

GDS-FORUM &

IMPACT DAY



MANY MINDS CAN...

GROW  
GROW  
GROW  
GROW  
GROW

ENGAGE TO  
CHANGE

?

GET  
HEARD

DO MORE

REDUCE

MOVE THE WORLD

DO LESS

# Innovation Award 2026

Check the criteria below and submit your application via [this online Form](#)



#visit  
SZCZECIN!

▶ BETTER TOGETHER ◀

# Introduction

The **GDS-Movement Innovation Award** recognises and showcases a single destination using innovative solutions to drive sustainability performance.

Applications are evaluated by a panel of five experienced event professionals and sustainability leaders.

The winner will be announced during the **GDS-Awards Ceremony**, happening on **17 June** during the **2026 GDS-Forum and Impact Day** in Szczecin, Poland.

**02 March 2026**

Impact, Innovation and  
Changemaker Award  
Applications Open

**17 April 2026**

Impact, Innovation and  
Changemaker Award  
Applications Close

**17 June 2026**

GDS-Awards Ceremony

# Eligibility

Any destination that is part of the 2026 GDS-Index and has developed an **innovative programme or initiative promoting sustainability and regeneration** is encouraged to apply.

## The initiative or programme must:

- already be implemented before submitting the application;
- promote sustainability and regeneration in a clear and credible way;
- be appealing to global stakeholders and impact positively outside the MICE industry;
- include a defined storytelling strategy;
- set a replicable standard for other destinations;
- have measured results and a year-on-year growth projection.

# Why Apply

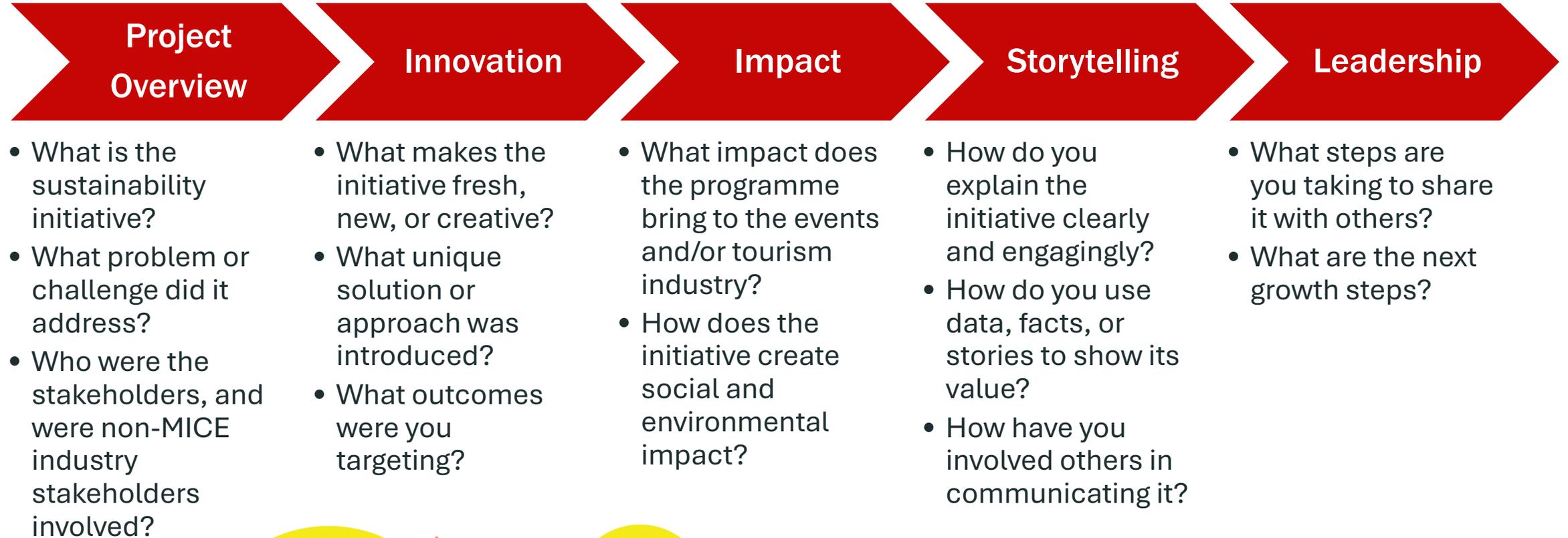
In addition to visibility among global DMOs, associations, policymakers, and sustainability leaders, and positioning as a frontrunner in regenerative destination transformation, the winner will:

- **enjoy on-stage exposure** at the 2026 GDS-Awards Ceremony in Szczecin;
- **be featured** on the GDS-Movement website and LinkedIn Channel;
- **receive coverage** in a dedicated press release;
- **present the initiative** at the GDS-Movement "Feeling the Pulse" webinar in 2026.



# Award Application

Please prepare a **presentation of maximum 8 slides** about your innovative sustainability initiative covering the following areas:



# Judging Process and Criteria

The applications will be shortlisted by an internal panel and, to determine a winner, the finalists will be independently evaluated by an external panel of judges.

**The applications will be judged based on four criteria with defined scoring weight:**

**1. Innovation and Design (weight: 30%)**

Presentation of the initiative's innovative concept and the design of the solution, showing how it introduces a new or creative approach with defined targets.

**2. Outcomes and Impact (weight: 20%)**

Definition of outcomes supported by evidence of measurable impact, including benefits for stakeholders within and beyond the MICE industry.

**3. Storytelling and Engagement (weight: 20%)**

Engagement and communications efforts, illustrating purpose, actions, and results using data, facts, and examples of stakeholder involvement.

**4. Leadership and Forward-Thinking (weight: 30%)**

Demonstration of sector leadership, replicable practices, knowledge sharing, and next steps for future growth or scaling.

# Submission Rules

- Maximum of 8 slides;
- English language only;
- videos are allowed only if embedded or linked, not attached separately;
- links must be accessible;
- no confidential information unless authorised;

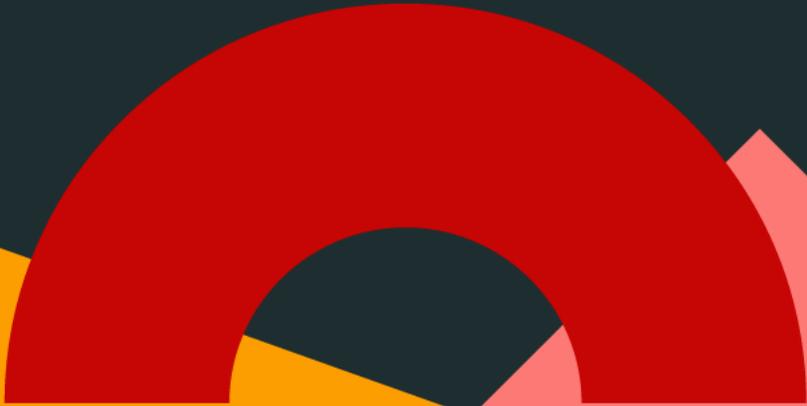
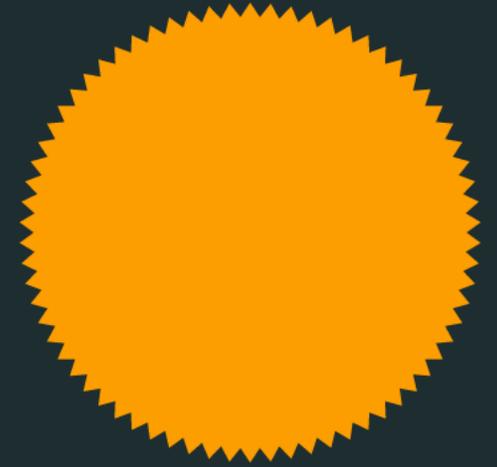
Only complete submissions submitted via the dedicated [online Form](#) will be evaluated. Late submissions will not be considered.

**Deadline: 17 April 2026**

For any questions, email Giulia Barbero at [giulia@gds.earth](mailto:giulia@gds.earth)

# Innovation Award Past Winners

The Hall of Fame



# Past Innovation Award Winners

## 2024

The CopenPay initiative by Wonderful Copenhagen is the 2024 Innovation Award winner. Visitors earn rewards, such as free guided tours, complimentary kayak rentals, and vegetarian meals on the house for climate-positive actions like choosing more sustainable transport or participating in site clean-up activities. CopenPay effectively promotes behavioural change and encourages more meaningful travel experiences.



Rikke Holm Petersen, Director of Communication, Marketing & Behavior, Wonderful Copenhagen receiving the 2024 GDS-Index Innovation Award from Gemmeke De Jongh, Senior Manager of Education and Impact, ICCA, and Guy Bigwood, CEO and Chief Changemaker of the GDS-Movement.

## 2023

The 2023 Innovation Award winner was Destination DC for its pioneering project “Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Business Fellowship”. The programme is a purposeful effort to support small businesses in the local travel and tourism industry owned by people of colour, LGBTQ+ people, women, disabled people and their allies.



Shelby Luzzi, Sustainability Manager from Destination DC receiving the 2023 GDS-Index Innovation Award from Petra Stuček, President of CityDNA, and Guy Bigwood, CEO and Chief Changemaker of the GDS-Movement

# Past Innovation Award Winners

## 2022

The 2022 Innovation Award winner was Visit Belfast for its pioneering project “Changing the Menu. For Good”. The aim of the project is to raise awareness, funds, and supplies for those experiencing growing food poverty in the city.

This initiative is part of the City’s long-term commitment to delivering more sustainable events and leaving a positive legacy through the power of those events.



Jac Callan, Sustainability Manager from Visit Belfast receiving the 2022 GDS-Index Innovation Award from Marta Gomes, President of ICCA, and Guy Bigwood, CEO and Chief Changemaker of the GDS-Movement.

## 2021

The 2021 Innovation Award winner was Wonderful Copenhagen, for Copenhagen Legacy Lab (CLL), an innovative, systematic, and strategic initiative out of Copenhagen, designed to help international associations achieve long-term, positive, and sustainable impacts from their global events. It was developed for the benefit, transformation, and flourishing of the association, its communities, the host destination, and its society at large.



Kit Lykketoft, Conventions Manager from Wonderful Copenhagen receiving the 2021 GDS-Index Innovation Award from James Rees, President of ICCA, and Guy Bigwood, CEO and Chief Changemaker of the GDS-Movement.

# Past Innovation Award Winners

## 2019

The panel selected Business Events Sydney (BESidney) as winner of the GDS-Index Innovation Award 2019 for its outstanding “Sustainable Destination Partnership”. Sydney’s multi-stakeholder collaboration first enabled in the environmental foot-printing of the Sydney hospitality sector, then the co-creation of a pioneering strategy to achieve a 70% reduction in carbon emissions and divert 90% of the sector’s waste from landfills by 2030.



Richard Yore from Business Events Sydney receiving the 2019 GDS-Index Innovation Award from James Rees, President of ICCA, and Guy Bigwood, CEO and Chief Changemaker of the GDS-Movement

## 2018

The judging panel chose Copenhagen as the 2018 Innovation Award winner. Wonderful Copenhagen released a bold, long-term strategy, “Tourism for Good”. This strategy’s ambition is to “make tourism part of the solutions for a sustainable future, not a part of the problem. Tourism is not a goal in itself, it is a means to a sustainable end”. The jury was also impressed by the runner-up projects presented by Helsinki and Sydney.



From Left: Mélanie Delaplanche – MCI Group Sustainability Services Director, Kit Lykketof – Director of the Wonderful Copenhagen Convention Bureau, and James Rees – President of ICCA.

# Past Innovation Award Winners

## 2017

In 2017, the panel elected Gothenburg the Innovation Award winner. The city was recognised for its pioneering app, “Got Event”, that facilitates greater accessibility for events. It’s the first of its kind to address accessibility at events and venues. This enhances the events experience for those living with accessibility challenges.

Zurich and Rotterdam’s inspiring initiatives earned them positions as finalists.



From Left: Nina Freysen-Pretorius – President of ICCA, Annika Hallman – Director of the Gothenburg Convention Bureau, Aileen Crawford - Head of Conventions at Glasgow Convention Bureau, and Martin Sirk - CEO of ICCA at ICCA Congress 2017.

## 2016

Helsinki was recognised in 2016 as the GDS-Movement Innovation Award winner. Helsinki received the award for its “Greening Events Project”, a creative, joint venture between the neighbouring cities of Helsinki, Espoo, and Vantaa. It aimed to develop substantial ways to implement environmental management at events in the capital area in Finland. Close runners-up were Stuttgart, Kyoto, and Gothenburg, who deserve honourable mentions for their innovative submissions.



Ines Antti-Poika, Convention & Events Bureau, Visit Helsinki, receives the 2016 Innovation Award for the “Greening Events Project”.

GDS-FORUM & IMPACT DAY



THANK YOU!

We look forward to receiving your applications.

