgerald TD, former Tánaiste and Minister for Justice & Equality; Ronny Zuckermann, co-founder of the Innovation in Politics Awards; Grace McManus, National Youth Council of Ireland; Independent Cllr Guss O'Connell, South Dublin County Council; Dr Grainne Healy, Chairperson of Marriage Equality and Co-Chair of Yes Equality; and Cllr Áine Clancy, Dublin's Deputy Lord Mayor. (Pic: Shauneen Armstrong)

CIVIL SOCIETY INFLUENCE

Providing a civil society perspective, Dr Grainne Healy provided insights into the Yes Equality Campaign. She highlighted the significance of the Constitutional Convention, the importance of building relations with a range of stakeholders and the courage of specific politicians across the political spectrum to be advocates for Marriage Equality early on. Dr Healy warmly acknowledged the significant roles played by Eamon Gilmore and Deputy Frances Fitzgerald.

Dr Healy said: "The job of civil society advocates is not an easy one, but having politicians with a passion for social justice and a wish to engage with us, breathes life and hope into politics."

Speaking about the awards, she said that politicians who use their creativity for the betterment of citizens are inspirational. "Their work and the awards themselves strengthen that which may feel at times fragile, but a most precious phenomenon – democracy."

Grace McManus from the National Youth Council of Ireland said: "Innovation in politics cannot happen without young people. Young people are passionate, enthusiastic and radical—the key ingredients for innovation."

"The stereotypical apathy of young people is a result of the purposeful sidelining of young people. There is a fear of innovation, no doubt, but that is where these awards can and do play an important role. They include young people and they encourage change."

Senator Fintan Warfield spoke of the importance of politicians engaging with people on their terms. At 22, Senator Warfield became the youngest Mayor of a local authority in Ireland, and the first openly LGBT Mayor, in a year that Ireland would say 'Yes' to the referendum for civil marriage equality.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Fidelma Joyce, Irish Representative for the European Innovation in Politics Awards, has over 20 years of experience working in senior management, communications, public affairs and advocacy roles for human rights, social justice, and youth organisations in the public and civil society sectors at local, national and European level.



She has led the communications and public affairs work in human rights and social justice bodies in Ireland and prior to that worked on youth policy and youth work development for the European Youth Forum in Brussels.
For more information email fidelmajoy@gmail.com

"I was questioning whether the political system was truly representative of the community it serves. Many people my own age often saw no point in engaging with the democratic process and only 34% of those registered to vote exercised that right in the Dublin South West By-election in 2014.

"I started a blog that intended to make the Mayor's office more

accessible and afford young people an opportunity to ask questions anonymously, if they lacked the confidence to do so publicly. I called the blog 'Ask The Mayor Stuff'."

Having seen a diversity of interesting projects as an Irish Juror for last year's awards Muireann Montague said she found that the launch itself made the whole experience come full circle.

"It was a very unique and unifying experience to be involved in a cross-party and cross-NGO sector conversation discussing the partialities and the impact of legislation. I volunteered as a juror not knowing what the Irish projects were, thinking that politics in Ireland was stagnant and that we have a lot to learn from our European counterparts.

"However, what I came to realise is that we do have innovation in Ireland and that not only can we learn from other countries but that we also have a lot we can teach."

RECOGNITION FOR LOCAL COUNCILS

The Innovation in Politics Awards offers a great opportunity for local councils in Ireland to showcase their work and gain national and international recognition. In 2017, 589 projects were nominated and the vast majority were submitted by politicians elected at the local, city and regional level.

These were whittled down to 80 finalists, ten in each of the eight award categories. The finalists offered innovative ways to successfully deal with local challenges. These were very diverse in nature, including citizen round tables to solve local problems and participatory budgeting to allocate resources to improve communities.

Collaboration between local councils that led to a better service provision also featured. Initiatives that promoted sustainability such as community gardens and orchards, waste and energy reduction, were also in the frame, as were ways to support refugees to integrate into their new communities and support older and younger people to bond.

'TOWARDS ZERO WASTE' PROJECT

The winner of the Community Award - Tariffa Puntuale - is part of the project Verso Rifiuti Zero (Towards Zero Waste),

Formal criteria for project to be accepted for evaluation by Jury

- It takes place in a Council of Europe (COE) country.
- Key role for politician(s) in making it possible.
- Financed (at least partially) by public funds.
- Has had substantial impact on the lives of at least 1,000 people in the country.
- Must have been launched on or after 1 January 2013.
- Must be in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.



Substantial criteria for evaluation by Jury

The project must break new ground while meeting a challenge in its sphere of influence (municipality, region or country). The innovation need not be a 'world first'. What counts is a new approach in the country or region where the project was realised and skilful adaptation to local culture and needs.

The project must also meet **at least one** of the following three criteria:

Participation: Motivating a diversity of citizens to participate extensively in the project.

Building Trust: Strengthening trust in democratic processes and institutions.

Sustainability: Creating lasting and sustainable improvements in people's lives and producing high output in relation to the financial input.

To participate in the 2018 Awards complete the online forms to:

Nominate / Submit an innovative project: **Closing date is 15 July 2018**

Sign-up to be a juror: **Closing date is 31 July 2018**

The award winners will be announced on **17 November 2018**.



The winners of the first Innovation in Politics Awards pictured the awards gala at Vienna City Hall in December 2017. Out of 589 nominated projects, 80 finalists were selected before the eight winning projects were announced. For details of award winners visit <https://innovationinpolitics.eu/en/awards-2017> (Pic: Sebastian Philipp)

aimed at establishing a system of rewards and penalties for households and businesses in order to minimise the production of non-recyclable waste.

As the first town in Italy to adopt a 'Towards Zero Waste' strategy, Capannori launched a project to align waste tariffs with the systems used for energy and water, linking the cost to the amount of non-recyclable waste.

This method encourages households and businesses to maximise waste separation, thereby increasing recycling which turns waste into value and gives it a second life. The initiative, conducted from 2007 to 2013, was based on a technical design which combined social and technological innovation and encouraged citizens' involvement. It started with a pilot project

on a small part of the territory to test different technologies and concluded with full implementation in 2013.

CITIZEN

PARTICIPATION

The participation of citizens is a core feature of the Innovation in Politics Awards as project nominators or jurors. Any person or group including civil society organisations at local or national level can nominate a project by a politician or group of politicians that

they believe tackled an issue or a problem in an innovative way.

The nomination is a way of drawing the Innovation in Politics Institute's attention to a worthy project. It then contacts the politician(s) and invites her or him to formally submit the project to the Awards process. Politicians can also submit their projects directly.

The Awards are unique. The winners will be decided by a jury of 1,000 European citizens. Anyone over 16 can apply to be a juror. A selected juror will be able to review and score innovative projects from other European countries.

Prof Gary Murphy said: "We want to encourage people in Ireland who are interested in the political process to apply to members of the European jury – no jury member will score projects and politicians from their own country, so being a juror is also a chance to learn first-hand what's happening in other places in Europe and to take inspiration from that back to their own communities."



It's now time to flag this year's Innovation in Politics Awards across 14 countries – Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, The Netherlands and the UK.

TESTIMONY BY IRISH JURORS

Testimonies from Irish jurors who participated in the inaugural Innovation in Politics Awards last year:

"The awards are a very worthwhile experience and innovative in their own rights. Two things that stood out to me were how common some of the issues were across several different countries and how most of the projects were undertaken by local government. I think in Ireland we sometimes look at local government as a stepping stone and we don't realise its impact on our everyday lives." (Muireann)

"The Innovation in Politics Awards is a remarkable opportunity for people to open their eyes to the outstanding work done by many to encourage political change in Europe in a variety of ways. It encourages people to embrace their sense of creativity in a manner which can prove incredibly beneficial on a large scale." (Liam)

"It was fantastic to see a snapshot of work being done that otherwise I would absolutely never have known about! Seeing initiatives working with refugees among many others highlighted how worthwhile projects are making a difference. To become involved is essential and this is part of that process." (Jack)

