



Call for Proposals: Call for Pilot Cities Cohort 3 (2024) NetZeroCities

This document covers proposals for funding under Horizon Europe, Grant Agreement number: 101121530 (HORIZON-RIA-SGA-NZC)

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netzerocities.eu



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History of reviews

Version	Date	Item
A1.0	16 January 2024	First version published

All amendments to these Call Guidelines, as well as any additional guidance and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ), will be made available at the [NetZeroCities Platform](#), [NetZeroCities website](#), and [EU Funding and Tenders Portal](#).

To stay informed on the latest developments, we encourage proponents to check the website regularly. Changes to these guidelines will be detailed in the above table.

Contents

1. Call Summary	5
1.1 Background	5
1.2 NZC Pilot Cities programme – How cities will work in and through the programme	6
1.3 Who can apply	7
2. What we are calling for	10
2.1 Aim	10
2.2 Approach: Systems innovation	10
2.3 Scope of activities	11
3. Call Timeline	13
4. Budget requirements	14
4.1 Funding	14
4.2 Subgrant allocation compliance	14
4.3 Financial provisions	15
4.4 NZC Pilot Cities Programme: special budget features	16
5. Review Mechanism and Selection Criteria	18
5.1 Overview	18
5.2 Stage 1 – Eligibility	19
5.3 Stage 2 – Assessment	21
5.4 Stage 3 – Strategic Selection	23
5.5 Decision communication	24
6. How to submit a proposal	25
7. Data, systems, and complaints	27
7.1 Your Data	27
7.2 Confidentiality	27
7.3 Complaints & Appeals	27

Introduction to the second Call for Pilot Cities – NetZeroCities

1. Call Summary

This Call for proposals to join the NetZeroCities (NZC) Pilot Cities Programme is for Mission Cities¹ who wish to undertake two-year, systems innovation-oriented pilot activities, under the aegis of the **European Union (EU) Cities Mission**, and who are not yet a Pilot City within the Pilot City Programme (i.e., in the current portfolio, consisting of Cohorts 1 and 2 – with the latter being selected no later than 22 January 2024).

Supported through the range of services, knowledge, and expertise provided by the [NZC Mission Platform](#), the selected **Pilot Cities** will commit to implementing innovative activities within and/or across several city systems/emissions domains, that test pathways to decarbonisation and approaches to overcoming challenges/barriers to transformation and, ultimately, becoming a carbon-neutral city.

Pilot Cities will receive funding to support implementation of their experiment with an emphasis on collaboration, reflection, and learning, and identifying both barriers to change and opportunities for multi-level, multi-lever interventions to overcome these.

The SGA-NZC Consortium will aim to complement the existing portfolio of Pilot Cities and also fund new Pilot Cities of varying sizes and that reflect different starting points for cities, so as to reflect the diversity of contexts and maximise learning, replication, and scaling potential across the EU Mission Cities. This 'portfolio approach' ensures a cross-EU Cities Mission innovation and learning dimension (i.e., addressing challenges of/at Mission-scale and potentially relevant for many cities to meet European policy objectives) is achieved, as it evolves over the course of the programme. A balanced representation of contexts is the most conducive means towards the EC Missions target of change at the EU level, which goes beyond what can be achieved at the level of individual regions and nations.

The subgrants are funded under the umbrella of Horizon Europe, the 2021-2027 **Research and Innovation (R&I)** Framework Programme of the European Commission (EC). As the Coordinator of NetZeroCities, subgrantees will contract with EIT Climate-KIC following selection, due diligence, and the finalisation of the Award Agreement.

1.1 Background

NetZeroCities is a project designed to help cities overcome the current structural, institutional, and cultural barriers they face to achieve climate neutrality by 2030. NZC recognises the need for cities to develop specific strategies that are tailored to suit local and regional contexts, and will support them by developing, promoting, and integrating new and existing tools, resources, and expertise into an online platform accessible to all cities (**Mission**

¹ “[100 EU cities](#) that will participate in the [EU Mission](#) for 100 climate-neutral and smart cities by 2030, the so-called Cities Mission. The 100 cities come from all 27 Member States, with 12 additional cities coming from countries associated or with the potential of being associated to [Horizon Europe](#), the EU's research and innovation programme (2021-2027).” [Taken from https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_22_2591, accessed 22.08.2023]

Platform). The project tailors advanced capabilities related to systemic change, citizen engagement and democratic, participatory governance, capital and financial structuring, and social innovation, to ensure cities have access to expertise needed to address their challenges in becoming climate neutral.

The **NZC Mission Platform** provides support in the co-creation of Climate City Contracts with local stakeholders and citizens. Drawing up, signing, and implementing Climate City Contracts is a central feature of the [EU Mission on 100 Climate Neutral and Smart Cities](#) by 2030. While not legally binding, these contracts represent a clear and highly visible political commitment. This commitment extends not only to the EC, national and regional authorities, but also to the citizens they serve. These contracts outline the city's path to achieve climate neutrality by 2030, accompanied by a comprehensive investment strategy.

The **NZC Pilot Cities Programme** supports large scale piloting activities to exploit, deploy, and scale R&I and systemic solutions combining social, cultural, technological, nature-based, regulatory, and financial innovation, and new business and governance models to underpin the climate transition. As such, the NZC Pilot Cities Programme and its subgrant-funded activities are an opportunity for Mission Cities to put into practise elements of their developing and/or finalised Climate City Contracts and the plans contained in them and learn by doing so in the process.

For the avoidance of doubt, please remember this is the final opportunity for Mission Cities to join the Pilot Cities Programme, and the portfolio of Pilot Cities across three Cohorts selected through dedicated calls:

- NetZeroCities (NZC-H2020-202209) Call for Pilot Cities, Cohort 1 (2022) – see [here](#) for details of this Cohort;
- SGA-NZC (NZC-SGA-HE-202309) Call for Pilot Cities, Cohort 2 (2023) – decision communication and announcement of award by 23 January 2024; following the official announcement, the details of Cohort 2 will be available on the NetZeroCities [website](#);
- (This current call) SGA-NZC (SGA-NZC-SGA-HE-202401)

For a more detailed introduction to NZC, the EU Cities Mission, and the systems innovation approach being undertaken in the NZC project and Pilot Cities Programme, please refer to the [NZC Pilot Cities Guidebook](#).

All amendments to these Call Guidelines, as well as any additional guidance and FAQs, will be made available at the [NZC Platform](#), [NZC website](#), and [EU Funding and Tenders Portal](#).

To stay informed on the latest development, we encourage proponents to check the website regularly. Changes to these guidelines will be detailed in the *History of reviews* table on page 3 of this document.

1.2 NZC Pilot Cities programme – How cities will work in and through the programme

The NZC Pilot Cities Programme invites Mission Cities to apply to become **Pilot Cities** to test and implement innovative approaches, exploiting R&I towards rapid decarbonisation over a **two-year** pilot programme, working across thematic areas and functional silos in support of transforming systems. The selection of Pilot Cities will seek to address all urban systems,

including mobility, energy systems, and the built environment, material and resource flows, health and well-being, natural areas, cultural/ social/ financial/ institutional systems, and accessible public spaces. Any one Pilot City might focus on all, or a combination of, these urban systems, depending on their context and the scale of the proposed pilot activities.

The **expected results** of the NZC Pilot Cities Programme are:

- i) innovative solutions or groups of solutions tested and implemented at city or district level over the duration of the Pilot Cities Programme,
- ii) explicit lessons learnt from the innovative trajectories, with knowledge, capacity and capabilities developed at city level; and
- iii) a clear set of innovative solutions identified and ready to be implemented by the end of the Programme, which could include a new business model, policy initiative, governance innovation, funding or financing model, and EU-level replication or scaling strategy.

Cities or city-led partnerships selected to be a NZC Pilot City will receive financial support to third parties (FSTP) in the form of subgrants (following HE Grant Agreement rules for financial support to third parties specified in Article [9.4 Recipients of financial support to third parties \(page 41 of the HE MGA\)](#) 9.4) and, in addition, support from Climate Neutral City Advisors and other specialists to advance their work. Selected Pilot Cities may also access support from Mission Platform services provided by the SGA-NZC Consortium members or by external expertise, through a NZC City Expert Support Facility, to meet specific challenges outside the scope of services and support already provided.

As cities and/or local communities, participating in pilot activities, work to leverage additional resources, the NZC Mission Platform will assist them in building funding and financing for full implementation and subsequent replication and scaling efforts.

Finally, activities will be organised to advance learning among Pilot Cities as a key component for building capabilities, replicating successful innovations, and deepening relationships. A ‘Twinning programme’ will link Pilot Cities with ‘twin cities’ from across EU Member States and HE Associated Countries. The twinning effort aims to foster inclusive participation in effective climate action, nurture just and inclusive transitions, and build social cohesion.

1.3 Who can apply

Only local authorities or city administrations selected to be part of EU Mission for climate-neutral and smart cities by 2030 (Mission Cities) are eligible to apply to, and receive funding under, this Call. For the avoidance of doubt, this call is addressed to designated Mission cities only (who are not yet part of the Pilot Cities Programme portfolio) and therefore these consortia may not include other city, district, or municipal authorities (i.e., ‘non-Mission’) or existing Pilot Cities. Furthermore, if a district of a Mission City is also already a Pilot City, identified via either by the first Call (cohort 1 – NZC-H2020-202209) or second Call (cohort 2 – NZC-SGA-HE-202309) for Pilot Cities, that Mission City and related districts of that city are precluded from applying to this Call.

A group of Mission Cities (national or trans-national) may apply together in a consortium, however one of the Mission Cities will have to be designated as the consortium leader for all administrative and process-related purposes. The logic behind a joint application

will need to be explained in the proposal. In the case of a group of cities applying together in one proposal, the size of the requested subgrant must follow the award amounts as stated at section 4.1 of this document.

PLEASE NOTE

IMPORTANT:

- 1) Clarifications regarding eligibility criterion #2: *The consortium must be composed of at least two legal entities (one of which must be the local authority or city administration)*
- 2) Identification of Mission Cities as relates to the budget envelopes and number of Mission Cities required for each envelope (see section 4.1 of this document):

1) The eligibility of administrations of a higher level of governance (i.e. a metropolis, region, or national/governmental departments) as relates to Eligibility criterion #2: these entities are eligible to participate as consortium partners where there is a formal governance link with the Mission City/cities leading or involved with the proposal, however do not themselves count towards the eligible Mission City *count* (i.e. as related to the budget envelopes and the number present in the proposal) *except* in the case where the metropolis or region is itself the Mission City, formally.

2) For the avoidance of doubt: when considering the size of the budget envelopes for an application with multiple cities, only formally identified Mission Cities count. If one or more districts of a Mission City submits a proposal, they would count altogether as one Mission City and therefore represent that/those Mission City/cities, and must provide a Letter of Support from the relevant Mission City administration, acknowledging the representation acts on behalf of the given city – this consumes the right of the relevant Mission City to access a grant under the NZC Pilot Cities Programme.

Other organisations could also participate as members of a consortium led by a Mission City. These organisations could be, for example: research institutions, universities, SMEs, NGOs, associations, citizen groups or other relevant stakeholders involved in the implementation of the climate ambitions of a Mission City participating in the consortium.

Eligibility requirements for the call include, but are not limited to, each proposal being led by a relevant and eligible local authority or city administration, and the presence of at least two legal entities (one of which must be the eligible local authority or city administration), when applying as a consortium.

In the case of a group of cities applying together in one proposal, a partnership agreement which outlines the terms and conditions of collaboration between the consortium partners should be agreed upon and signed between the applicants before the signing the Award Agreement. Should this help, and with no obligation, applicants might use the [DESCA model agreement](#) for Horizon Europe.

In the case of a grouped proposal, please note that references to “city” in this document, and the associated Pilot Cities Programme Guidebook, will imply the group of cities or each city involved in that group.

For further information on eligibility, please see section **5.2** of this document.

2. What we are calling for

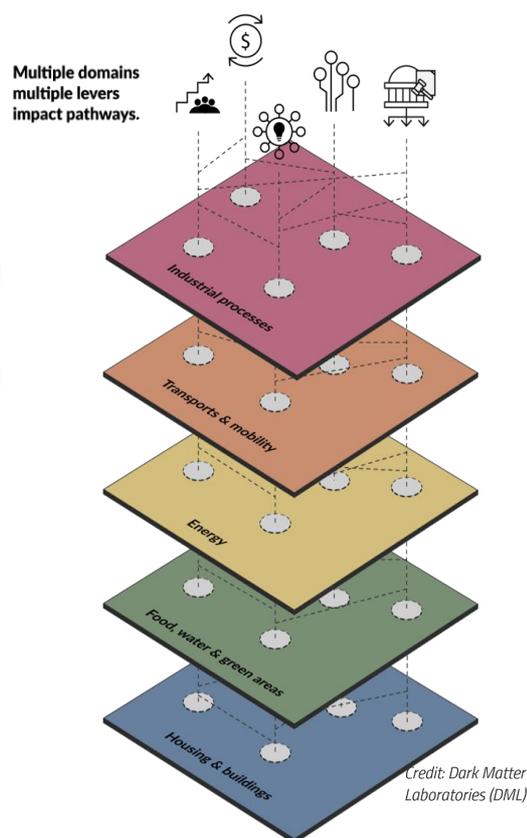
2.1 Aim

The aim of the selected cohort of Pilot Cities is to explore and test pathways to accelerated change towards 2030 climate neutrality goals — relevant to a city’s key emission domains — and to generate accelerated learning that can inform subsequent replication and scaling efforts in all other EU cities.

Cities will aim to achieve breakthroughs in overcoming entrenched barriers in emissions reduction, driving towards “tipping points” in deploying a range of solutions relevant to the local context, and enabling accelerated mutual and peer learning both locally and across Europe.

The NZC Pilot Cities Programme will support piloting activities aiming at a larger scale to deploy and scale systemic solutions, exploiting R&I outcomes, and combining social, cultural, technological, nature-based, regulatory, and financial innovation, and new business and governance models to underpin the climate transition.

The selection of Pilot Cities to join the existing portfolio will result in **multiple pilot-activity-types, each of which generates a different test of change and proves diverse types of pathways – as such, a cohort of diverse pilots.**



2.2 Approach: Systems innovation

Climate action in cities needs a systemic approach to change. We cannot change things in isolated pilot activities but only through a systemic way of thinking and acting on how to reduce harmful emissions quickly and at the same time build capacity for a just transition.

That means that cities must address sources of emissions at a sectoral scale (e.g., mobility, industry, buildings, etc.), understanding them as ‘transition building blocks’ to be ‘assembled’ in an overall city-scale climate neutrality strategy. Different levers of change must be activated simultaneously and in a coordinated way to enable change and achieve impact at sectoral or cross-sectoral level — political decisions that give a structure for changing cities, investments into change, regulation that triggers change, citizen engagement that demands change and technological, innovative, and holistic solutions that make implementation possible.

An approach integrating one or many emission sources (domains) combined with multi-lever action is an explicit requirement for Pilot Cities under NZC.

Therefore, in their proposal, cities will need to identify:

- key emissions domains they will be addressing through the pilot activities.

- systemic barriers related to these key emissions domains.
- levers/enabling conditions (technology; business models and finance; regulation, governance and contracting; participative democracy and culture; organisational capacity, etc) and system intervention-points to be tested in pilot activities.
- anticipated shorter- and longer-term impacts of their pilot activities implementation, and relevant indicators to measure impact/change.
- and how they intend to build upon relevant past or existing city climate action, research and innovation, related regional/national policies, knowledge and stakeholder platforms, and lessons to date.

In support of this, cities will also outline:

- their mandate to act (support and/or direct buy-in and contribution of decision makers, politicians, city/government departments, agencies, etc.)
- existing capabilities and capability gaps within the city government
- existing and intended (informal and formal) collaboration partners and coalitions of relevant stakeholders and actors.

This is not *only* about numbers of emissions reductions in/through the programme, but about the enabling system conditions, and complementary supporting interventions (cross system), to achieve the levels of decarbonisation required for net-zero by 2030. The change also needs to be sustainable, so this is about creating the conditions, capabilities, momentum, vectors, learning opportunities, and co-operative structures (trans-national, trans-continental) for change.

2.3 Scope of activities

The NZC Pilot Cities Programme will identify European cities or districts to test and implement innovative approaches, exploiting and building upon existing and past R&I outcomes/solutions towards rapid decarbonisation over a **two-year** pilot programme, working across thematic areas and functional silos in support of transforming systems.

Activities eligible for funding are:

- **Pioneering activities to support climate-neutrality**, including the deployment of innovative (new or improved) technology, product, process, service, solution, policy, or governance model at city level, explored in a cross-sectoral and systemic manner.
- **Systemic, science-based innovative initiatives that strengthen cities' use of scientific research** and ensure translation of research results into policy actions, to accelerate climate neutrality in the sectors/domains of water, food, energy, industry, housing and deep building retrofitting, transport, and mobility through the levers of green technology (i.e., digitalisation), behavioural/lifestyle change, social innovation, culture, policy and regulation, finance, and new business models (e.g., circular economy). These innovations shall account for co-benefits (e.g., health promotion) and the "[Do No Significant Harm](#)" (DNSH) principle.

- **Activities to support climate-neutrality to establish new knowledge and build capacity and capabilities of city government and associated local actors** through training, workshops, and other forms of learning.
- **Activities aiming to build more collaborative communities**, to advance new governance models at city level, and to engage citizens (including vulnerable/marginalised groups) and enable them to act on climate change in a systemic and cross-sectoral manner.

Please note: Pilot activities may cover several or all of these descriptions of eligible activities: this list is intended to allow for flexibility in proposing activities, rather than limiting proposed activities to any one alone.

Applicants will be requested at the point of submitting a proposal to describe and declare the links between their pilot activities and the eligible activities as listed above.

3. Call Timeline

Date/Time (CET)	Item	Link (if applicable)
Tuesday 16 January 2024	<p>Publication: Call Guidelines</p> <p>The guidelines for the Call, including eligibility, assessment, and selection criteria, will be published both to the NZC website and Mission Portal and EU Funding and Tenders Opportunities Portal, under the type of subgrants “Cascade Funding Calls”.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NZC Platform - NZC Website - EU Mission: Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Funding & tenders (europa.eu)
Tuesday 16 January 2024 (12.00 CET)	<p>Call Opens</p> <p>At 12.00 CEST hrs on 16 January 2024, the finalised Call Guidelines shall be published, and the Call and application process will be formally launched. Cities will be able to register themselves with the submission platform and create a proposal. Cities will be able to save and return to this proposal at any time up until the submission deadline as stated below.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NZC Platform NZC Website
January – February 2024	<p>Upcoming information sessions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 23/1 – Ambition, Approach & System and technical information 2. 6/2 – Eligibility and Assessment Criteria 3. 13/2 – Pilot City Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning & Sensemaking 4. 20/2 – Pilot Cities Programme Boot Camp & Twinning Learning Programme 	<p>Registration links:</p> <p>23/1 – 11.00 CET - LINK</p> <p>6/2 – 11.00 CET - LINK</p> <p>13/2 – 11.00 CET - LINK</p> <p>20/2 – 11.00 CET - LINK</p>
January – February 2024	<p>Update to existing Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)</p> <p>Between January and February 2024, the existing Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section will continue to be available and regularly updated as required.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NZC Website
Monday 18 March 2024 (17.00 CET)	<p>Call deadline</p> <p>Formal deadline for full submission. Proposals received after this date are not considered eligible. No extensions and modification of your proposal after the submission are possible.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NZC Platform NZC Website
March – May 2024	<p>Review and selection</p> <p>Proposals will be checked against eligibility criteria (Stage 1) and eligible proposals reviewed by independent external experts (Stage 2). Proposals reaching a minimum scoring threshold against specified criteria will proceed to final portfolio selection (Stage 3). More information about these Stages can be found in section 6 of this document.</p>	N/A
20 May 2024	<p>Decision Communication</p> <p>Formal outcomes will be sent to applicants, along with feedback.</p>	Email
May – June 2024	<p>NZC Pilot Cities Programme ‘Boot Camp’</p> <p>Selected cities and their consortia will be invited to an intensive learning and exchange ‘Boot Camp’ to support the refinement of their pilot activities, and raise ambition to, and synergy with, Mission goals. These will be a combination of online and face to face sessions</p>	<p>Online</p> <p>Face-to-Face</p>
May - August 2024	<p>Award Agreement development</p> <p>This period will kick-off with a collective session on next steps, covering due diligence, the proposal refinement/amendment process, upcoming Boot Camp, and subgrant award signing process.</p> <p>Proposals will be amended during this time to address compliance and selection feedback. Due diligence checks, and finalisation of revised project plans.</p>	Online
May 2024	<p>Publication of Call outcomes and selected Pilot Cities</p> <p>Parallel to the contracting process, a list of successful Pilot Cities will be published to the NZC Platform and disseminated through NZC communications channels. This will include a description to illustrate the portfolio selected.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NZC Platform NZC Website
1 September 2024	<p>NZC Pilot Cities Programme – Cohort 3, launches.</p> <p>The programme start date is also the effective start date and indicates the cost eligibility start date for the programme.</p>	N/A
30 August 2026	<p>NZC Pilot Cities Programme – Cohort 3, concludes.</p> <p>The programme end date is also the effective project end date and indicates the cost eligibility end date for the programme.</p>	N/A

4. Budget requirements

4.1 Funding

The total available budget under this call is between a minimum of 18 million and a maximum 26 million Euros (EUR). The funding will be allocated across three subgrant envelopes as follows:

- **500,000 - 600,000 EUR²**: proposals with a minimum of one Mission City plus at least one additional consortium partner (NB: the additional consortium partner may be another eligible Mission city/district).
- **1,000,000 EUR**: proposals with a minimum of two distinct Mission Cities (i.e. formally selected as such), plus any additional consortium partners.
- **1,500,000 EUR**: proposals with a minimum of three distinct Mission Cities (i.e. formally selected as such), plus any additional consortium partners.

Reflecting the diversity of cities and the proposed scope in combination of eligible activities that cities may undertake in the Pilot Cities Programme, the amount awarded will be determined by the subgrant request specified by the applicant (and as aligned to the subgrant allocation compliance criteria, under section **4.2**) and the budget/estimated costs corresponding to the proposed activities articulated in the proposal form (matching the subgrant request), in line with national and institutional policies, rules, practices. Please see **4.3** for further information.

The number of subgrants allocated via this Call will depend on the distribution of subgrant envelopes as described above, and the number of proposals that pass Stage 2 of the evaluation process. The final number of subgrants awarded will fall within the budget range of eighteen to twenty-six million Euros (€18-26M). The budget range is established by the programming of €12-20M through the Call for Pilot Cities (Cohort 2), launched in September 2023, and a future additional funding opportunity (details of which are to be confirmed), where remaining funds will be programmed up to the maximum available across all three calls under HORIZON-RIA-SGA-NZC-101121530: fifty-two million EUR (€52M).

Funding for the selected projects will be made available in tranches subject to progress monitoring and risk mitigation, with foreseen 50% of prefinancing, followed by 40% within 30 days of the approval of the first reporting milestone and up to 10% of final balancing payment within 30 days from the approval of the final reports. The final amounts are subject to satisfactory reporting and total declared costs submitted by the projects.

4.2 Subgrant allocation compliance

For your budget assumptions and subgrant allocation to be compliant under the HORIZON-RIA-SGA-NZC-101121530, the following budgeting rules, at the level of the proposal, should be followed.

² As per the Grant Agreement text (HORIZON-RIA-SGA-NZC-101121530), the minimum grant to be allocated through this Call is 500,000 EUR. An upper range in this subgrant envelope is set to provide sufficient funding for at least one city and consortium partner, relative to the other subgrant envelopes. Therefore, for this envelope proposals may have a budget range and grant allocation request between 500,000 and 600,000 EUR.

1. **The minimum and maximum amount for subgrant funding to be allocated to a selected proposal** through this Call will be no less than 500,000 EUR and not more than 1,500,000 EUR, depending on the expected scope and impact of the proposed projects, and according to the given budgeting envelopes and associated rules outlined below.
2. At least **two legal entities** should have budget / allocated subgrant in the proposal.
3. The requested subgrant allocation per legal entity **not being more than two-thirds** of the total subgrant requested.
4. **The criteria for determining the exact amount of subgrants to selected third parties** will be based on:
 - i) proposed budgets submitted by applicants, in line with eligible cost categories; and
 - ii) assessment of the budget/proposal's value for money in relation to the proposed activities and expected impacts.

This will need to be reflected in the budget assumption submission, specified per consortium organisation in the budget table of the proposal.

The signing of subsequent Award Agreements will be preceded by compliance with these budgeting rules.

4.3 Financial provisions

Information and guidance on eligible cost categories for the NZC Pilot Cities Programme will be published by the opening of the Call on 16 January 2024.

It is anticipated that eligible costs will cover **direct costs**: personnel; travel and subsistence, equipment, other goods, and services (purchase costs); internally invoiced goods and services; and subcontracting – following applicable [Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement](#) Articles.

Forms of Costs

Costs actually incurred, identifiable and verifiable, recorded in the accounts, etc. Only **indirect costs** are based on a flat rate – 25% – calculated on the direct costs (personnel and purchase costs only; internally invoiced goods and services and subcontracting costs do not attract overheads), and no supporting evidence is needed to verify them.

More information on the eligible costs for the Pilot Cities Programme is published in [NZC PCP Financial Guidelines for Applicants](#). guidelines provide the framework to prepare the budget to ensure value for money and proportionate budgets as related to planned activities. Budgeted costs should align with national and institutional policies and practices. Such assessment would take place prior to any subgrant allocation and may result in the adjustment of grant allocation where there is assessed to be misalignment or where financial guidelines are not followed.

Form of subgrant

Financial support is provided in the form of subgrants based on, and reimbursed against, actual costs incurred and submitted in interim and final reporting.



The criterion for determining the exact financial support is based upon estimated costs (based on the guidelines provided) and in relation to the activities proposed (i.e., budget assumption), in line with national and institutional policies, rules, and practices.

4.4 NZC Pilot Cities Programme: special budget features

NZC Pilot Cities Programme ‘Core Support’

Throughout the programme, Pilot Cities receive **Core Support** from SGA-NZC expert consortium partners across three components:

- **Governance for system transformation:** supporting the creation of viable pathways to systemic transformation, assisting cities with the set-up and governance of multi-actor collaborative structures, and working methods between multi-level public authorities, private sector, higher education, and civic organisations, including vulnerable groups and communities.
- **Funding and financing:** helping cities understand how to practically and quickly mobilise resources to support their pursuit of the Mission goal, unlocking a range of resources, whether public sector co-funding, private sector finance, redirection of public and private sector budgets, philanthropic funding, funding from local liability holders (e.g., utility companies).
- **Monitoring, evaluation, and learning:** enabling developmental evaluation and learning to accelerate capacity building by offering a range of tools, processes and settings for such evaluation and learning, i.e., sensemaking.

Considering the specificity of the NZC Pilot Cities programme, including the features focussing on a large learning programme addressing pan-EU pathways to change and decarbonisation, and the development of skills and capabilities in addressing financial sustainability of climate action, the following activities should be represented by person months/necessary resources in your proposal:

Activity	Scope
Governance	No additional person months required, beyond those allocated to governance of the pilot activities themselves; however, it is expected that proposed project management and governance activities/ resources will engage with core support on innovative approaches to governance, collaboration, planning, and decision making (as described above).
Future financing /financial sustainability	Future financing / financial sustainability is a separate compulsory workstream to allow Pilot Cities (and in the case of a multi-city proposal, all cities) to acquire and test capabilities necessary to ensure the sustainability and the replication of their pilot activities. Estimated person months for this activity during the Pilot Cities Programme is 8 to 10 person months.

Sensemaking³	Sensemaking and cross-fertilization activities task will require the appointment of a systemic innovation focal point of the city. The focal point will participate in the co-design of specific cross-fertilization activities (providing contrast and suggesting topics) and will also facilitate the participation of city officials and other relevant city stakeholders in those activities. The estimated person months for this activity during the Pilot Cities Programme is 4 to 5 person months, in addition to any consortium partner contributions.
Learning Activities (Including the Cities Learning Programme)	Twinning Learning Programme consists of one visit of two days to Twin Cities (plus preparation time), two in-person meetings hosting Twin Cities for two days (plus preparation time), and online work, summing up to an estimated 25 days, distributed proportionally across the different modules of the learning cycle, over the period of the programme. This may also include consortium partners and city stakeholders as required.
Communications and media activities	<p>Communications and media activities – please make sure to include pilot activities in your communications and media programming.</p> <p>Beneficiaries must promote the action and its results, targeting multiple audiences (including the media and the public) in a strategic and effective manner; and ensure the visibility of the EU funding. This is a pass-through subgrant requirement for third parties and will be contained within subsequent subgrant agreements resulting from this call, including further information on obligations.</p>
Financial management and audit	Please refer to the NZC Pilot Cities Programme Financial Guidelines for further information on the audit requirement.

³ Sensemaking refers to a structured, facilitated process of observation, collection, reflection, synthesis, analysis, pattern finding and insight generation in order to produce intelligence that enables decision making.

5. Review Mechanism and Selection Criteria

5.1 Overview

This Call will follow a three-stage evaluation and selection process:

Stage 1: Eligibility check

The eligibility check stage entails the assessment of pass/fail requirements (see **5.2**) that are assessed by the SGA-NZC Consortium. Proposals must comply to the full set of eligibility criteria to proceed to Stage 2.

Proposals that fail the eligibility criteria will not be considered further in the process and applicants will be informed of the outcome.

Stage 2: Evaluation and scoring of eligible proposals

Scores will be made against the individual assessment criteria (see **5.3**) by at least two independent external experts, based on the submitted proposals. These experts are appointed from the pool of experts identified through an open call and contracted by the coordinator as part of the NetZeroCities project. The experts from this pool are deployed against all Calls for Pilot Cities. This evaluation is made using sub-criteria grouped into the three main categories elaborated below:

- **Mandate to Act:** under this grouping of criteria, we will mostly assess the political mandate and support of the proposed pilot activities; the relevance and understanding of the city/district's emissions domains (in focus under the proposed pilot activities) and the identified barriers to change that will be addressed; and the city/district's orientation to prospective solutions and/or approaches to overcoming these.
- **Capacity to Act:** under this grouping of criteria we will mostly assess the city/district's existing and/or proposed approach to engaging with key stakeholders, as well as plans for how citizens will be involved in the proposed activities as relevant; the proposed organisational and cross-department/functional capacity and leadership of the city/district in implementing the pilot activities; the planning for and integration of considerations relating to diversity, inclusion, gender, and justice/just transition throughout the pilot activities; and the coherence of the proposed work plan and budget as they relate to the proposed activities.
- **Impact:** under this grouping of criteria we will mostly assess the anticipated direct impacts and indicators proposed by the city/district for measuring change/impact; anticipated indirect impact(s) and co-benefits; the proposed approach to governance and learning, and prospects for transfer, replication, and scaling; plans for risk management and continuous learning; and the change anticipated to be seen in the city following the implementation of pilot activities.

The detailed criteria for assessment of proposals for the SGA-NZC financial support to third parties scheme is defined in section **5.3** of these Call Guidelines. In order to proceed to **Stage 3 – Strategic Selection**, proposals will need to meet minimum threshold scores in each of the three grouped criteria and any specified individual criteria.

Stage 3: Award decision

The selection committee will choose a cohort of Pilot Cities to join the portfolio of Pilots Cities⁴ through a dedicated selection process, aiming at complementing the existing cohorts of Pilot Cities (i.e. inter-cohort portfolio) selected through previous calls, based on the given selection

⁴ "Portfolio of Pilot Cities" refers to a group of cities selected through the Call(s) for Pilot Cities, offering the highest potential for direct impact, and learning opportunities at individual and group levels.

criteria. The selection of the Pilot Cities to be supported through the subgrants will build on the review by independent external experts and the scores noted in Stage 2.

All submissions will be assessed fairly and transparently in the scope of the eligibility criteria, assessment of quality criteria, and strategic programme considerations as outlined in section **5.4**. Decisions as to whether a proposal is accepted or rejected will be communicated as detailed in this document.

Potential conflicts of interest

EIT Climate-KIC are committed to ensure no conflicts of interest in the assessment and selection process:

- **Stage 1:** EIT Climate-KIC persons involved in Stage 1 abide by the Conflicts of Interest & Gifts Policy and Anti-Fraud, Corruption & Bribery Policy and undergo periodic training to ensure processes are free from conflicts of interest. These policies are available at <https://www.climate-kic.org/policies/>
- **Stage 2:** Independent reviewers are appointed by EIT Climate-KIC ensuring confidentiality of review and freedom from conflicts of interest.
- **Stage 3:** The selection committee will confirm freedom from conflicts of interest prior to conducting Stage 3.

5.2 Stage 1 – Eligibility

Eligibility criteria are used to ensure proposals submitted under the call meet mandatory requirements as set out in the Grant Agreement (number: HORIZON-RIA-SGA-NZC-101121530) and, should they be successful in Stages 2 and 3, are subsequently eligible to receive funding. Eligibility criteria are typically pass/fail where proposals must pass on **all criteria**, otherwise they will not proceed to the next Stage of the process and be rejected from the call outright. The pass/fail eligibility criteria for this call are:



#	Eligibility criterion	Description and how demonstrated	How assessed
1	Only one proposal may be submitted by an eligible Mission City / District.	<p>Only one proposal may be submitted by an eligible city/district. In the case of multi-city/district proposals, each city/district may appear in only one proposal. There shall be no territorial double-funding; therefore, a higher level of administration should not appear in a separate proposal to that of a constituent, lower-level administration (e.g., district). Applicants are advised to coordinate at the relevant city/district administrative levels before applying.</p> <p>How demonstrated: Proponent/consortium members listed in the Call platform, and their role(s).</p>	Pass/fail
2	The consortium must contain at least two legal entities (one of which must be the local authority or city administration).	<p>The consortium must contain at least two partnering organisations, one of which must be the city / district administration, and any others must be separate, independent (from the city) legal entities.</p> <p>How demonstrated: Proponent/consortium members listed in the Call platform, and their role(s). Note: due diligence will be undertaken post-selection to establish legal entities, as/where required.</p>	Pass/fail
3	The proposal must be led by one of the city administrations.	<p>The proposal must be led by the city administration; in case of a district submission, it must be led by an authorised administration from within the specified district.</p> <p>How demonstrated: Proponent/consortium members listed in the Call platform, and their role(s).</p>	Pass/fail
4	A letter of support from the city mayor (or equivalent) must be provided. In the case of a multi-city proposal, one letter must be provided for each city.	<p>Letter of support from the city mayor (or equivalent) and/or any city official mandated to sign on the city/mayor/city council's behalf, for the NZC Pilot City Programme. In the case of a multi-city proposal, one letter must be provided for each city.</p> <p>How demonstrated: Letter of support included in application. The letter must include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant's official document header/template. • Signed and dated by a city/district official mandated to signed on the city/mayor/city council's behalf. • The name and code of the Call. • Unambiguous commitment of the city/district authority to the NZC Pilot Cities Programme and declaration of learning exploitation. <p>Please use the provided pro forma template, accessible here.</p>	Pass/fail
5	A list of stakeholders to be engaged in the pilot activities must be provided.	<p>A list of stakeholders engaged/to be engaged are provided</p> <p>How demonstrated: Question in the Call Form requesting a list of engaged/to be engaged stakeholders.</p>	Pass/fail

Please be mindful that applicants will be required to declare participation in the Twinning Programme at the point of submission.

Proposals must comply to the full set of the eligibility criteria. Proposals that fail the eligibility criteria will not be considered further in the process and applicants will be informed of the outcome. Due to the large volume of proposals and the nature of the criteria applied, EIT Climate-KIC is not able to entertain modification to proposals that fail to meet eligibility criteria. Applicants are advised to pay careful attention to these criteria to avoid errors at this stage.

5.3 Stage 2 – Assessment

Assessment criteria

The assessment criteria for this call are set out below. Each criterion is scored, on a scale of 0 to 5, by at least two independent external experts. The score across all categories is totalled to produce a ranked list of proposals. The maximum available score is 115 points.

In order to proceed to **Stage 3 – Strategic Selection**, proposals will need to meet minimum threshold score in each of the following three groupings of criteria, as follows:

Criteria grouping	Points available / number of criteria	Threshold required*
Mandate to Act	35pts / 7 criteria	21 (including at least 6 pts score against “Understanding the problem” and at least 6 pts score against “Orienting to solutions”)
Capacity to Act	35pts / 7 criteria	21 (including at least 3 pts score against “Cross-cutting considerations”)
Impact	45pts / 9 criteria	27

*EIT Climate-KIC reserves the right to adjust the threshold depending on the overall quality and number of proposals received.

Scoring table

Score	Description
0	Proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.
1	Poor. The criterion is inadequately addressed or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
2	Fair. The proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.
3	Good. The proposal addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present.
4	Very good. The proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.
5	Excellent. The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

	Criterion	Description
Mandate to Act	Mandate to Act (15 points)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Political: The pilot activities have a high level of political support and endorsement from the city, with a strong mandate for continued support through political will (5 points), ● Strategic: The pilot activities are well connected to the city's overarching vision for climate neutrality and existing activities that will support this. (5 points) ● Operational: The pilot activities are well connected to, and supported by, city budgeting and city programming. (5 points)
	Understanding the problem(s) (10 points)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● City emissions domain(s): The pilot activities are focussed on relevant and important emissions domain(s) for the city, and the city's understanding of the emission domains' status quo is credible and - where available/applicable - backed up with data. (5 points) ● Barriers to change: The city has identified systemic barriers and/or opportunities relevant to the concerned emissions domains. (5 points)

	<p>Orienting to innovative and systemic solutions (10 points)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Levers: The pilot activities identify multiple, connected levers of/for change relevant to the concerned emissions domain(s), considering and exploiting relevant R&I solutions (and where relevant, inspired by and building upon existing European best practices and available solutions) and the city's overarching carbon neutrality ambition. (5 points) • Entry points: Relevant entry / intervention points for the pilot activities to exploit the levers of change are identified (i.e., where and how, practically, the levers will be used in the two-year programme), and the proposal explains how their interaction will target a system change / transformation, towards climate-neutrality. (5 points)
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Capacity to Act</p>	<p>Collaboration and engagement (10 points)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder engagement: The pilot activities engage/aims to engage stakeholders that are relevant to these activities and emissions domain(s) concerned and representing a broad spectrum of expertise and experience. Roles of stakeholders are elaborated and an understanding of how the city will collaborate with them to implement pilot activities. (5 points) • Citizen engagement: Citizens are engaged at relevant stages of the pilot activities, and it is clear how their engagement will contribute to garner collective narrative and understanding of climate actions. Where relevant, the pilot activities describe how citizen engagement will contribute to the design and implementation of the pilot activities. (5 points)
	<p>Cross-cutting considerations (5 points)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-cutting considerations: The Pilot City proposal demonstrates awareness of how its activities and/or outcomes relate to and cater for cross-cutting themes such as diversity, inclusion, gender dimension, accessibility, and a just transition. The pilot activities outline a practical and proportionate approach to how it will approach how such considerations are treated in the implementation of the pilot activities. (5 points)
	<p>Capacity and capability (10 points)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leading implementation: The proposal details how the pilot activities will be led and coordinated by the city, with representation from relevant city departments, roles, and capabilities, as they relate to the pilot activities and their implementation. (5 points) • Learning assessment plan: The proposal identifies, through a learning plan, how it intends to address capability and capacity needs of the city administration throughout implementation and then retain these beyond the life of the Programme. (5 points)
	<p>Soundness of work plan (10 points)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sound work plan: The proposed work plan to implement the pilot activities, within the allocated timeframe and budget, is sound and coherent with a systemic approach. Where a pilot cannot be fully implemented with the provided subgrant, a coherent plan is demonstrated for identifying and securing additional resources (by the city or co-financers) to fully implement the pilot within 24 months. (5 points) • Sound budget: The proposed budget is clearly outlined and justified and reflects value for money. (5 points)
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Impact</p>	<p>Pilot activities' (learning / reflexive) governance (10 points)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflexive governance: The proposed governance model fosters transparency and accountability, actively contributes to the implementation of the pilot activities, and engages a diverse range of relevant participants with appropriate roles. (5 points) • Governance for learning: Governance activities support and enable learning and reflection, to drive development and improvement of pilot activities. (5 points)
	<p>Pilot activities' outcomes and direct/indirect impact (20 points)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct impact: The proposal outlines substantive, direct impact it aims to have on city-level GHG emissions across one or more emission domains, as a proportion of the city's overall emissions profile. (5 points) • Indirect impact or co-benefits: A wide range of co-benefits of the pilot activities is identified (from a provided catalogue and/or, where applicable, bespoke 'non-standard' co-benefits) and the link demonstrated, with relevant indicators to

	<p>measure outcomes and impact beyond the scope of direct implementation. (5 points)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Indicator selection: Relevant and balanced set of indicators have been selected from a provided catalogue (and/or, where required, bespoke 'customised' indicators elaborated) for the pilot activities' intended direct impact and co-benefits, with appropriate proposed monitoring of indicators (including how to measure). (5 points) ● Pathways to climate-neutrality: The city outlines how they would expect their pilot activities to unlock pathways (i.e., create enabling conditions for long-term change beyond the direct scope of the project) by achieving short-term or medium-term outcomes to transition towards climate-neutrality. (5 points)
Pilot activities' scalability, replication, and risk management (15 points)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Scalability of impact: The proposal outlines how the pilot activities could be expanded, and the impact this expansion (scaling) would have (at intervals/over time) upon city-wide GHG emissions. (5 points) ● Replication and transferability: The proposal presents detailed assumptions for how learning in and through the pilot activities will be captured and disseminated to support potential transferability and/or replication to other cities across the EU. (5 points) ● Risk management: The proposal identifies risks related to both the practical implementation of the pilot activities and the potential indirect impacts and outcomes (such as related to co-benefit factors), with adequate mitigation and appropriate contingency measures. (5 points)

5.4 Stage 3 – Strategic Selection

A Selection Committee composed of two members of the NZC Executive Committee, the Coordinator, and the potential addition of (an) external independent observer(s) (EC staff or external) will look for geographic diversity, a range of city sizes and typology, city-system and emissions domain foci, potential connections, synergies, and combinatorial learning and opportunities across Pilot Cities.

This stage constitutes a contextual judgement that considers and prioritises a portfolio of Pilots Cities. We regard all proposals that have passed the preceding Stage 2 as being of suitable quality and this subsequent stage instead focusses on the potential additional value that can be unlocked by supporting multiple Pilot Cities in parallel as part of a portfolio of experiments.

To ensure the highest possible combined impact and learning opportunities at the portfolio level⁵, strategic selection of pilot cities portfolio takes consideration of (in order):

- **Geographic diversity** - based on data gathered at application stage (*highest possible representation of EU MS & HE AC*)
- **Diversity of city size & typology** - based on data gathered at application stage (*best possible representation of cities' size and typology*)
- **Diversity of focus on emissions domains/barriers and of intended levers of/for change to be tested** - based on data gathered at application stage (*highest representation of combined emissions domains and levers of change*)
- **Score in Stage 2** (see section 5.3). During the portfolio selection, in the event of proposals with similar characteristics with equal scoring in Stage 2, the following

⁵ The 'portfolio' here refers to the combined Pilot Cities under both this call and the previous NetZeroCities Pilot Cities Programme Call (September 2022, NZC-H2020-202209).

parameters will be used to define the final ranking:

- Priority will be given to those scoring highest in the grouped **Impact criteria**.
- When the scores are still equal, priority will be given to those scoring highest in the grouped **Capacity to Act** criteria.
- When the scores are still equal, priority will be given to those scoring highest in the grouped **Mandate to Act** criteria.
- When the scores are still equal, priority will be given to those scoring highest on **cross-cutting considerations** (sub-criterion under Capacity to Act).
- **Budget availability**

Subgrant allocation across budget envelopes will be considered according to the information set out in section **4.1**.

5.5 Decision communication

EIT Climate-KIC will aim to communicate final outcomes to applicants by 20 May 2024. The final communication will indicate the subgrant allocation and state the cost eligibility period (if unchanged, 1 September 2024 to 30 August 2026). This communication might include (if applicable) a set of recommendations/conditions. The subgranted funding may vary from the requested funding in the proposal. A list of selected projects with a description of the action, subgrant amounts and legal names of selected applicants and their country as well as date of the award and duration will be published on the NetZeroCities Platform. Contract development and signing processes are expected to continue through to June 2024 as applicants respond to relevant compliance requirements and conditions for funding. EIT Climate-KIC aims to issue subgrant awards for signature no later than 1 September 2024, with the programme commencing from no later than 1 September 2024.

6. How to submit a proposal

To develop a high-quality proposal to this call, you should run through this pre-submission checklist:

Checklist	
You have established that you are a Mission City and not (yet) a NZC Pilot City, which would preclude your proposal being considered further in the process.	<input type="checkbox"/>
You have read this document carefully and started to think about how your pilot activities will be framed with respect to the Call for Proposals brief.	<input type="checkbox"/>
You have read the EU Cities Mission Implementation Plan and the Info Kit for Cities , and you have attended the information sessions to learn how to shape your proposal. To register, please see the Call Timeline table under section 3 of this document. For further information, please contact pilotcities@netzerocities.eu .	<input type="checkbox"/>
You have read the NZC Pilot Cities Programme Guidebook , which contains useful information for developing your pilot activities and proposal, and further information about the NZC Pilot Cities Programme and its implementation.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cities have registered both their organisation and individual account(s) in the proposal submission system. The proposal submission system will be launched by the 16 January 2024, with further guidance provided on how to register with it, and then begin and complete your proposal for submission. The registration process can take time, so do not leave it until the last minute! We encourage applicants to register in the system as soon as possible. Please ensure you have registered more than 10 days in advance of any deadline.	<input type="checkbox"/>
[Optional] You have created a proposal in the submission system, providing high-level information about the proposed pilot activities (this is not assessed but will be useful for the NZC consortium to analyse registered proposals and their location, focus, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>
The programme will request the lead Mission City to indicate their PIC number at Due Diligence stage if selected; kindly check your PIC status in the EC portal.	<input type="checkbox"/>
All proposals should be written in English. Exceptions can be made for supporting documents, such as census source data, formal council resolutions – these documents could be written in one of the official languages spoken in the country from which the proposal is submitted. You may choose to provide a brief summary in English ⁶ .	<input type="checkbox"/>
Obtained and uploaded a Letter of Support from the city Mayor (or equivalent) that incorporates all the elements outlined in point four (4) of the eligibility criteria.	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you have followed all the suggested steps above and wish to proceed, then complete the Full Proposal (according to the Call process and required documentation), by the specified deadline.

Please note that any proposals submitted outside of the proposal submission system will not be accepted; **and that the system will be locked after the deadline**. If you experience technical difficulties, please consult the system guidance. If you are still unable to resolve your

⁶ EIT Climate-KIC reserves the right to request a translation at any time. EIT Climate-KIC also reserves the right not to pass additional information to reviewers if not provided in English or supported by a translation.

system issue, follow the guidance on how to raise a support request via appropriate channels.
For all other non-technical related queries, please contact pilotcities@netzerocities.eu.

7. Data, systems, and complaints

7.1 Your Data

All applicants will be required to accept EIT Climate-KIC's [General Terms and Conditions](#) which also includes, in particular, our [Privacy Policy](#), [Acceptable Use Policy](#) and [Cookie Policy](#) and warrant and represent that they have the authority to agree and accept these on behalf of the named organisation. The public sharing of data may include, but is not limited to, EIT Climate-KIC making the outcome of this call for proposals available on its website in relation to statistics on number of proposals, per country, per thematic topics, budget, and funding (i.e., aggregated Call data). Information on each activity selected for funding, including data on each participant and abstracts of the activity proposal, may also be made available for publication purposes.

Personal data provided may be processed, including sharing with other organisations, by EIT Climate-KIC and certain sensitive data elements will be visible to other SGA-NZC Consortium partners. The applicant warrants and represents that in providing personal data in connection with the proposal, the data subjects have consented to the provision of this personal data and the processing of it by EIT Climate-KIC in the manner indicated in accordance with our Privacy Policy, and that the organisation provides the personal data in accordance with applicable law.

Applicants shall comply with applicable data protection legislation including but not limited to the General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR) and any national implementing laws, regulations, and secondary legislation, in each case as amended, supplemented, or replaced from time to time.

7.2 Confidentiality

EIT Climate-KIC will treat your proposal confidentially, as well as any related information, data and documents received in accordance with our Privacy Policy or as otherwise indicated throughout the proposal form (i.e., city name, project title, summary description etc.), subject to the above paragraph (Your Data).

Please note, SGA-NZC Consortium members are prohibited from discussing in detail, or advising on or contributing directly to the development of your proposal.

7.3 Complaints & Appeals

Upon reception of a decision communication letter with either the results of the eligibility review (Stage 1 Eligibility) or the evaluation report (Stage 2 Assessment), the lead applicant may request a review of the outcome if they identify that the results of the eligibility checks were incorrect, or that there has been a procedural shortcoming or a manifest error in the evaluation process.

This procedure is not meant to contest the judgement made by the independent external reviewers or the selection committee. It can only look into procedural shortcomings and – if it applies – into factual errors. The decision communication letters (either Stage 1 or Stage 2) will specify a deadline for the receipt of any such requests, which will be 5 calendar days

starting from the day immediately following the date of receipt of the decision communication letter by the applicant. The confirmation of delivery of a decision communication letter will be established via the Microsoft Outlook Tracking function.

An acknowledgement of receipt of a request for review of the outcome by the applicant will be sent by the NZC Pilot Cities Team no later than 3 calendar days after the deadline for submitting the request, indicating the estimated date of a final reply.

Request must be:

- related to the evaluation process or eligibility checks, including a clear description of the grounds for complaint.
- received within the time limit specified in the information letter.
- sent by the lead applicant.

Requests that do not meet the above-mentioned conditions will not be admitted.

Should the applicants want to raise a complaint, they will need to send an email to the NZC Pilot Cities team at pilotcities@netzerocities.eu. EIT Climate-KIC maintains an independent and fair assessment procedure to avoid potential conflicts of interest and ensure fair treatment among applicants.