



Call for Proposals: LIFT

Leveraging Innovation & Financing for Transformation

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

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History of reviews

Version	Date	Item
A1.0	28 July 2026	First version published

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

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

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Introduction to the Call and NetZeroCities

1. Call Summary

This Call for proposals is for Mission Cities¹ to undertake a short-term, implementation-focused grant-supported programme of interventions **focussed on innovation in enabling city transformation**, in the context of the **European Union (EU) Cities Mission**.

Unlike the Pilot Cities Programme, which aimed at identifying and overcoming barriers to climate action in cities, similarly to the **Enabling City Transformation (ECT)** programme the **Leveraging Innovation & Financing for Transformation (LIFT)** programme is aimed at exploring and implementing enabling innovations for *whole-city transformation*, and that lead to practical, replicable learning at scale, and that can support **many other European cities**. Cities and city groups should therefore focus their proposals on building enabling factors and conditions for transformation in ways that other cities can practically use, and that will be replicable across the Mission.

Proposals will be selected to integrate the existing ECT portfolio of interventions that will address **major Mission implementation challenges** commonly emerging across Mission Cities. In this way, the portfolio will be strategically oriented towards enabling and supporting the implementation phase of the Cities Mission.

The **Enabling City Transformation** portfolio will receive funding to support the implementation of interventions that put effort into collaboratively tackling collective challenges in the implementation of Mission-aligned initiatives, with a European level and dimension for impact.

With the programming of this new portfolio, the SGA-NZC Consortium will also aim to build upon the existing portfolio of Pilot Cities, and maximise learning, replication, and scaling opportunities.

Portfolio approach

The 'portfolio approach' ensures a cross-EU Cities Mission innovation and learning dimension (i.e., addressing challenges of/at Mission-scale and potentially relevant for many cities to meet European policy objectives) is achieved. A portfolio that represents collective challenges, needs, and opportunities arising in the context of the Cities Mission, and across Mission Cities, is the most conducive means towards the EC Missions' target of change at the EU level, which goes beyond what can be achieved at the level of individual cities, regions, and nations.

Financial support to third parties (subgrants) is deployed under the umbrella of Horizon Europe, the 2021-2027 **Research and Innovation** (R&I) Framework Programme of the European Commission (EC). As the Coordinator of SGA-NZC, subgrantees will contract with Climate KIC following selection, due diligence, and the finalisation of the Award Agreement.

1.1 Background

NetZeroCities helps cities overcome the current structural, institutional, and cultural barriers they face to achieve climate neutrality. NetZeroCities recognises the need for cities to develop specific

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

strategies that are tailored to suit local and regional contexts, and supports them by developing, promoting, and integrating new and existing tools, resources, and expertise.

NetZeroCities manages **the EU Cities Mission Platform** and supports the [112 Mission cities](#) in drastically reducing their greenhouse gas emissions to achieve climate neutrality by 2030; it extends support to all cities in Europe committed to achieving climate neutrality, in particular through its online NetZeroCities Portal accessible to all cities.

NetZeroCities aims to enable European cities and citizens to show the way forward towards an **inclusive, thriving, climate resilient and sustainable future**. It tailors advanced capabilities related to systemic change, citizen engagement and democratic, participatory governance, capital and financial structuring, and social innovation, to ensure cities have access to expertise needed to address their challenges in becoming climate neutral.

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

The **Pilot Cities Programme**, programmed between September 2022 and May 2024 across three cohorts, supports large scale piloting activities to exploit, deploy, and scale R&I and systemic solutions combining social, cultural, technological, nature-based, regulatory, and financial innovation, and new business and governance models to underpin the climate transition. As such, the Pilot Cities Programme and its subgrant-funded activities are an opportunity for Mission Cities to put into practise elements of their developing and/or finalised Climate City Contracts and the plans contained in them and learn by doing so in the process.

The portfolio of Pilot Cities, selected across three Cohorts through dedicated calls, can be found:

- NetZeroCities (NZC-H2020-202209) Call for Pilot Cities, Cohort 1 (2022) – see [here](#) for details of this Cohort;
- SGA-NZC (NZC-SGA-HE-202309) Call for Pilot Cities, Cohort 2 (2023) – see [here](#) for details of this Cohort;
- SGA-NZC (NZC-SGA-HE-202401) Call for Pilot Cities, Cohort 3 (2024) – see [here](#) details of this Cohort (more information will become available on the focus of these activities in support of the next Twinning Learning Programme call.)

The **Enabling City Transformation Portfolio** builds upon existing activities, learning, and (early) outcomes in/from the Climate City Contract process, Pilot Cities Programme, and wider deployment of the Mission Platform activities to date. It is funded under the SGA-NZC (NZC-SGA-HE-202401) grant agreement.

The current portfolio of Enabling Cities, selected through a dedicated call in 2024, can be found:

- SGA-NZC (NZC-SGA-HE-202406) Call for Enabling City Transformation (2024) – see [here](#) for details of this Cohort;

1.2 LIFT: Expected results, learning approach, and programme support

The LIFT programme, as ECT, **builds upon and progresses beyond** the Pilot Cities Programme by inviting Mission Cities to propose innovation actions to overcome systemic implementation challenges, the results/outcomes of which will support them (and other European cities) to **shift** from **testing and experimentation** (Pilot Cities) to **enabling whole-city implementation**, i.e. implementation at scale towards Mission goals, before stepping into catalysing and embedding the transformational change required for sustaining city climate neutrality, further down the line. As such, applicant Mission Cities should be thinking about enabling conditions within *and* beyond their own context, targeting shared challenges and opportunities for impact.

Programmatically, the results of the LIFT cohort will be:

- i) innovative and/or enabling solutions or groups of solutions tested and implemented at city level over the duration of the Programme,
- ii) explicit lessons learnt from the innovative trajectories, with knowledge, capacity and capabilities developed at city level; and
- iii) clear learning and outcomes of enabling approaches/measures to support the implementation of innovative solutions, at scale, by the end of the Programme, which could include a new business model, policy initiative, governance innovation, funding or financing model, and EU-level replication or scaling strategy.

Encouraging collaboration between applicants

In this programme, applicants are highly encouraged to seek potential collaboration opportunities with other applicants, towards enhancing impact at the portfolio level. The intent is to advance learning among portfolio of interventions and beneficiaries (cities and their consortia) as a key component for building capabilities, replicating successful enabling approaches and innovations, and deepening relationships.

Unlike the previous calls for the Pilot Cities Programme, there will **not be** an equivalent Twinning Learning Programme in the LIFT cohort of interventions.

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

1.3 Who can apply

Only local authorities or city administrations selected to be part of EU Mission for climate-neutral and smart cities by 2030 (Mission Cities) are eligible to apply to and receive funding under this Call. For the avoidance of doubt, this call is addressed to designated Mission cities only and therefore these consortia may not include other city, district, or municipal authorities (i.e., 'non-Mission').

Please note: Administrations of a higher level of governance (i.e. a metropolis, region, or national/governmental departments) are eligible to participate as consortium partners where there is a formal governance link with the Mission City/cities leading or involved with the proposal, however do not themselves count towards the eligible Mission City count (i.e. as related to the

prescribed budget envelopes and the number present in the proposal) unless the metropolis or region is itself the Mission City, formally.

A group of Mission Cities (national or trans-national) may apply together in a consortium. However, in that case, one of the Mission Cities will have to be designated as the consortium leader for all administrative and process-related purposes. In the case of a group of cities applying together in one proposal, the size of the requested subgrant must follow the award amounts as stated at section **4.1** of this document.

Other organisations could also participate as members of a consortium led by a Mission City. These organisations could be, for example: research institutions, universities, SMEs, NGOs, associations, citizen groups or other relevant stakeholders involved in the implementation of the climate ambitions of a Mission City participating in the consortium. **Please note: SGA-NZC Consortium Partners are not able to participate directly in applications and project consortia of selected interventions.**

Each proposal must be led by a relevant and eligible local authority or city administration, and there must be the presence of at least two legal entities (one of which must be the eligible local authority or city administration), in proposal a consortia.

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

In the case of a group of cities applying together in one proposal, a consortium agreement which outlines the terms and conditions of collaboration between the consortium partners should be agreed upon and signed between the applicants before the signing the Award Agreement. We recommend using the [DESCA model agreement](#) for Horizon Europe.

In the case of a multi-city proposal, please note that references to “city” in this document, and any others directly associated to this call, will imply the group of cities or each city involved in that group.

2. What we are calling for

2.1 General principles

Call for Proposals for the NZC LIFT programme grants are subject to the principles laid down below.

Non-cumulative award

Double financing is prohibited: the expenses cannot be funded or claimed to different funders. A given project activity may only receive one grant from the European Union funds. Under no circumstances shall the same costs be financed twice. To ensure this, applicants shall indicate in the grant application any funding received or applied for, (and the source(s)) for the project, specifying the relevant activities or for the applicant's functioning during a relevant financial year(s).

Co-funding, when existing, should be declared with a clear identification of what is funded under which budget.

No-profit principle

The SGA-NZC grant (FSTP) may not have the purpose or effect of producing a profit. Profit is defined as a surplus of the receipts over the eligible costs incurred, when the request is made for payment of the balance. If this calculation results in a profit, the granting organisation (Climate-

KIC) will reduce the final amount of the grant proportionally to the profit made. The verification of the no-profit principle does not apply for beneficiaries which are a non-profit organisation.

Best value for money

Under this principle purchases and contracts will select the offer that provides the best balance of price and quality (or simply the lowest price, where appropriate), while ensuring:

- Transparency and equal treatment of potential suppliers.
- An absolute absence of conflict of interest.

2.2 Aims, outcomes, and impact

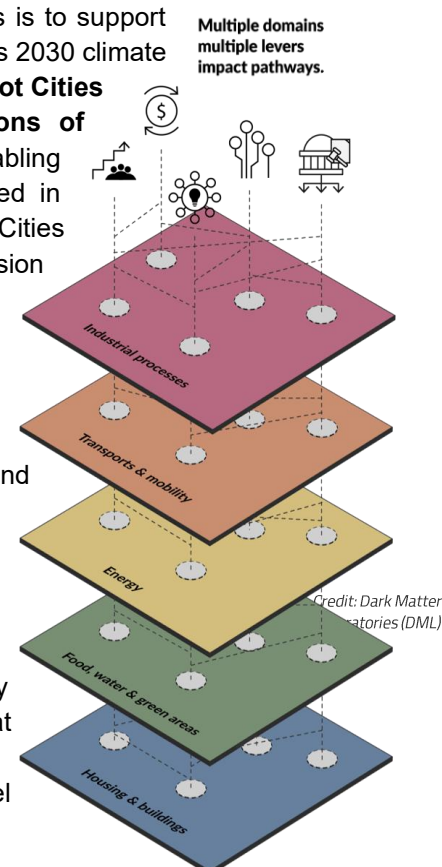
The aim of the selected portfolio of implementation-enabling innovations is to support cities in taking next steps in their pathways to accelerated change towards 2030 climate neutrality goals, **including build upon their and other's work in the Pilot Cities Programme to date**. It aims to do so by **supporting combinations of interventions** that explore and experiment with key enabling innovations/enabling conditions to achieving Mission goals, as revealed in Mission activities such as the Climate City Contract process, Pilot Cities Programme, and other Mission work — relevant to a city's key emission domains — and by generating accelerated learning that can inform subsequent transfer, replication, and scaling efforts in all other EU cities.

The LIFT cohort will support interventions in cities aiming at holistically enabling the deployment and scaling of solutions, building on insights gained from Mission activities so far and exploiting R&I outcomes, and combining multiple levers of change to underpin the climate transition: social, cultural, technological, nature-based, regulatory, and financial innovation, and new business and governance models.

Through the **combination** of interventions supported in this programme, cities will collectively aim to achieve breakthroughs in enabling whole-city innovation and subsequent implementation at scale (*direct Outcomes*), that will ultimately lead to the reduction of GHG emissions and maximising Co-benefits, by unlocking the deployment of solutions at whole-city level (*long-term targeted impacts*).

The selection of proposals will result in multiple implementation-enabling innovations focussing on resolving key implementation barriers. Interventions will work individually and in combinations/clusters to generate resolutions for shared challenges.

While working towards the direct impacts expected, cities will be asked to make space for observing and capturing unforeseen direct or secondary effects, as they emerge (*unforeseen outcomes*), through relevant and evolving learning enquiries framed in the proposal that guide the observation process.



2.3 Approach: Enabling systems innovation

This programme is about enabling *system conditions*, and complementary supporting interventions to achieve the accelerated decarbonisation (substantive emissions reductions) required to achieve climate neutrality by 2030.

Mission Cities can create the conditions for implementing and accelerating their ambitions to achieve Climate Neutral and Smart cities by 2030 - as laid out in their (completed or emerging) Climate City Contracts - by inducing change in governance, multi-actor approaches, citizen participation, finance, digital systems and/or organisational structures. In doing so, cities can benefit from insights gained working on topic-specific, domain-specific, or technological innovations, such as the Pilot Cities Programme or other EU funded R&I projects and similar innovation initiatives.

This call is not prescriptive in defining what systemic implementation challenges cities might propose to address, or what type of enabling innovation may be required to overcome them. Cities could work on these challenges individually or together with other cities, whether at national level or across countries – however, considering the complexity of these challenges and the orientation of the Cities Mission to European-wide decarbonisation, it is anticipated that cities would be willing to work together for higher impact and enhanced learning opportunities. Cities should take note of the Pilot Cities Programme activities being undertaken across the Mission (see [here](#)), with a view to building upon and progressing beyond them.

2.4 Scope of interventions (eligible activities)

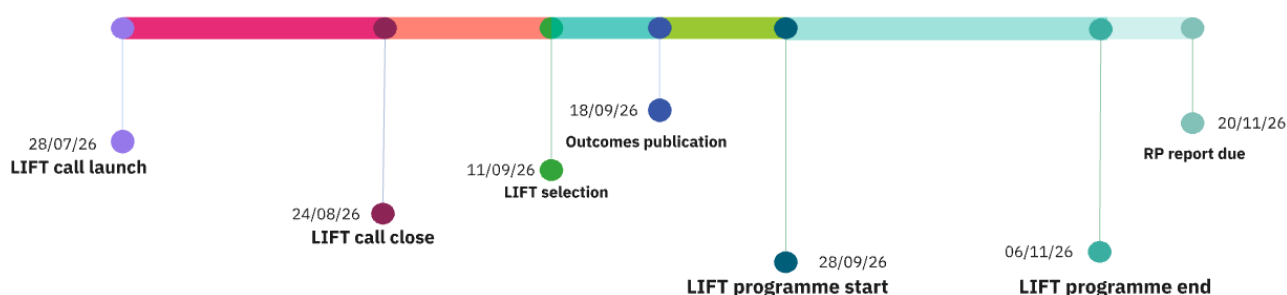
Interventions should consist of the following activities to be eligible for funding:

- Innovative implementation activities to support climate-neutrality, including the deployment of cutting-edge (new or improved) technology, product, process, service, solution, policy, or governance model at city level, explored in a cross-sectoral and systemic manner.
- Deployment of public and private capital in purpose-built capital structures that enable blended financing in the implementation activities.
- Activities aiming to build cross-sector collaboration that advance new governance and deployment models.
- Legal and financial expertise to structure/audit and de-risk project financial packages

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

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

3. Call Timeline



Date/Time (CEST)	Item	Link (if applicable)
Tuesday 28/07/2026 (12.00 CEST)	Publication of Call Guidelines and launch of Call The Call guidelines will be published both to the NetZeroCities website and Portal and EU Funding and Tenders Opportunities Portal, under the type of subgrants “Cascade Funding Calls”. At the same time, the application process will be formally launched. Cities will be able to register themselves with the submission platform and create a proposal. Cities will be able to save and return to this proposal at any time up until the submission deadline as stated below.	- NetZeroCities Portal - NetZeroCities Website Funding & tenders (europa.eu)
06/08/2026	Upcoming information sessions: 6 August 2026, 10.30-11.30 CEST – covering: Ambition, Approach & System, technical information, Eligibility and Assessment Criteria. Q&A. Open to all potential applicants	Registration link: (register)
Monday 24/08/2026 (12.00 CEST)	Call deadline Formal deadline for full submission. Proposals received after this date are not considered eligible. No extensions and modification of your proposal after the submission are possible.	NetZeroCities Portal NetZeroCities Website
25/08-10/09 2026	Review and selection Proposals will be checked against eligibility criteria (Stage 1) and eligible proposals reviewed by independent external experts (Stage 2). Following assessment, the final Stage, Strategic Portfolio Selection (Stage 3) will take place. More information about these Stages can be found in section 5 of this document.	N/A
Friday 11/09/2026	Decision Communication and Cost eligibility start date Formal outcomes will be sent to applicants, along with feedback. From this date costs or output generation can officially begin and be counted toward the project, subject to the successful completion of due diligence and the Sub-Grant Agreement signature	Email
September 2026	LIFT ‘Boot Camp’ Selected cities and their consortia will be invited to a learning and exchange ‘Boot Camp’ to support the refinement of their interventions through boosting readiness to start and elaborating on potential portfolio synergies. This process serves to raise the ambition of individual and collective actions within the portfolio, and plan for the exploiting of synergies and complementarities therein.	Online
11-25/09/2026	Grant Agreement Process This process covers the Grant Agreement Process (GAP), including due diligence, the proposal refinement (including the adjustment of the lump sums), and subgrant award signing process. Proposals will be adjusted during this time to address compliance and selection feedback.	Online
11-18/09/2026	Appeals management Eventual appeals and complaints received after the communication to applicants of the call outcome will be managed in parallel to the due diligence of selected beneficiaries	Email
18/09/2026	Publication of Call outcomes and selection During the contracting process, a list of successful portfolio interventions will be published to the NetZeroCities Portal and disseminated through NetZeroCities’ communications channels. This will include a description to selected proposals.	NetZeroCities Portal NetZeroCities Website
28/09/2026	LIFT programme launch The programme officially starts: the grant agreement is signed and becomes legally binding	N/A
06/11/2026	LIFT programme concludes The programme end date is also the effective project end date and indicates the cost eligibility end date for the programme.	N/A

4. Budget requirements and cost eligibility

4.1 Funding

The total available budget under this call is **2 million Euros (EUR)**.

The maximum amount for grant funding to be allocated to a selected proposal will be no less than 0.5M and not more than 1.5M EUR, depending on the expected scope and impact of the proposed projects.

As described above in this document, applicants are encouraged to identify synergies and complementarities with other applications in this call, in particular where these synergies and complementarities demonstrate and seek to leverage opportunities for enhanced scale, scope, impact, and learning, when combined to the Enabling City Transformation Portfolio.

The final amount awarded will be determined by the subgrant request specified by the applicant **4.2** and the budget/estimated costs corresponding to the proposed interventions articulated in the proposal form (matching the subgrant request), in line with national and institutional policies, rules, practices. Please see *Error! Reference source not found.* for further information.

It is anticipated that between 1 (one) and 3 (three) proposals will be selected via this call. The final number of subgrants awarded will not exceed the call budget of 2 million Euros (EUR).

4.2 Form of grant and eligibility of costs

The grant is an action grant which takes the form of a **lump sum grant** for the completion of work packages.

The SGA-NZC project, under which this financial support to third parties (FSTP) is deployed, is funded under [Horizon Europe](#) (HE), and the rules for the NZC ECT applications build on those of the HE Programme.

The presented budget, broken down by partner and work package, must be a detailed list of estimated realistic costs for the implementation of the project exclusively with indirect costs calculated based on a flat rate (25% - as per Horizon Europe rules).

These cost estimations and the resources applicants commit to mobilise will be the basis to define and justify the lump sum and will add up to the total requested amount. Each lump sum must be mirrored with tangible outputs and milestones.

Estimated costs must be:

- in line with the same eligibility rules as in actual costs grants of the programme, i.e. cost estimations can be included only if the same cost item/type of cost would be eligible in an actual cost grant;
- in line with applicants normal practices and comply with the requirements of applicable tax and social legislation;
- reasonable/not excessive, justified and comply with the principle of sound financial management, in particular, regarding economy and efficiency;
- in line with and necessary for the activities proposed.

The budget may result in the adjustment of grant allocation where there is a misalignment assessment during the GAP process. It will then be locked and reported as work package totals during contract phase.

Applicants should carefully ponder how to build work packages: work packages not fully delivered and/or not approved will be rejected.

Value added tax (VAT) is considered as eligible where it is non-deductible and non-refundable under the applicable national VAT legislation and is paid by a beneficiary other than a non-taxable person as defined in Article 13(1) of Council Directive 2006/112/EC of 28 November 2006 on the common system of value added tax.

The beneficiary's regular internal accounting and auditing procedures must be followed. The lead beneficiary is responsible for the management of the project's budget and passing the obligations on to the partners of its lead-consortium, as well as its documentation and alignment with the financial rules.

The detailed estimated budget must be presented in Euro. Applicants established in countries outside the Eurozone must use the conversion rates published in the C series of the Official Journal of the European Union (OJ) available [here](#).

The exchange rate will be calculated as average over the whole reporting period.

Moreover, a FAQ section for the LIFT call will be available, and regularly updated as required, on the call page on the NetZeroCities website.

Eligible costs, following applicable [Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement](#) article to build the budget, cover:

Cost Category	
A. Personnel Costs	
B. Subcontracting Costs (not subject to indirect costs)	
C. Purchase Costs	C.1 Travel and subsistence
	C.2 Equipment
	C.3 Other goods, works and services
D. Other cost categories (internally invoices goods & services) – (not subject to indirect costs)	
E. Indirect Costs = $0,25 * (A + C.1 + C.2 + C.3)$	
Eligible Costs (A + B + C + D + E)	

4.2.1 Ineligible costs

Costs are not eligible when they do not comply with the conditions set out above, in particular:

- costs related to return on capital;
- debt and debt service charges;
- provisions for future losses or debts;
- interest owed;
- doubtful debts;
- currency exchange losses;
- bank costs charged by the beneficiary's bank for transfers from the granting authority;
- excessive or reckless expenditure;
- deductible or refundable VAT (including VAT paid by public bodies acting as public authority);
- costs or contributions for staff of a national (or regional/local) administration, for activities that are part of the administration's normal activities (i.e. not undertaken only because of

the grant) (d) costs or contributions (especially travel and subsistence) for staff or representatives of EU institutions, bodies or agencies;

- costs or contributions declared under other grants (EU or grants awarded by an EU Member State, non-EU country or other body implementing the EU budget);
- costs incurred in case of suspension of the project implementation.

4.2.2 Out of scope costs

The following costs are out of scope for the NZC LIFT Programme:

- infrastructure costs;
- sub-grants or prizes;
- large research infrastructure.

4.3 Subgrant allocation compliance

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

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

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

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

4.4 LIFT programme: special budget features

Selected Cohort – Building for synergies, complementarities, and connectivity

Upon selection of cities (and their interventions) for the LIFT cohort, cities and their partners will be invited to engage with the Boot Camp process, alongside requisite due diligence and grant agreement preparation processes.

During the Boot Camp, connections between complementary/synergistic interventions in the Enabling City Transformation portfolio will be explicitly identified and established. These will be formalised and reflected in refined and updated work plans and budgets, and carried forward to award agreement signing, in order to ensure they are inherent in the prevailing interventions.

As such, applicants are requested to make provision for such eventualities in their budget – please see the table below for further information.

Budgeting for these programmatic features

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

Activity	Scope
Governance	No additional person months required, beyond those allocated to governance of the interventions themselves; however, it is expected that proposed project management and governance activities/ resources will engage with core support on innovative approaches to governance, collaboration, planning, and decision making (as described above), and that existing climate change, citizen- and stakeholder-work will be integrated throughout the process.
Building for synergies, complementarities, and connectivity	As we cannot fully anticipate the resulting connections between portfolio interventions, and therefore the exact level of effort/costs to allocate to activating these during implementation, applicants are advised to make a budget provision for prospective collaboration with other cities throughout the duration of the programme (i.e. person months, travel and subsistence, and any relevant purchase costs) .
Sensemaking²	Sensemaking and cross-fertilization activities task will require the appointment of a systemic innovation focal point of the city. The focal point will participate in the co-design of specific cross-fertilisation activities (providing contrast and suggesting topics) and will also facilitate the participation of city officials and other relevant city stakeholders in those activities.
Communications and media activities	Communications and media activities – please make sure to include Enabling City Transformation in your communications and media programming. Beneficiaries must promote the action and its results, targeting multiple audiences (including the media and the public) in a strategic and effective manner; and ensure the visibility of the EU funding. This is a pass-through subgrant requirement for third parties and will be contained within subsequent subgrant agreements resulting from this call, including further information on obligations.

² Sensemaking refers to a structured, facilitated process of observation, collection, reflection, synthesis, analysis, pattern finding and insight generation in order to produce intelligence that enables decision making.

4.5 Reporting and Payment procedures

The programme consists of one reporting period (RP):

- RP1: 14 September 2026 – 6 November 2026.

The coordinator of the project will be required to submit the final (RP) report on behalf of the consortium within 2 weeks following the end of the reporting period.

Reimbursement will occur after proving the technical completion of the various work packages and that work was properly implemented with the foreseen results achieved.

Reporting will include a **financial statement** and a **technical report**.

The **technical report** will include

- Procurement & Resource summary report to demonstrate procedural, transparency and value for money (to cover questions such as: how many suppliers were contacted, which criteria were used for the winning provider, how was absence of Conflict of Interest guaranteed,...);
- Implementation and impact deliverable (a detailed narrative description mapping the achievements of each work package and the completed milestones accompanied by verifiable, tangible project outputs achieved through the grant³);
- MEL reporting (insight & outcomes, indicators reporting excel).

More information on the content expectations for reporting will be provided in due course.

The **financial statement** must contain the lump sum contributions indicated in the annexes of the signed grant award agreement, for the work packages that were completed during the reporting period.

Through the financial statement the beneficiary will confirm:

- The provided information is complete, reliable and true
- The declared lump sum contributions are eligible
- The implementation can be supported by adequate records to be produced upon request.

Considering the LIFT programme goals, as well as the short-term outcomes and impacts that can be realistically expected in the short programme duration, the longer-term impacts will be actually unlocked at a later stage after the programme concludes. Therefore, beneficiaries will be invited to extend the collaboration by participating in the NetZeroCities light-touch post-programme monitoring of the larger-scale impact of the interventions implemented during the LIFT programme, by actively contributing to data and findings.

The beneficiaries must keep records and other supporting documents to prove the proper implementation of the action (proper implementation of the work and/or achievement of the results as described in Annex 1) in line with the accepted standards in the respective field (if any); beneficiaries do not need to keep specific records on the actual costs incurred.

Specifically, documentation justifying costs must be kept by the beneficiary for five years following the closure of the NetZeroCities Horizon Europe contract “101121530 - SGA1-NZC”, from where the award fund cascades from. The records and supporting documents must be made available upon request or in the context of checks, reviews, audits or investigations.

³ Including but not limited to: deliverables, finalised design frameworks, validated stakeholder agreements, validated roadmaps, signed letters, technical specifications, completed advisory deliverables, institutional hand-offs, ...

Financing of the selected subgrants will be disbursed in two tranches, subject to progress monitoring and risk mitigation, with:

- a foreseen 60% prefinancing payment (at the point of signing the Award Agreement), followed by
- up to 40% of final balancing payment upon receipt and approval of the work packages and final project report declared by Climate-KIC, followed by positive final review of the SGA NZC 101121530 by CINEA.

5. Review Mechanism and Selection Criteria

5.1 Overview

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

Stage 1: Eligibility check

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

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

Stage 2: Evaluation and scoring of eligible proposals

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

The detailed criteria for assessment of proposals for the SGA-NZC LIFT programme's financial support to third parties scheme is defined in section **5.3** of these Call Guidelines.

Stage 3: Award decision

The selection committee will select a cohort of interventions, to be added to the existing ECT portfolio, through a dedicated selection process. The cohort will be selected with the intention to support Mission Cities to overcome challenges to, experimenting with, and learning about, the implementation phase of the Cities Mission: i.e. enabling (Cities) Mission innovation implementation. It will also aim at complementing the existing cohorts of Pilot Cities (i.e. inter-cohort portfolio) selected through previous calls, creating opportunities to exploit learning and outcomes of these diverse interventions over the course of the programme.

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

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

Potential conflicts of interest

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

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

5.2 Stage 1 – Eligibility

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

#	Eligibility criterion	Description and how demonstrated	How assessed
1	Only one proposal may be submitted by an eligible Mission City / District.	Only one proposal may be submitted by an eligible city/district. In the case of multi-city/district proposals, each city/district may appear in only one proposal. There shall be no territorial double-funding; therefore, a higher level of administration should not appear in a separate proposal to that of a constituent, lower-level administration (e.g., district). Applicants are advised to coordinate at the relevant city/district administrative levels before applying. How demonstrated: Proponent/consortium members listed in the Call platform, and their role(s).	Pass/fail
2	The consortium must contain at least two independent legal entities (one of which must be a local authority or city administration).	The consortium must contain at least two partnering organisations, one of which must be a city / district administration, and any others must be separate, independent (from the city) legal entities. How demonstrated: Proponent/consortium members listed in the Call platform, and their role(s). Note: due diligence will be undertaken post-selection to establish legal entities, as/where required.	Pass/fail
3	The proposal must be led by one of the city administrations.	The proposal must be led by a city administration; in case of a district submission, it must be led by an authorised administration from within the specified district. How demonstrated: Proponent/consortium members listed in the Call platform, and their role(s).	Pass/fail
4	Presentation in the application, or commitment to present before grant agreement signature, a letter of support from the city mayor (or equivalent).	Letter of support from the city mayor (or equivalent) and/or any city official mandated to sign on the city/mayor/city council's behalf, for the LIFT programme. In the case of a multi-city proposal, one letter must be provided for each city. How demonstrated: Letter of support must include: • Applicant's official document header/template.	Pass/fail

#	Eligibility criterion	Description and how demonstrated	How assessed
	In the case of a multi-city proposal, one letter must be provided for each city.	- Signed and dated by a city/district official mandated to signed on the city/mayor/city council's behalf. - The name of and/or code of the Call. - Unambiguous commitment to collaborating and learning with other cities in the Enabling City Transformation portfolio. Please use the provided pro forma template, accessible here.	
5	A list of stakeholders to be engaged must be provided.	A list of stakeholders engaged/to be engaged are provided. How demonstrated: Question in the Call Form requesting a list of engaged/to be engaged stakeholders.	Pass/fail

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

5.3 Stage 2 – Evaluation and scoring of eligible proposals

Assessment criteria

The assessment criteria for this call are set out below. Each criterion is scored, on a scale of 0 to 5, by at least two independent external experts. The score across all categories is totalled to produce a ranked list of proposals. **The maximum available score is 100 points.**

Scoring table

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

	Criterion	Description
Mandate to Act (25 pts)	Articulating the challenge(s) (15 points)	Enabling implementation challenge(s): The proposal clearly articulates the implementation challenge and subsequent expected enabling innovation. (5 points) Strategic connectivity to city vision: The proposed interventions are well connected to the city's overarching vision for climate neutrality and the challenges to/for implementing and achieving this vision. In the case of multi-city applications, the logic of this multi-city collaboration is well articulated. (5 points) Relevance of implementation challenge(s) and enabling innovation to other EU Cities: The proposal states how and why other European cities, pursuing carbon neutrality and the Mission goals, will learn and benefit from the interventions and/or outcomes. (5 points)

Capacity to Act (45 pts)	Mandate to Act (5 points)	• Political: The proposal has a high level of political support and endorsement from the city/ies, with a strong mandate for continued support through political will (5 points)
	Consortium and stakeholders (5 points)	• Consortium and relevant stakeholders/contributors: The proposal identifies and includes consortium partners and contributing stakeholders that are relevant and important to the challenge(s) identified, and enabling innovation proposed. There is relevant expertise, experience, and competencies represented. Roles are elaborated, and it is clear how the city/ies and partners/stakeholders will collaborate to implement the innovation interventions. (5 points)
	Capacity and capability (25 points)	• Capability and capacity building: The proposal comprehensively presents how the city administration, its partners, and the wider ecosystem of contributing stakeholders and long-term strategic partners, will collectively generate, share, and retain knowledge, know-how, skills, and partnerships, from the proposed interventions, beyond the life of the programme. (5 points) • Implementation readiness: The proposal demonstrates that the city and partners are ready to initiate implementation rapidly following award. Evidence may include pre-negotiated supplier frameworks, procurement timelines, activated stakeholders, secured internal approvals, and dedicated resources ready for deployment. (5 points) • Operational readiness: The proposal demonstrates that the governance, management, and coordination arrangements required to deliver the intervention are established and fit for purpose. Roles, responsibilities, decision-making processes, reporting lines, delivery oversight, and partnership coordination mechanisms are clearly defined and capable of supporting effective implementation throughout the programme period. (5 points) • Delivery at pace: The proposal demonstrates its ability to move quickly from award to action and generate meaningful results within the programme period. Activities are implementation-focused, critical dependencies have been addressed, and a clear plan is presented for achieving tangible outputs, outcomes, and learning within the short delivery window. (5 points) • Effective Mobilisation: The proposal demonstrates how the grant will activate, align, and leverage existing capabilities, assets, partnerships, resources, and commitments within the city and consortium. The proposal clearly explains how these will be mobilised to overcome barriers to deployment, accelerate implementation, and maximise impact during and beyond the grant period. (5 points)
	Soundness of work plan (10 points)	• Sound work plan and budget: The proposed work plan to implement the interventions, within the allocated timeframe and budget, is sound and coherent (potential doubtful or overestimated cost items will be flagged). The proposed budget is clearly outlined and justified and reflects value for money. Where the interventions cannot be fully implemented with the provided subgrant, a coherent plan is demonstrated for identifying and securing additional resources (by the city/ies or co-financers) to fully implement within the prescribed programme duration. (5 points) • Risk management: The proposal identifies risks related to both the practical implementation of the interventions and the potential indirect impacts and outcomes, with adequate mitigation and appropriate contingency measures. (5 points)
	Cross-cutting considerations (5 points)	• Cross-cutting considerations: The proposal demonstrates awareness of how its interventions and/or outcomes relate to and cater for cross-cutting themes such as diversity, inclusion, gender dimension, accessibility, and a just transition. The proposal outlines a practical and proportionate approach to how it will approach how such considerations are treated in the implementation of its interventions. (5 points)

Impact (30 pts)	Citizen engagement and participation (5 points)	• Citizen engagement and participation: Where relevant, citizens are engaged at relevant stages of the interventions, and it is clear how their engagement will contribute materially to the enabling innovation. Where relevant, the proposal describes how citizen engagement will contribute to the design and implementation of the interventions. If/where citizen engagement and/or co-design is not included, the proposal provides a robust rationale for why citizen engagement and participation is not relevant for the proposal. (5 points)
	Innovativeness & Learning (5 points)	• Innovativeness & Learning: The proposal demonstrates how it could generate new knowledge, insights or delivery models relevant to other Mission Cities and demonstrates a clear commitment to capturing, applying and sharing learning throughout implementation. (5)
	Impact (15 points)	• Direct Outcomes of interventions: The proposal comprehensively describes foreseen early and later changes in/through the interventions, and how these are expected to lead to longer-term impacts in enabling innovation and implementation at the city-level. (5 points) • Approach to integrated monitoring, learning and evaluation (MEL): Relevant quantitative or qualitative indicators and a coherent process to monitor and continuously assess both the <i>direct outcomes of interventions</i> (targeted changes) and <i>long-term impacts on GHG emissions and Co-benefits</i>, have been included, and a description of how the MEL approach will be implemented. (5 points) • Long-term targeted Impacts: The proposal articulates how the enabling innovation and expected impacts will lead to reduction in GHG emissions and identifies quantified impacts on GHG emissions that would be unlocked by the successful outcome(s) deployed at city-scale. Co-benefits of the interventions are identified (from a provided catalogue and/or, where applicable, bespoke 'non-standard' co-benefits) and the link demonstrated, with relevant indicators to measure outcomes and impact beyond the scope of direct implementation. (5 points)
	Enabling innovation interventions' replication and transferability (10 points)	• Replication (speed): The proposal describes how the interventions, if/where successful, can be rapidly replicated and deployed across EU cities, in support of Mission goals and articulates how collaboration with complimentary initiatives could enhance the wider replication and impact of their work. (5 points) • Transferability (scale): The proposal presents detailed assumptions of the interventions' potential for transferability to other cities and/or contexts (e.g. national) across the EU and outlines potential synergies with related projects and networks to support wider scaling, learning and impact. (5 points)

5.4 Stage 3 – Award decision

A Selection Committee composed of two members of the SGA-NZC Executive Committee, the Coordinator, and the potential addition of (an) external independent observer(s) (EC staff or external) will look for potential connections, synergies, and combinatorial learning and opportunities across proposed portfolio interventions, as well as the European dimension.

This stage constitutes a contextual judgement that considers and prioritises enabling and implementation of/towards Mission goals. Though Stage 2 assessments outcomes (scores and Independent Expert observations/feedback) will be used to inform Strategic Selection, this subsequent stage primarily focusses on the potential additional value that can be unlocked by supporting a combination of proposed interventions in parallel, as part of a portfolio of innovation and experimentation.

To ensure the highest possible combined impact and learning opportunities at the portfolio level, strategic selection takes consideration of:

- **Geographic diversity** - based on data gathered at application stage (*highest possible representation of EU MS & HE AC*)
- **Diversity of city size & typology** - based on data gathered at application stage (*best possible representation of cities' size and typology*)
- **Diversity of focus on emissions domains/barriers and of intended levers off/for change to be tested*** - based on data gathered at application (*highest representation of combined emissions domains and levers of change*)
- **Score in Stage 2** (see section 5.3). During award decision, in the event of proposals with similar characteristics with equal scoring in Stage 2, the following parameters will be used to define the final ranking:
 - Priority will be given to those scoring highest in the grouped **Impact criteria**.
 - When the scores are still equal, priority will be given to those scoring highest in the grouped **Capacity to Act** criteria.
 - When the scores are still equal, priority will be given to those scoring highest in the grouped **Mandate to Act** criteria.
 - When the scores are still equal, priority will be given to those scoring highest on **cross-cutting considerations** (sub-criterion under Implementation).
- **Budget availability**

*In line with the specific focus of this call, the selection criterion referring to diversity of focus (i.e. the third bullet point in the above list) is of particular relevance and consideration for the Selection Committee, meaning the Selection Committee will look at/for diversity of focus on **implementation challenges** across emission domains, and of **enabling innovation approaches deploying** intended levers off/for change to be tested.

Subgrant allocation will be considered according to the information set out in section 4.1.

5.5 Decision communication

Climate KIC will aim to communicate final outcomes to applicants by 11 September 2026. The final communication will indicate the subgrant allocation and state the cost eligibility period (if unchanged, 28 September 2026 – 6 November 2026). This communication might include (if applicable) a set of recommendations/conditions. The subgranted funding may vary from the requested funding in the proposal. A list of selected projects with a description of the action, subgrant amounts and legal names of selected applicants and their country as well as date of the award and duration will be published on the NetZeroCities Mission Platform. Contract development and signing processes are expected to continue through to 25 September 2026 as applicants respond to relevant compliance requirements and conditions for funding. Climate KIC aims to signed subgrant awards no later than 28 September 2026, with the programme commencing from no later than 28 September 2026.

6. How to submit a proposal

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

Checklist	
You have read this document carefully and started to think about how your interventions will be framed with respect to the Call for Proposals brief.	☐
You have registered both yourself and your organisation in the proposal submission system, if not already registered. The proposal submission system will be launched by 28 July 2026. The registration process can take time, so do not leave it until the last minute! We encourage applicants to register in the system as soon as possible. Please ensure you have registered more than 10 days in advance of any deadline.	☐
The programme will request the lead Mission City to indicate their PIC number at Due Diligence stage if selected; kindly check your PIC status in the EC portal before submitting.	☐
All proposals must be submitted in English. Exceptions are made for supporting documentation, such as census source data, formal council resolutions – these documents could be written in one of the official languages spoken in the country from which the proposal is submitted. Please include a short summary in English ⁴ .	☐
Confirm you've provided evidences to pass all requirements of the eligibility criteria.	☐
You've prepared the requested attachments on the basis of the templates provided in the supporting documentation links on the NetZeroCities LIFT webpage .	☐

Please make sure all the above steps are finalised by the call deadline.

Applications will be submitted through the Climate KIC Grant Management System. Out of the system or last minute applications sent by email will not be considered.

Step 1: If not already registered, applicant organisations should be registered first by a lead contact point (who will then be automatically registered) using this [link](#).

Step 2: To access the system and/or register additional, individual accounts, use this [link](#) (please bookmark it!)

Guidance on how to submit your application can be found through the following links:

- [How to register in the System?](#)
- [FAQ & Instructions](#)

Please note that any proposals submitted outside of the proposal submission system will not be accepted; **and that the system will be locked after the deadline**. If you experience technical difficulties, please consult the system guidance. If you are still unable to resolve your system issue, follow the guidance on how to raise a support request via appropriate channels. For all other non-technical related queries, please contact ect@netzerocities.eu ..

⁴ Climate KIC reserves the right to request a translation at any time. Climate KIC also reserves the right not to pass additional information to reviewers if not provided in English or supported by a translation.

7. Data, systems, and complaints

7.1 Your Data

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

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

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

7.2 Confidentiality

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

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

7.3 Complaints & Appeals

Upon reception of a decision communication letter with either the results of the eligibility review (Stage 1 Eligibility) or the selection outcome (Stage 2 Assessment and Stage 3), the lead applicant may request a review of the outcome if they identify that the results of the eligibility checks were incorrect, or that there has been a procedural shortcoming or a manifest error in the evaluation process.

This procedure is not meant to contest the judgement made by the independent external reviewers or the selection committee. It can only look into procedural shortcomings and – if it applies – into factual errors. The decision communication letters (either Stage 1 or Stage 2) will specify a deadline for the receipt of any such requests, which will be 4 working days starting from the day immediately following the date of receipt of the decision communication letter by the applicant..

An acknowledgement of receipt of a request for review of the outcome by the applicant will be sent by the NZC Call Team no later than 2 working days after the deadline for submitting the request, indicating the estimated date of a final reply.

Request must be:

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

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

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