



# NET ZERO CITIES

## Mid-term report on City Panel activities and recommendations

Deliverable D13.6

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## Abbreviations and acronyms

Acronym	Description
WP	Work Package
CCC	Climate City Contract
M	Month
T	Task
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
D	Deliverable
FPA	Framework Partnership Agreement

## Summary

The EU 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission is driven by peer-to-peer exchange and mutual learning among ambitious cities. To foster this exchange and support all European cities in their journey towards climate-neutrality, NetZeroCities has established two City Panels. The Panels, organized under NetZeroCities Work Package 13 Task 13.3 [M1-M24], serve as a dynamic test environment, facilitating the implementation of the latest strategies for achieving climate neutrality.

The City Panels go beyond the selected Mission Cities, representing a diverse range of cities with a shared ambition to address climate change collaboratively. Panelists play a crucial role in guiding the development of various tools, such as the NetZeroCities online Platform and the Cities Mission Climate City Contract (CCC), while also exploring innovative approaches to scaling up climate action. The Practitioner Panel comprises technical and administrative staff from municipalities directly involved in climate neutrality efforts, while the Strategic Panel includes Mayors, Deputy Mayors, and local officials responsible for making strategic decisions and guiding climate change mitigation policies at the local level.

This report provides a comprehensive overview of the City Panels' purpose and objectives, member selection process, specifications, activities conducted to date and their key messages, as well as recommendations for the future design and implementation of the City Panel program.

First, the purpose and overarching structure of the City Panels are outlined, highlighting the roles of the Practitioner Panel and the Strategic Panel. The City Panel Committee's responsibilities in coordinating and supporting the panels are also detailed. The member selection process, including the criteria used for selecting representatives and the outcomes of the application assessment, is subsequently discussed. The more in-depth specifications for the City Panels are synthesized, covering more details about activity formats, expectations for representatives, and the panel engagement and knowledge management process, including consultation design, registration, session organization, and feedback mechanisms.

The activities conducted so far are described, including the kick-off meeting and 15 and 2 consultations held with the Practitioner and Strategic Panels, respectively. Key themes and messages derived from the consultations are then presented. These include discussions on Climate City Contracts, the development of the Mission Platform, financing and Investment Planning, monitoring, evaluation, replication and scale-up efforts, communications, and co-designing the NetZeroCities Service Offer.

The report offers recommendations for enhancing the future City Panel program. This includes refining consultation and agenda design, optimizing session organization and logistics, promoting active attendance and engagement, and emphasizing reflexive learning and knowledge management. The report concludes with an outlook of the City Panels' evolving role in the NetZeroCities project.



## Keywords

engagement, co-design, service offer, platform, custom tools, demand driven, stakeholders, climate neutrality

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# 1 The fundamentals of the City Panels

## 1.1 Purpose and overarching structure

Developing a range of custom tools and support services to assist cities on their path to achieve climate neutrality by 2030 is one of the central purposes of the NetZeroCities project. To help ensure that the project's outputs are demand-driven, ICLEI Europe-led Task 13.3 serves to establish and maintain a formal consultation mechanism with cities in the form of two City Panels, each with distinct target members and areas of focus.

The City Panels provide a space for members to help to shape and test services and products such as, but not limited to, the Climate City Contract (CCC) process linked to Work Package (WP) 1; the Platform (WP3), and service design (WPs 6-10), principally through consultation sessions organized by experts from the NetZeroCities consortium. Under the Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) of NetZeroCities, the City Panels were envisioned to be most active during the initial design phase in 2022 and 2023, after which the Panels could convene on an as-needed basis. Accordingly, Members' commitment to the Panels after selection is fixed for the duration of two years, after which membership can be extended upon review.

Panel members represent a diverse range of cities, ranging from populations of just a few thousand up to 1.5 million inhabitants. with the selection criteria for city size being more open than for the 100 Climate Neutral and Smart Cities Mission itself. The Panels needed to be formed prior to the selection of the 112 cities for the Mission ("Mission Cities") to progress design work sufficiently before their onboarding, but ultimately, the Panel Members represent a mix of some of the Mission Cities and those who are not Mission Cities at the time of this report's writing. From the 192 applications, 138 representatives were selected, with 75 Practitioner Panel and 63 Strategic Panel representatives from 87 cities and 25 countries. For the full list of participating cities and for more details about the selection process, including the full list of criteria, please see [Appendix I](#).

## 1.2 Role of the Practitioner and Strategic Panels

The two City Panels that have been established share a common overarching objective and structure, but differ in membership, exact topical focus, and meeting formats and frequency. The **Practitioner Panel** is composed of technical and administrative staff actively working on climate neutrality. Practitioner Panel members more regularly (15 consultations to-date) evaluate services and solutions showcased on the Mission Platform, among other NetZeroCities outputs. The **Strategic Panel**, meanwhile, is composed of Mayors, Deputy Mayors and others responsible for making strategic decisions (e.g., Head of Departments) who are actively involved with steering policymaking and climate governance. Strategic Panel Members principally provide conceptual advice and observe processes like the CCC on more selective occasions (just two consultations to-date). Some activities and topics are only relevant to one of the panels – either the Practitioner or the Strategic Panel – whereas other topics will be addressed by both panels, but from slightly different angles.

## 1.3 The City Panel Committee

Task 13.3 partner organisations (ICLEI Europe, Eurocities, RCN, ViableCities, ERRIN, Energy Cities, EIT-Urban mobility, EIT Climate KIC), make up the NetZeroCities City Panel Committee. The committee was responsible for establishing the panels, including launching the open call for City Panel members, evaluating applications, and creating initial specifications. On an ongoing basis, the City Panel Committee coordinates with project partners, particularly other WP leads, to design and schedule consultations with Panel members, observes consultations and provides consultation hosts with organisational and technical support, and supports partners in feeding back key outcomes and learnings to the wider NetZeroCities project.





## 2 Specifications summary

Building on the application call content and following feedback from city representatives in the kick off meeting and further input from Work Package leads, the City Panel committee created specification documents for both City Panels and shared these with members. The following section summarizes the content of the specifications for members. A full version of the combined specifications for both Panels that elaborates further on the consortium’s processes and protocols is included as [Appendix II](#).

### 2.1 Activities

The key differences between the Practitioner and Strategic Panel activities are summarized in Table 1, below.

Topic	Practitioner Panel	Strategic Panel
Activity formats	Vary from round table discussions to more focused working groups, to online questionnaires or beta tests	Online activities, in most cases, have the format of round table discussions
Activity duration	Range from an hour to (a limited number of) half-day events	Events do not exceed two hours
Activity frequency	Online meetings take place on a regular basis to contribute to the development of services and products.	Representatives are expected to participate in a more limited number of online meetings and activities to provide their strategic and high-level input.
Consultation preparation expectations	Some preparatory work such as reading a report, completing a survey, or engaging in a beta test may be required.	Very basic preparatory work may be requested, such as reading a factsheet or completing a short survey

**Table 1: Key differences between NetZeroCities Practitioner and Strategic Panel activities**

### 2.2 Expectations for representatives

Each participating city’s key representative(s) are **encouraged** to:

- participate in as many activities as possible, and otherwise, in cases where appropriate, to coordinate internally and delegate participation within their organisation with related expertise.
- discuss and share meeting outcomes within their organisation to enhance dissemination.

Each participating city’s key representative(s) are **expected** to:

- inform the City Panel committee of any changes to their contact information, requested revisions to their registration information for any session, and if they wish to delegate participation to a colleague
- support the Panels’ status as a collaborative space for co-developing, testing, and refining concepts, tools, and services, including by respecting the confidential nature of the content discussed in consultations, which is presented in draft and unofficial form.



## 2.3 Panel engagement and knowledge management process

The summary of the engagement process and knowledge management flow for both panels is captured in Figure 1 below, and each step is elaborated briefly below.

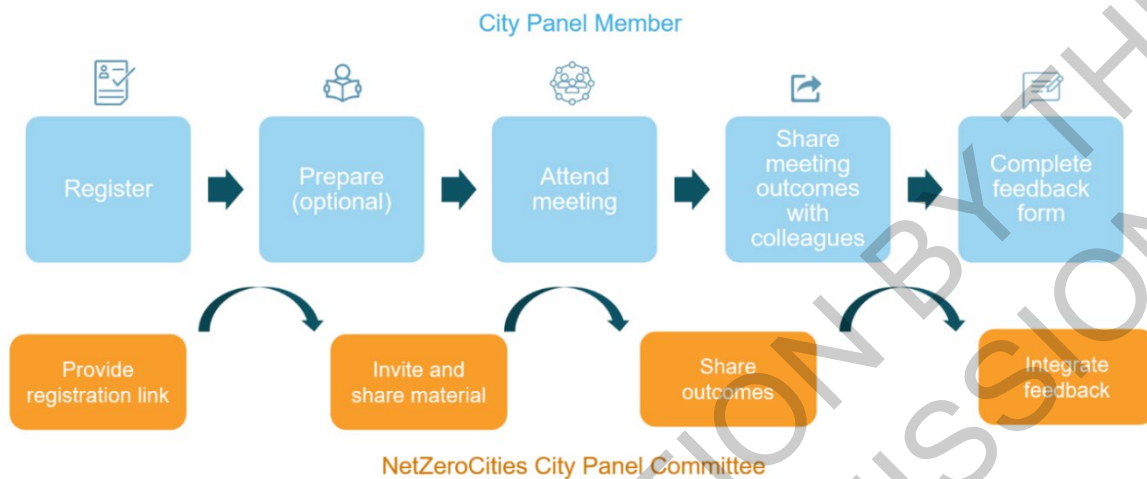


Figure 1: NetZeroCities City Panel engagement and knowledge management flow

### 2.3.1 Consultation design

Before organizing panel consultations, the City Panel Committee collaborates with lead organizers to define the event's purpose and objectives, ensuring key resources and materials are prepared. Lead organizers develop the final agenda and engage with key parties to refine the content.

### 2.3.2 Registration

The Committee notifies Panel Members of session details via email, the private [City Panel portal group](#) (restricted to Members and administrators), and/or calendar invites. Depending on factors like participant caps, a registration process may be implemented. Registration should be open at least three weeks in advance and remain open for at least one week.

### 2.3.3 During Sessions

Lead organizers facilitate sessions, create an engaging environment, and encourage active participation. Online meetings are recorded but not shared outside the consortium. Committee members welcome participants, provide session context, and offer support throughout. They close sessions by thanking participants and looking ahead to future consultations.

### 2.3.4 Follow-Up and Feedback

After each activity, participants are invited complete a feedback form to improve the program. The Committee shares feedback forms and reporting templates with lead organizers. Key outcomes are synthesized and shared with Panel Members and the consortium. Lead organizers prepare meeting minutes, highlighting discussions and next steps. They seek validation and feedback from participants and inform the Committee of future consultation needs.

## 3 Overview of activities and key messages to-date

### 3.1 Summary of activities

#### 3.1.1 Kick-off meeting

The City Panel Programme kicked off with a joint online session on 31 March 2022, which drew more than 70 participants. The Kick-Off event introduced Panel Members to the project and its connection to the Cities Mission. The meeting outlined the role of the City Panels and presented an overview of the calendar of activities scheduled for the panels in 2022. Participants also explored how to integrate cities' experiences and expertise to drive demand for NetZeroCities services, while assessing cities' needs, drivers, and barriers towards achieving climate neutrality. The breakout sessions provided an opportunity for further interactions for members of each Panel separately, including an open floor for asking questions and sharing additional insights.

#### 3.1.2 Practitioner Panel consultations

15 Practitioner Panel sessions have taken place between April 2022 and June 2023. Table 2, below, provides essential information about each of the consultations, including their titles, when they took place, key topics that were covered, and the corresponding NetZeroCities WP that lead the consultation organization and whose work was supported.

Related WP(s)	Consultation title	Date <i>all times in CE(S)T</i>	Key topics covered
1	Climate City Contract (CCC)	Tuesday, 5 April 2022, 10:00-11:30 and 15:00-16:30; plus select follow-up session on Thursday, 28 April 2022, 11:30-13:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCC process and its implementation, with a particular focus on Commitments (Stakeholder Engagement and Pathway development) and Actions (portfolios of climate actions and initiatives)</li> <li>• Time and resource needs anticipated for cities to implement the CCC process</li> <li>• Contribution to the development of the services and support provided to Mission Cities through the Mission Platform</li> </ul>
3	100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission Platform: Part 1 of 2	Friday, 29 April 2022, 11:00-14:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inputs on the technical design of the Mission Platform, including web-based portal and connection of cities with organisational support from the Cities Mission secretariat and staff</li> <li>• Specific focal aspects of the service in more detail, including the design of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ the Portal's Peer-to-Peer Collaboration Space</li> <li>○ the Portal's reporting tool</li> <li>○ the City Dashboard</li> <li>○ the Portal's Introduction &amp; Onboarding Tool</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How Climate-Neutral City Advisors will work with user cities</li> </ul>
7	Barriers to financing and the Investment Plan Framework	Monday 30 May 2022, 10:00-12:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification of needs and barriers to financing from a city perspective</li> <li>• How the proposed Investment Plan Framework will support cities in tackling finance barriers</li> </ul>
3	100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission	Wednesday, 22 June 2022, 10:30-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Testing and feedback on the Platform's Knowledge Repository, with a focus on the</li> </ul>



	Platform: Part 2 of 2	12:30 and 14:30-16:30	100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Policy Framework and Solutions Database
5	Replication and scale-up Framework	Wednesday, 6 July 2022, 14:00-16:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consortium's findings and first concept outline on the Replication and scale-up framework.</li> <li>• Cities's feedback and reflections on their related experiences.</li> </ul>
12	EU Mission Cities Communication Playbook	Tuesday, 13 September 2022, 14:00-16:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation of the draft of the Playbook and list of materials to be shared with cities</li> <li>• Feedback to identify cities' main communication challenges and additional needs</li> <li>• Input to help finalise the Communication Playbook and ensure Mission Cities are provided with the adequate materials and support through the Mission Platform</li> </ul>
1, 2	CCC Evaluation Criteria and Process	Wednesday, 14 September 2022, 14:30-16:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The CCC evaluation criteria proposed by the NZC consortium</li> <li>• The intended Joint Questionnaire for collecting both quantitative and qualitative data for Key Performance Indicator monitoring and learning, respectively</li> <li>• Key insights to developing and operationalizing a CCC Evaluation Framework</li> </ul>
7	Finance tool testing	Monday, 10 October 2022, 14:00-15:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation of the Finance Guidance Tool developed for the Mission Cities as part of the NetZeroCities Portal, complementing the process of developing the supporting documents of the CCCs, particularly to give orientation in the phase of development of the Action and Investment Plans</li> <li>• Feedback, comments, and suggestions for improvement on the prototype, including evaluation on the content, the user interface, as well as the overall usefulness and relevance to cities (complemented by online questionnaire)</li> <li>• Input for further refinement and preparation for launch later in the year</li> </ul>
5	Replication and scale-up framework (follow-up session)	Wednesday, 26 October 2022, 14:00-16:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outline of the phases and steps of the Replication Journey cities should go through in order to identify and replicate best practices from Pilot cities</li> <li>• Presentation of the framework for feedback and further alignment with city interests</li> <li>• Suggestions to integrate as the basis for future update reports</li> </ul>
6, 7, 8, 9, 10	An invitation to co-design the NetZeroCities service offer: Workshop 1	Thursday, 24 November 2022, 9:30 - 10:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Testing underlying hypotheses, assumptions, design choices and developing new development trajectories for five services to support Transition Teams: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Capability building service, a challenge-based cohort learning program with masterclasses</li> <li>○ Mapping service to help map existing innovations and resources for improved decision-making</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Social Innovation Hub to facilitate peer-to-peer interactions and content/case matching across cities</li> <li>○ Transition Team incubation: Workshops to help kickstart work and understand their role and needed skills for effective collaborations</li> <li>○ Social Innovation Readiness service to help start, support, or scale social innovation initiatives by harnessing Platform content</li> </ul>
8	Co-Designing NZC's Service Offer: Workshop 2 (Focus: Citizen Engagement & Participation)	Thursday, 19 January 2023, 14:00-16:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Similar in format to the first Service Offer Co-Design workshop, but with a particular focus on four services supporting citizen engagement and participatory processes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Civic Environment Mapping to facilitate identification, analysis, and engagement with citizens and stakeholders</li> <li>○ Engagement Process Assembly Kit (or, «Building Blocks») providing sophisticated insight on designing engagement processes</li> <li>○ Spaces for Encounter, providing guidance on how to facilitate spaces for diverse interactions and scaling new ideas for municipalities</li> <li>○ NetZeroCitizens, a portal for contributing, connecting &amp; engaging municipalities with disconnected populations</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
6, 8, 9, 10	Co-Designing NZC's Service Offer: Workshop 3	Tuesday, 31 January 2023, 10:00-11:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Similar in format to the two previous Service Offer Co-Design sessions, but with a specific focus on the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Masterclass Series component of the Capability Building Service</li> <li>○ Shared City Vision Co-Creation Service to support city users in organising and realising the co-creation of a unifying vision for their city's future with their local actors.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
3, 7	Boosting collaboration with the Portal	Thursday, 30 March 2023, 14:00-16:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Several new Portal features and their functionalities, including the user directory, groups (including a new City Panel group), a media library, event creation and registration, and channels for feedback and suggestions on features</li> <li>● Knowledge repository features including filtering and searching resources, quick reads on specific topics, feedback on Scopes and solutions bundle development, Gap Analysis Tool suggestions</li> <li>● Live demonstration of the Finance Guidance Tool</li> <li>● Future plans to make CCC resources collaborative</li> </ul>



5	Case Studies on replication and scale up and the Twinning Learning programme	Thursday, 13 April 2023, 14:00-15:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Case studies supporting replication and scale up. The aim is to publish written and practical multimedia case studies in the NZC portal to support, change and influence actions in Pilot cities, Twin cities, Mission cities and non-Mission cities. These will include practical case studies of scaling-up of technologies, financing and business models. Participants were asked to weigh in on priority topics of interest that they would like to see reflected in the case studies.</li> <li>• Twinning Learning Programme, a 20-month programme that aims to transfer knowledge, build capacities and inspire replication of best practices across the Pilot cities and Twin cities. Twin and Pilot cities with a similar focus will be paired together actively shaping each other's development through knowledge exchange, site-visits and collaborative problem-solving using various formats. Participants were asked to critically reflect on the programme's roadmap, the formats used, the planning, and the resources needed to take part.</li> </ul>
2	Indicators for progress monitoring for CCC Action Plans	Friday, 2 June 2023, 10:00-12:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation of the Comprehensive Indicator Framework and its intended logic</li> <li>• Testing of relevance of specific indicators and collection of feedback on (sub-)domains, with breakout groups focusing specifically on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Greenhouse Gas Emissions Indicators</li> <li>○ Economic Co Benefit/ Co Risk Indicators</li> <li>○ Social Inclusion, Innovation, Democracy and Cultural Impact Co Benefits/ Co Risk</li> <li>○ Biodiversity Co Benefit/Co Risk Indicators</li> <li>○ Resource Efficiency Co Benefit/Co Risk Indicators</li> <li>○ Public Health and Environmental Impact Co Benefit/Co Risk Indicators</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

**Table 2: NetZeroCities Practitioner Panel consultations through September 2023**

### 3.1.3 Strategic Panel consultations

Two Strategic Panel sessions took place in 2022. Table 3, below, provides essential information about each of the consultations, including their titles, when they took place, key topics that were covered, and the corresponding NetZeroCities WP that lead the consultation organization and whose work was supported.

Related WP(s)	Consultation title	Date <i>all times in CE(S)T</i>	Key topics covered
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1	Cities Mission Climate City Contract	Tuesday, 3 May 2022, 10:00-11:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCC process and its implementation, with a particular focus on Commitments (Stakeholder Engagement)</li> <li>• Barriers and opportunities at a strategic level in cities, including challenges in:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ setting mandates</li> <li>○ buy-in</li> <li>○ issues around transparency and accountability</li> <li>○ the role of citizen input</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Integration with regional and national policy, regulation and funding frameworks</li> </ul>
7	Investment Planning in cities	Monday, 23 June 2022, 11:00-12:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation of the Investment Plan Framework for broad strategic-level validation</li> <li>• Main activities to undertake by the cities under the framework and how NetZeroCities will support in delivery</li> </ul>

**Table 3: NetZeroCities Strategic Panel Consultations through September 2023**



## 3.2 Central themes and key messages from across consultations

This section captures a synthesis of key common needs and recommendations participants contributed across consultations. [Appendix III](#) provides a more detailed synthesis of the key discussions and recommendations of each session, grouped thematically.

- Cities seek comprehensive assistance in understanding what NetZeroCities support for successful CCC process implementation entails, such as further clarity on the Mission Label. In particular, special support and technical assistance were seen as essential for smaller municipalities. They also suggest tailoring resources for Transition Teams of various sizes to accommodate potential capacity constraints.
- Cities highlight the importance of time, human resource requirements, and financial planning for building and maintaining a local Mission team. Cities emphasized the need for support in accessing private finance and comprehensive ecosystem approaches for financing climate neutrality efforts.
- Cities recommended using existing structures, processes, and tools rather than creating new ones throughout NetZeroCities, with the Expressions of Interest highlighted as especially valuable sources of insight. Panel Members emphasize the need for clear and explicit linkages between each service on the Cities Mission Platform and components of the CCC process and Climate Transition Map.
- Panel members sought clarification and support on connecting local, national, and EU-level actors in climate neutrality efforts. Aligning efforts with national-level actors was seen as having the potential in many places to accelerate comprehensive urban planning, but requires careful coordination and is a significant challenge in many contexts.
- Cities see the need to find a balance between context-specific and generic information in reporting, particularly concerning sectors and emissions domains. The need for specificity in certain domains, while avoiding excessive detail, was highlighted. At the same time, cities require precise and detailed data and indicator management guidelines to facilitate successful CCC implementation.
- Cities recommended establishing unified and accessible terminology regarding key aspects of the Cities Mission, especially the CCC process, to ensure clarity and inclusivity. Communication about climate neutrality, NetZeroCities, and the Cities Mission both internally and externally should entail consistent messaging and visuals, as well as tailoring materials to various target groups, including simple language to be widely accessible. Cities have urged careful consideration around the use of language and jargon that could create barriers to this.
- Cities stress the importance of providing communication materials, tools, and resources in the native language of the focal community to ensure inclusivity and accessibility. This is particularly critical for Mission Cities' local languages that are not (yet) available on relatively high quality online AI-based translation tools.
- Cities emphasize the need to facilitate peer-to-peer interactions and content/case matching across cities to promote knowledge sharing and collaboration. Many cities prefer in-person interactions whenever feasible, and particularly when flying can be avoided for environmental reasons, as it allows for better engagement and collaboration with each other and wider stakeholders.
- Cities stressed the importance of guidance and support in mapping, engaging, and building partnerships with stakeholders from various sectors, including to better ensure inclusivity in mapping exercises to address gaps when some actors are left out.





- Panel Members suggested providing templates for case studies, facilitating in-person exchanges, and supporting versatile and straightforward approaches to replication.

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## 4 Recommendations for the future City Panel program and similar initiatives

The following section provides a non-exhaustive summary of good practices and learnings that can benefit the future City Panel program, as well as similar initiatives beyond the Cities Mission context. These recommendations are distilled from the feedback Panel Members contributed during sessions and in session evaluation forms, session organizers contributed during de-briefing meetings and in internal feedback documents, and City Panel Committee members have contributed in NetZeroCities T13.3 reflection meetings.

### 4.1.1 Consultation and agenda design

- **Maintaining balance between clear planning and flexibility – while both 1) accommodating the fast-paced development of services and yet 2) minimizing the burden on city representatives – is essential to successful co-design programs with public servants and needs to be a continuous effort.** This has been particularly crucial for the City Panel program given that the actual volume of demand for Panel Member interactions is substantially higher than was originally anticipated in the Panels' initial design.<sup>1</sup>
- **Open and regular communication within the wider program governance structure during planning promotes streamlined and value-added agendas.** The City Panels should maintain open communication with the Executive Committee (ExCom) and City Advisors throughout the agenda design process. This ensures that proposed sessions align with important deadlines, avoid conflicts, and maintain relevance to the wider Cities Mission landscape.
- **Quality assurance should involve both thematic technical expertise and practical understanding of the cities you're working with.** In addition to quality assurance within their own Work Packages, organizers should also seek validation of content with City Advisors, who possess the most up-to-date understanding of Mission Cities' evolving needs when possible. Including the Programme Management Team and/or City Advisors in the content validation process ensures that the sessions address the most relevant and pressing concerns of the participating cities.
- **Particularly in structures like the City Panels' in which session hosts rotate, organizer briefing should include a summary of any persistent participant feedback.** Organizers should be supported in proactively addressing persistent pieces of feedback from Panel Members (elaborated previously in this report) during their presentations. By acknowledging and incorporating this feedback, organizers can optimize the limited time with city representatives and maximize the impact of the consultations.
- **A consistent session structure facilitates clear communication and ensures that all relevant aspects of both content and technical needs are adequately covered.** Using a common template structure, such as that employed in the Service Offer Co-Design sessions, can aid in streamlining the planning process for City Panel sessions.
- **Regularly (re)assess whether the program is adding value for all its target groups.** While addressing the needs of Mission Cities is vital, organizers should also make a concerted effort

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<sup>1</sup> Compared to the initial vision for the City Panel program at the beginning of the NetZeroCities project, which envisioned quarterly meetings with 30 Practitioner Panel members, the demand for panel consultations is substantially larger, particularly for practitioners. This is likely due, in part, to the larger number of Mission Cities that were to be initially supported by NetZeroCities than was planned when the project was initiated, which translates to a different scale of service offer needed earlier in the program. Increasing the frequency of interactions, particularly thematically-targeted ones with facilitated small group interactions, with the Panels was also an intentional measure to ensure the quality of engagement with the Panels overall was still ensured after the City Panel committee made the decision to raise the participant cap on the panels following an exceptionally high volume and quality of applications.

to engage non-Mission Cities. Sessions that exclusively target Mission Cities should be balanced with sessions that seek to involve and gather insights from a diverse range of cities and to ensure the City Panel program remain relevant to all its Members.

### 4.1.2 Session organization and logistics

- **Providing relevant preparatory content well in advance of the session not only stands to improve the quality of feedback from session participants, but is an important accessibility measure.** City Panel organizers should provide relevant content for preparation at least a week in advance for cities that wish to and have the capacity to prepare. This is particularly important to support city representatives whose English is not native level. However, it is still essential to ensure that the consultation presentation brings all participants to the same page, considering the varying capacities of cities.
- **Registration details should be communicated well in advance, and "Save the Date" notifications should be sent as early as possible.** For the NetZeroCities panels, an absolute minimum of three weeks ahead of the session is typically needed to ensure participation in the realm of the target range. Indeed, there is one Practitioner Panel Member city is only able to participate in sessions when links are provided 14 days in advance due to internal IT clearance protocols. It's recommended to use calendar invites for confirmed participants only, avoiding confusion by separate "Save the Date" invites when additional registration steps are actually required.
- **Hold a session design meeting with all key contributors to plan the session effectively.** In the context of the NetZeroCities Panels, such meetings should include a City Panel Committee representative. Use a facilitation guide template to outline crucial questions and details that need to be addressed beforehand.
- **Schedule a technical test with all session participants at least 30 minutes ahead of the main session using the same meeting link.** This ensures that all features and technology work smoothly during the consultation.
- **Breakout groups can be a valuable means of having more in-depth and focused discussions with more participants; but only if they are planned carefully, considering their composition, duration, and timing.** It is important for organizers to consider the specific technical capabilities of their chosen online platform for this, and to be technically prepared to support participants in migrating to breakout groups.
- **Define specific roles for facilitators, technical assistance, and note-takers for consultations to ensure seamless execution.** Having distinct people take on these respective roles is especially recommended for any sessions with more than a small handful of participants given the potential for competing attention demands. Future organizers may consider using supplemental AI/auto transcription support to assist note-takers in the future, though it is crucial to ensure data protection standards are maintained.

### 4.1.3 Attendance and engagement

The following recommendations lay out good practices that can help to enhance attendance and engagement in City Panel consultations across the board:

- **Provide significant advance notice for sessions and send multiple reminders to reduce last-minute drop-offs.** Individual messages inviting participants and registration for specific topics or breakout groups can instil a sense of shared ownership and mitigate this risk as well.
- **Clearly identify any specific expertise required for sessions, such as finance, during registration or direct outreach** to city representatives to ensure relevant expertise is available.



- **Presentations should avoid jargon and project-specific references to ensure clarity and understanding, especially for new participants.**
- **Avoid overly dense presentation materials and focus on key questions that require input.** Sharing material in advance, such as (“draft” watermarked) PDFs, can help participants prepare and engage meaningfully. Consider adopting a one-minute pitch format to succinctly present ideas and engage participants effectively.
- **Encourage case studies and interviews with each city to build relationships and activate cities in the co-design process.**
- **While perfect timing for breakout groups is challenging, aim to allow sufficient time for in-depth discussions and feedback.** This should ideally also include designated time to allow participants to introduce themselves, or even to engage in a short icebreaker activity, to establish a more open environment.
- **Utilize interactive platforms like Miro, but be prepared to accommodate participants who may not feel comfortable or have access issues with these tools.** For example, consider screen sharing to display the board and offer to add contributions from meeting participants manually on their behalf if they prefer.
- **Ask for specific points of feedback in addition to leaving space for general feedback to guide discussions and streamline conversations.**

Meanwhile, the following represent specific suggestions for optimizing participation and engagement in the context of the future Strategic Panel program. Specifically, initially, the Strategic Panel consultations disproportionately represented Panel Members other than Mayors and Deputy Mayors.

- The Panel Committee found that sending formal invitations and engaging in direct outreach have helped improve attendance of Mayors and Deputy Mayors between the first and second consultation.
- Moreover, providing opportunities for individual contributions in the agenda could be beneficial in such settings.
- Previous organizers have recommended ensuring that the political relevance of all content is explicitly communicated to align with the interests of elected representatives.
- Another approach to consider in the future could involve planning in-person sessions alongside high-profile events where Mayors and Vice Mayors who are Panel Members are already attending, thereby optimizing resource allocation. Alternatively, conducting sessions with a smaller, targeted group of Mayors and Deputy Mayors could be considered.

#### 4.1.4 Reflexive learning and knowledge management

- **A prompt debrief after consultations allows for reflection on the session’s outcomes and learnings, facilitating efficient follow-up actions.** This feedback-driven approach can help identify successful strategies and areas for improvement, ultimately enhancing the quality and effectiveness of future sessions.
- **Knowledge-sharing strategies with relevant external stakeholders need to find a balance between fluidity and sufficient structure to maintain high data protection and anonymity standards.** For Mission Cities, it is recommended to identify respective city advisors and invite them to sessions and/or notify them of their city’s participation. This will help ensure that relevant stakeholders are aware of and engaged in the Panel’s activities. It continues to be critical, however, to comply with data protection regulations and maintain anonymity where necessary in any Panel consultation outputs that have the potential for publication outside the consortium.



- **To enhance interaction between cities beyond consultation sessions, proactively activating platforms such as the NetZeroCities Online Portal as a tool for fostering collaboration within the Panel groups holds potential, and needs dedicated resources.** Alignment with and support from knowledge management capacity in this activation beyond the Panels is also advised, ensuring the smooth flow of information and embeddedness in the wider ecosystem.
- **Prioritizing validated and finalized information sharing outside of sessions will promote accuracy and reliability in the knowledge shared among participants.** As we aim to centralize City Panel activities on the Platform, caution must be exercised with content that is still in draft or not-yet-validated format.
- **Using multiple communication channels to share important information is vital to ensuring all participants are reached.** To complement interaction on the Platform, the Panel Committee should ensure that it continues to use email communications through the alias managed under the Customer Relationship Management system for critical communications such as event invitations.

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## 5 Outlook

The City Panels have provided a distinct channel for a wide range of cities to contribute to the co-design process of key NetZeroCities concepts, tools, resources, and services. The City Panel Committee is committed to continuing to work closely with the broader NetZeroCities consortium to support demand-driven engagement with the City Panels. To support fluid knowledge sharing and engagement between formal meetings, Panel operations will be increasingly migrated to take place within the Mission Platform in the next phase of the Panels.

This report also coincides with a pivotal moment of strategic and larger structural transition for the City Panels. Strategic alignment will become increasingly important to ensure that the Panels not only address the needs of the FPA Work Packages but also align with the work under the SGAs, including remaining responsive to the SGA1 Thematic Cluster structure.

The City Panels will mark their second anniversary in Spring 2024. Under the FPA and current specifications, this will necessitate a review of specifications and membership. Before this milestone, it is critical to seek input and validation from current Panel Members to define new proposed specifications. The assessment should also consider whether a new call for members is needed. However, it may be necessary to consult with Panel Members and revise this plan, depending on when the implementation of SGA2 begins. The establishment of a dedicated UX team under SGA2 (T1.3.1) aims to improve the user experience of the Cities Mission Platform. The broader Work Package is tasked with providing a fully-digitised online service to *any* European city. This team will also adapt the City Panels' functionality as a users' panel to test usability and the user interface of the Platform with this expanded end user group in mind. At the same time, the changes in the structure of the City Support offer under SGA 1 may have additional implications for the resources and capacities relevant for City Panel governance.

In anticipation of these foreseen shifts in the constellation of frameworks under which the City Panels operate, in Autumn 2023, the City Panel Committee is initiating a consortium-internal alignment process to define the strategic vision for the future of the City Panels. This process will seek to understand the key steps in the Panels' transition under the scope of the remainder of NetZeroCities with all partners who have a role in their leadership under the FPA and SGA2.

As the first step of this process, the first draft version of this report was shared with all partners who have (co-)organised a City Panel session so far, and they were asked to share their wishes for the City Panels in their next phase, and in particular, their vision for the Panels' transition in the context of SGA1 and SGA2. Based on their inputs, these are some of the open questions that should be addressed in the remainder of the strategic alignment process, complementing the recommendations laid out in the previous section of this report:

- What is the ideal frequency of activities and scope of topics to be addressed in the next phase of the City Panels – particularly before they are fully adapted through the activities of WP1 of SGA2?
- How can we ensure the aspect of co-creation is central in the next phase of the City Panels? Specifically, particularly in the context of the City Panels foreseen transition under SGA2: to what extent and how can the City Panels continue to play a unique role in co-creating key elements of the Cities Mission beyond specific services, such as the Climate City Contracts process?
- How can we best keep Panel Members up to date on the key developments of the project and enable them to accompany and influence the bigger-picture development process without overwhelming them?
- Where are there opportunities to further strengthen the feedback loop with the City Panels to ensure that the cities' feedback has an impact on the project activities and that they can also see this impact?



- What are the opportunities for the future role of the Strategic Panel, given the emphasis on topics such as service, tool, and platform refinement that are primarily the focus of the Practitioner Panel under SGA2? For example: could the Strategic Panel be a first group of political representatives to mobilised for any political issues and topics that arise within NZC's work?

Cities and their needs must be at the centre of the Cities Mission and NetZeroCities activities. The consortium's strategy definition should be understood as in the start of an iterative approach to continuously shaping and improving the Panels with Members themselves.

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## Conclusion

The NetZeroCities project's main objective is to aid cities in achieving climate neutrality by 2030 through custom tools and support services. To ensure demand-driven results, two City Panels were formed: the Practitioner Panel, comprising technical staff working on climate neutrality, and the Strategic Panel, consisting of strategic decision-makers including Mayors and Deputy Mayors. The City Panel Committee oversees and coordinates the panels' activities, consultations, and support, and coordinates closely with the broader NetZeroCities consortium to shape the agenda.

138 representatives were selected to participate in the City Panels. Among them, 75 were chosen for the Practitioner Panel, and 63 for the Strategic Panel, representing 87 cities from 25 different countries. The cities represented in the Panels vary in size, ranging from less than 100,000 inhabitants to 1.5 million inhabitants, and are found across Europe.

Between the Kick-Off of the City Panels in Spring 2022 and June 2023, 15 Practitioner Panel and 2 Strategic Panel consultations have taken place. Across the consultations, common needs and recommendations from cities emerged:

- Cities seek comprehensive assistance in understanding NetZeroCities' support for successful CCC process implementation, with special support for smaller municipalities and tailored resources for Transition Teams of various sizes.
- Time, human resources, and financial planning for building and maintaining local Mission teams are crucial, necessitating support in accessing private finance and comprehensive ecosystem approaches for financing climate neutrality efforts.
- Cities recommend leveraging existing structures and tools, such as the Expressions of Interest, and emphasize the need for clear linkages between services on the Cities Mission Platform and components of the CCC process and Climate Transition Map.
- Connecting local, national, and EU-level actors in climate neutrality efforts requires support and coordination.
- Finding the right balance between context-specific and generic information in reporting, establishing unified and accessible terminology, and providing materials in native languages are essential for avoiding potential accessibility barriers both in communications and in service implementation.
- Peer-to-peer interactions, in-person exchanges, and facilitated collaborations are valued by cities for effective knowledge sharing. Panel Members seek support establishing partnerships with stakeholders from various sectors to ensure inclusivity and templates for case studies and replication to support this.

The future City Panel program can benefit from several key recommendations derived from feedback provided by Panel Members, session organizers, and City Panel Committee members, including:

- To strike the right balance between planning and flexibility, clear and regular communication with the Work Package Leads, the Executive Committee, and City Advisors during agenda design is crucial.
- Timely and clear communication, as well as a structured session design, will help ensure smooth logistics and enhance engagement from participants.
- Specific points of feedback should be sought during sessions to guide discussions effectively, and proactively addressing persistent feedback from Panel Members in session presentations can enhance the value of consultations. Using interactive platforms like Miro while accommodating participants less comfortable with these tools is advisable.
- Holding group debrief sessions after consultations fosters reflexive learning and allows for efficient follow-up actions. Ensuring smooth information flow with City Advisors and activating





the Platform for collaborative interactions will strengthen knowledge management efforts. To ensure reliable information exchange, validated and finalized content should be housed on the Platform, complemented by critical communications via email.

The City Panels have played a vital role in engaging a diverse range of cities in the co-design process of NetZeroCities concepts and services, and demand-driven engagement with the Panels will continue to support this with the enhanced knowledge sharing enabled through the Mission Platform. Strategic alignment beyond the City Panel Committee is becoming increasingly important to cater to the needs of the Cities Mission as a whole, going beyond the need to support FPA Work Packages alone and align with the broader SGAs, including the SGA1 Thematic Cluster structure, and especially in anticipation of the transition of the City Panel function under SGA2.

To prepare for these future shifts, a consortium-internal alignment process is being initiated in Autumn 2023, involving all key partners to define the strategic vision for the future of the City Panels. The initial list of open questions that should be addressed in this process are to be informed both by the recommendations, found in [Section 4](#), as well as the complementary inputs contributed from previous City Panel organizers, found in [Section 5](#) of this report.



## Appendix I: NetZeroCities City Panel Member Selection

The application process to join either City Panel began in December 2021 and ended in February 2022 (M3 to M5). It was disseminated through the NetZeroCities project website, social media platforms, and the City Panel Committee's networks.

### Selection criteria

The City Panel Committee defined selection criteria to guide the assessment of applications. The Frequently Asked Questions document that was included in the application call disclosed the criteria to potential applicants.

For both panels, the committee only considered applications from local government entities representing a city in its entirety, rather than specific boroughs or districts. Applications from cities outside of the EU27 and associated states were excluded. Further assessment criteria were developed specific to each panel.

Specific assessment criteria for the Strategic Panel:

- Application by a person of significance in strategic decision-making on the city level: The prospective Panel Member holds the role of Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Department Chair, or an equivalent senior-level in the city or region.
- Level of ambition: The municipality has ambitions to achieve climate neutrality before 2050, moving the target date to 2030, and is eager to engage and exchange with other municipalities for mutual learning.
- Participation in consultations: The applicant agrees to the expectation of participating in online meetings and giving feedback on Climate City Contracts (CCC) as an instrument to achieve climate neutrality.

Specific assessment for the Practitioner Panel:

- Place of employment: The applicant is directly employed at the municipality as a policy or technical officer, or in an equivalent role.
- Relevance of the applicant's role: The applicant's work in the municipality focuses on supporting the technical or regulatory implementation of actions towards climate neutrality.
- Level of ambition: The municipality is eager to become more advanced in its work towards climate neutrality.
- Participation in consultations: The applicant agrees to the expectation of participating in online meetings and evaluating services and solutions brought forward in the NetZeroCities project, including via the Mission Platform.

### Outcome of the application assessment

192 applications to join one of the City Panels were submitted. The application closed on 8 February 2022 and the committee reviewed the applications in the remainder of the month and notified applicants of their acceptance or rejection in March.

From the 192 applications, 138 representatives were selected, with 75 Practitioner Panel and 63 Strategic Panel representatives from 87 cities and 25 countries. Most Member cities have only one official designated representative, but in certain cases, applicants requested multiple representatives for capacity reasons from the start.



Table 4, below, provides a summary of the number of cities represented broken down by Panel affiliation and their Mission City status. Then, Table 5 that follows lists all of the participating cities, and indicates which panel(s) they are represented on and whether they are currently a Mission City.

*Number of cities represented*

<i>Cities Mission status</i>	Practitioner Panel only	Strategic Panel only	Both Panels	Grand total across Panels
<b>Mission City</b>	11	8	29	48
<b>Submitted Expression of Interest but not selected</b>	10	8	6	24
<b>Did not submit Expression of Interest</b>	7	6	2	15
<b>Any</b>	28	22	27	87

**Table 4: Summary overview, 100 Climate Neutral and Smart Cities Mission status among NetZeroCities City Panel Member cities as of September 2023**

City	Country	NetZeroCities City Panel Membership	Mission City
Linz	Austria	Practitioner Panel	NO
Brussels	Belgium	Strategic Panel	YES
Ghent	Belgium	Practitioner Panel	NO
Leuven	Belgium	Both Panels	YES
Sarajevo	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Strategic Panel	YES
Blagoevgrad	Bulgaria	Strategic Panel	NO
Burgas	Bulgaria	Practitioner Panel	NO
Varna	Bulgaria	Both Panels	NO
Aarhus	Denmark	Both Panels	YES
Rakvere	Estonia	Strategic Panel	NO
Tartu	Estonia	Practitioner Panel	YES
Espoo	Finland	Both Panels	YES
Helsinki	Finland	Strategic Panel	YES
Lahti	Finland	Both Panels	YES
Lappeenranta	Finland	Both Panels	YES
Tampere	Finland	Both Panels	YES
Turku	Finland	Both Panels	YES
Vantaa	Finland	Strategic Panel	NO
Communauté d'Agglomération de La Rochelle	France	Practitioner Panel	NO
Dunkirk	France	Both Panels	YES
Lille	France	Strategic Panel	NO



Marseille	France	Both Panels	NO
Nantes	France	Practitioner Panel	YES
Pau	France	Practitioner Panel	NO
Cologne	Germany	Practitioner Panel	NO
Frankfurt am Main	Germany	Practitioner Panel	YES
Freiburg	Germany	Practitioner Panel	NO
Hamburg	Germany	Practitioner Panel	NO
Mannheim	Germany	Both Panels	YES
Münster	Germany	Strategic Panel	YES
Farkadona	Greece	Practitioner Panel	NO
Karditsa	Greece	Both Panels	NO
Komotini	Greece	Practitioner Panel	NO
Thessaloniki	Greece	Practitioner Panel	YES
Reykjavik	Iceland	Both Panels	YES
Dublin	Ireland	Practitioner Panel	YES
Arezzo	Italy	Strategic Panel	NO
Cesena	Italy	Practitioner Panel	NO
Magliano Alpi	Italy	Strategic Panel	NO
Messina	Italy	Practitioner Panel	NO
Milan	Italy	Both Panels	YES
Parma	Italy	Both Panels	YES
Reggio Emilia	Italy	Strategic Panel	NO
Turin	Italy	Both Panels	YES
Riga	Latvia	Both Panels	YES
Alkmaar	Netherlands	Practitioner Panel	NO
Eindhoven	Netherlands	Both Panels	YES
Groningen	Netherlands	Both Panels	YES
Rotterdam	Netherlands	Strategic Panel	YES
Utrecht	Netherlands	Practitioner Panel	YES
Skopje	North Macedonia	Strategic Panel	NO
Oslo	Norway	Strategic Panel	YES
Stavanger	Norway	Both Panels	YES
Tromsø	Norway	Both Panels	NO
Trondheim	Norway	Practitioner Panel	YES
Bydgoszcz	Poland	Practitioner Panel	NO
Krakow	Poland	Both Panels	YES
Wrocław	Poland	Both Panels	YES
Braga	Portugal	Practitioner Panel	NO
Cascais	Portugal	Strategic Panel	NO
Lisbon	Portugal	Both Panels	YES
Porto	Portugal	Practitioner Panel	YES
Valongo	Portugal	Both Panels	NO
Vila Nova de Gaia	Portugal	Both Panels	NO



Alba Iulia	Romania	Practitioners Panel	NO
Cluj-Napoca	Romania	Strategic Panel	YES
Comsnesti	Romania	Strategic Panel	NO
Slănic-Moldova	Romania	Strategic Panel	NO
Timisoara	Romania	Strategic Panel	NO
Basque municipalities	Spain	Both Panels	NO
Logroño	Spain	Strategic Panel	NO
Madrid	Spain	Both Panels	YES
Murcia	Spain	Strategic Panel	NO
Valencia	Spain	Both Panels	YES
Valladolid	Spain	Both Panels	YES
Vitoria-Gasteiz	Spain	Practitioner Panel	YES
Zaragoza	Spain	Both Panels	YES
Gothenburg	Sweden	Strategic Panel	YES
Helsingborg	Sweden	Both Panels	YES
Lund	Sweden	Both Panels	YES
Malmö	Sweden	Both Panels	YES
Stockholm	Sweden	Both Panels	YES
Umeå	Sweden	Both Panels	YES
Izmir	Türkiye	Practitioner Panel	YES
Konya	Türkiye	Practitioner Panel	NO
Lviv	Ukraine	Both Panels	NO
Glasgow	United Kingdom	Practitioner Panel	YES

**Table 5: Full list of NetZeroCities City Panel Members, specifying their 100 Climate Neutral and Smart Cities Mission status**



## Appendix II: Full specifications

### Role of the City Panels

To support cities in their journey towards climate neutrality by 2030, the NetZeroCities project is developing a range of demand-driven support services. The project's two City Panels help to shape and test the project's products, services and processes during the design phase (2022-2023):

- The Strategic Panel, composed of Mayors, Deputy Mayors and high-level decision-makers (i.e. Head of Departments) actively involved with strategic policymaking and climate governance, principally advises and observes processes including the Climate City Contract.
- The Practitioner Panel, composed of technical and administrative staff actively working on climate neutrality, evaluates services and solutions showcased on the Mission Platform (One-Stop-Shop Platform), and other outputs.

Some activities and topics are only relevant to one of the panels – either the Practitioner or the Strategic Panel – whereas other topics will be addressed by both panels, but from slightly different angles. In general, the Practitioner Panel will be asked to participate in more meetings than the Strategic Panel.

NetZeroCities City Panel Membership is open both to Mission Cities and to those that are not a Mission City at this time. Input from a wide range of cities remains essential to supporting and enriching the Cities Mission's contribution to our shared, ambitious efforts towards achieving climate neutrality.

### Activity formats

Practitioner Panel activity formats vary, from round table discussions to more focused working groups, to online questionnaires or beta tests. Activities vary in duration, ranging from an hour to half-day events, and sometimes require some preparatory work from Members, such as reading a report or completing a survey. In the interest of balancing demands on Members' capacities, the committee aims to limit the number of half-day events to a maximum of two per year. Some activities require time-bound but flexibly timed inputs, such as beta-testing environments, which may be open for several days.

The Strategic Panel online activities, in most cases, have the format of round table discussions. The meetings vary in duration but do not exceed two hours. Very basic preparatory work may be requested, such as reading a factsheet or completing a short survey.

### Expectations for representatives

As explained previously in this report, Practitioner Panel representatives are expected to join online meetings on a regular basis to contribute to the development of NetZeroCities services and products. Strategic Panel representatives, meanwhile, are expected to participate in a more limited number of online meetings and activities to provide their strategic and high-level input.

The NetZeroCities project's official contact list for the Panel Members, housed on a Customer Relationship Management platform through an alias co-managed by the City Panel committee, only includes the key representative(s) of each participating city, but Panel Members are encouraged to discuss and share meeting outcomes within their organisation to enhance dissemination.

Each Member institution's key representatives are strongly encouraged to participate in as many activities as possible. However, the committee recognizes that it can be challenging for just one person to commit the time needed to participate in every activity. The relevance of certain activities will also depend on each Member's background and expertise. Thus, the key representatives for each city are encouraged to coordinate internally and delegate participation to another person within their organisation with related expertise, and to inform the City Panel Committee in such cases.





If a Panel Member representative changes positions or leaves their organisation, they are asked to inform the City Panel Committee as early as possible. Either the city can propose a new person to take over the role of the Panel member or, if necessary, the Committee may launch a new panel member call.

The primary purpose of the Panels is to create a collaborative space for co-developing, testing, and refining concepts, tools, and services that will aid cities in their efforts towards achieving climate neutrality. As such, the content discussed within the consultations is generally considered confidential, and the representatives should not reproduce or repurpose any of the content without explicit consent from the consortium. It is essential to note that the content presented during the panels is in draft and unofficial form, and the Panels do not replace technical support or advice, including for Mission Cities, who should reach out to city advisors as their first point of contact for any technical queries. For instance, presentations on focal tools and services should only be delivered with the facilitation of City Advisors or other NetZeroCities Consortium Members, rather than being presented solely by individual cities.

## Panel engagement and knowledge management process

The summary of the engagement process and knowledge management flow for both panels is captured in Figure 2 below, and is explained in the sub-sections to follow:

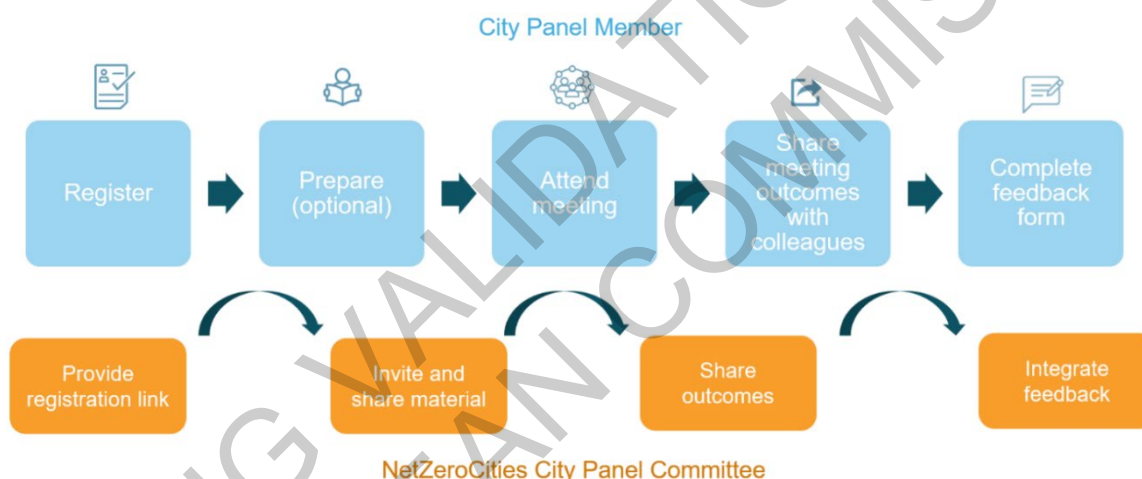


Figure 2 NetZeroCities City Panel engagement and knowledge management flow (identical to Figure 1)

## Consultation design

Before participants are invited to events, the City Panel Committee coordinates with consortium members who have expressed the need to organize a panel consultation (“lead organizers”) to provide guidance on the development of their event agenda and to coordinate scheduling. Before a session can be organized, the lead organizers define the purpose, objectives, and other key conditions of the proposed meeting clearly, and confirm necessary Work Package capacity support.

The Committee provides lead organizers with all key resource templates needed ahead of the session including an invitation, agenda, presentation, and a short session brief. The lead organizers then develop the final agenda and essential guiding documents for the consultation, ensuring a clear definition of the specific objective and intended outcomes of the event. The meeting link to the event, along with the final agenda, is shared with the participants no later than one week before the event’s commencement. Organizers are expected to share and validate any presentation material with key stakeholders within the consortium, seeking their input and approval before the actual presentation. Any changes to the agenda, the objective of the meeting, or the list of participants are promptly communicated to the Committee as soon as they arise. Additionally, the lead organizers are asked

schedule at least one meeting to prepare for the session, and they are encouraged to invite Committee support to this meeting as well.

## Registration

As soon as a date is fixed for a panel consultation, the City Panel Committee sends the Panel Members a save-the-date as an email, message on the private [City Panel portal group](#) (restricted to Members and administrators), and/or a direct calendar invite as early as possible. The save the dates will always include the session title, a short description that communicates the purpose and intended outcomes of the session, and a provisional agenda. The organizers do their best to accommodate all participants' time zones in scheduling. In some cases when there is no participant cap, Panel Members may simply receive a calendar invitation without needing to complete a separate registration process. In most cases, particularly if the consultation has a limit to the number of participants, the lead organizers work with the Committee to run a registration process. If registration is necessary, the Committee works with the lead organizers to create the registration form content, and then can provide the registration form link and manage the registrations. Whenever possible, registration should be open three or more weeks ahead of the session, and the form should remain open for at least one full week.

If panel members find themselves unable to attend any of the activities they have registered for and are unable to delegate their participation to another person within their organization, they are to inform the NetZeroCities City Panel Committee as soon as possible. If the minimum participation requirements for the session are otherwise at risk of not being met, the Committee may request that members communicate their availability within two weeks after the initially scheduled date for the activity. If a session doesn't have a participant cap and more than 10 panel members are unable to attend a particular activity, the Committee will make efforts to arrange additional time slots as alternatives, provided that the consortium has the necessary resources and time available.

## During sessions

Lead organizers lead the facilitation of the entire event and ensure there are designated notetakers. They take on the responsibility of creating a conducive environment for engagement and collaboration among the participants. This facilitation includes presenting the current understanding or materials relevant to the topic under consideration. Additionally, the lead organizers create space for questions and open exchange, encouraging active participation and knowledge-sharing among the Panel members.

The standard practice is to record online meetings for the purposes of note taking, but recordings, chat logs, or transcripts are never shared outside of the NetZeroCities consortium. Participants are informed of this at the beginning of every meeting.

During the event, members of the Committee fulfil several key roles to ensure its smooth functioning and effective outcomes. They start each consultation by welcoming the Panel members, providing them with an overview of how the session fits into the broader agenda of the Panel. The Committee will always observe the consultation process. Throughout the event, Committee members may provide additional organizational, technical, and moderation support as needed, such as by supporting the moderation of breakout rooms. The Committee members close the consultation by thanking the participants and offering an outlook for the next consultations.

## Follow up and feedback

To gather valuable insights and continually enhance the program, the City Panel Committee requests participants to complete a standardized feedback form after each activity. After the event, the Committee ensures that participants receive the feedback form and provides consultation organizers with internal feedback and reporting templates and reminders tailored to each specific consultation. The lead organizers and City Panel Committee should typically have at least one meeting after the session for an internal debrief.





The City Panel Committee and the lead organizers collaborate to share a synthesis of key meeting outcomes with respective Panel Members, as well as with relevant members of the NetZeroCities consortium. Following the event, the lead organizers take the responsibility of preparing the minutes or summaries of the meeting, along with any other essential documents, and making these available to the participants. The post-event summary or minutes include key highlights and an account of the events and discussions, as well as details on the next steps for incorporating insights gleaned from the consultation. The consultation leads seek validation or feedback from participants within a suitable timeframe. Additionally, the consultation leads inform the Committee about any further consultations needed in the future, enabling anticipation for the next consultation cycle, or scheduling appropriate follow-ups with the same or part of the original group.

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## Appendix III: Key consultation discussions and recommendations by theme

### Early discussions on the Climate City Contracts key principles and processes

The CCCs are a cornerstone of the Cities Mission, and accordingly, were the focus of the first consultations of both the Practitioner and Strategic Panel in Spring 2022. These discussions consequently framed the agenda for future consultations.

These consultations served to share the state of discussions around the CCC at the time – understood as a potent instrument to help cities achieve carbon neutrality by 2030, facilitating mandate setting, system understanding, and portfolio design -- particularly around the key phases of 1) Activation (Understand, Mobilise, Frame & Assess), 2) Implementation (Commitments, Action & Investment Transition Plans, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning), and 3) Upscaling (Connect & Inspire, Amplify at local, regional, national levels). In the sessions, the consortium clarified that the phases of the CCC should not be understood strictly sequential, but rather, can run in parallel for faster progress. In a subsequent session with Practitioners, the NetZeroCities Systems Innovation approach was introduced, along with its connections to the CCC process. The session also provided clarity on the expected CCC Outputs and how the CCC approach relates to other initiatives like SECAPs and Local Green Deals.

Practitioners were asked to consider if the provisional CCC phases aligned with their views, identify potential connections to existing activities, and pinpoint any missing elements and support needs. The Strategic Panel representatives, meanwhile, focused specifically on the question of how municipalities can lead the co-creation of broad city coalitions on climate action, to share their cities' experiences in this, and to identify related expectations and support needs from the Cities Mission.

Several key messages arose from these foundational consultations, reflecting areas for city support needs and recommendations for the further iteration of the CCCs and the tools, resources, and services aiding their implementation.

#### **Practitioners' perspectives:**

- **Mobilizing resources and commitment within the city, including time and skills, were emphasized as essential.** Cities were keen for a comprehensive understanding of what NetZeroCities support for successful CCC process implementation will entail, including the potential need for establishing consortia and engaging external experts or consultants. They highlighted their need to consider foreseen time and human resource requirements, understanding the framework to plan for building a local CCC team and allocating financial resources. Furthermore, Panel Members highlighted the importance of NetZeroCities and the CCC process in supporting opportunities for collaboration and matchmaking while addressing cities' needs, fostering a solid understanding of their existing systems and emissions domains. The platform's peer-to-peer learning area was flagged as a means to facilitate such connections between cities.
- **Cities will need comprehensive mandate-setting support.** Cities anticipate that the Mission Label would crucially focus on aiding cities in updating commitments and investment plans, which is likely to pose challenges in many locations. Before engaging in mandate setting, cities must have a clear direction and a comprehensive understanding of existing plans, goals, innovative structures, and financial systems. While some cities have utilized the Cities Mission Expression of Interest to conduct in-depth stocktaking, Panel Members underscored the necessity for all cities to undergo critical assessments, taking a systems perspective and determining the extent of structural changes required to meet the 2030 neutrality target. Additionally, the impact of the current geopolitical situation raises questions about how cities across Europe can be supported in transitioning away from fossil fuels and achieving climate neutrality targets even earlier than 2030 if necessary. Joint initiatives and specialized advice on



energy provision and independence may be essential responses to the ongoing international situation.

- **Advocacy is critically needed for the inclusion of small rural communities in programs and to support cities in countries with less ambitious climate goals at the European level.** Cities felt the CCC process should cater to cities' varying levels of readiness, taking into account their knowledge, skills, ambitions, and current progress towards climate neutrality. The scale of cities can be crucial in determining their resource capacity and experience in climate action planning and implementation. Small municipalities may face eligibility challenges in developing various sustainability plans. To achieve climate neutrality and territorial equality in Europe, it is essential for small and mid-sized cities, as well as rural municipalities, to receive increased support and technical assistance from the NZC project and NZC platform in their journey towards becoming climate-neutral and smart by 2030.
- **Participants strongly recommended that the Cities Mission leverage existing structures, processes, and tools rather than creating new ones during the CCC process.** As one component of this, cities emphasized that the Expressions of Interest are valuable sources of insight for orchestration team structures and co-creation processes.
- **Panel members sought further clarification and support on the topic of multi-level governance – specifically, connecting local, national, and EU-level actors – in the CCC process.** This is particularly important considering that local authorities may encounter emission reduction barriers, and capacities vary significantly between different places. Aligning efforts with national-level actors can accelerate comprehensive urban planning, but it requires careful coordination. Cities expressed their need to identify which national government institutions would be coordinating with the EU Mission "Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities" at the national level, and who could serve as National Contact Points to ensure state support. Practical guidelines on climate action planning and financing to this end are eagerly awaited by cities and towns: many seek detailed information on working with the national government and a roadmap for funding their journey towards climate neutrality by 2030, considering various funding sources.
- **Participants felt that NetZeroCities should strive to strike a balance between context-specific and generic information for various cities concerning sectors and emissions domains.** Certain Panel Members expressed their concern that the draft graphic of sectors and emission domains within the CCC process as it was presented at the consultation lacked enough specificity, suggesting a need for further elaboration (such as breaking down the "Energy" category into more detailed subcategories like storage, generation, transfer, and use). Others, though, noted that an excessively detailed breakdown could pose challenges due to variations in taxonomies among the numerous cities involved.
- **NetZeroCities should provide detailed data and indicator management guidelines, including on behavioural changes.** Cities must understand the required environmental and climate data, impact metrics, and indicators for successful CCC implementation, and will need to plan for data availability, possibly involving external stakeholders. Detailed data and impact metrics management guidelines therefore are crucial. Additionally, to advance climate neutrality, cities noted the need to focus on both technological and behavioral changes, and expressed interest in showcasing measurable (co-) benefits of behavioral changes in the CCC process.
- **Cities will benefit from further guidance and support in mapping, engaging, and building partnership with stakeholders from a range of sectors.** Cities undertaking the CCC process should prioritize stakeholder engagement and partnership building, starting communication with relevant stakeholders such as businesses and NGOs at the right moment and incorporating their input into the CCC process. To facilitate this, cities said they would benefit from tools, guidelines, and templates/software for identifying, mapping, and visualizing climate action stakeholders. NetZeroCities can also support by facilitating peer connections, encouraging representatives from other cities to participate in local meetings to foster collaboration and



knowledge exchange, overcoming skepticism. Panelists underscored the importance of linking co-benefits and adverse impacts, such as air quality and nature, to encourage multi-sector engagement. Cities should consider interconnected costs and impacts, link to investment strategies, and utilize participatory structures. For cities with less experience, framing the process as a call for community support may be a helpful approach, but addressing silos within the city remains a challenge.

- **The Cities Mission should strive to establish unified and accessible terminology regarding key aspects of the CCC process.** Considering the varying proficiency levels and sectors involved, it is crucial to determine whether language modifications are necessary for better understanding. Cities' own feedback on the language used to describe key stages, methods, and processes can help to ensure clarity and inclusivity. For instance, clarifying terms like "ecosystem" is vital, specifying it as a local collaboration of actors.

#### **Perspectives from the Strategic Panel:**

- **Municipalities can take the lead in co-creating broad city coalitions for climate action by adopting a quadruple helix approach**, involving citizens, civil society, industry, research, and local/regional governments in governance structures. They can establish separate governance systems to address climate plans independently from political systems, encouraging shared undertakings and responsibilities. Pooling resources for funding challenges like energy transition, building renovations, and labor shortages is essential. Utilizing district-level organizations facilitates connections with communities and captures diverse voices. Furthermore, Strategic Panel representatives emphasized that effective communication with citizens requires using simple language to inform and encourage behavior and consumption choices.
- **NetZeroCities can help connect cities with guidance and resources on co-creation processes and strategies to address political cycles and partisan divisions that may impede effective mandate-setting.** Clear mandates from city leaders help align political expectations and priorities are necessary to gain support from stakeholders. For cities with limited experience in local co-creation leading to broad city coalitions, they may require support in engaging citizens constructively and promoting the benefits of citizen engagement. Learning from other cities' experiences in citizen engagement and cooperation between national and local decision-making levels can be valuable to this end.

### **Role of the Climate Neutral City Advisors**

In April 2022, before the formation of the Climate-Neutral Cities Advisors (City Advisors) team, Practitioner Panel Members were provided an overview of their intended role and functions and asked to contribute their feedback and suggestions to optimize the City Advisors' work.

The consultation presentation envisioned the City Advisors as key facilitators in driving systemic change and pursuing the Mission ambition. They were expected to have significant experience in city contexts, working full-time from various European cities, and possessing diverse expertise in finance, social innovation, citizen engagement, and technical areas. Their duties were to include supporting Mission Cities through the CCC process, aiding Pilots and Twins in their projects and learning programs, and connecting cities with resources on the Platform while fostering collaboration among them.

During the Spring 2022 Practitioner Panel consultation, panel representatives anticipated challenges for the City Advisors and the cities receiving their support such as understanding specific city contexts, navigating different national and regional regulations, adapting to changing roles and political cycles within municipalities, and maintaining enthusiasm throughout the Cities Mission. Creating a culture of collaboration and ensuring effective engagement and communication were also identified as critical.

Cities offered several valuable suggestions to optimize City Advisors' time and enhance collaboration. These encompassed creating workspaces for sharing materials and solutions among cities, mapping cities' needs and grouping them based on common challenges, encouraging cities to lead thematic groups to ease the workload on advisors, and ensuring regular engagement through workshops and



events. Additionally, strategies like regional face-to-face meetings and focused support to individual cities during crucial moments were emphasized to maximize the efficiency and impact of City Advisors' efforts.

## Development of the Mission Platform

The three dedicated Practitioner Panel consultations over several months have contributed to the Climate Neutral and Smart Cities Mission Platform's ongoing progress in providing a collaborative and resourceful space for cities to work towards climate neutrality. Practitioner Panel members' testing and feedback has critically highlighted ways to improve the user-friendliness of features, the practical and technical content of the Platform, and informed the structure and content of features like the Knowledge Repository.

During the first session held on 29 April, Panel Members were first presented with the initial Platform design and provided feedback on the functional descriptions and mock-ups of the designed online modules. Specifically:

- Onboarding and self-assessment features were highlighted as essential to help cities fully utilize the Platform's resources. Cities expressed interest in knowing the type of support they can expect from the Platform and the need for tailored assistance. Panel Members suggested that the self-assessment tool could add significant value by providing instant feedback and recommendations, as well as user-friendly functionalities like file downloads, saving items for later, and easy ways to share outputs publicly. Some cities faced challenges with data collection for the Expression of Interest, highlighting the importance of cross-team collaboration.
- The Platform as a Peer-to-Peer Collaboration Space was another crucial focus of the Panel Members' feedback. Participants envisioned user-friendly, thematic working spaces, private groups, and networking opportunities with other organizations for collaboration. They desired communication with various stakeholders, including policymakers, cities' stakeholders, experts, and the public. The idea of city profiles on the Portal received attention, with cities wishing to display indicators, data, action plans, and contacts. While participants were open to comments and communication on their profiles, some showed reluctance towards changing their internal communication methods to use private working groups on the platform.

The second session in June 2022 focused on the Knowledge Repository, where participants provided feedback on the search engine features, content formats, and the solutions database. Cities emphasized the need for practical, technical solution-oriented content in factsheets, EU policy overviews, and policy case studies. They also expressed interest in sharing their own resources and requested a clear narrative to support communication with stakeholders.

In the third session held in March 2023, a range of updated and new Platform features were introduced. Participants were introduced to groups, events, and an auto-translate feature, with positive feedback on the user-friendliness and potential for large-scale engagement. The Climate Transition Map and Finance Guidance Tool received positive responses, and on the latter, participants emphasized the need for real examples and conversations about financing models.

Panel Members also received a walkthrough of the live Knowledge Repository, and overall, lauded it for its easy navigation and searchability. Participants expressed interest in features like flagged resources, direct contact with authors, and the ability to post comments. They suggested introducing a solution bundle for technical solutions and emphasized the importance of guiding cities on prioritizing solutions and their connection to specific emission scopes.

## Financing and the Investment Plan Framework

The Investment Plan Framework and its implementation were the focal points of discussion during a dedicated Practitioner and Strategic Panel session in May and June 2022, respectively. One component





of the Investment Plan Framework is the Finance Guidance Tool, which Practitioner Panel Members helped to shape and test at multiple stages in and between separate sessions.

### **The Investment Plan Framework**

The dedicated Investment Plan Framework Panel sessions highlighted the alignment between action and investment planning, presented the Investment Plan's six pillars, and examined several crucial elements of plan development for each city, including cost analysis, expected impact assessment, and capital planning. The consultations stressed the importance of comprehensive support, advocating for smaller communities, and the significance of standardized terminology and data management guidelines. Panel Members expressed the need for the Mission to utilize existing structures and support multi-level governance, empowering cities to lead in forming extensive city coalitions for climate action. Effective communication, stakeholder engagement, and clear language were also highlighted as crucial for successful implementation.

Specifically, key takeaways from the Practitioners' perspectives included:

- Panel Members highlighted the need for a clear definition of the "Investment Plan" to ensure a shared understanding. Key elements of this definition should encompass its focus on identifying investment requirements and achieved impacts to achieve climate neutrality, its involvement of diverse capital sourcing across funding and financial ecosystems, and its role as an ongoing planning exercise supporting action plan implementation.
- Cities emphasized the importance of coordinated data collection, integrating it with existing initiatives to streamline the process and maximize data effectiveness.
- Cities expressed interest in utilizing tools like ClimateView and sought practical exercises and case studies to improve implementation.
- Some cities lack full control over their budgets, relying on other governmental levels, particularly national ones. Aligning and involving other governmental levels and policies are seen as essential for success.
- Other critical challenges faced by many cities in financing climate neutrality efforts include the inclusion of private sector actors, quantifying the benefits of citizen engagement, aligning private investments with actions, overcoming silos between climate and finance departments, and managing workload in the face of limited capacity.

During the subsequent Strategic Panel session, the key takeaways were as follows:

- Supporting cities in accessing private finance was identified as a vital aspect of the Mission.
- The Investment Plan should closely align with the EU Sustainable Finance Taxonomy to ensure effective implementation.
- City leadership over time was emphasized as essential in overcoming process issues and bringing the right people on board at various levels.
- A related training structure is seen as critical for the Mission, and should consider language options, format of delivery, and the involvement of various city departments.
- Each city's existing budget will serve as the starting point for the Investment Plan, leveraging their current financial resources.
- It is important that the Investment Plan adopt a comprehensive ecosystem approach, involving relevant public and private stakeholders collectively in the net-zero transition.



## The Finance Guidance Tool

The Finance Guidance Tool aims to provide direction to cities for developing their Investment Plans and understanding finance and funding requirements. A first session with Practitioners involved a frontend mock-up and a backend algorithm presented interactively using a Miro Board. In a subsequent session once the tool went live in the Mission Platform, participants provided feedback on its actual usability.

In the prototype-centred session, Panel Members noted that cities vary in their progress towards financing climate neutrality. When developing the tool for the Investment Planning process, it's thus crucial to consider both the differences and similarities among cities. Participants overall felt the finance content as presented in the prototype was comprehensive but stressed that it is essential to ensure that the relevant city personnel have access to and actively engage with the tool. Participants also emphasized the significance of connecting with other cities that are pursuing similar projects or exploring comparable funding and financing resources. They expect the Mission Platform to facilitate matchmaking between cities and foster collaboration to this end, complementing the tool. Other feedback suggested the need for user-personas to develop helpful explanations of its functionality and to illustrate its use for a wide range of city users. The availability of information on public funding sources and eligibility criteria was deemed important for future improvements.

Overall, the live version of the Finance Guidance Tool was well received, but Panel Members suggested several potential improvements in its future development. They appreciated the tool's ability to filter by domains and direct users to relevant financing options based on their selections. The option to export results to Excel and access links to resources were also praised. Certain cities, though, noted potential challenges in the tool not, at that time, being available in their local languages. Interest in further real examples from cities. conversational learning about financing models was emphasized, while, at the same time, some stressed the need to avoid information overload.

## Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

### The CCC Evaluation Criteria

A September 2022 Practitioner Panel session focused on the CCC Evaluation Criteria. The session aimed to present the proposed criteria, gather feedback, and recalibrate the framework based on insights. Mid-level administrative managers responsible for the CCC process in various Mission Cities were the target group of participants. Overall, the session provided valuable input for operationalizing the CCC Evaluation Framework, with insights shaping D2.11. Specifically, four key questions were identified for further discussion and resolution with the Mission Team and cities, including the final set of evaluation criteria, the scope of the evaluation, the inclusion of Key Performance Indicators, and the establishment of a data collection and processing procedure.

Key recommendations from the Panel Members for the CCC Evaluation Framework at the time included:

- Providing onboarding support to ensure cities make the most of available resources.
- Clarifying the type of support cities can expect from the NetZeroCities project and Platform from the outset, while also offering tailored assistance.
- Designing the self-assessment to be time-efficient and avoid duplicating efforts, e.g., by ideally limiting it to an hour per individual annually.
- Ensuring the self-assessment offers instant feedback and recommendations, including the option to share outputs publicly for communication purposes.
- Considering whether to use the self-assessment for participant input or integrating a more detailed questionnaire into the dashboard.



- Recognizing that the Expression of Interest process for joining NetZeroCities as a Mission City encouraged cross-team collaboration – though some cities faced challenges due to limited personnel and expertise for data collection.
- Balancing transparency and practicality in shaping the framework.

### Indicators for monitoring the CCC Action Plans

The purpose of this session was to get feedback from the City Panel on the first complete iteration of the indicator system intended to monitor the final impact of cities' CCC Action Plans. The indicator system is made up of approximately 80 indicators categorised by 6 subdomains. City Panel participants were thus split into groups to provide feedback on these subdomains and the indicators contained within each. Subdomains each group considered is outlined below.

#### Group 1

- Greenhouse Gas Emissions Indicators
- Economic Co Benefit/ Co Risk Indicators

#### Group 2

- Social Inclusion, Innovation, Democracy and Cultural Impact Co Benefits/ Co Risk Indicators
- Biodiversity Co Benefit/Co Risk Indicators

#### Group 3

- Resource Efficiency Co Benefit/Co Risk Indicators
- Public Health and Environmental Impact Co Benefit/Co Risk Indicators

Within each group, the participants were asked to vote on 4 questions with respect to:

- the Relevance of Subdomains,
- the Relevance of the Indicators themselves,
- the Availability of Data with respect to Indicators and,
- the Difficulty of Calculation Methods with respect to the indicators.

Based on the review of the votes and valuable feedback received, a number of indicators were recommended for removal from the system. These indicators were considered in detail, and ultimately, it was concluded that 5 indicators should be removed from the system, primarily due to challenges with respect to acquiring the relevant data in order to implement and monitor each of the indicators.

The removed indicators include:

- % of adult population with High Sleep Disturbance
- Active engagement of citizens in decision-making
- Social Innovation impact on climate neutrality
- Food Waste index
- Change in the number of species of birds in built-up areas in the city.





Although some of these indicators were considered important in relation to tracking progress towards climate neutrality, it was considered that some of these were covered through easier-to-use indicators already included within the system.

## Replication, Scale Up, and the Twinning Learning Programme

The first related consultation focus was on understanding the needs for replication and scale-up within the NetZeroCities program. In particular, the meeting included a presentation on the replication and scale-up research (conducted in T5.1), distinguishing between replication (scale-out) and expansion (scale-up). Barriers and enablers were discussed, including challenges related to good practice information oversupply and cultural and regulatory differences. A follow up session presented a more mature version of the framework for further iteration. One aim of the replication framework at the time was to address the Twin Cities that were anticipated to join down the road, and to scale the prospective pilot projects through peer learning, with thematic clusters of pilots and twins to be guided by city advisors through the facilitated Twinning Learning Programme that would roll out later in 2023, which was accordingly one of the focuses of a consultation in Spring 2023. The Spring 2023 session also focused on the identification of important topics that new multimedia replication case studies should address.

During the consultations, Panel Members highlighted some key recommendations for the approach to replication and scale up in NetZeroCities:

- Cities may lack the capacity to produce case studies and materials, so providing templates to facilitate the process is crucial. Even cities not selected as formal case studies should be able to utilize the developed templates to share information effectively. Capacities are uneven, so support should be tailored accordingly.
- Meeting in person to exchange common interests, share experiences, and build interpersonal connections is considered essential for successful replication.
- A brainstorming exercise collected cities' experiences on replication and suggested that common success factors include:
  - good relationships between staff
  - finding reliable partners and consortium leaders
  - matching cities with similar backgrounds for better replication outcomes. For example: understanding the main sources of GHG emissions in each city can help match cities with similar profiles, making replication more effective.
- The Mission Platform's ease of accessibility, also in terms of language, was identified as having an important role in enabling effective knowledge exchange and matching.
- Panel Members expressed interest in a versatile and straightforward approach to replication, applicable to both formal and informal city connections.
- Cities acknowledged the interest in case studies spanning diverse sectors like mobility and policy levers such as citizen engagement. Additionally, they expressed curiosity about failed experiments and replication attempts, as valuable learning experiences.

The Practitioners' key recommendations from the Spring 2023 discussions on the replication and scale up case studies were:

- Use the Cities Mission Expressions of Interest to identify existing suitable projects as well as thematic priorities for the case studies. But initially, suggested thematic priorities include:
  - The Climate Transition Map and CCC process



- The portfolio approach
  - Climate procurement
  - Investment Plans
  - Calculation tools
  - Community engagement
  - Behavior change
  - Emission domains
  - Urban planning
  - Decision-making that breaks (internal) silos
- Focus not only on replication but also on building capacity in the cities.
  - Consider establish indicators to gauge the influence of case studies on other cities to adopt similar approaches.

In the Spring 2023 consultation, the Twinning Learning Programme was presented, outlining the steps Twin and Pilot cities would take in the learning cycle. Panel Members were asked for their opinions on the setup, workload, and facilitation of the program, as well as how to maximize its impact and encourage long-lasting collaboration. Their key recommendations were:

- Establish clear deadlines and timeframes for the learning cycle to communicate with city officials and decision-makers effectively.
- The focus of the program should be to develop replication plans rather than full implementation right away.
- Extend the proposed duration of the learning cycle after the pilot cities evaluate their projects to adjust plans effectively.
- The role of facilitators should be to provide tailor-made exchanges and logistical support, with cities having flexibility to use their own facilitators if needed. Facilitators from the NetZeroCities consortium can act as intermediaries, but pilot cities can also be supported by their own facilitators during the exchanges.
- Explore additional learning opportunities for Mission Cities beyond the Twinning Learning Programme to learn from each other organically, avoiding repetitive application processes.
- Encourage train travel for the learning cycle visits to promote climate-friendly practices when possible. Meanwhile, consider that island cities may incur higher travel costs and support them accordingly.

## Communications

In September 2022, the Practitioner Panel provided valuable feedback on their pressing needs and challenges related to communication on climate neutrality, with special focus on assessing the draft Communication Playbook, aimed at supporting cities in their communication efforts related to the Mission and NetZeroCities.

The following are some of the key recommendations the cities shared related to challenges and their needs related to...



...communicating about climate neutrality more broadly:

- Address the vocabulary confusion around climate neutrality, adaptation actions, sustainability, and other related topics by providing clear definitions and explanations.
- Find ways to communicate positively about the urgency of climate action to motivate people to take action.
- Help cities communicate on Climate Neutrality effectively, ensuring that people understand the issue and commit to taking action. Provide particular support in effective communication about especially challenging subjects like energy savings and transportation.
- Facilitate reaching out to all stakeholders and involving the public in climate initiatives.

... about the Cities Mission and NetZeroCities:

- Clarify the differences between the Mission and NetZeroCities; Mission Cities, Pilot Cities, and Twin Cities; and other similar initiatives or categories that have degrees of overlap to avoid confusion.
- Develop consistent communication messages and visuals to integrate elements towards the common 2030 goal.
- Communicate the importance and relevance of participating in the Mission to increase understanding and engagement.
- Explain the added value of being a Mission City to citizens and involve stakeholders in the process.
- Support communication with regional and national levels for better coordination.

...the draft of the Communications Playbook:

- Provide easy-to-use graphics, visuals, and professional images for effective communication.
- Incorporate positive storytelling to co-create shared visions and engaging stories.
- Offer different messages and materials tailored to various target groups.
- Ensure materials can be easily translated and adapted to local languages.
- Include explanations of main concepts related to the Mission and NetZeroCities.

Panel Members also called for NetZeroCities to support their communication efforts by continuously assessing and responding to their evolving needs. At the same time, many cities expressed feeling overwhelmed at the time by excessive information, webinars, and materials from NetZeroCities, and emphasized the need to better streamline key messages, input requests, and exchanges. To complement establishing city advisors as the first point of contact for ongoing support with local campaigns and communications to this end, some suggested creating an online peer-to-peer space for cities to discuss and exchange communication strategies.

## Co-designing the NetZeroCities Service Offer

Between November 2022 and January 2023, three Practitioner Panel sessions were held following a consistent structure based on a cohesive sprint strategy from WP6-10. The sprint groups, organized around these tools, used a coordinated structure based on a value proposition canvas. The main purpose of these sessions was to present and gather feedback from city practitioners, involving them in the co-design process of a number of key services. The Panel Members tested hypotheses, assumptions, design choices, and helped shape new development trajectories. In each session, the city practitioners received a brief introduction to each service, including the challenge, service description, key features, and delivery method. Ahead of sessions, they received background information about each



focal service, and indicated the particular service(s) they wished to work with more closely in smaller groups. In breakout groups, service leads then delved into more specific details of the services, discussing the logic, expected outcomes, and gathering feedback through targeted questions.

Several transversal insights in the first of the co-design session in particular served to inform a more comprehensive understanding of designing NetZeroCities services. First, Panel Members urged careful consideration around the use of language and jargon, which could create barriers to the implementation of services. Mission Cities in particular highlight the critical significance of the CCC process, and called for the explicit and clear display of the linkages between each prospective service on the Platform and components of the CCC and Climate Transition Map.

The key recommendations Practitioner Panel Members offered for specific focal services are described below.

### **Capability Building Service, a challenge-based cohort learning program with masterclasses**

Panel Members affirmed that a cohort-based capability-building program that is practical and hands-on would be valuable. Panel representatives suggested that in the composition of cohorts, there should be a minimum degree of cultural alignment to ensure effectiveness. Cities also recommended aligning program experts with Transition Teams' composition.

After the further development of the service based on these recommendations from cities, a subsequent consultation focused specifically on the Masterclass Series component of the service. Overall, cities desire a Masterclass Series that emphasizes collaboration, support, and action-oriented strategies, while promoting a holistic mindset towards effective orchestration. While Panel Members in the first Capability Building Service consultation in particular reiterated the importance of designing the capability-building program to support the CCC process, representatives clarified that the Masterclass Series focus needs to look beyond completing the CCC documents for their own sake. A specific topic cities indicated as being beneficial for support through the series include building transition teams both within and outside the sustainability department, given that identifying and then engaging key actors and stakeholders in climate conversations is challenging. Cities expressed interest in learning from cities with similar typologies and those that are more advanced in specific categories, though felt that it would be important for the cohort to feel more like working group and less like a gallery of interesting cases. To foster this, cities were interested in pursuing in-person meetings, feasible under the right conditions, including advanced preparation and a location within train distance, ideally.

### **Mapping service to help map existing innovations and resources for improved decision-making**

The cities acknowledged the importance of the kind of visualizations the mapping service would provide. They also emphasized the need for user-friendly resources, presented in respective local languages, and the need to provide resources adapted specifically for Transition Teams of a range of sizes to accommodate potential capacity constraints. Panel Members also noted that a helpful parallel resource would be guidance on how to engage individuals who may otherwise be unfamiliar or not initially interested in such a systemic approach in mapping exercises like these.

### **Social Innovation Hub to facilitate peer-to-peer interactions and content/case matching across cities**

### **Transition Team incubation: Workshops to help kickstart work and understand their role and needed skills for effective collaborations**

City representatives acknowledged the significance of such a series of workshops aimed at assisting Transition Teams in comprehending their roles and establishing collaborations with pertinent



stakeholders. Cities saw these workshops as being beneficial both in the early stages of forming their transition teams, as well as for those with more established teams. Many stressed that conducting these workshops in-person whenever feasible is preferable.

### **Social Innovation Readiness service (or, “Actionable Pathways”) to help start, support, or scale social innovation initiatives by harnessing Platform content**

Panel Members stressed the need for the tool to be localized to the native language of the community. Additionally, some observed that their organization lacks an explicit focus on social innovation and provides limited support for such initiatives and thus may need more comprehensive support. Cities also emphasized the necessity of proactive promotion and advocacy for the tool since its value may not be readily evident to some potential users.

### **Civic Environment Mapping to facilitate identification, analysis, and engagement with citizens and stakeholders**

Participants across the board found value in the proposed tool and envisioned various use cases for its application. Panel Members provided valuable input to consider for the tool's further development:

- Depending on specific scenarios, either virtual and/or physical versions of the tool could be helpful.
- Though the tool might require facilitation with a core team initially to ensure effective utilization, it should eventually become self-sustaining.
- It would be advantageous if the tool not only facilitated discussions but also offered guidance by recommending suitable methods based on the participants' unique contexts and goals.
- Additionally, after the initial context and design choices are established, the tool should present available paths to pursue.
- A critical aspect of development would be to translate the tool into local languages to ensure inclusivity and accessibility for a broader audience.
- Ideally, the tool should culminate in an action plan, providing participants with clear and actionable next steps to implement after their discussions.

### **Engagement Process Assembly Kit (or, “Building Blocks”) providing sophisticated insight on designing engagement processes**

The Building Blocks provide an interactive and creative approach to comprehending frameworks for citizen and urban stakeholder engagement design. The tool includes sets of cards that build on each other, each focusing on a specific theme. Furthermore, a comprehensive instruction guide is available to offer detailed guidance on utilizing the card decks effectively.

Panel Members shared the impression that this tool would be relatively easy to use and implement and commended the versatility in being applicable in both physical and online formats. Cities highlighted the mapping process, which precedes citizen engagement, as crucial for understanding the system being worked on. To motivate cities to adopt this process, it is recommended to position the tool as a starting point, emphasizing its importance in inclusive mapping, especially for cities new to the process. In larger cities with diverse sectors, cities saw the tool's potential to act as a unifier. Sharing real-life examples of the tool's application was suggested as a means of enhancing its dissemination potential. Additionally, conducting training sessions and practical exercises were proposed as effective means to introduce the tool.

However, Panel Members also noted barriers and risks to consider related to the tools' focal content and dissemination potential. One challenge is ensuring inclusivity in mapping and addressing gaps when





some actors are left out. Recovering from such losses and re-engaging stakeholders are essential considerations. Communicating and disseminating the mapping canvases to a wider audience beyond the Platform is another concern. Cities also face the issue of maintaining engagement after workshops and keeping track of stakeholders, which requires resources and defining roles.

### **Spaces for Encounter, providing guidance on how to facilitate spaces for diverse interactions and scaling new ideas for municipalities**

Panel Members suggested making efforts to engage both politicians, as a crucial target group, as well as people who may not typically participate in stakeholder dialogues. Panel Members felt the service could add value by helping cities to assess the sufficiency and effectiveness of their current platforms and spaces for engagement, and where appropriate, suggest integration of existing platforms to make it easier for citizens in particular to access multiple services in one place. The cities urged careful consideration for selecting the appropriate framework for discussions, addressing topics that are relevant and close to citizens' interests. They also felt the service should explore strategies to motivate participation, especially for dialogues with no immediate tangible outcomes. To this end, the service should show the value of engagement beyond formal reports, and it should support continuity to keep conversations going.

The Panel Members recommended that guidelines cover both physical and digital spaces, as cities have a need for digital platforms as well. Panel Members felt the proposed "Timeout Cards" (a card deck-style facilitator guidance resource) could be improved by addressing both beginners, as their content would lean towards now, and experienced facilitators. Cities also suggested that the Cards clarify engagement rules and emphasize the importance of dialogue without always seeking tangible results.

### **NetZeroCitizens, a portal for contributing, connecting & engaging municipalities with disconnected populations**

The Panel Members emphasized the significance of overcoming engagement challenges, involving key stakeholders, and ensuring seamless service integration to maximize the prospective impact of NetZeroCitizens. The Platform's customization for different cities was deemed essential, providing a means for cities with limited communication tools to engage influencers and citizens, while Members thought advanced cities could be encouraged to use existing platforms to avoid redundancy. Challenges in engaging young people and enlisting "climate influencers" were identified, suggesting the need for targeted strategies to promote sustainable lifestyles. Additionally, Panel Members noted that cities at the time were waiting for further service development before actively utilizing the Cities Mission Platform in general. Integrating frontrunner citizens into the CCC process and interlinking the platform's services were recommended for enhanced effectiveness.

### **Shared City Vision Co-Creation Service to support city users in organising and realising the co-creation of a unifying vision for their city's future with their local actors.**

The Panel Members emphasized ensuring accountability and continuous support, tailoring the service to suit different stakeholders, translating visions into user-centric terms, and creating a clear and engaging tool that fosters collaboration and systemic thinking among city users. Additionally, they emphasized the importance of clear language and the need to address different perspectives and levels of understanding among users.

