Terms of the new OIDP Special Award

“Responsible and Participatory AI Governance” (1st edition).

1. PRESENTATION

The new OIDP Special Award for the **“Responsible and Participatory AI Governance” (1st edition)** is an initiative from the International Observatory on Participatory Democracy (OIDP) to recognize practices in which **the local community - citizens, civil servants, civil society organizations, businesses, and other local actors - is actively involved in defining the conditions, rules, and guardrails under which AI operates locally**. The award has been promoted and coordinated by a pool of organizations that - in the last three years - have been collaborating with OIDP for discussing how to combine participation with innovative digital and AI-driven experimentations: namely,

- the Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra;
- the International Alliance of Inhabitants (IAI);
- Red de Innovación Local (RIL);
- Monithon Europe and
- “EUDEMA.net - Appropriate technological transitions”.

The main goal of this technical Award is **to promote experimentations of democratic, ethical, inclusive, and locally-controlled AI**, honoring initiatives that contribute to creating AI environments that move away from deploying fixed, proprietary models of AI toward architectures that are open, customizable, culturally-sensitive and deeply rooted in local needs and democratic deliberation.

In this perspective, this new Award differs from the “Civic Tech” Special Mention of the OIDP Award. In fact, unlike the OIDP Award for “Best Practice in Citizen Participation”, this Special Award is **not aimed at recognising a participatory practice that makes creative, meaningful and effective use of digital technologies**. Rather, it seeks to **recognise practices that adopt participatory and ethically driven approaches to the development, adaptation, governance and localisation of Artificial Intelligence**. Its focus is on the **creation of enabling environments in which further participatory and deliberative practices can emerge, flourish and become consolidated.** This also entails fostering dialogue with broader awareness-raising processes that encourage a critical and creative engagement with the ambivalences, complexities and open challenges associated with AI-driven digital technologies.

The Special Award also aims to:

- Encourage and value the implementation of successful participatory practices at the local and supra-local levels, highlighting initiatives that foster public participation and engagement in the **governance, regulation, and ethical framing of AI** in public service delivery.
- Map and showcase these practices, bringing them to the attention of other local governments so they can be transferred, and promote networking.

- Serve as a catalyst for long-term change by creating a dynamic repository of good practices in AI localization and participatory AI governance.
- Build a reusable body of evidence, methods and case studies that can support peer learning among OIDP members and leverage the activity of a Working Group on Local AI, Local Democracy and Participation.

2. APPLICATIONS

Who may apply

- Applications may be submitted by **local and supralocal governments** that have been promoting a participatory AI governance practice on a local or supra-local scale.
- Cities and governments that are not yet members of the OIDP and wish to apply must fill out the membership form when submitting their application by **5 January 2027**.
- **Individuals, nonprofit organizations, community groups, educational institutions or cooperatives** may also submit an application based on a practice promoted and implemented in collaboration with local and supra-local governments, exclusively with their written authorization.

Eligibility of practices

- All practices must have been **active and impactful during 2026**. Practices may have been initiated in earlier years but must have remained in effect throughout that year.
- Practices submitted in previous editions of the OIDP Award “Best Practice in Citizen Participation” may be resubmitted for this Special Distinction, if they have been updated with innovations.
- Applications should pertain to any public policy, strategic plan, assembly, council, or practice - whether temporary or permanent - that involves citizen participation in the regulation, governance, or ethical framing of AI in local public service delivery.
- The practice must involve an operational or demonstrably implemented use of AI, machine learning, algorithmic decision support, automated classification/recommendation, generative AI, or related computational systems in a local or regional public-governance context.
- Pilot practices are eligible if they have been tested with real users, real public-sector workflows or real community participation and if sufficient evidence exists to assess their governance and technical design.
- Purely conceptual proposals, procurement plans with no implementation, vendor demonstrations without public-sector ownership, and projects that cannot provide sufficient evidence for assessment are not eligible.
- The candidate practice must comply with applicable law and should describe relevant safeguards concerning data protection, non-discrimination, cybersecurity, accessibility, human oversight and fundamental rights.

Submission requirements

- Applications must be submitted via the **word-format Application Form** annexed to this call and linked on the OIDP website by **February 15, 2027**. Submissions can be in **English, French, Spanish, or Portuguese**.
- The application must include: a description of the process that brought to the creation of the AI-environment, including its participatory dimension. This description must clearly identify the public problem(s) addressed, the role played by AI, the territorial and institutional context, the target groups, the implementation phases, governance responsibilities, results, risks, proofs of a certain level of institutionalization, safeguards and sustainability arrangements.
- Applicants must provide technical and documentary evidence sufficient to substantiate the claims made in the application. Evidence may include architecture diagrams, policies, procurement clauses, system/model cards, algorithm registers, impact or risk assessments, evaluation reports, public consultation records, links to services or demonstrations, repositories and other supporting documents.
- The jury, through the OIDP Technical Secretariat, may eventually request some specific additional information deemed necessary for the jury to better evaluate the process, in case specific points of the description need to be clarified.
- The summary of your practice, along with images and links, will be posted on the "ParticipateOIDP" platform in order to leave a public documentation and spread awareness of the experience. Please ensure that the materials you submit are copyright-free or that you hold the necessary rights.

3. SELECTION CRITERIA

The winning practices must demonstrate **excellence in at least three of the six dimensions** below, being that **the dimension "A" has a central value and will have a weight of "1,5x",** in relation to the other dimensions. Each dimension is scored from **1 to 5** by the jury. **In the Annex,** a dedicated table summarises the main evaluation dimensions and provides guidance to help you build a compelling narrative around your experience, highlighting both its achievements and the challenges encountered along the way.

Dimension A: Means and Strategies for Citizen Involvement in AI Governance

Assesses the depth, breadth, and quality of participatory processes through which local stakeholders - citizens, civil servants, civil society, and other actors - are involved in defining the conditions under which AI operates locally.

The evaluation considers quantitative reach (number of participants, sessions, formats); inclusion of vulnerable and particularly exposed groups; activation of training, peer learning and knowledge-sharing opportunities; the level of institutionalization of the process and its outcomes in formal regulations or organizational rules; and the degree to which non-technical stakeholders participated in technical implementation decisions and local knowledge was integrated into AI design.

Dimension B: Data Sovereignty and Control

Measures the level of control the local community and administration maintain over the full lifecycle of data - from collection, storage, and processing to use for training or inference - ensuring that data remains a local, protected asset and a subject of collective governance.

The evaluation considers the existence of local data governance frameworks and legal instruments; technical measures to prevent data leakage and external dependency; democratic oversight mechanisms over data flows; and the use of federated or collaborative data models where data remains local while learnings are shared across a network.

Dimension C: Algorithmic Autonomy and Control over AI Functioning

Assesses the degree of freedom the municipality and its community have in defining the rules, architecture, and ethical guardrails of the AI, moving away from "black box" proprietary systems toward open, customizable, and context-aware architectures.

The evaluation considers the shift toward open models and local fine-tuning; the implementation of ethical filters and operational guardrails defined by the community; explainability and auditability mechanisms; and democratic safeguards ensuring that AI does not diminish citizen agency or replace the emancipatory value of deliberation. It also values the creation of multidisciplinary teams in charge of shaping the algorithm.

Dimension D: Infrastructure Control and Resilience

Assesses strategies to reduce dependency on global Big Tech providers and to build computational sovereignty, ensuring that the physical and technical foundations of local AI are under local control.

The evaluation considers the level of compute localization (from global cloud to on-premise); shared and cooperative infrastructure models; resilience and continuity plans for AI-dependent services; and procurement strategies that impose binding requirements on vendors and ensure portability in case of termination.

Dimension E: Environmental Impact Mitigation

Assesses specific actions taken to identify, measure, and reduce the environmental footprint of AI deployment in the local context, and to involve the community in these decisions.

The evaluation considers carbon and resource footprint assessments; green AI practices (energy-efficient architectures, renewable energy, optimized compute scheduling); e-waste and circular economy policies; and the integration of AI environmental governance into the municipality's broader climate action plan and ecological transition strategy.

DIMENSION F: Consistency with Principles, in Coordination with Other Levels of Local and Supralocal AI Governance

Assesses the strategy and the actions implemented to translate values and coordinate the AI governance of participatory processes with other levels of local and supralocal AI governance.

The evaluation of this crosscutting dimension considers the measures taken to respect, defend and put into practice the principles of citizen participation, human and environmental rights, data sovereignty, algorithmic transparency and autonomy, and infrastructure resilience in relation to other levels of local and supralocal AI governance. It values the collaboration between different public and private entities (with different sizes, capacities and resources), and approaches based on solidarity and subsidiarity, that can support smaller organizations that – alone – could not have the opportunity to face and comply with all the above mentioned dimensions.

---

4. SELECTION PROCESS

Step 1: Application Submission

Applications must be submitted via the Word Application Form annexed to this call in the OIDP website, by **February 15th, 2027**, and sent via email to oidp@uclg.org and giovanni.allegretti@ces.uc.pt.

Submissions can be in English, French, Spanish, or Portuguese.

An administrative and eligibility check will be performed on applications.

Step 2: First Jury Assessment

A jury of experts (belonging to disciplinary areas like participatory design, AI ethics and data governance, algorithmic autonomy, infrastructure and resilience, environmental sustainability), will assess all applications against the main dimensions listed above, scoring each from 1 to 5. The jury will select **5 finalists**.

Step 3: Assessment of Finalists

This stage is centered around a dedicated **online presentation/showcase session organized by the Jury Committee (scheduled to take place around the end of March 2027)** during which finalists will be invited to present their practices to a panel and to the public. To ensure an informed assessment and encourage broad community engagement, this session will be **livestreamed and recorded as a podcast**.

Step 4: Final Jury Decision

The jury will select the winning practice, taking into account the results of the showcase session.

The jury can eventually award:

- **Special Mentions** in different thematic sub-categories (e.g., Best Citizen Inclusion, Best Data Sovereignty, Best Algorithmic Transparency, Best Environmental Innovation, Best Infrastructure Resilience), ensuring geographic representation across continents.

Jury Composition

This first edition of the OIDP Special Award for “Responsible and Participatory AI Governance” is a joint initiative of the OIDP Technical Secretariat and UCLG with the collaboration of five organizations that in the past have been collaborating with it to propose discussions and reflections on the topic of how to localize AI through innovative, participatory and ethical approaches. They are: the Centre for Social Studies of Coimbra University, the International Alliance of Inhabitants (IAI), Red de Innovación Local (RIL), Monithon Europe and

"EUDEMA.net - Appropriate technological transitions". Together, this pool of five organisations will coordinate the procedures for collecting sound practices and selecting the winner.

In this first pilot year, the Jury will be composed of 11 members: 7 representatives of the promoting organisations and 4 invited experts. Its composition will bring together expertise in local democracy and participation, AI and data governance, public-sector innovation, digital rights and, where possible, municipal implementation.

In future editions, an open call will be launched to identify professionals, experts and practitioners with relevant experience in democracy, citizen participation, AI governance and the Award categories to take part in the jury.

Grounds for exclusion or withdrawal

The jury can decide to exclude one or more applications where information is materially false or misleading, where the applicant lacks the necessary authorizations, or where the practice does not meet the eligibility requirements. The pool of organizations that organize the Award may request clarification where there are credible concerns relating to unlawful discrimination, serious rights violations, unlawful processing of personal data, deceptive claims, or other issues incompatible with the values of OIDP/UCLG. Applicants may withdraw their application before the final decision by written notice. Materials already published may remain archived where technically necessary, subject to applicable law and platform rules.

Publication of Results

The OIDP Technical Secretariat will publish an Award compilation including summaries of the winning practice and the Special Mentions, as well as a full list of all the submitted applications, and will disseminate them widely through the OIDP website, the "ParticipateOIDP" platform, and social media.

5. AWARD CEREMONY AND RECOGNITION

The award ceremony will take place at the **OIDP Conference in Niteroi (Brazil), on May 10th-13th, 2027**.

Recognition for the winner:

- A **trophy** and official **diploma**;
- Enhanced visibility through all OIDP communication channels;
- **Travel and accommodation** will be covered for one representative of the winning government (or organization) to attend the OIDP Conference;
- Invitation to participate in a **roundtable workshop** during the OIDP conference to discuss the relationship between their practice and the broader challenges of AI governance and participatory democracy.

Recognition for finalists and special-mention recipients:

- Official certificate of recognition;
- Inclusion in the OIDP Award compilation and digital repository.

6. SUSTAINABILITY AND LONG-TERM IMPACT

The OIDP Special Award for “Responsible and Participatory AI Governance” has been imagined as a catalyst for long-term change in participatory AI governance, and this call serves also to map different initiatives that can enter in dialogue with one another to explore future synergies, and work together for higher impact. To ensure such a goal, this Special Award is not an isolated recognition to a best practices, but is interconnected with other spaces and moments organized by the promoting organizations in collaboration with the OIDP Technical Secretariat and the City of Niteroi. Such ecosystem of initiatives includes:

- **AI Localization and Participatory Governance Repository:** The creation of a dynamic database of good practices in AI localization, providing a toolkit for other administrations to reference and adapt.
- **Dissemination Materials:** The video of the showcase session will be used as material for public dissemination through OIDP channels and partner networks.
- **Working Group Involvement:** Winners and special-mention recipients will be actively involved in the creation of the OIDP Working Group on **"Local AI, Local Democracy, and Participation,"** contributing to the development of model clauses, templates, and strategic guidance.
- **Training and Peer Learning:** Awarded practices will serve as core case studies for potential training activities and workshops designed to educate other OIDP members.
- **Annual Follow-Up:** Regular surveys and check-ins will assess the continued impact, evolution, and scalability of the recognized practices.

7. ORGANIZATION AND CONTACT

The Award is organized by a pool of promoting organisations, in collaboration with the OIDP Technical Secretariat in collaboration with the Centre for Social Studies of Coimbra University, the International Alliance of Inhabitants (IAI), Red de Innovación Local (RIL), the Association of Municipalities and Regions of Sweden (SALAR/SKR), Monithon Europe and “EUDEMA.net - Appropriate technological transitions”.

For questions regarding eligibility, submission, or the selection process, please contact the OIDP Technical Secretariat via oidp@uclg.org.

Giovanni Allegretti will serve as the main point of contact for this Award: **giovanni.allegretti@ces.uc.pt**