

Building Capacity for Climate Innovation in Guimarães

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Executive snapshot



Guimarães used City Expert Support Facility (CESF) support to strengthen the municipal capabilities needed to turn climate ambitions into practical, investable projects. Between April and August 2025, staff from the Climate Transition Team and the Landscape Laboratory took part in a tailored programme covering design thinking, financial modelling, sustainable procurement, governance and innovative financing.

The support combined structured mentoring with hands-on project development. Rather than focusing only on theory, participants applied new tools to a real challenge in waste and circular economy. This process led to the development of the Smart Bin Co-Design Pilot, an initiative that uses smart waste bins, a digital platform and reward mechanisms to encourage better recycling and stronger citizen participation.

Alongside the pilot concept, the programme delivered a business model, governance plan, risk matrix, impact framework and roadmap for scaling. Together, these outputs provide Guimarães with a practical methodology for designing and financing climate initiatives that can be tested locally and adapted to other priority areas.





Knowledge Report

THE IMPACT

Guimarães is better equipped to develop climate projects that are financially sound, operationally feasible and aligned with public sector requirements. Municipal teams strengthened their ability to assess project viability, manage risks, structure partnerships and identify suitable financing mechanisms.

The programme also created a concrete investment-ready concept in the Smart Bin Pilot, giving the city a tested model to improve recycling performance while increasing citizen engagement. Beyond waste management, the work established internal capabilities and tools that can support a broader pipeline of climate-neutral projects.

THE APPROACH

The support began with a capability assessment to identify strengths and gaps in innovation, procurement and project development. Based on this diagnosis, a tailored learning programme was designed and delivered through eight extended mentoring sessions.

The methodology followed a learning-by-doing approach. City staff used design thinking tools to map stakeholders, understand user needs, generate ideas, test concepts and build implementation plans. Throughout the process, technical guidance was combined with collaborative workshops to ensure that new skills were applied directly to a live municipal challenge.



OUTCOMES AND LEARNING

- Eight mentoring sessions delivered to municipal staff and key partners.
- Smart Bin Co-Design Pilot developed as a practical circular economy initiative.
- Public-sector business model canvas completed.
- Governance and implementation structure defined.
- Financing options identified, including green bonds, public-private partnerships and social bonds.
- Risk matrix and mitigation measures prepared.
- Impact framework established across environmental, social, economic and governance dimensions.
- Roadmap created for scaling and replication.

What worked:

Using a real project as the focus of the training accelerated capability development and kept the programme closely connected to municipal priorities. The combination of technical mentoring and stakeholder co-creation helped transform abstract concepts into practical solutions.

Transferable insight:

Capacity building is most effective when cities apply new methods immediately to a concrete challenge. Starting with a manageable pilot and producing decision-ready tools - such as business models, risk assessments and KPI frameworks-creates a stronger foundation for implementation and future investment.

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NEXT STEPS FOR THE CITY

- The next phase is to test and refine the Smart Bin Pilot, validating citizen participation, operational performance and environmental benefits. Findings from this stage will inform adjustments to the business model, governance arrangements and financing strategy.
- Over time, Guimarães can apply the same methodology to other climate priorities, using the capabilities and tools developed through CESF to design additional projects and strengthen its pathway toward climate neutrality.

