Open Call for agile Smart City pilots

Instructions for participants

What is the purpose of the call?

This call is an integral part of the international project PilotInnCities (Pilot-based Innovation Ecosystems for Smart Cities) implemented within the Interreg Danube Region Programme and co-funded by the European Union. The open competition aims to identify new Smart City solutions with a high potential and facilitate their market entry and expansion, using the agile piloting method. Unlike traditional funding approaches, this initiative involves procuring piloting services from the winning solution providers at the end of the competition (i.e., without providing a grant or subsidy). The ultimate purpose of this effort is to test agile piloting in the specific conditions of the Danube Region and pave the way for its long-term, program-based adoption to foster and accelerate the uptake and upscaling of urban innovation.

What is agile piloting?

Agile piloting is a model for rapid (short-term of maximum 6 months) and efficient experimentation of new solutions in real-world "living lab" environments, originally pioneered by Forum Virium Helsinki. This approach bridges the gap between private-sector innovators and public-sector adopters, fostering collaboration and co-creation in urban innovation. Partners from the PilotInnCities consortium will procure piloting services to advance public good—in the first place benefiting selected municipalities (or other local public entities) and their citizens, and then contributing to society at large by sharing data, insights and best practices.

What do we mean under Smart City?

Our perception of Smart Cities is strongly holistic. We are on the lookout for technologies and also non-technological solutions that can be implemented in urban environments with the effect of: improving the quality of living, increasing the efficiency of decision-making processes and public service provision, leveraging the potential of modern technologies, enhancing environmental sustainability, ensuring social inclusion and citizen participation, building resilient communities, improving mobility etc.

Who is the organizer?

Project partners of the PilotInnCities consortium are responsible for organizing competitions in their respective countries. The call in Germany is managed by Zentrum für Digitale Entwicklung GmbH. The main contact person for participants' inquiries is Johannes Röder, j.roeder@digitaleentwicklung.de, +49 (0)7363 9604-39.

Who can take part?

The primary target group for the call includes start-ups and SMEs offering innovative Smart City solutions with a suitable readiness level for pilot implementation. To maintain agility and ensure that our innovation funding aligns with EU policy objectives and reaches those in

genuine need, we are limiting eligibility to enterprises with fewer than 250 employees and an annual turnover below €50 million. While the call imposes no formal restrictions on applicants in the initial phase, contracting requires a business entity capable of further developing its piloted solution in and beyond the project, issuing invoices, and subcontracting. Non-business stakeholders, such as municipalities or researchers, are encouraged to collaborate with business entities to enhance the FEASIBILITY score of their application.

What types of solutions are admissible?

The competition is open for a wide array of potential urban innovations. In default, the call operates with six major domains corresponding with internationally acknowledged Smart City models: 1. Digital services, data and communication, 2. Energy efficiency, 3. Shared and green mobility, 4. Circular economy, 5. Blue-green infrastructure, 6. Health and wellbeing. However, this categorization is not exhaustive. It is the novel added value, positive impact and upscaling potential that make a solution admissible for this competition.

What can I win?

The PilotInnCities project will finance the pilot implementation of 4 to 8 top proposals in Germany, covering eligible costs as outlined in the submitted budget proposals. The number of pilots funded will depend on the bid amounts in relation to the total budget available. Each agile pilot will run for 3 to 6 months and can receive up to EUR 10.000 (including VAT) in funding through a contract for piloting services. As part of this contractual relationship, the PilotInnCities consortium will provide piloting teams with international visibility and mentorship. **Disclaimer:** the agile pilot does not give the solution provider any guarantee of a long-term contract or a consequent partnership, or any other advantage beyond the scope of the agile pilot.

What costs are eligible?

Pre-approved categories include: 1. staff costs, 2. equipment purchase and rental, 3. operation and maintenance, 4. external expertise and justifiable costs incurred by local stakeholders, 5. travel costs, 6. co-creation meetings and activities, 7. publicity. The list is non-exhaustive. Applicants may propose other costs, but these will be subject to approval by the jury and the call organizers. Services for the evaluation of the pilots during the project term are awarded separately. These do not have to be included in the pilot. As a general rule, all of the costs intended to be reimbursed by the applicant must be covered by the submitted cost categories; no further claims against the organiser and participating local authorities are possible.

How can I apply?

Participants must complete and submit an online application form available at this link: www.digitaleentwicklung.de/open-call-en. The short form asks for basic information about the applicant and a structured description of the proposed solution. Along with the form, participants are asked to submit a 1-minute 'elevator pitch' video in which they briefly introduce themselves and their project (we recommend a playful and informal style for the video). The full official instructions for the Open Call can also be found on the ZDE website. All questions received from participants and the corresponding answers will be published on an

ongoing basis under the same link. **Disclaimer:** Only one application per company (company identification number) is allowed for the Open Call PilotInnCities 2025, regardless of the country of submission. In the event of multiple applications, the organisers will exclude all applications from the company concerned. Participation in the competition does not entitle the applicant to any consideration. The organisers accept no liability for the proper functioning of the servers, forms and online services. The applicant bears the costs of the application.

What are the key deadlines and overall timeline?
The competition will open on 24 February 2025. The closing date for applications is 7 April 2025, 23:59 CET. Late applications will not be considered unless the deadline is officially extended. The evaluation of applications will take place in two rounds in April 2025. The most successful applicants from the first round will advance to the second round, where they will meet the jury in a video call, give a 5 to 10-minute presentation and answer the jurors' questions. These pitches should provide additional reasons for applying and emphasise the added value of the proposed projects. This is expected to take place in calendar weeks 18 and 19. The final selection of winners will be announced shortly thereafter. After submitting the application, participants should be ready to answer any questions.

How does evaluation work?
The applications will be assessed by an independent jury of experts exclusively on the basis of the following criteria: INNOVATION(15 %), IMPACT (25 %), FEASIBILITY (25 %), SCALABILITY (20 %) and BUDGET (15 %). The total score is the sum of the points awarded for each criterion. The weighting of the individual criteria is indicated in brackets. The application form is organised according to these criteria and contains guiding questions to help applicants provide thorough and complete answers. The second round will focus on validating the added value and integrity of the proposals and clarifying specific details based on the jury's enquiries. The jury will select 4 to 8 winning projects. The remaining finalists from the second round will be placed on a reserve list in case a winning bidder withdraws or does not fulfil the terms of the contract. **Disclaimer:** If a proposal receives less than 40% of the points in a single criterion, the jury reserves the right to disqualify the proposal regardless of its overall score. The jury will not meet in public. The submitted applications will not be published.

What happens if I win?
The winners will be invited to individual meetings with the management team of the PilotInnCities project to discuss and jointly clarify key aspects of the future agile pilot project. The results of this meeting will be incorporated into the subsequent contract award procedure. The organisers, in the case of Germany the ZDE, will sign a contract with the solution provider in which the KPIs of the agile pilot, the services to be provided, the obligations of each party and the payment terms are defined. There is no contractual relationship for the applicant with the local authority in which the pilot is implemented. A workshop will be organised with all successful applicants at the start of implementation to discuss implementation details and refinements to the submitted concepts. The results of the successful applications and pilot projects will be published and actively disseminated by the

organiser and the PilotInnCities project consortium and, where appropriate, the European Union bodies responsible for the INTERREG funding programme.

What obligations will I have during implementation?
The solution providers are responsible for the overall operation of the pilot project, which is carried out in their name and under their liability. Therefore, insurance for possible damages caused to third parties is mandatory. In order to comply with the principle of co-creation, solution providers must co-organise and actively participate in three intermediate meetings with local stakeholders: Kick-off, Mid-term and Wrap-up. At the end of the agile pilot project, the solution provider must submit an overall report (approx. 10 A4 pages) containing the most important findings, the validation of the business model applied and the evaluation by the stakeholders involved. In addition, the solution providers are obliged to participate in the promotional and marketing activities organised by the organisers that are directly related to their agile pilot project. Solution providers must sign a self-declaration confirming conformity with these criteria upon participation in the competition.

What is the expected timeline of implementation?
The organisers of the tender will announce the winners by the beginning of May 2025 at the latest. The first meetings for mutual clarification and finalisation of the specifications for the agile pilot projects will take place in May and June. This time will also be used to prepare and sign contracts. The pilot projects are expected to start in June or July 2025, with a maximum implementation period of 6 months. Interim meetings with local stakeholders will be planned individually depending on the specific needs and progress of each pilot project. All pilot projects must be completed by the end of December 2025, including final report and invoicing. A postponement to the beginning of 2026 is only possible in exceptional cases and with the prior written consent of the organisers. Please note that the timeline is indicative only and may change due to unforeseen circumstances that may arise during the project.

How will I receive funding?
All instalment payments are made on the basis of an invoice issued by the solution provider. The number and frequency of payments are agreed individually when the contract is concluded, depending on the project milestones. In principle, the amount is to be divided into three instalments. The first instalment of 40 % is to be paid at the beginning, a further 40 % during and 20 % after successful completion of the implementation. In the event of demonstrable deficiencies in implementation, the organisers reserve the right to reduce the funding amount proportionately.

What data policy applies?
As agile piloting is an inclusive peer-to-peer learning process, all pilots follow a strict application of Open Data principles. If relevant to the piloted solution, the organiser may request GitHub or open API access to enable the measurement and presentation of data via the PilotInnCities project partners' IoT platform.