



Agile Piloting

A Complete Guide for Public Authorities

Part II

Agile Piloting Methodology

A ten-step operational guide for execution teams on designing and implementing an Agile Piloting programme from an open call to final evaluation





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WELCOME ON BOARD



Dear colleagues in public authorities responsible for implementing innovation,

This document serves as a ten-step operational guide for execution teams responsible for designing and running Agile Piloting programmes. It is grounded in documented implementation experience across six national contexts—Czech Republic, Germany, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Serbia—accumulated through the PilotInnCities project, co-funded by the Interreg Danube Region Programme, and validated through more than twenty pilots implemented between 2024 and 2026.

Agile Piloting is a structured mechanism through which public authorities, or other stakeholders with public interest in mind, commission short-cycle, real-world tests of innovative solutions—developed by startups or SMEs—in live municipal or institutional environments. Operating under service-procurement contracts with fixed budgets and pre-agreed performance indicators, it generates practical evidence on a solution's viability and scalability at a stage where full procurement would be premature (for the municipality or the startup). The result is reduced risk for the public sector, real-world validation for the solution provider, and a structured pathway from experimentation to adoption.

This document was written for practitioners, by practitioners. It reflects the accumulated experience of teams who designed open calls, composed juries, navigated procurement, managed municipal relationships and supported piloting teams through implementation—and who recorded what worked, what failed and what they would do differently.

The guidance it contains is not theoretical. Every recommendation has been stress-tested against real institutional conditions, real budget constraints and real administrative friction.

While we have aimed to identify and design principles that are broadly applicable, every context comes with its own constraints, opportunities and turbulence. We therefore encourage you to adopt a flexible and agile mindset and to trust your professional judgement. This methodology is intended as a living document: your experience, actions and lessons learned may help shape its future iterations.

The methodology in your hands is powerful—yet only a tool. The decision to use it, and the outcomes it produces, depend on your determination, consistent work and openness to learning by doing.

WHAT THIS DOCUMENT COVERS

The ten steps in this document cover different stages of a standard Agile Piloting cycle which generally address the three phases of implementation:

Phase 1: Preparation (STEPS 1–2)

- 1 Setting the open call framework—language, timeline and milestones
- 2 Determining the type and thematic direction of the call

Phase 2: Open call and selection (STEPS 3–6)

- 3 Defining participant eligibility
- 4 Navigating the public procurement logic that governs the programme
- 5 Selecting the best applications through a structured jury-based evaluation
- 6 Establishing the financial and contractual framework

Phase 3: Implementation (STEPS 7–9)

- 7 Connecting solution providers with piloting locations
- 8 Facilitating the implementation period from kick-off through to delivery
- 9 Evaluating results against pre-agreed KPI

Additionally

- 10 STEP 10 discusses communication management as a cross-cutting function affecting all phases



SAFETY INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE FLIGHT – AUTHOR’S NOTE



The greatest strength of Agile Piloting is its versatility. A programme can be organised by a public agency, a private intermediary, a university, a development agency or a multi-institutional consortium. It can address nationally defined innovation priorities or highly specific local challenges. It can operate across an entire country or within a single district. Solutions can be tested in public squares, schools, healthcare facilities, transport networks or housing estates. **That same versatility is, however, the principal limiting factor of any written methodology.**

How to navigate this document

1. Assumed institutional constellation

The working constellation assumed throughout this document is the following: a public agency—operating at a national or regional level, funded by and accountable to a ministry with a mandate in innovation, economic affairs and/or regional development, or to regional government—is tasked with managing the implementation of a nationwide or region-wide Agile Piloting programme. It constitutes a dedicated internal execution team, designs and launches a public transparent open call aimed at attracting innovators, and contracts selected applicants to test their solutions in municipal environments.

2. Short note on the STEPs adopted

The steps presented in this methodology do not follow a strictly linear sequence. Several run in

Addressing every possible constellation in adequate depth would produce a document that tries to speak to everyone and ends up giving clear guidance to no one. This document therefore does not make a claim for completion, it rather assumes a typical use case. The assumed working constellation described below makes the document’s underlying assumptions transparent, allowing the reader to identify where the guidance applies directly and where contextual adaptation is required before proceeding.

parallel, some feed directly into others before either is complete, and a small number of activities in early steps might need to be revisited as later steps introduce new information or constraints. The implementation in itself is an agile process; therefore, it is not recommended to follow strict and rigid structures.

The content throughout is written from the perspective of the execution team—the practitioners responsible for designing and running the programme—rather than from a policy or academic vantage point. Recommendations are intended to be directly actionable, grounded in documented implementation experience of the PilotInnCities project, and specific enough to inform real decisions without prescribing outcomes that only the team, with knowledge of its own context, can determine.

SAFETY INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE FLIGHT – AUTHOR’S NOTE

! Proceed with caution

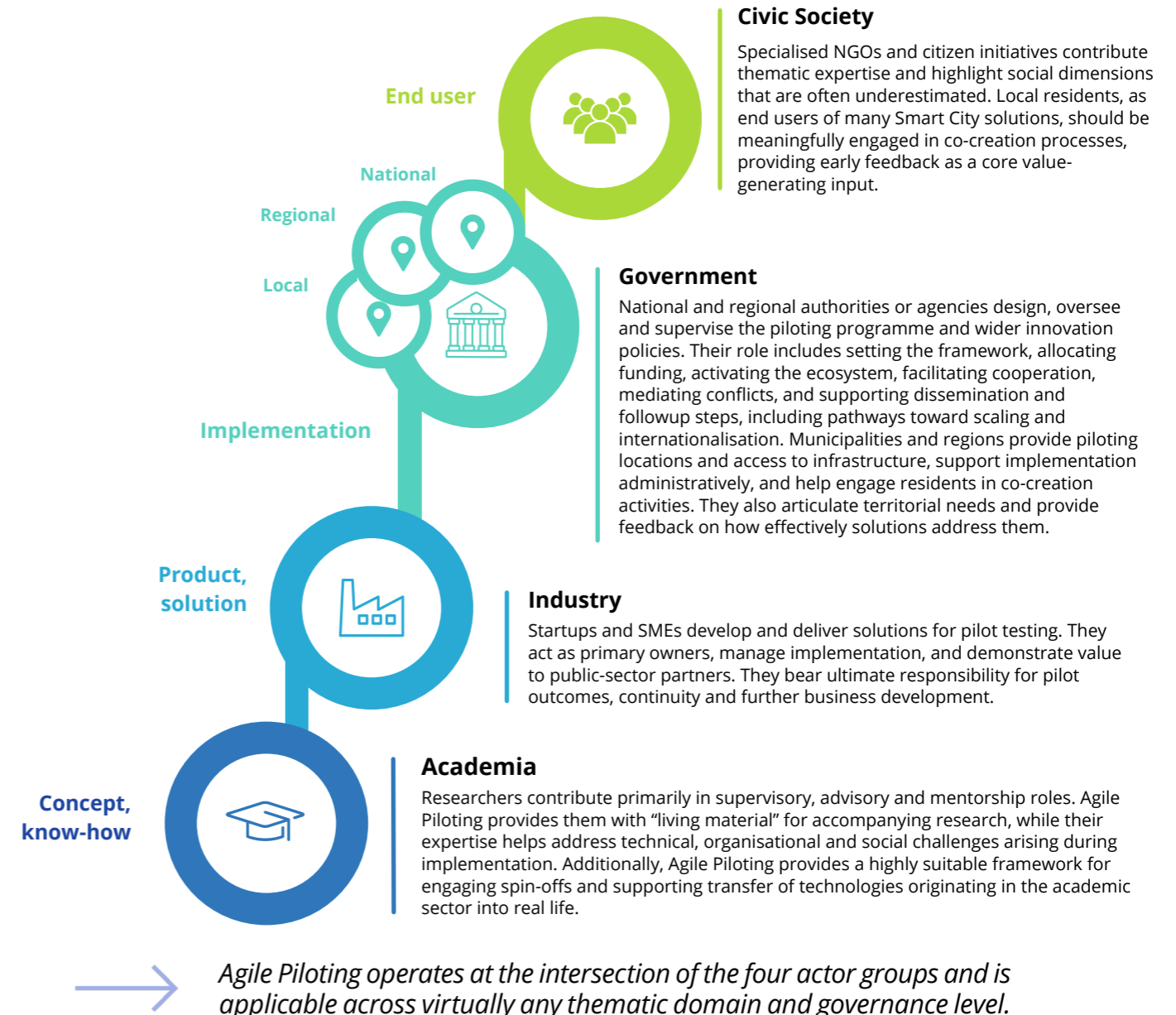
This document provides methodological guidance, not legal advice. Recommendations relating to contracting, procurement and compliance reflect practical experience and should be verified against applicable national legislation and the institution’s own legal framework before implementation.

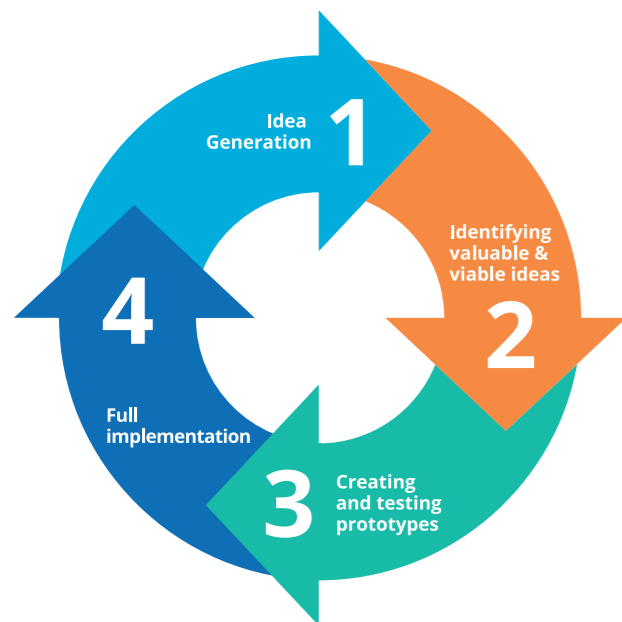
Key concepts

1. Quadruple helix model

The quadruple helix is a framework for categorising stakeholders operating within innovation ecosystems that ensures different perspectives are

represented at key moments in the implementation. It organises actors into four groups—government, industry, academia and civil society—each bringing a distinct mandate, set of resources and point of view to the innovation process.





2. Innovation cycle

The innovation cycle describes the progression of a solution from initial concept through development, testing, market entry and eventual scaling. Each stage carries different risks, requires different resources and involves different actors—and the transitions between stages are where solutions most commonly stall or fail to progress.

Agile Piloting operates as a **catalyst** at a specific and critical point in this cycle: the gap between a solution that has been developed to a functional prototype stage and one that is ready for full public procurement or market deployment.

Key prerequisites for takeoff

This methodology is designed to be implemented in conjunction with the *Action Plan for Adoption of Agile Piloting*, which establishes the necessary conditions at the decision-making level for successful programme delivery.

In practice, this requires secured political and managerial support, as well as thorough administrative preparation to ensure that financial, legal and organisational conditions are in place before implementation begins. **Without these prerequisites, even well-designed programmes are likely to encounter delays, procedural barriers or implementation failure.**

The Action Plan defines five preparatory steps that must be completed prior to launching the operational phase described in this methodology.

Before initiating implementation, execution teams should verify each of these conditions. These steps establish the foundation on which the stability of a piloting programme depends. Equally critical is the presence of a “captain” —a high-level representative with the authority to steer the programme and intervene when key decisions or obstacles require escalation. In most cases, this role is also essential for ensuring that the prerequisites are put in place in the first instance.

STEP 1 | DEFINING A STRATEGIC GOAL

STEP 2 | IDENTIFYING A CLEAR STANDING WITHIN THE ECOSYSTEM

STEP 3 | BUILDING AN ELITE EXECUTION TEAM

STEP 4 | ALLOCATING FINANCIAL RESOURCES

STEP 5 | PAVING THE ADMINISTRATIVE WAY



STEP 1: SETTING THE OPEN CALL FRAMEWORK

The open call functions as the undercarriage of the entire process. It is what makes the programme visible and the quality of its design determines the quality of everything that follows. An effective open call ensures transparency and equal access, mobilises the strongest available innovation potential within the target territory, and creates the dissemination infrastructure through which successful pilots reach audiences beyond the immediate programme. Poorly designed, it filters out the wrong participants, generates confusion

Language

Local language is the natural choice for Agile Piloting communication. Across the Danube Region, for example, limited foreign-language proficiency at the municipal and local level is a practical reality that directly shapes who participates. An English-only call will routinely filter out potential piloting locations, user groups and evaluators before content is even considered. Local-language calls also reinforce the core logic of Agile Piloting: local challenges addressed by local innovators, with minimal logistical friction and stronger roots in the local ecosystem.

English serves a different and more specific purpose: attracting internationally competitive applicants, increasing the quality ceiling of submissions, and building territorial excellence in a given domain. But it risks excluding potential piloting locations, user groups and qualified evaluators often regardless of content quality—enhancing existing disparities rather than resolving them.

that compounds throughout evaluation, and undermines the credibility of the selection process before a single application has been received.

This chapter covers the two parameters that shape the call framework before any other design decisions are made—language and timeline—and establishes the detailed milestones that structure the preparation, selection and implementation phases from first announcement through to final reporting.

English may be justified particularly in two specific cases:

1. where the organiser can offer a comprehensive ecosystem of business development services to support international applicants over the long term, or
2. where the strategic objective is explicitly to work with more mature and experienced innovators, focusing on scaling, replication or international exchange rather than early-stage experimentation.

! Dual- or multi-language calls should be avoided.

The administrative and facilitation burden they introduce is disproportionate to the inclusivity gained, and directly compromises the agility of the process.

STEP 1: SETTING THE OPEN CALL FRAMEWORK

Timeline

The timeline of an Agile Piloting run must be built with adaptation in mind from the outset—not treated as a fixed schedule that is reluctantly adjusted when reality intervenes. Establishing a baseline schedule provides the discipline and momentum that the process requires. But fixed and institutionally enforced deadlines, reporting cycles or rigid financial arrangements can easily undermine agility if applied mechanically. In an ideal setting, the programme allows room for adjustment without signalling that flexibility is the default expectation—otherwise the urgency that keeps everything on track is lost.

The following factors predictably affect the timeline of any piloting run and should be actively planned for at the outset rather than treated as exceptional circumstances when they arise:

- **Seasonal constraints:**

are the pilots dependent on outdoor environments, school calendars, heating and cooling cycles, availability of sunlight etc...?

ASSOCIATED ANNEXES

- APPLICATION FORM
- INSTRUCTIONS FOR OPEN CALL PARTICIPANTS
- LIVE Q&A DOCUMENT

- **Availability of key individuals for decision-making processes:**

could the implementation be delayed due to holidays, institutional commitments, long internal approval chains and other administrative cycles...?

- **Volume and length of applications:**

a high volume of applications stretches evaluation capacity and extends the selection phase. Jury availability, briefing time and deliberation requirements must be factored into the post-submission schedule.

- **Internal contracting regulations:**

for public institutions encountering the service-procurement logic of Agile Piloting for the first time, the contracting phase requires institutional adaptation and alignment with internal approval procedures. This is the single phase most commonly underestimated in first-run timelines.

- **Degree of facilitation involvement during implementation:**

pilots will possibly require intensive facilitation support that consumes more time from the facilitation team than initially projected. Does the implementation team have the capacity to intervene in a timely manner?

- 1 SETTING THE OPEN CALL FRAMEWORK
- 2 DEFINING APPROACH AND THEMATIC FOCUS
- 3 DETERMINING ELIGIBLE PARTICIPANTS
- 4 NAVIGATING PUBLIC PROCUREMENT
- 5 SELECTING THE BEST APPLICATIONS
- 6 COMMISSIONING OF PILOTS
- 7 CONNECTING THE SUPPLY AND THE DEMAND
- 8 FACILITATING IMPLEMENTATION
- 9 EVALUATING RESULTS
- 10 MANAGING COMMUNICATION

PREPARATION PHASE

T - 2 months 1 2 7

Specification of thematic focus and identification of challenges (if relevant)
Clear definition of focus areas or challenge topics, either based on industry-focus or a specific existing demand.

T - 1 month 2 3 4 10

First announcement
Initial communication with a “save-the-date” effect, primarily targeting key network organisations (innovation centres, start-up hubs, chambers of commerce etc.) in order to leverage their outreach capacities.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

T + 5 months 8 10

Launch of implementation
Official start of pilot implementation, followed by kick-off meetings with local stakeholders. The expected implementation period is approximately six months. From this point onward, programme organisers operate in continuous facilitation mode: conducting regular status checks (e.g. brief progress calls), monitoring delivery and intervening where necessary to address emerging issues.

T + 18 weeks 6 7 9

Contract signing
Formal conclusion of contracts with selected pilots, following clarifications and fine-tuning of proposals.

T + 12 weeks 5

Pitch-deck session
Live presentations by shortlisted applicants in front of the jury.

T + 10 weeks 5 10

Shortlisting
Selection of the strongest applications, adjusted to the total number and quality of submissions. A maximum 12 shortlisted projects are generally recommended.

T + 7 weeks 5

Jury briefing
Instructional meeting with all jurors, clarifying evaluation criteria, processes and roles.

T + 6 weeks 4 5

Submission deadline
Definitive closure of the application window.

T + 4 weeks 4 5

Jury nomination and confirmation
Formal agreement with selected experts regarding their participation in the evaluation jury.

T + 2 weeks 4 5 10

Information session(s)
One or more carefully structured webinars, including a guiding presentation and moderated Q&A session.

T + 12 to 15 months 8 9 10

Evaluation
Quantitative and qualitative evaluation of pilot implementation. An additional extension window of up to three months may be considered if justified.

T + 8 months 8 9

Interim meetings
Mid-term review of implementation progress, serving as a structured checkpoint. Progress against agreed objectives and KPIs is assessed, and adjustments to pilot goals, KPIs or implementation approaches are introduced based on lessons learned during execution.

T + 16 weeks 5 6 7 9

Pre-contracting dialogue
Individual consultations with selected teams to clarify and finalise the parameters of each pilot prior to contracting. This includes defining KPIs, setting milestones and payment calendar, confirming the implementation timeline, securing commitment from piloting locations and resolving key practical and administrative aspects (e.g. insurance, contact persons, responsibilities).

T + 14 weeks 5 10

Selection of winners
Final decision and announcement of winners, based on iterative deliberation within the jury.

PILOT SELECTION PHASE: OPEN CALL

T - Official launch of the open call 4

Publication of all application documents, opening of the application system, and a strong, visible communication moment.

figure: An indicative timeline mapping key milestones across the three phases of an Agile Piloting run. The open call launch marks T=0. Each milestone card indicates the corresponding methodology STEP(s) by number.

STEP 2: DEFINING APPROACH AND THEMATIC FOCUS

Every piloting programme begins with a positioning question that shapes all subsequent design choices: whether to define the challenge first and invite solutions to meet it, or to open the field to innovation and let the most compelling proposals specify the destination. In Agile Piloting terms, the former represents a demand-driven approach whereas the latter is a supply-driven approach.

Demand-driven approach

The demand-driven approach begins with one or more public authorities defining the challenges to be addressed before any solution providers are invited to respond. Rather than trusting the market to identify what cities need, it places that judgement with the institutions closest to those needs—municipalities, sectoral agencies or community organisations—and builds the open call around their articulated priorities. This reflects a conviction that the most effective innovations are those developed in direct response to a real and locally owned problem.

This approach is particularly suited to organisers with strong territorial mandates and established relationships with municipal stakeholders. Where it is well prepared, it generates high levels of local commitment and ownership, creates clear implementation conditions for solution providers, and tends to produce outcomes with immediate practical relevance to the piloting location. It positions Agile Piloting not primarily as a competitiveness instrument, but as a cohesion and service improvement mechanism—one that

This choice has cascading implications for every subsequent step—from participant eligibility to evaluation criteria to the type of innovation the programme will attract. In flight planning terms, it is the difference between filing a route to a known destination and departing with an open clearance. In your ideation stage, you may consider the following options:

reinforces the capacity of public institutions to act as intelligent commissioners of innovation. Demand-driven calls may be structured around:

1. broad framework challenges:

e.g. carbon-free logistics in city centres, cooling green elements for streets and squares, or

2. highly specific operational tasks:

e.g. developing a digital platform enabling real-time citizen feedback on public space.

The open call then seeks solution providers capable of responding to these predefined needs. Within PilotInnCities, this approach was adopted for the implementation in Germany; the accompanying Excursus provides best-practice guidelines from that experience. The original City of Helsinki Agile Piloting programme and the Horizon Europe project CommuniCity were also demand-driven and therefore offer a great deal of information for practitioners seeking additional implemented examples.

EXCURSUS:

How to manage a theme-identification workshop in a demand-driven approach—best practice from the German PilotInnCities implementation

For a demand-driven approach, it is essential to have at least one dedicated workshop with senior representatives of the municipality(ies) where piloting is supposed to take place. This workshop precedes the open call and lays the foundation for the use case(s) to be piloted. Here are some hints for a successful workshop:

- Creative methods like idea sprints can work well, but be careful not to overwhelm your counterparts. With public administration audiences, a simple back-and-forth conversation, incrementally building on existing ideas and listening attentively, usually works better than structured brainstorming formats
- Start with a compact and understandable definition of what Agile Piloting actually is and what it can / can't do. This helps manage the expectations with regard to scope, scale and nature of the potential pilots. Give a set of diverse examples from previous Agile Piloting rounds to make it understandable.
- In some cases, a possible application area for the agile pilot(s) will become evident very quickly. In other cases, there might be too many ideas—which is fine as long as you can say that all of them are suitable for Agile Piloting. Here, it helps to make a list and let the mayors and other administrative representatives prioritize them according to their own agenda.
- Actively ask for current challenges in the municipality. Each and every mayor or other representative will know some areas from his or her municipality where the shoe pinches. Then, with your knowledge of Agile Piloting, you can develop first ideas of applications for the method. If you think something is not suitable at all for Agile Piloting, e. g. because of its scale, say so right away and discard or modify the application until it is suitable
- After the workshop, cast the selected use case(s) into a brief description that is directly usable for the open call. Let some days go by before you send the case description(s) to the workshop participants for validation. Make clear that, as soon as they validated the text, it will be used for the open call and thus go out to potential solution providers.



Consortium-wide sharing of learnings with pilot actors in FichtelLab in Selb, Germany

Supply-driven approach

In contrast, the supply-driven approach gives greater freedom to the market and challenges innovators to bring forward their most promising ideas for improving urban environments. It is based on trust in entrepreneurs' ability to push beyond the current status quo and propose solutions that everyday practitioners in municipal administrations may not yet envision. It also reflects the interconnectedness of Smart City domains and the possibility of pursuing the same objective through multiple pathways (e.g. lower carbon footprint through new mobility solutions, renewable energy, or more responsible consumption patterns).

This approach is particularly suited to organisers operating at national or regional scale, without a fixed territorial mandate or predefined municipal partners. Where it is well designed, it generates strong competitive dynamics, attracts a wider and more diverse pool of innovators, and tends to surface solutions with potential beyond the immediate local context. It positions Agile Piloting not only as a problem-solving instrument but as a competitiveness-building mechanism—one capable of embedding piloting within the full innovation cycle, including later stages such as scaling and internationalisation.

Supply-driven calls may still be thematically framed, limiting submissions to specific domains rather than leaving them entirely open. They may be structured around:

1. improving general Smart City dimensions:

e.g. digital services and communication, circular economy (...), or

2. addressing specific missions:

e.g. improving climate-neutrality, better citizen engagement, S3 smart specialisation priorities (...)

These domains make it particularly easier to align the call with the strategic direction of the implementing or funding institution.

Best Practice

PilotInnCities adopted the following six dimensions for classification of Smart City solutions:

1. Digital services and communication
2. Energy efficiency
3. Shared and green mobility
4. Circular economy
5. Blue-green infrastructure
6. Health and well-being

EXCURSUS:

between supply & demand driven approach—a strategic recommendation for the Danube Region.

Conditions in the Danube Region currently tend to favour a supply-driven approach, at least until Agile Piloting becomes more firmly embedded in institutional structures. Fragmented local governance and limited innovation uptake capacities mean that many municipalities struggle to keep pace with emerging trends or to formulate forward-looking demands. Giving them a leading role too early may therefore risk reinforcing the status quo.

To make a demand-driven approach work under such conditions, piloting would need to focus on a small number of highly capable frontrunners—such as Wunsiedel, one of Germany's federal-le-

vel Smart City lighthouse projects. While effective in specific cases, this model is difficult to apply at scale and risks undermining the inclusive and democratic potential of Agile Piloting.

From a strategic perspective, an argument can be made that competitiveness is a precondition for cohesion—not the other way around. For this reason, the PilotInnCities consortium recommends starting with a supply-driven approach, potentially within clearly defined thematic domains reflecting local assessment of main priorities, and gradually complementing it with demand-driven or challenge-based mechanisms as capacities, partnerships and institutional confidence grow.

STEP 3: DETERMINING ELIGIBLE PARTICIPANTS

Not every traveller holding a ticket is cleared to board a particular flight. While Agile Piloting promotes openness and inclusivity, its effective functioning depends on correctly discerning

between eligible and non-eligible applicants and solutions. Maintaining clear role boundaries is, therefore, essential for both implementation quality and long-term sustainability.

Eligibility principles for applicants

As a general rule, applicants—as primary owners of pilot projects—must be business entities, ideally legally established startups or SMEs. This principle is fundamental to Agile Piloting for three main reasons.

1. Administrative rationale

The model is based on the provision of commercial services, not grants or subsidies. This requires a legally established economic operator capable of issuing invoices, entering into contractual obligations, and subcontracting where necessary. These requirements are non-negotiable under the setup proposed by this methodology.

2. Business development logic

An agile pilot is not an end in itself, but a phase within a broader innovation cycle that should ideally bridge the gap between technology development and market-entry. While non-profit organisations, universities, municipal entities or informal groups may be highly motivated to address local challenges, they typically lack either the mandate or the incentive structure for sustained business development, scaling and replication. This makes continuity beyond the pilot phase uncertain.

3. Funding purpose

Public funding in Agile Piloting is used as a leverage mechanism to support early-stage innovators in validating their solutions under real operational conditions. It is designed to reduce the risks associated with market entry by providing access to testing environments, reference cases and institutional partners. The instrument is therefore most effective when targeted at startups and SMEs, where it generates the highest added value and accelerates the transition from development to adoption. Large companies, given their existing resources and market position, are generally not the intended beneficiaries of this type of support.

At the same time, participation of individual natural persons without institutional backing is not recommended. Such actors are likely to encounter legal, accounting, tax and capacity-related constraints during implementation. These should be addressed prior to entering the piloting process, rather than introducing risks that may compromise delivery.

Eligibility principles for solutions

The Technology Readiness Level (TRL) is a useful reference for assessing solution maturity, but it should not function as a binary eligibility threshold. Given the wide variability of Smart City solutions—and the very different rates at which technologies evolve—a single numeric cut-off would be both misleading and counterproductive. Some solutions advance through readiness levels within weeks; others require years of incremental progress. TRL is therefore best treated as one input into a contextual judgement, not as a pass-or-fail criterion.

The practical baseline is straightforward: **a candidate solution should be ready for real-world deployment at the start of the pilot or during its early stages.** The relatively short duration of pilots is intended for validating the solution and the business model in real-life conditions.

Maintaining a soft and context-sensitive approach to TRL does not mean lowering standards. What it means in practice depends significantly on the strategic orientation of the call:

Best Practice: one application per legal entity

Each legal entity—identified by its registration or VAT number—should be limited to a single application per call. This prevents administrative and potential State aid complications, while ensuring a diverse and competitive field of solution providers.

On the contrary, a single municipality may host multiple pilots, provided that this outcome results from a fair and transparent selection process or is clearly justified. This is particularly relevant where a city acts as the organiser of the open call and implements pilots using its own financial resources within a demand- or challenge-driven approach. In supply-driven approaches, certain municipalities may also appear more frequently due to their proactivity, openness to innovation and experience gained in previous initiatives.

- **In supply-driven calls**, an effective evaluation must be capable of identifying solutions that are technologically too immature to be deployed safely within the pilot timeframe—as well as solutions that are already fully mature but offer limited added value, treating the piloting budget primarily as a low-risk business development opportunity.
- **In demand-driven calls**, municipalities with limited digital infrastructure or innovation experience may derive substantial benefit from solutions that are well-established elsewhere but represent a meaningful step forward in their specific context. In that regard, a solution's potential impact or compatibility with the existing infrastructure could be more highly evaluated.

Further applicant and solution selection procedures are explored in more detail in STEP 5: SELECTING THE BEST APPLICATIONS.



STEP 4: NAVIGATING PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

Public procurement is one of the most critical and context-dependent aspects of Agile Piloting. In practice, it determines how pilot projects can be contracted, what forms of cooperation are permissible and how financial resources can be deployed. While overarching principles are shared across the European Union, their application is shaped by national legislation, institutional rules and established administrative practices.

As a result, approaches that are feasible in one context may require adaptation in another. For execution teams, procurement should therefore be treated as a defining constraint of the piloting process—one that directly influences its design, timing and feasibility. Early assessment of applicable frameworks and careful alignment with institutional procedures are essential to minimise risk and avoid delays.

At the same time, Agile Piloting often introduces elements that are new or unfamiliar to procurement and legal departments: open-call selection processes, solutions extending beyond established market offerings, iterative delivery and close cooperation with small innovators. These characteristics can clash with conservative administrative environments that are optimised for standardised, repeatable procedures. In practice, this tension is frequently less about legal impossibility and more about organisational comfort with established approaches.

For this reason, successful Agile Piloting typically requires early and proactive alignment

with procurement and legal services. Rather than treating procurement as a downstream formality, it should be addressed as a strategic risk-management component of the process. This may include internal clarification of roles, shared interpretation of applicable procurement frameworks, and change-management efforts to ensure that support functions understand the purpose and logic of Agile Piloting. The *Action Plan for Adoption of Agile Piloting* emphasizes these aspects already as a part of preparatory steps.

Prioritising private funding sources over public ones, and national instruments over EU-level funding where feasible, is generally advisable to enable more straightforward procedures. Yet, Agile Piloting does not require bypassing public procurement rules. Instead, it requires selecting appropriate procurement pathways, applying them consistently, and ensuring that all decisions remain transparent, documented and compliant with applicable frameworks and underlying principles. Where such alignment is achieved, public procurement can function as an enabling tool rather than a bottleneck for innovation.

Within this context, a key responsibility of the call organiser is to design and manage processes in a way that preserves agility, as unnecessary administrative complexity risks diluting the innovative value of the piloting process and discouraging high-quality applicants.

The Agile Piloting procurement logic

Agile Piloting is based on the role of a public authority as an active policy maker and innovation ecosystem architect, acting in the public interest. Within this framework, public procurement is used as a tool to enable public value creation, rather than solely to meet the internal operational needs of the procuring entity. The Agile Piloting model deliberately avoids grant- or subsidy-based arrangements, as these often introduce significant administrative complexity and may distort market dynamics. Instead, the mechanism applies a market-based, service-procurement logic, using limited public resources as a catalyst to activate market forces rather than replace them.

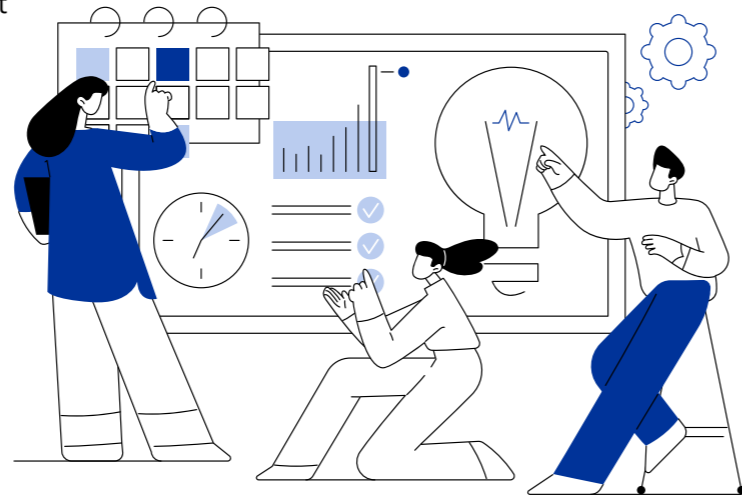
Call organisers act as buyers of commercial services, defined as the testing of innovative solutions in real-life environments with potential societal benefits and clearly specified deliverables. To preserve agility, the model avoids the acquisition or ownership of physical assets wherever possible. Full responsibility and liability for performance, safety and third-party risks rest with the solution provider, typically supported by mandatory insurance provisions. No transfer of intellectual property is required; however, solution providers are expected to share non-confidential data, results and learnings generated through the pilot as a public good.

A distinctive feature of the supply-driven approach is that the procuring entity does not predefine the exact solution to be procured. Instead, the objective is to enable the market to present the most suitable solution available at the time. This differs from standard procurement

scenarios—such as office equipment or maintenance services—where requirements and competitive landscapes are well established in advance. As a result, Agile Piloting typically involves multiple independent service contracts, differing in supplier's entity, content, location and implementation timelines, even when conducted within a single call.

In practice, this allows each agile pilot to be treated as a separate service procurement, even though pilots are identified through the same open-call exploration process. Call organisers should nevertheless remain aware that alternative legal interpretations may appear in particular national and institutional contexts and should be prepared to adapt procurement design accordingly, in close cooperation with legal and procurement services.

By contrast, demand-driven approaches, thematic calls, or tightly scoped city- or region-level pilots introduce greater procurement concentration. In such cases, cumulative contract values may need to be considered—based on assessment of functional, geographic and temporal relatedness of contracts—and the entire call may be treated as a single procurement procedure. Remaining within thresholds applicable to low-value or simplified procurement regimes is therefore often critical, as higher-value procedures introduce formal requirements that may significantly constrain agility. These implications need to be assessed early and factored into the design of your piloting process.



Step-by-step procedure

1. Open call

The open call functions as a transparent and competitive selection mechanism, designed to ensure fair access for all interested entities. We recommend publishing all call documentation through a single central information point (e.g. website), using open-access application channels with low entry barriers (e.g. widely available online forms), setting proportionate submission deadlines, and ensuring adequate outreach through an active communication campaign.

2. Applications

Submitted applications serve as structured offers, fulfilling the bidding function within the selection process. They should contain information typically required for contracting commercial services, including in particular: applicant identification data (e.g. name, registration number, and address), organisational profile and relevant references, proposed price and cost structure, and structured content aligned with the published evaluation criteria.

3. Evaluation by expert jury

An expert and impartial jury evaluates submissions using transparent criteria that are published in advance and known to applicants. The evaluation process should be documented through a written report, including justification of results and any exclusion decisions, to ensure traceability, equal treatment and auditability.

4. Contracting

Following the evaluation, multiple selected entities may be contracted on the basis of a single open call. Technically, this model combines a robust competitive selection process—based on open access, transparent criteria and documented evaluation—with the subsequent direct contracting of distinct service packages. This reflects the fact that pilots typically involve unique solutions implemented in specific contexts, for which no directly comparable alternatives are available.

5. Invoicing and payments

Solution providers receive remuneration in accordance with the contractual terms and the delivery of agreed outputs. Where a 50 % / 50 % payment scheme is applied, the first instalment is released automatically upon contract signature, supported by an invoice issued for accounting and tax purposes. The second instalment is paid following submission of a final invoice, subject to approval of the final report by the designated supervisor.

Where to pay extra attention

Agile Piloting is primarily a quality- and impact-driven mechanism, rather than a “lowest price wins” exercise that often characterizes standard procurement practice. While price plays a dominant role in routine purchases of well-defined and comparable goods or services, over-emphasizing it in Agile Piloting risks discouraging ambitious solutions and undermining innovative outcomes. Price assessment should therefore focus on value for money, including the credibility of the budget structure and the extent of co-investment, while recognizing that more complex or pioneering solutions may legitimately require higher budgets.

STEP 5: SELECTING THE BEST APPLICATIONS

Every applicant who has passed the eligibility check in STEP 3 holds a valid ticket—but a ticket is not a boarding pass. A more detailed assessment follows, based on a standardised and transparent set of criteria applied equally to all candidates.

The evaluation framework operates on the same principle. Selection is the first stage where the programme's design choices are tested against

real applications—and one of the few stages that cannot be adjusted once the process is underway. Once the call is launched and applications are submitted, the evaluation must proceed as defined. Getting it right at the design stage is therefore critical. This step provides the evaluation architecture required to ensure a fair, consistent and robust selection process.

The Evaluation framework

1. Jury composition

High-quality evaluation requires diversity of perspectives, and jury composition should maximally reflect the quadruple helix structure that underpins Agile Piloting. A panel of **four to five members** is recommended—sufficient to represent the necessary range of expertise without creating coordination challenges or budgetary strain. A balanced jury typically combines:

1. a policy-maker with a systemic understanding of Smart City agendas,
2. a technical expert familiar with current technological trends,
3. an entrepreneur or business mentor with business development experience, and
4. a representative of municipalities or someone aware of real municipal infrastructure and operation

The profiles described above bring complementary forms of expertise to the evaluation table—expertise that cannot be fully captured through numerical scoring alone. Such a constellation, combining diverse perspectives and their iterative confrontation, helps to mitigate the effects of unconscious bias that are inherent in the assessment of disruptive innovation.

Securing genuine engagement from each jury member is therefore as important as the selection itself. The experience and availability of prospective jurors should be assessed before any formal invitation is extended.

Financial management—jury costs:

Where external experts are involved, appropriate financial compensation may be essential to ensure their full commitment to the process. In practice, short-term contractual arrangements covering approximately 20–40 hours of work have proven to be both suitable and proportionate.

Each jury member is required to sign a declaration of impartiality and absence of conflict of interest prior to the start of the evaluation process. Where a jury member identifies an affiliation or other potential conflict in relation to a specific proposal, they must inform the call organiser and refrain from evaluating that proposal. Given the interconnected nature of Smart City ecosystems, situations giving rise to potential conflicts of interest are not exceptional. The methodology therefore relies on transparent disclosure and case-by-case management.

2. Evaluation criteria and weighting

The following set of five criteria and their weight distribution has proven effective in practice:



1. Innovation (15%): Novelty of the approach, including technological uniqueness, and its disruptive potential.



2. Impact (25%): Scale, relevance and sustainability of expected benefits, including socioeconomic and environmental effects.



3. Feasibility (25%): Practical viability of implementation in the selected location, including partnerships, timeline, risk management and operational readiness.



4. Scalability (20%): Potential for replication, transferability and international expansion.




5. Financing / Budget (15%): Cost-effectiveness, value for money, and level of co-financing or in-kind contribution from the applicant or piloting location.

This configuration should be understood as a default recommendation, not a rigid template. Individual calls require calibration, and the relative weight of each criterion should reflect the approach and thematic orientation established in STEP 2.

For example, Scalability—a key prerequisite when competitiveness and internationalisation are strategic objectives—may carry less weight in calls focused on addressing highly specific local needs. Across contexts, however, certain criteria remain consistently critical, varying only in their relative emphasis. Impact can be interpreted either in terms of immediate local benefits or broader urban relevance over a medium-term horizon (e.g. five years), depending on programme priorities.

Feasibility is central to assessing technological maturity and operational readiness and should be supported by a mandatory implementation timeline and letters of intent from pilot locations in supply-driven calls. Projects that postpone implementation beyond the first half of the dedicated time period should be treated as a clear warning signal, regardless of the strength of their underlying concept.

 Jury members should be explicitly briefed on the intended nuanced interpretation of each criterion before evaluation begins.

Unconscious bias toward risk aversion—or conversely, toward novelty for its own sake—can significantly distort results if left unaddressed. This issue is best managed by providing jurors with a brief manual and holding an instructional meeting before individual scoring takes place.

3. Financing / Budget criterion & cost categories

The Financing / Budget criterion is perhaps the most critical to both the organizer and the pilot. At face value it enables assessing cost-effectiveness and value for money. At a deeper level it functions as a signal of the applicant's understanding of what the pilot actually requires and how practicable their financial plan is. Requiring applicants to break their proposed budget into defined cost categories serves this diagnostic function: it allows jurors to assess whether the internal allocation reflects a realistic understanding of the pilot's operational demands. The cost structure need not be exhaustive—an open-ended format preserves flexibility for innovative approaches and unforeseen needs.

Three levers could sharpen the selection in this regard and should be applied consistently:

- assigning sufficient weight to the criterion to make budget quality a material factor in the overall score,
- structuring guiding questions to require explicit justification of each cost category and the rationale for any co-investment contribution, and

- briefing jurors explicitly to reward proposals where the budget structure demonstrates genuine planning rather than a default request for the ceiling amount or gravely undercutting market-value.

Co-investment—whether financial, in-kind or through the contribution of staff time and facilities by the piloting location—is one of the clearest indicators of genuine commitment from both the solution provider and the municipality. It must however be verifiable to a reasonable extent to insure fairness, an aspect explored more in depth in the **STEP 6: COMMISSIONING OF PILOTS**.

Best Practice: eligible cost categories

1. staff costs
2. equipment (purchase or rental)
3. operation and maintenance costs
4. subcontracted expertise and involvement of local stakeholders
5. travel costs
6. co-creation activities and communication

Common misconceptions with regards to the pilot-funding:

This distinction that the funds are fixed-price contract, should be communicated clearly to applicants—ideally during the information session—to avoid confusion among teams expecting grant-style reporting requirements. The question “Why submit a detailed budget if the actual-costs will not be audited?” has a straightforward answer: the budget plan demonstrates planning quality, not accounting accuracy. Additionally, it provides foundation for potential negotiations about budget rationalisation in the pre-contracting phase or project modification during implementation.

4. Guiding questions and application structure

To establish an infallible understanding among organisers, applicants and jurors regarding what each criterion means and how it is assessed, it is best to structure the application form for open call directly alongside the evaluation criteria, complemented with clearly formulated guiding questions. **These guiding questions must appear in the same wording in the application form and the jury instructions.**

This approach creates a predictable and fair evaluation environment in which:

- applicants provide precisely the information relevant for assessment,
- jurors are not expected to search for missing details or make assumptions, and
- organisers can respond consistently to clarification requests by referring to transparent, predefined rules.

Example of guiding questions – full set of questions for all criteria provided in the application form template in ANNEX.

FEASIBILITY

Weight 25% = 25 points (max. 2,500 characters)

- Is the 6-month time frame of the pilot realistic, given your solution's current readiness level? Please submit a work plan to demonstrate this.
- Do you have a specific municipality or municipal stakeholder prepared or interested to host your pilot?
- How many people are in your piloting team? What are their qualifications and what will be their roles?
- Do you plan to involve any external partners (e.g. researchers) that can increase the quality of your project?
- Do you see any major barriers or risks for the implementation of your pilot? If yes, how do you plan to resolve them?

Ensure that appropriate character limits are defined ...

... in the application form. Limits that are too restrictive prevent meaningful differentiation between projects, while excessively high or absent limits place burden on jurors and reduce clarity of assessment. In practice, a limit of 2,500 characters per criterion has proven to provide a balanced level of detail, typically accommodating four to five guiding questions.

The evaluation process

1. Key steps of the evaluation process

Preparation for the evaluation should begin early. The following provides an overview of the important steps in this process:

1. Identification and pre-negotiation of jurors
2. Instructional meeting with jurors (ideally led by an independent facilitator; see STEP 7)
3. Submission of individual shortlists
4. First iteration based on aggregated scores, followed by individual adjustments
5. Announcement of finalists
6. Pitch-deck session, followed by second iteration and submission of individual results
7. Final iteration and consensus confirmation—through direct yes/no votes

8. Announcement of winners

The pitch-deck session and final selection can be organised in different formats depending on programme design and contextual considerations. These may include private sessions—with each team presenting to the jury individually—or public formats, where shortlisted applicants present openly and results are announced transparently.

The private format allows for more candid discussion of business model details and reduces the risk of applicants withholding information in a competitive setting. The public format increases transparency and can strengthen the programme's visibility within the ecosystem.

If a two-stage evaluation process is in place, initial shortlisting can be followed by a preparatory or pre-mentoring phase, during which selected teams receive targeted guidance to refine their proposals

STEP 5: SELECTING THE BEST APPLICATIONS

before the final pitch session. This approach can improve the overall quality and comparability of presentations, particularly where applicants have varying levels of experience in pitching or working with public-sector stakeholders. Pre-mentoring is particularly recommended in public pitch formats, where differences in presentation skills may otherwise influence evaluation outcomes.

2. Facilitation during the open call phase (the secretary of the open call)

During the preparation and selection stages, the facilitator plays a vital role, typically fulfilling several interconnected functions:

1. Primary contact point

Providing practical information, guidance and light-touch pre-mentoring to applicants; acting as a key presenter during information sessions; and maintaining a public FAQ document.

2. Support to the jury

Summoning joint meetings, preparing and distributing materials, proposing procedural steps, aggregating and interpreting individual inputs, and supporting consensus-building while remaining neutral.

3. Negotiation and clarification lead

Supporting clarification of selected proposals, reviewing budgets, and assisting in pre-contractual alignment.

4. Communication coordinator

Managing communication milestones, announcing results, and acting as a spokesperson where appropriate.



Best Practice: pre-mentoring function of the secretary of the open call

Shortlisted applicants may overestimate the scope of what their pilot can realistically achieve or misinterpret the purpose of KPIs. Where relevant, this can be addressed through a pre-mentoring phase, supporting teams in refining their proposals and aligning expectations. This not only improves the feasibility of individual pilots but also enhances comparability across applications.

3. Scoring logic and thresholds

Experience shows that jurors vary in how they use the scoring scale. Assuming a 100-point scoring scale, some jurors place top projects in the 70–80 range, others in the 90–100 range. Encouraging reviewers to use the full scale prevents internal differentiation. Comparability across different calls remains limited by nature and should not be treated as an objective of the evaluation process. This issue should be explicitly addressed during the instructional meeting.

Introducing minimum threshold values, e.g. 40% of available points per criterion, is strongly recommended. Failure to meet such thresholds may justify exclusion based on a consensual jury decision. This mechanism prevents paradoxical outcomes—for example, a non-innovative but highly mature project scoring well overall despite clearly falling outside the purpose of Agile Piloting.

Additionally, certain guiding questions are designated as mandatory elements and are clearly marked in the application form (in bold and underlined). These elements carry particular weight in the evaluation process, as they are essential for assessing core feasibility. Failure to address mandatory questions, or to provide sufficiently substantiated responses, may therefore constitute grounds for automatic exclusion.

Best Practice: start implementation planning during the selection stage.

Applicants should be systematically challenged on the feasibility of their proposals. Key assumptions must be tested during the evaluation phase, particularly in pitch-deck sessions, where identified weaknesses should directly inform selection decisions and prevent non-feasible projects from proceeding.

Administrative pre-checks with the piloting location—including verification of infrastructure conditions, confirmation of municipal commitment and contact persons, and initiation of permitting processes that require early activation—should begin immediately after selection. Conditions identified before contracts are signed can be addressed through negotiation; the same conditions identified after signing become implementation risks.



Kick-off meeting with local stakeholders in Debrecen, Hungary

ASSOCIATED ANNEXES

- DECLARATION OF IMPARTIALITY AND ABSENCE OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST
- INSTRUCTIONS FOR JURY MEMBERS
- SCORING SHEETS – INDIVIDUAL
- SCORING SHEETS – OVERALL

STEP 6: COMMISSIONING OF PILOTS

A flight cannot depart without fuel—and the amount must be calculated in advance, calibrated to distance, weight and operating conditions. The amount of “fuel” must be sufficient to carry the programme through to its objectives, yet kept free of rigid structures and procedures that would prevent adjustment when conditions change.

This step defines the financial and contractual framework (“fuel”) that governs the relationship between the organiser and the piloting teams.

Commissioning logic of Agile Piloting: contractual simplicity

Agile pilots are commissioned as market services, not funded as grants. This distinction is foundational and has direct implications for how contracts are structured, what applicants are required to demonstrate, and what financial reporting is expected after delivery. The piloting team is contracted to provide a defined service—*the implementation and testing of an innovative solution in a real-world environment*—under a fixed-price contract with staged payments linked to predefined milestones or deliverables. **No itemised cost justification is required ex post.** The remuneration structure serves a specific purpose: it preserves the agility of the process by removing the administrative burden of cost verification that characterises grant-based instruments.

These parameters are equally relevant to applicants and the execution team: financial conditions directly influence who applies and how proposals are structured. They should therefore be communicated clearly and early in the open call, rather than introduced for the first time at the contracting stage.

The piloting team bears primary operational responsibility for the pilot. In that sense, the call organiser acts as a commissioning body, not as an operational partner assuming shared liability for the piloting team’s activities. This encompasses the quality and safety of implementation, compliance with all sector-specific procedures applicable to their solution and fulfilment of the contractual deliverables. Piloting teams are responsible for ensuring compliance with all laws governing their industry and bear full liability for any non-compliance.

! Piloting liability, intellectual property, legal, and data compliance

The more novel or innovative a solution, the more significant the legal risks associated with its public deployment become—for both the piloting team and the organiser. Intellectual property ownership, the right to publish or share information about the pilot, and third-party liability or legal non-compliance liability must all be addressed, understood, and accepted before signing the contract.

ASSOCIATED ANNEXES
• PILOTING CONTRACT

Financial limits per pilot

The piloting-round budget ceiling will have been established during the preparatory phase described in the *Action Plan for Adoption of Agile Piloting*. The execution team’s task is to operationalise that figure, translating it into per-pilot figure, and reflecting it in the contracting framework.

A per-pilot allocation in the range of EUR 10,000–20,000 (including VAT) represents the practical sweet spot for most implementations. At the upper end of this range, the budget is sufficient to cover staff costs, equipment, co-creation activities, communication and external expertise—attracting serious applicants and supporting technically meaningful delivery while remaining within

simplified procurement thresholds in most national contexts. Allocations below EUR 10,000 are not inherently unworkable, but carry real risks: piloting teams tend to drop the activities that generate ecosystem value beyond the core technical test (such as user onboarding, documentation, co-creation), and the reduced financial incentive tends to attract applicants primarily motivated by the reference case rather than the piloting opportunity itself. Budgets significantly above EUR 20,000 may trigger higher procurement thresholds, introducing administrative complexity that works against the agility the model depends on.

Eligible costs and co-investment

The categorical cost breakdown submitted at the application stage serves another purpose beyond simply evaluating the pilot planning. The second utility is operational: a clear cost structure gives the organiser a meaningful basis for pre-contracting negotiation, particularly where certain costs pose legitimate questions (for example; purchasing expensive equipment for short-term use where rental would be more appropriate) or where categories fall outside of what the piloting programme’s setup permits.

This second function is directly connected to **co-investment**. Where specific cost categories are ineligible for organiser funding—infrastructure costs, for example, or certain types of subcontracting—they must be covered by the piloting team or a third party. Making eligible and ineligible categories explicit in the call documentation therefore does not restrict applicants; it clarifies where co-investment will be structurally necessary and gives well-prepared

teams a competitive advantage by signalling that their ability to cover those costs will be assessed. Applicants may also introduce voluntary co-investment within eligible cost categories to strengthen their application under the Financing / Budget criterion.

Co-investment declared at the application stage must be verifiable prior to finalising the contract; otherwise, it should not be considered in the evaluation in order to avoid unjustified score inflation. The following mechanisms have proven practical:

- a letter of intent from the co-investing party confirming the nature, form and indicative value of the contribution;
- direct interrogation of the co-investment source and structure during the pitch round, as a standard element of the second-round evaluation.

! Avoid double funding

Where co-investment involves public funding, care should be taken to avoid double funding of the same cost categories. Double funding refers to situations where the same cost is financed by more than one public funding source, which may lead to potentially serious financial and legal consequences.

Timing of payments

Agile Piloting payment is typically structured in instalments as neither party benefits from a structure that concentrates the full financial exposure at one end of the implementation period. In defining the instalment amounts and frequency the following aspects need to be considered:

1. Cashflow viability

Pilots vary significantly in how their costs are distributed over time. Some are front-loaded—requiring substantial upfront investment in equipment setup, infrastructure access or initial personnel deployment before any measurable output is generated. Others are back-loaded, with the majority of costs concentrated in the final weeks of implementation as user testing,

reporting and communication activities intensify. A payment structure that does not reflect this distribution places unnecessary financial strain on piloting teams, particularly SMEs and startups operating without significant financial reserves.

Similarly, equal attention must be given to the cash-flow capacity of the funding institution itself. Payment timelines that depend on uncertain or delayed internal approval processes create implementation risk that falls entirely on the piloting team. Where funding availability is subject to institutional payment cycles or external disbursement conditions, this should be identified before contracting and factored into the payment schedule.

✓ Best Practice: a 50/50 payment structure

Combining an initial instalment upon contracting with a final payment upon delivery has proven to be an effective default in most piloting scenarios. It provides sufficient upfront cash flow for startups and SMEs to initiate implementation, while retaining enough leverage for the organiser to ensure delivery of agreed outputs. This balance supports both operational feasibility and accountability. At the same time, each pilot should be assessed individually, and the payment structure confirmed accordingly to reflect specific risks, timelines and implementation conditions.

STEP 6: COMMISSIONING OF PILOTS

2. Performance safeguard

Where a pilot is only partially delivered—whether due to unforeseen technical obstacles, a change in the piloting location's conditions, or a deliberate mid-course adjustment made in the spirit of agility—the itemised budget provides the organiser with a proportionate and defensible basis for adjusting the final payment accordingly. Without this reference, partial delivery becomes difficult to quantify and disputes become harder to resolve.

The performance safeguard mechanism should therefore be built into the contract as a standard clause, specifying the conditions under which payment may be adjusted, the process for documenting and agreeing any mid-implementation changes, and the minimum delivery threshold below which the second instalment may be withheld or reduced. This is not a punitive instrument—it is a transparency mechanism that protects both parties.

! Milestone-based payment structures

Where instalments are tied to the completion of defined intermediate deliverables—are not a recommended practice. The administrative burden they introduce, both for the contracting process and for ongoing monitoring, is disproportionate to the benefit. Where performance assurance is needed, a well-defined output clause achieves the same objective with considerably less overhead.



Pitch-deck session in Belgrade, Serbia

STEP 7: CONNECTING THE SUPPLY AND THE DEMAND

An aircraft may be fully fuelled, its passengers boarded and its route confirmed—but without a cleared runway, none of that preparation translates into movement. Similarly, innovators targeting the public sector require access to real locations where solutions can be tested, demonstrated and refined in real-life conditions. Without a committed, prepared and operationally ready

piloting location, the programme cannot take off. Connecting solution providers (the supply) with potential adopters, users and owners of challenges (the demand) is commonly referred to as innovation brokering, and it represents a core responsibility of the open call organiser within the Agile Piloting process.

Onboarding municipalities

Three main approaches to innovation brokering can be distinguished. These largely reflect the initial strategic choice between demand-driven and supply-driven logic.

1. Including specific municipalities from the outset

This represents a pure demand-driven approach, in which the open call is co-designed around clearly articulated municipal needs and challenges, and municipal representatives are directly involved in the evaluation process. This model is suitable primarily for city-level or small-region-level organisers with clear territorial mandates.

For larger-scale organisers, however, a practical dilemma arises: which municipalities should be selected and on what basis? Attempts to ensure transparency may result in a two-stage process (first selecting municipalities, then solutions), introducing a level of complexity that often outweighs the benefits. For this reason, this approach should be used only in clearly justified

and well-scoped scenarios, with the understanding that it does not fully unlock the systemic potential of Agile Piloting.

2. Stimulating organic matchmaking

This approach has proven to be the most natural and effective mechanism for supply-driven calls. It relies on attracting motivated actors on both sides and enabling their matchmaking through light-touch instruments, such as joint information sessions or networking formats. Excessive organiser intervention may be counterproductive and unrewarding. The organiser's role is to enable and incentivise, not to micro-manage the formation of partnerships.

A key design element is giving positive weight—within the Feasibility criterion—to proposals that already include confirmed piloting partners. This encourages early dialogue between public and private actors around shared interests and often leads to relationships that persist beyond the piloting call itself. In practice, a significant majority

STEP 7: CONNECTING THE SUPPLY AND THE DEMAND

of proposals (exceeding 70%) already include some form of partnership, demonstrating that public-private dialogue can emerge organically when appropriate incentives are in place.

3. Engaging municipalities after project selection

This option represents a fall-back scenario for supply-driven calls and carries the highest degree of uncertainty. In this case, the organizer seeks suitable piloting locations for projects already selected by the jury.

This approach places greater responsibility on the organizer and is inherently risky: solutions developed without anchoring in a concrete local context may encounter unforeseen obstacles

during implementation, not the least of which is lower engagement from the municipality. While it is important to keep this option available, a call organiser should take all reasonable steps to minimise the likelihood of needing to rely on it.

→ *The chosen brokering approach has direct implications for the timeline.*

Approaches 1 and 3 typically require a dedicated engagement window of approximately two months to secure municipal or local stakeholder involvement. In each case, this engagement occurs at a different phase of the overall piloting process and should be planned accordingly.

Ecosystem stewardship—a tool for subsequent Agile Piloting

A structured record of engaged municipal stakeholders—built incrementally across piloting rounds—reduces search costs, supports faster location matching and strengthens continuity between calls. Associations of towns and municipalities or regional development agencies can fulfil this intermediary role where direct outreach is not within the organiser's capacity.

Matchmaking & managing expectations

The engagement level of the hosting location by itself cannot guarantee suitability for pilots, it intrinsically also poses restrictions on what could be implemented and how. During the matchmaking, it is important to check & validate:

1. Municipality profile

Large urban municipalities and smaller towns present fundamentally different administrative structures, data collection capacities, digital infrastructure levels and innovation absorption capabilities. This should not be a ground for discrimination favouring already established municipalities. At the same time, implementation should reflect the municipality's capacity, with more intensive facilitation often needed for interventions in small settlements and rural areas.

2. Infrastructure prerequisites

The availability and stability of physical and data infrastructure at the intended piloting location is a concrete implementation condition, not background context. This includes for example: the network coverage, sufficient digital data, sensor networks, and so on.

3. Municipal expectations

Understanding why a municipality has joined the programme—and what it expects to get from it—is as important as confirming that it is a good match. Expectations that are not surfaced and addressed early will surface later, at a point where the programme has far less flexibility to respond. The execution team should treat expectation alignment as a preliminary conversation and also as a continuous facilitation responsibility.

STEP 7: CONNECTING THE SUPPLY AND THE DEMAND

Commitments and responsibilities

By the end of the matchmaking phase, a clear and documented commitment from the piloting location must be in place. The appropriate form of that commitment should be determined on a case-by-case basis, balancing the need for administrative security against the equally important need to avoid burdening a willing municipal partner with disproportionate procedural requirements (in case of signing a binding contract).

The available instruments range in formality and administrative weight.

1. Letter of intent or declaration:

the lightest and most commonly used option that may include co-financing commitment.

2. Three- or four-way agreements:

bringing together the organiser, the solution provider, the municipality and, where relevant, a research or facilitation partner—is appropriate where the pilot involves more complex interdependencies and a higher degree of shared operational responsibility.

3. Framework agreement or memorandum of understanding provides a more durable structure suited to municipalities participating across multiple piloting rounds or committing to an ongoing relationship with the programme.



Installation of the Glassticine demonstrator in Liberec, Czech Republic

STEP 8: FACILITATING IMPLEMENTATION



Once the aircraft is in the air, technical systems take over the primary work of flight—but the crew does not disengage. Pilots monitor conditions, manage communications and track deviations from the planned route, while the cabin crew supports passengers, provides instructions and intervenes as required.

By design, individual agile pilots are intended to remain low maintenance, with primary responsibility resting on the solution provider and the participating municipality. The role of the execution team is therefore not to manage delivery directly, but to maintain oversight, provide structured support, broker relationships, navigate institutional friction and ensure that conditions for successful implementation are sustained. This step covers the key functions of facilitation during implementation.

The facilitator plays a central role in this process. Operating without dedicated facilitation is comparable to flying without a co-pilot or cabin crew: while the aircraft may technically remain airborne, there is no capacity to manage the journey, respond to emerging needs or address disruptions effectively. The value of facilitation lies not in controlling outcomes, but in preventing confusion, resolving friction early and ensuring that minor issues do not escalate into systemic failures.

Over the course of implementation, facilitation should gradually transition from an active, hands-on role to a more supervisory function as pilots stabilise. In practice, facilitation needs are unevenly distributed: some pilots progress with minimal support, while a smaller number may require disproportionate attention due to emerging challenges or lower levels of business or technological maturity.

Best Practice:
calibrate portfolio size
to facilitation capacity

Around **five to six pilots** per dedicated facilitation FTE represents an optimised and manageable portfolio. The total budget envelope should be distributed according to the facilitation capacity, prioritising implementation quality over pilot count.

The facilitator as implementation overseer

With signing of contracts, the execution team should assign a named facilitator as the internal contact point for each pilot or group of pilots. This role begins actively—managing early coordination between parties, ensuring the local working group is functional and the kick-off delivers a clear operational foundation—and gradually transitions toward structured oversight and targeted intervention as the pilot matures. **The facilitator** oversees implementation and

acts where the process is at risk **but does not substitute for the operational responsibilities of the solution provider or the piloting location.** Where a facilitator steps in to resolve a problem on behalf of a piloting team, that intervention should be treated as a documented exception rather than a routine extension of the role—blurring this boundary creates liability exposure for the organiser and weakens the accountability that makes the model work.

Establishing the working group

A dedicated (informal) working group should be formed early for each pilot bringing together the execution team facilitator, the solution provider, the piloting location representative and any other party whose active cooperation is necessary or beneficial for delivery. What matters is not the number of members but the completeness of representation: every party whose active

cooperation is necessary for implementation should have a seat, and **the boundaries of each party's responsibility should be made explicit at the first meeting.** The working group could be led by the facilitator but this task could also be delegated to local actors such as a “living lab” or the host municipality representative themselves depending on their level of involvement.

! Ambiguous task allocation is one of the most ...

... consistently reported sources of implementation friction. Clearly defining responsibilities at the first working group meeting—and documenting them—helps prevent this friction from developing into a structural issue. Experience shows that this problem does not resolve on its own and requires an active approach.

Kick-off: laying the operational foundation

The kick-off meeting marks the formal transition from selection to implementation and should be treated as a structuring event rather than a procedural formality. Held at the piloting location with all working group members present, its primary goal is to concretely define the exact scope of pilot activities considering the limited implementation timeframe.

A well-run kick-off significantly reduces the likelihood of misalignment emerging later in the implementation phase. **Every unresolved question left open at the kick-off has a compounding cost:** it will resurface under greater time pressure, with less goodwill available to resolve it. The agenda of the kick-off meeting

should therefore be treated as a checklist of foundational scope-defining aspects. Amongst this checklist:

- **Shared terminology:** define key operational terms explicitly: what constitutes a deliverable, who counts as a user etc.
- **Scope and KPIs:** confirm the boundaries of what will and will not be tested, and matching expectations of all involved parties. At least two or three categories of KPIs need to be developed—see **STEP 9: EVALUATING RESULTS.**

- **On-site infrastructure review:** conduct or immediately precede the kick-off with a joint infrastructure review that would be necessary for the implementation.
- **User onboarding plan:** identify the target user group, define the recruitment strategy and determine how feedback will be collected and incorporated.

- **Monitoring safeguard and backup plans:** establish a monitoring mechanism—site visits or online checks—to verify throughout implementation that data collection, technology and user engagement function as intended. Identify foreseeable implementation risks and agree a contingency scenario for each.

! Late identification of bottlenecks

Bottlenecks identified during or after the kick-off are significantly costlier to resolve than those surfaced before it. Key institutional stakeholders should ideally not be meeting for the first time at this event.

i Limitations of municipal readiness

In one PilotInnCities implementation focused on water infrastructure monitoring, delivery was hindered by fragmented city data spread across multiple (forty!) systems and formats, as well as outdated water meters. An early check following selection could have identified these constraints and allowed for timely adjustments to the implementation plan. These are not exceptional circumstances; they are the norm in many municipalities across the Danube Region.

Facilitation during the implementation period

Once the kick-off has established the operational foundation, the facilitator's role shifts toward monitoring, intermediation and light-touch support. The intensity of this engagement should decrease as pilots mature and stabilise—transitioning from active hands-on coordination in the early weeks to a more supervisory function as teams develop operational momentum. The following tasks and tools have proven both necessary and sufficient:

- supporting KPI definition and monitoring from the outset,
- conducting regular status calls with simple written summaries of decisions and agreed actions,

- maintaining continuous communication alongside a shared documentation workspace,
- advising on stakeholder engagement, communication and external partner involvement,
- mediating conflicts and proposing corrective measures when deviations occur,
- verifying and approving reported deliverables, and
- participating in joint communication moments at the piloting location and within the broader ecosystem to ensure results reach the right audiences.

STEP 8: FACILITATING IMPLEMENTATION

Where the pilot's requirements go beyond what the facilitation team can cover, **external experts** can provide valuable additional support, particularly in areas such as technical validation, business development, design of co-creation activities or impact assessment. Their involvement should be purpose-driven and appropriately motivated, either through financial compensation or—more exceptionally—through shared interests such as research agendas or strategic alignment. The latter may occur in specific cases, but should not be assumed as a default.

When used thoughtfully, external expertise can significantly amplify ecosystem effects, especially in terms of capacity building and long-term innovation capability. It also serves as a form of independent quality assurance for the Agile Piloting program, while providing added value to start-ups and municipalities through access to diverse and experienced mentorship.

Co-creation

A key challenge during implementation is the generally low level of citizen engagement, which remains a structural issue in many parts of the Danube Region. Active support from piloting location representatives, external experts and the core execution team is therefore essential for designing and executing effective engagement formats and fostering meaningful participation within pilots. Well-managed co-creation can generate significant added value through direct end-user feedback.



PilotInnCities consortium at the first-year review meeting in Bratislava, Slovakia

STEP 9: EVALUATING RESULTS

The aircraft touches down. The journey that was planned, designed, fuelled, cleared and navigated is now complete—and the first question the crew faces is not whether the flight was pleasant, but whether it reached the right destination, what was learned along the way, and whether the aircraft is ready to fly again. What matters now is the structured evaluation: what the instruments recorded, what the passengers experienced and what the findings mean for the next departure.

In Agile Piloting, evaluation is not a compliance exercise conducted at the end of the programme—it is **the fruit of the process as it generates the**

evidence that allows successful solutions to be replicated, scaled and adopted. A complete evaluation addresses the following questions:

- Is the tested solution ready for wider deployment?
- Is the municipality ready to delve deeper into the field of technologies and innovation?
- How was the local ecosystem impacted by the pilot?

This step explores the guidelines for a purposeful review of pilots.

Failure as a legitimate outcome

It is critical to emphasise that not all pilots will reach their intended conclusions. This notion may be unfamiliar or uncomfortable within parts of the public sector in the Danube Region, yet it is fundamental to innovation. A piloting portfolio in which all supported solutions succeed would indicate excessive risk aversion rather than effective selection.

Innovative solutions typically face their greatest challenges at the stage where market and

institutional confidence is not yet established. Agile Piloting is designed precisely to support this vulnerable phase by providing a protected space for experimentation, allowing learning to occur before irreversible commitments are made. Fear of failure represents a major psychological and institutional barrier to innovation and competitiveness; Agile Piloting explicitly seeks to reduce this barrier.

Strategic use of key performance indicators (KPIs)

1. Establishing KPIs early

Each agile pilot must define key performance indicators (KPIs) at the outset of implementation, establishing a clear and measurable evaluation framework. It is recommended that each pilot includes at least one quantitative and one qualitative KPI. These indicators form the basis for post-implementation assessment and must be explicitly included in the contract with the solution provider.

KPIs should not be treated as a formal or bureaucratic requirement. Their primary function is to support strategic reflection on the value generated by the pilot. A guiding question throughout KPI definition should therefore be:

“What key value does this solution provide to its users or clients?” Sufficient time should be dedicated to this discussion during the pre-contracting phase and kick-off, as well-defined KPIs help solution providers think beyond the pilot itself and position their solution for future scaling.

KPIs can be categorised along several parallel dimensions that are not mutually exclusive. Effective KPI setting involves combining these aspects appropriately, typically within a set of two to three well-defined indicators. The following dimensions draw on experience from PilotInnCities implementations. They are offered as reference points, not prescriptions—KPI design will always require contextual judgement.

Type of delivery	KPI category	Role	Examples
	Performance	Audit the delivery of the solution or its components defined in the application	Website launched; sensor installed
	Usage	Assess interaction with users and functional outputs of the solution	Number of users onboarded; number of warnings issued
	Communication	Capture outreach and awareness-raising activities linked to the pilot	Number of onboarding emails sent; number of videos published

Category of impact	KPI category	Role	Examples
	Economic	Capture economic effects and value-creation potential of the solution	Cost savings achieved; operational efficiency gains
	Environmental	Measure environmental impact generated by the solution	Reduction in emissions; number of alerts issued; change in consumption patterns
	Social	Assess effects on users, communities and stakeholder engagement	Number of users engaged; participation rates; user feedback

Character of KPI	KPI category	Role	Examples
	Quantitative	Measure performance through numerical indicators and hard data	Number of users onboarded; savings achieved
	Qualitative	Capture user experience, perceptions and behavioural change	User satisfaction; usability assessment; changes in public attitudes

2. Prioritise interpretation over mere measurement

While useful reference frameworks exist—such as those developed under the CITYkeys project—agile pilots require a high degree of customisation and contextual interpretation. KPIs should be understood as a framework for learning, not as rigid targets. Oversimplified indicators are of limited value. The objective is not to tick boxes at the end of implementation, but to enable meaningful reflection on:

- the magnitude of impact achieved,
- user acceptance and behavioural change,
- practical limitations encountered, and
- pathways for improvement.

In this context, **qualitative insights often reveal patterns, constraints and opportunities that numerical indicators alone cannot capture.** Strategic KPI design therefore serves to direct attention to those layers of implementation where such insights can be generated.

For qualitative, user-feedback-oriented KPIs, only carefully designed questionnaires and engagement tactics can generate inputs capable of informing future business development and marketing strategies.

KPI-setting: examples of good and bad practice	KPI category	Good practice	Bad practice
	Quantitative	Number / share of schools approached vs. interested and successfully onboarded within the municipality's overall portfolio	Number of implemented solutions
		Average shortening of time for detecting non-standard conditions and water leakages compared to the situation without the system, with a calculation of the reduction in the volume of leaked water and a possible reflection of avoided damage to property	Number of months of deployment
	Qualitative	User experience expressed by the level of satisfaction with the interface and functionalities of the application and the relevance and attractiveness of offered challenges and rewards, and an assessment of the economic and reputational effect for commercial partners	Level of satisfaction with the solution (1 to 5 scale)
Increased understanding of the topic of sustainable water management and changing attitudes towards the protection of water resources among visitors interacting with the exhibit		Share of users that liked the installation (Yes or No question)	

2. KPIs and budget implications

It is essential to clearly separate learning-oriented evaluation from financial control. **KPIs must not be used as an automatic basis for budget reductions.** Failure to meet expected outcomes is a natural and necessary part of Agile Piloting and must be protected as such; otherwise, piloting teams will avoid ambition and innovation. Budget-related consequences should be considered only

in cases where a lack of adequate effort can be demonstrated—for example, where agreed activities were not carried out without justification or where implementation scope was significantly reduced without prior alignment. Piloting teams cannot be held responsible for factors beyond their control, such as limited user engagement, provided that reasonable efforts were made to mitigate such risks.

Final report

The main tangible output of STEP 9 is the final report, which consolidates learning from each agile pilot and contributes to the collective knowledge base. Primary responsibility for drafting the report lies with the solution provider, while the call organiser is responsible for providing clear guidance to ensure consistency, comparability and effective dissemination of results as a public good.

At this point, a compact format is recommended, with a total length not exceeding ten A4 pages—to enable efficient sharing of lessons learned—and the following structure:

- one-page executive summary,
- results based on KPIs, including both data and interpretation,

- business model assessment with emphasis on viability and scalability,
- reflection by the solution provider on progress, challenges and lessons learned,
- commentary from the piloting location based on practical implementation experience
- expert assessment (where available), providing independent perspective, and
- recommendations for next steps, particularly regarding sustainability and replication.

ASSOCIATED ANNEXES

- FINAL REPORT
- CONCISE DISSEMINATION FORMAT

Best Practice: concise dissemination format in English

While the full final report provides comprehensive documentation, its length and use of local language may limit its accessibility for wider dissemination. In addition, certain sections—particularly those related to business models—may contain sensitive information not suitable for broad sharing. For this reason, a concise three-page summary in English, prepared by the organiser, is recommended as a primary dissemination format. This version should capture key results, lessons learned and recommendations in a clear and accessible manner, enabling effective knowledge transfer across contexts.

Applying this living methodology, further practitioners are encouraged to contribute specifically to the development of good- and bad-practice sharing templates and supporting datasets. Additional experience from real implementations, combined with structured

dialogue with local representatives, is needed to refine how results, failures and lessons learned are captured in ways that are genuinely useful for municipalities and help de-risk replication.

Beyond pilot-level evaluation

While this methodology focuses primarily on evaluating pilot performance, additional layers of evaluation may be considered depending on programme objectives. These can include reflection by the execution team on strategic outcomes with the goal of further shaping the programme, assessment by municipalities of their internal processes and readiness, and in-depth mentoring for solution providers focusing on their business model and scaling potential. Structured dissemination activities—such as internal and external reflection workshops—may further support knowledge transfer and long-term impact

STEP 10: MANAGING COMMUNICATION

Communication is often underestimated or treated as a formal obligation. In Agile Piloting, however, it is both a governance function and a cross-cutting implementation tool, essential throughout all phases of the process. **Communication shapes expectations, legitimises experimentation, supports stakeholder engagement and enables replication.**

In aviation terms, communication accompanies the entire journey: from providing clear information before take-off, through guidance and reassurance during the flight, to structured information after landing that helps passengers reach their final destination.

Communication as a normalising force

Communication, when integrated into the Agile Piloting process, plays a crucial normalising function. By making innovation visible, understandable and routine, communication helps reduce perceived risk and lowers psychological barriers to experimentation—particularly at local level. Regular, transparent and honest communication based on tangible interventions allows innovation to become part of everyday institutional practice rather than an exceptional or risky undertaking.

This is essential for fostering openness, trust and long-term engagement among municipalities, local stakeholders and solution providers.

Communication should therefore not be understood as mere promotion, but as a means to build legitimacy for experimentation, including uncertainty and failure, and to create a shared understanding of why Agile Piloting exists and how it delivers value.

Key communication moments

At each phase of the Agile Piloting process, communication serves a distinct purpose:

1. Preparation phase: raising awareness and interest

During preparation, communication supports early coordination and mobilisation. In demand- or challenge-driven calls, this includes information exchange with participating municipalities and

partners. Initial teasers help activate stakeholder networks, communicate benefits and ensure representative participation. This phase is also suitable for early, informal engagement with potential jurors to avoid later time pressure.

STEP 10: MANAGING COMMUNICATION

2. Open call: encouraging applicants and clarifying conditions

Communication in this phase primarily targets startups and SMEs, and secondarily municipalities as potential piloting locations. Information sessions and individual consultations—typically facilitated by the designated facilitator—serve to clarify conditions, prevent misunderstandings and reduce entry barriers. The objective is to attract a high number of high-quality submissions.

3. Evaluation: managing expectations and announcing results

The evaluation phase naturally builds expectations. While deliberations take place behind closed doors, communication must ensure alignment and continuity within the jury. Pitch-deck sessions often represent a turning point, where shortlisted applicants gain wider visibility. The announcement of winners is a key ceremonial moment with strong dissemination potential. It is equally important to acknowledge all applicants, thank them for their effort and—where possible—provide basic feedback, keeping channels open for future cooperation.

Communication channels

To ensure visibility and engagement across stakeholder groups, a combination of channels—developed and managed by the execution team’s communication manager—should be used:

1. Stakeholder networks

Existing partnerships and ecosystem actors are among the most effective dissemination channels. Regional innovation centres, start-up associations, chambers of commerce and similar intermediaries can amplify reach through trusted relationships. Leveraging existing national initiatives, projects and structures has great potential to exponentially amplify the programme’s reach. Their involvement also strengthens longer-term ecosystem functions, including mentorship and follow-up dissemination.

2. Social media

Social media supports transparency, openness and community building. Professional platforms, particularly LinkedIn, are well suited for announcing calls, sharing updates from implementation and

4. Implementation: communicating content and learning

Implementation offers a longer communication window, allowing gradual sharing of progress, early observations and emerging lessons. This phase can be challenging, as polished materials often become available only toward the end. Nevertheless, sharing authentic, work-in-progress insights helps demystify innovation and reinforces transparency.

5. Conclusion: sharing results and lessons learned

At the conclusion of implementation, communication enables structured reflection based on final reports and testimonials from involved actors. Honest sharing of outcomes—including limitations and encountered challenges—is essential to support replication and scaling. This phase is particularly suitable for interviews, peer exchange, events and presentations targeting both practitioners and policy-level audiences.

communicating results. Over time, consistent use can help build a community of followers who organically extend reach. Social media also allows for a more accessible tone, highlighting the practical opportunity of agile piloting while maintaining credibility.

3. Websites

Dedicated or organiser-hosted websites serve as stable and trustworthy repositories of information. While they may not generate significant traffic on their own, they are essential for framing the program, hosting all application documents in one place and presenting results in an official and structured manner.

4. Media outlets

Agile Piloting is inherently attractive to media, particularly through concrete local pilots. Local media at piloting locations, as well as thematic or economic media at national level, can be valuable partners. Media engagement requires

active outreach, clear messaging and capacity investment; it rarely happens automatically. Press releases, articles and interviews should be planned strategically and supported through stakeholder networks.

5. Events

Thematic events—such as Smart City conferences, innovation fairs or policy forums—provide opportunities to reach expert audiences and public

authorities. They are well suited for sharing lessons learned, highlighting good practices and positioning piloting locations as local innovators. Events also help create continuity between successive piloting cycles, as sharing of insights from previous rounds can serve as scouting for the future ones.

Communication principles

To support the objectives of Agile Piloting, communication should adhere to the following principles:

- Transparency over polish: communicate honestly about progress, uncertainty and limitations.
- Learning over promotion: include challenges and failures as learning assets.
- Consistency across phases: maintain a coherent narrative from call launch to final evaluation.
- Accessibility for non-expert audiences, especially at local level.
- Alignment with facilitation and evaluation to reinforce shared expectations.

- Building a long-term ecosystem perspective to demonstrate added value.

By contrast, communication that focuses exclusively on success stories risks undermining credibility and contradicting the learning-oriented nature of Agile Piloting. Communication should pursue the strategic objective of bringing innovation down to earth—creating a politically and institutionally safe space for experimentation, normalising uncertainty, and supporting replication and scaling. **In this sense, communication is not an add-on, but an integral component of making Agile Piloting a sustainable, repeatable and attractive mechanism.**

Internal vs. external communication

To maintain a manageable level of complexity, STEP 10 focuses primarily on external communication—ensuring visibility, outreach and dissemination of results—which falls within the core competence of the communication manager.

At the same time, other communication functions are equally critical to successful implementation. In particular, the facilitator performs a targeted, primarily internal communication role, operating at the interface between solution providers, municipal stakeholders and end users. This includes translating between different vocabularies and institutional mindsets, aligning expectations and ensuring that information is understood and actionable across all parties involved—a function covered in STEP 7 and STEP 8.

Given the potential overlap between these roles, execution teams should clearly define responsibilities from the outset and establish workflows that ensure alignment between internal and external communication functions.

CONCLUSION: THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

The final reports and dissemination activities mark the end of one piloting cycle—but not the end of the process it has initiated. The solutions tested through Agile Piloting now exist as validated, real-world interventions. The municipalities involved have gained direct experience with innovation adoption in practice, including the administrative, technical and organisational conditions required to make it work. The execution team has completed a full piloting cycle and accumulated institutional knowledge that strengthens its capacity for future implementation. The ecosystem formed around the programme—including jury members, expert mentors, municipal contacts and solution providers—represents a network that extends beyond the duration of a single call.

At the same time, the programme has provided evidence not only about individual solutions, but about the functioning of the methodology itself. **Each pilot contributes insight into what works under real institutional conditions, where friction emerges and how it can be mitigated.** This accumulated experience reduces uncertainty in future iterations and enables more informed decision-making at both strategic and operational levels.

These outcomes do not disappear with the conclusion of one piloting cycle or even a whole programme. Agile Piloting builds not only individual pilots, but also the capability to repeat the process with greater efficiency, confidence and impact. The methodology that guided the initial implementation can be further refined, adapted to new contexts and aligned with evolving policy priorities. Over time, this creates a structured pathway for integrating innovation into public-sector practice in a controlled and evidence-based manner.

The continuation of this work depends on the commitment of the teams and institutions that have taken part in it. The tools, experience and relationships are in place. The next journey—and its destination—now depends on those who take the controls and set the course ahead.



Acknowledgements

This methodology was developed within the framework of the PilotInnCities project, co-funded by the European Union through Interreg Danube Region Programme. It reflects the collective experience of a transnational consortium of eleven partner organisations operating across six countries: the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia.

The document is grounded in the implementation of more than twenty agile pilots conducted across the Danube Region between 2024 and 2026. The insights presented here are based on practical experience gained—often the hard way—by execution teams, municipal partners, solution providers and facilitators working under real institutional conditions. The consortium wishes to acknowledge the contribution of all piloting teams, municipalities and experts whose work has informed this methodology.

The approach builds on the pioneering work of Forum Virium Helsinki and the City of Helsinki, whose Agile Piloting model—developed in the Smart Kalasatama district and further disseminated through the Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform—provided the conceptual foundation for this work. The consortium also acknowledges the CommuniCity project, funded under the Horizon Europe programme, whose open call design and evaluation framework informed several practical elements of this methodology.

The document has been refined through structured partner feedback and cross-national review. The contributions of each national team—reflecting diverse institutional, legal and ecosystem conditions—have shaped its operational depth and practical relevance.

Interreg
Danube Region



Co-funded by
the European Union

PilotInnCities

Lead partner:



Project partners:



ANNEXES: CALL DOCUMENTATION TEMPLATES IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

the following annexes and document-templates are available online on the PilotInnCities project website in the library section:

- APPLICATION FORM
- INSTRUCTIONS FOR OPEN CALL PARTICIPANTS
- LIVE Q&A DOCUMENT
- DECLARATION OF IMPARTIALITY AND ABSENCE OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST
- INSTRUCTIONS FOR JURY MEMBERS
- SCORING SHEETS – INDIVIDUAL
- SCORING SHEETS – OVERALL
- PILOTING CONTRACT
- FINAL REPORT
- CONCISE DISSEMINATION FORMAT

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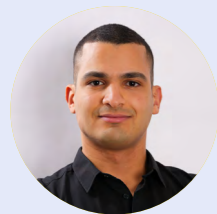
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About PilotInnCities

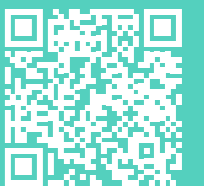
PilotInnCities—Pilot-based Innovation Ecosystems for Smart Cities—is a transnational cooperation project co-financed by the European Union through the Interreg Danube Region Programme, and led by the Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic. Running from 2024 to 2026, the project brings together eleven partner organisations from six countries across the Danube Region: the Czech Republic, Germany, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Serbia.

Its central objective is to develop, validate, and disseminate a practical methodology for agile piloting, enabling public authorities across the region to test innovative Smart City solutions in real municipal environments. This serves as a critical step toward accelerating the uptake and scaling of innovations with high economic, environmental, and societal potential.

This document forms part of the project's final knowledge portfolio—designed to ensure that the insights, lessons and tested guidance produced by the consortium continue to support new implementing teams across the Danube Region and beyond.

Project website:

www.interreg-danube.eu/projects/pilotinncities





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