European
Commission

Guide for
Applicants

DIGITAL
CITIES
CHALLENGE

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Applicants

Contents

1 Introduction

A confluence of advanced technologies such as the Internet of Things, big data, advanced manufacturing, robotics, 3D printing, block chain technologies, artificial intelligence and new materials (e.g. bio or nano-based) are enabling enterprises across Europe to transform production and services. They will have far-reaching consequences for productivity, employment, skills, innovation, income distribution, trade, well-being and the environment.

The 'Digital Cities Challenge' initiative is aimed at helping European cities to foster the use of these advanced technologies. By doing so, the cities involved will boost growth, create jobs and become better places to live.

Through hands-on first-class policy advice, coaching, networking and peer support, the initiative will **offer 15 cities in Europe with still unreleased potential in terms of digital maturity, but which have strong aspirations to advance, the opportunity to capture the benefits of digital transformation**. The initiative will support each participating city in implementing its digital transformation strategy and roadmap. To this end, the initiative is launching a call for Expressions of Interest.

The present **Guide for Applicants** presents a brief overview of the context and approach of the Digital Cities Challenge and details all the information needed to prepare a successful Expression of Interest.

1.1. The role of regions and cities in fostering digital transformation

European cities have a crucial role to play in creating the kind of infrastructure and ecosystems needed to foster innovation and enhance productivity, efficiency and well-being. In 2015, almost three quarters (72.4 %) of EU-28 citizens lived in

cities, towns and suburbs. In economic terms, European cities contribute up to 85% of the regions' GDP. This emphasizes the important role city based interactions among citizens and companies will play in creating digitally-enhanced opportunities. Cities offer a key platform for boosting business development and improving the wellbeing of citizens thanks to digital transformation, via factors such as:

- High quality infrastructures (digital and physical);

- A data rich environment;

- Digital talents and skilled workforce able to harness digital opportunities;

- Hands-on support for companies to engage and succeed in their digital transformation.

The high density makeup of cities puts them in an excellent position to create innovative ecosystems, bolstered by a wide array of different stakeholders from government, industry, finance, academia, communitarian organisations, social partners, etc.

1.2. The Blueprint for cities and regions as launch pads for digital transformation

The European Commission supported the development of the 'Blueprint for cities and regions as launch pads for digital transformation[1]. This blueprint sets out a step by step guide for local stakeholders to become digital ambassadors, including a range of enabling conditions and success factors identified across Europe. The blueprint is structured as a practical guide and addressed to the stakeholders of regions, cities and local ecosystems. It is made up of four building blocks, each citing three success factors and good practices for effective digital transformation, all taken from pioneer cities:

- **Leadership and collaboration for a smart governance of the local digital ecosystem:** The visionary, pro-active leadership of individuals facilitating the collaboration between sectors and industries.

- **Digital skills and entrepreneurs to accelerate the digital transformation process:** The development of relevant skills and the formation and attraction of entrepreneurial talent able to harness the possibilities provided by digital technologies.

- **Access to data and technologies for applied solutions to local challenges:** The use of data and technologies which have the potential to help tackle local challenges by enhancing productivity and efficiency while decreasing costs.

- **Key infrastructures and investments for digital launch pads:** The provision of infrastructures and investments which are a prerequisite for data driven solutions, and therefore indispensable for digital transformation.

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1   *Strategic Policy Forum (2016). Blueprint for cities and regions as launch pads for digital transformation.*
      Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/newsroom/cf/itemdetail.cfm?item_id=8820;

Figure 1 *Key dimensions to activate the digital transformation process*[2]

As shown by the 13 case studies carried out in the context of the European Commission's Blueprint for cities, examples of local collaborative efforts to create digitally enhanced solutions are manifold. From Barcelona and Bilbao to Trento and Lodz, public and private stakeholders launched support actions covering a range of sectors and themes, including mobile applications, digital skills enhancement courses, digital transformation advisory services and many others.

The Blueprint for cities and regions as launch pads for digital transformation is available at: http://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/newsroom/cf/itemdetail.cfm?item_id=8820 .

1.3. Overview of the present initiative

This is the context within which the Digital Cities Challenge is being launched. Fifteen European cities which want to take advantage of the impact of digital transformation will be offered free-of-charge high quality policy advice, coaching, facilitation and support, in their own language. The support provided will help cities to develop and implement strategic plans addressing economic growth and social welfare.

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2   *Strategic Policy Forum (2016). Blueprint for cities and regions as launch pads for digital transformation.*
         Available at: http://www.digitallytransformyourregion.eu/

The Digital Cities Challenge has the ambition to make cities better places to live. It will do so by putting advanced technologies at the service of the people living there. The steps taken will follow the recommendations set out in the "Blueprint for cities and regions as launch pads for digital transformation". They will reinforce networking among the participating cities and facilitate their participation in on-going European initiatives. The ultimate objective is to pull together local strategic stakeholders and stimulate investments, through joint cross-regional actions for digital transformation.

The selected cities will receive first-class customised advisory services. These will include advice on smart policy design, implementation and monitoring, as well as access to talent and financial resources. All services will be provided by high level consultants and peer reviewers who will accompany the cities on their transformative journey.

2 Call for Expression of interest

2.1. Objective

The present call for Expression of Interest is addressed to cities that want to be game-changers. Cities that seek to reignite growth and create jobs through the power of advanced technologies. The call is designed to select and support 15 cities which currently have yet to-be-released potential in digitalisation and which demonstrate a strong commitment to engaging local stakeholders in digital transformation.

2.2. Key dates

The selection of participating cities and the delivery of advisory services will be implemented in two waves: the first wave of 7 – 9 cities will be followed by a second wave of 5-7 cities.

This staggered implementation is intended to:

- Gradually improve the blueprint by learning lessons from challenges and errors;
- Utilise the experience of early participating cities during the subsequent wave;
- Limit the size of groups of cities interacting with each other during Academy seminars, thereby creating more intimate and effective spaces for dialogue.

The cities participating in wave 1 will be selected in November 2017 (first cut-off date), and wave 2 will be selected in January 2018 (second cut-off date) as indicated in the following table.

Table 1 *Key dates*

First batch of cities	
First cut-off date (wave 1 participants)	24 November 2017 – 12:00 (CET)
Evaluation and selection	24 November 2017 – 15 December 2017
Second batch of cities	
Second cut-off date (wave 2 participants)	25 January 2018 – 12:00 (CET)
Evaluation and selection	25 January 2018 – 15 February 2018

2.3. Target audience

The applicants must be local public organisations that are responsible for or involved in the funding and/or implementation of a policy or programme of a city related to digital transformation and industrial modernisation. This refers to local authorities or their representative public agency. Only one application may be submitted per city.

2.4. Eligibility criteria

In order to be eligible, organisations must comply with the following:

- **Originated from an EU Member State:** Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and United Kingdom.

- The EoI must be submitted in English. EoIs submitted in any other language will be excluded.

- Submit the application within the stipulated deadline.

- Complete the application following the template provided.

In cases where any of these conditions are not met, the Expression of Interest will be excluded from the selection process.

2.5. Commitment of the city

In order to participate in the Digital Cities Challenge, cities are required to demonstrate clearly their capacity and commitment to doing so. This will require allocating resources to managing, implementing and following up on the advisory services offered.

In practical terms, this will mean providing the following:

- A dedicated local project manager involved for the equivalent of at least at 20% of a full time post throughout the project

- The mobilisation of local stakeholders including, as a minimum:

- Local administration in charge of economic development, innovation, smart specialisation and/or ICT

- Representatives of industry/industry associations including ICT service providers and utility companies

- Representatives of the education sector, such as those working in higher and secondary education institutes, research and technology organisations, vocational education and training programmes.

- A commitment to deliver the expected work between the different working sessions

- Participation in four 2-day Academy seminar sessions

- The capacity to host and organise local workshops and working sessions (c.a. 4)

- A commitment to implementing the final strategy that will be co-designed together with the city stakeholders.

Participating cities will be offered the opportunity to organise and host an Academy seminar. Cities which wish to do so can include this as part of their Expression of Interest. Hosting an Academy seminar will provide Model Demonstrator Cities with a unique opportunity to increase the visibility of local digital transformation initiatives, alongside exposure to a large set of European stakeholders. Cities hosting an academy seminar will be expected to supply a seminar venue as well as support in mobilising local stakeholders. Remaining logistical work and financial support will be provided by the project consortium.

What will you gain from the Digital Cities Challenge?

3.1. Value proposition

The rapid development of digital technology and the innovation it offers is often referred to as the fourth industrial revolution. The cities chosen to take part in the Digital Cities Challenge will receive free-of-charge the support needed to take full advantage of this revolution. Harnessing the power of advanced technologies will enable these cities to grow their business, to foster further innovation and productivity and, most importantly, to improve the quality of life of their people.

3.2. So how will this happen?

The tools and services on offer to the selected cities will allow them to turn digital transformation from an aspiration to a local level reality. The fact that the initiative is so sharply focussed makes this opportunity unique for mobilising the knowledge, capacities networks and tools needed for digital transformation. The creation of a vibrant and effective innovation ecosystem – which, prior to the initiative, was probably a longer term ambition – will become an achievable target.

The specific advantages of the participating cities status include:

- Free-of-charge, tailored advice and support from high level experts who will be familiar with your city, its current challenges and future ambitions; and most of it in your own language.

- Access to tools allowing you to develop a clear understanding of what stage of digital maturity your city can currently claim and where you should be aiming for it to be;

- Access to unique and innovative training and capacity building sessions for key city staff and representatives;

- Dialogue with other cities in Europe who have embarked or are in the process of embarking on the same process, in order to exchange ideas, experiences and best practices;

- Access to European networks and platforms;

At the end of the initiative, each city will have:

- Developed and started implementing a strategy and action plan to move towards digital transformation. This will include tangible, achievable and measurable steps to be taken in the short, medium and long term;

- Built a community of local stakeholders willing to engage in the digital transformation process;

- Gained exposure at the European level and established itself as a beacon for the transformative power of digitalisation;

- Built a network of European peers and partners able to offer mutual support and advice in the future.

3.3. A Breakdown of the process

Once a city has been selected as one of the 15 participating cities, it will embark on a four stage process, at the end of which a bespoke action plan for digital transformation will be implemented. This process will include – but not be limited to – certain basic activities and services:

Advisory and counselling services provided by high level experts

Each team of experts will be put together with the requirements of an individual city in mind, and will work exclusively with that city for the duration of the project. They will visit the city in question on a regular basis, and maintain direct communication throughout. Each team of experts will be chosen on the basis of two factors:

- Prior working experience with the city authorities, familiarity with the local language

- Expert knowledge around specific key issues to be tackled.

Academy: Innovative training

Staff and other representatives from the city will be invited to participate in four collective sessions as part of the Academy. This innovative learning platform will bring together representatives from various cities taking part in the initiative and the experts working with them. The aim of each Academy is to provide access to innovative trainings, allow participants to pool ideas, share best practice, discuss any issues which have arisen and generally take advantage of peer to peer learning and the unrivalled value of insights gained through actual experience. Each Academy session will take place in a different location across Europe.

Networks

Each city will also gain direct access to existing initiatives and networks across Europe. In this way the cities will have the chance to form the kind of partnerships and support structures which would normally take years to establish.

Commitment

Cities which take part in the initiative will be required to make a commitment until June 2019.

3.4. Outcomes

The main aim of the Digital Cities Challenge is to deliver tangible, measurable results for the cities taking part. The overarching outcome which those cities can expect to be able to draw upon at the end of the process will be a carefully structured, detailed and agreed upon plan for digital transformation. At this stage they will be moving toward full implementation of this plan having made concrete decisions in the following areas:

- The development of digital infrastructure;

- The development of a mix of digital, creative and entrepreneurial skills among the local workforce;

- Facilitating access to advanced technologies and open data needed for industrial innovation on one hand and better policy making on the other;

- Identifying sources of funding for implementing their strategy.

4 Preparation and submission of EoIs

This section provides information on the preparation and submission processes to be followed by the applicants.

4.1. One stage submission

The Expression of Interest (EoI) is submitted in a single stage through the Digital Cities Challenge Application Form. This can be downloaded from the online platform. **Applicants are kindly asked to read and follow the instructions provided in the template extremely carefully.**

The EoI should give an overview of the digital ambition of the city in question and demonstrate its potential, capacity and willingness to implement a strong digital strategy.

4.2. Submission of EoIs

EoIs prepared according to the instructions provided above, shall be submitted electronically at the Digital Cities platform (www.digitallytransformyourregion.eu). Simply click on "**Apply Now**" button and fill in the submission form. Once you are done click "**Submit**". An on-line and a call- based helpdesk will also be available for applicants. Applicants will have the chance to submit new versions of their EoI as many times as they wish before the call closure. Only the last version submitted before the deadline will be considered in the evaluation.

Please note that:

- EoIs must be submitted through the www.digitallytransformyourregion.eu platform;

- EoIs must be submitted before the closing time and date of the call;

- EoIs must be submitted as a pdf file.

An acknowledgement of receipt will be sent out via email to all successfully submitted EoIs, as soon as possible after the closure of the call. However, this receipt will not be proof that the EoI is eligible for evaluation (see section 2.4).

4.3. Waves approach

The selected cities will be grouped into two waves.

Table 2 Waves

Cut-off date for selection	Wave	Number of cities	Support duration
24 November 2017	Wave 1	7 – 9 cities	January 2018 to June 2019 (18 months)
25 January 2018	Wave 2	5-7 cities	April 2018 to June 2019 (14 months)

As described in the table, EoIs sent before the 24 November 2017 will be considered for the first wave of cities supported. EoIs sent after the 24 November will be considered for the second (i.e. last) wave of cities supported. Applications not selected in November will be allowed to re-submit before 25 January 2018.

Cities selected will be required to participate in a Kick off session. More detailed information will be communicated at a later stage.

5 Evaluation and selection of cities

The EoIs received will go through the different steps of the evaluation process: eligibility check, evaluation and selection.

5.1. Expression of Interest template

Applicants are requested to use the expression of interest template made available on the EMS platform. The template details what is expected from the applicants in each of the section and includes examples and tables. Applicants must complete all the required sections and the EoI should not exceed 12 pages in total (including figures and tables). Further to the expression of interest, applicants are invited to provide the following Annexes:

- **Annex I:** Letter of intent of participation of stakeholders (not mandatory). The Letters of intent will demonstrate the engagement of local stakeholders in the implementation of the city's digital strategy.

- **Annex II:** Additional documentation to support the EoI (not mandatory).

It is strongly recommended that applicants demonstrate well established links with the local stakeholders.

5.2. Eligibility checking

The eligibility check will be carried out against the following call requirements: 1) country of origin, 2) English language, 3) submission within stipulated deadline, 4) application complete and according to the template provided. Eligible EoIs will then enter into the next evaluation step.

5.3. Evaluation criteria

The following table presents the evaluation criteria. The full details of what should be included in each section of the Expression of Interest are included in the EoI template, including examples and tables.

Criterion	EoI section	EoI sub-sections
Relevance	1. Presentation of the city and its ecosystem	1.1. Presentation of the city 1.2. Facts and figure 1.3. Innovation Ecosystem
Ambition	2. Digital ambition	2.1 Policies involving digital transformation dimensions 2.2 Participation in projects related to digital transformation (regional, national and European) 2.3. Timeline
Impacts	3. Impacts	3.1 Achieved / expected impacts
Resources	4. Staff and other assets	4.1 Team of professionals 4.2 Stakeholders involvement 4.3 Resources

Evaluation scores will be awarded for each of the criteria. Each criterion will be scored out of 5 and decimal numbers can be given (the scores will include less than whole numbers where appropriate).

The following table details the evaluation scores.

Score	Description
0. Inadequate	The EoI fails to address the criterion.
1. Poor	The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
2. Fair	The EoI broadly addresses the criterion but there are significant weaknesses.
3. Good	The EoI addresses the criterion well, although a number of shortcomings are present.
4 Very Good	The EoI addresses the criterion very well with a few shortcomings.
5. Excellent	The EoI successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion.

All activities proposed should respect fundamental ethical principles, including those reflected in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union[1]. If any issues with these fundamental ethical principles are identified while the EoI is being evaluated the initiative will take any measures deemed appropriate in order to deal with the situation.

All EoIs will be evaluated on equal terms.

5.4. Evaluation process

Digital Cities will evaluate the EoI received in light of the four criteria mentioned above.

The evaluation will be carried out with the assistance of experts who are completely independent from the applicants. These experts will be individuals with experience and knowledge in the fields of digital transformation, digital cities, and the implementation of digital strategies. All experts will sign a declaration of confidentiality concerning the evaluation process, the content of the EoI they evaluate and the evaluation results. They will also declare an absence of any conflict of interest over the assigned tasks.

The thresholds and priority to be used in the case of EoIs being evaluated equally have been defined as follows:

Table 3 Ranking in case of equal scoring and thresholds

Criterion	Priority	Threshold
Relevance	2	4 out of 5
Ambition	3	3 out of 5
Impacts	1	4 out of 5
Resources	4	3 out of 5

5.5. Selection process

The evaluation process results in a ranking of the highest scored Expression of Interest. The number of selected EoIs might vary in accordance with the quality of the EoIs received. None of the EoIs falling below the threshold scores will be selected (see table 3). All applicants, whether successful or unsuccessful, will receive a notice on the outcome of the evaluation and their Evaluation Summary Reports.

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1   *For more details on ethical principles please refer to the Regulation (EC) No 1906/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 Article 43 "Preservation of European competitiveness and ethical principles"*

6 Support to Applicants

6.1. Frequently Asked Questions

Frequently Asked Questions are available on the website. The FAQs is constantly updated to reflect the questions received.

6.2. Help Desk

Applicants may contact the Digital Cities Challenge Help desk (helpdesk@digitallytransformyourregion.eu) should they wish to receive further information on the Digital Cities Challenge content and conditions. Applicants may also book a phone appointment to receive feedback on their particular cases or questions. Applicants are advised to consult the Frequently Asked Questions document before contacting the Digital Cities Challenge Helpdesk.

6.3. Webinars

A series of webinars will be organised while the call is open to support the applicants. Please register for our newsletter and visit our website to be up-to-date.

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